

PS21 – Tools to Help with Decision-making

There are a number of tools and techniques that can be used to aid the process of decision-making. These are:

- SWOT analysis
- Priority Grid
- Force Field Analysis
- Mind Maps

The following provides a brief description of the main features of each.

SWOT Analysis

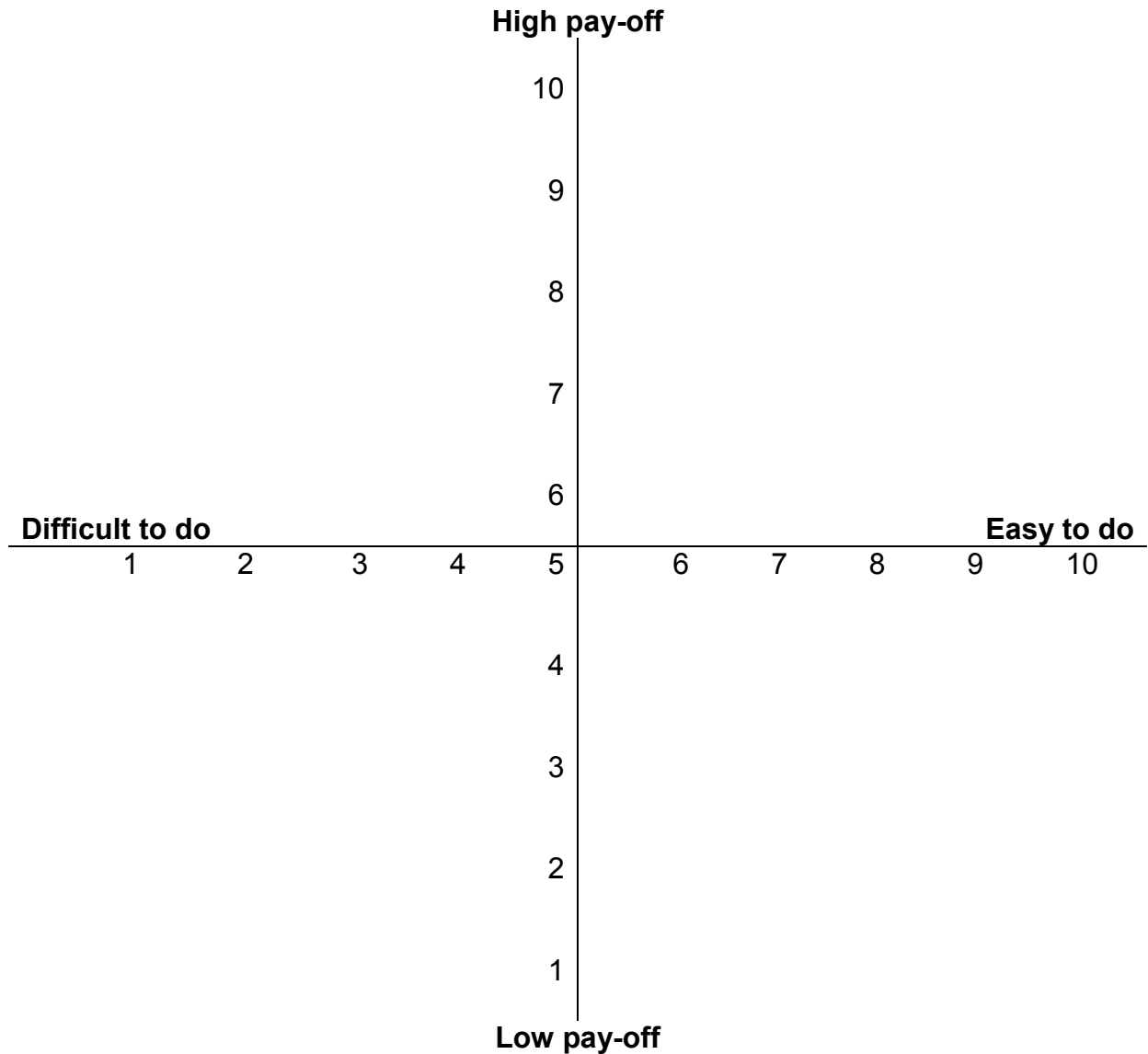
SWOT is a mnemonic for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Strengths. With the decision in mind, complete the table below to reveal the most productive route to identifying a solution/making a decision.

Strengths (What are the strengths that would support the decision being considered?)	Weaknesses (What are the weaknesses, eg time, resources etc?)
Opportunities (To use your strengths and overcome weaknesses)	Threats (To achieving your goal)

Adapted from McBride, P and Maitiland, S (2002) *The EI Advantage – putting emotional intelligence into practice*, McGraw Hill, London

Priority grid

- 1 Complete an idea storm of all the possible options available. Allocate a letter of the alphabet to each option.
- 2 Rate each option on a scale of high/low payoff. This may need an assessment to a lesser or greater extent depending on the complexity of the option and may include a cost benefit analysis.
- 3 Assess the ease of implementation of each option, eg consider the time needed to complete, the resources needed and knock-on effects of each option. Use a scale of 'easy to difficult'.
- 4 Plot each option on the grid below



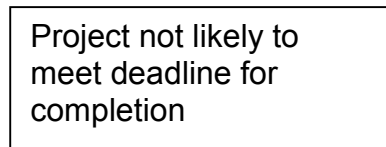
Adapted from Smith, S (1997) *Solve that Problem!*, Kogan Page, London

Force field analysis

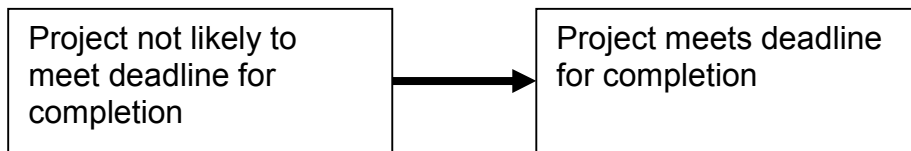
Force field analysis is a way of identifying those aspects that will help or hinder change and help reach decision/s about action to take. The idea is to create a plan that harnesses positive driving forces and reduces, or removes, negative forces that hinder or obstruct progress/solutions. They can be used in conjunction with consensus reaching and action planning.

Follow these steps:

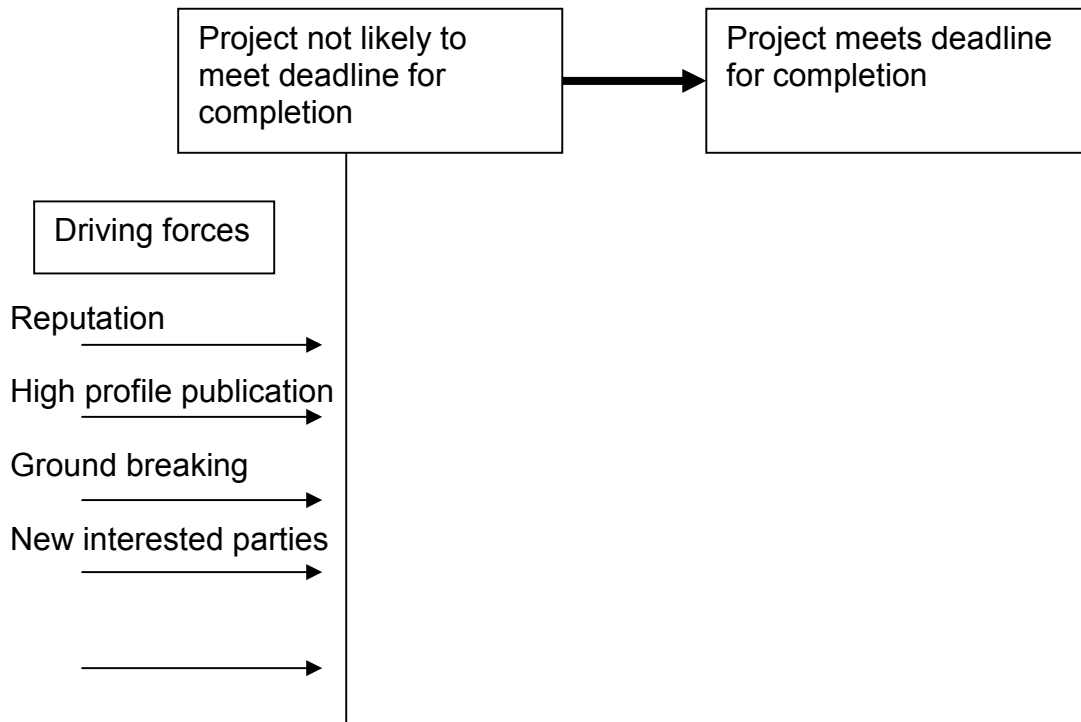
- 1 Identify the current problem in need of resolution, eg



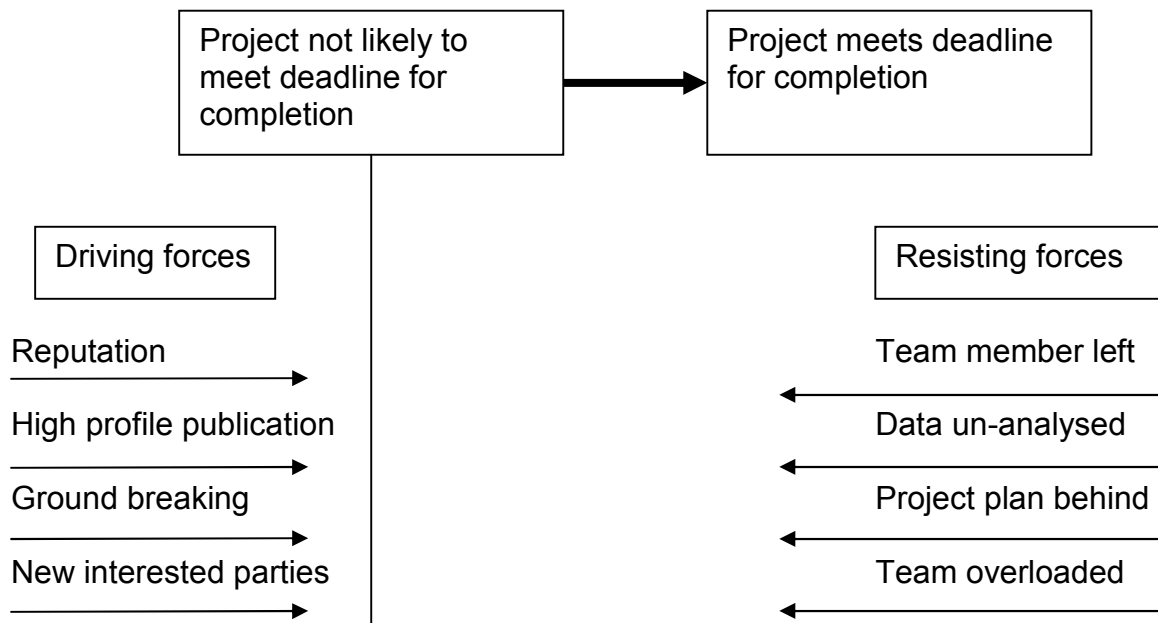
- 2 Identify the result you want to achieve



- 3 Brainstorm the driving forces



- 4 Brainstorm the forces that will restrain you from completing the project on time. Keep in mind the driving forces, so that you stay focused.



To avoid all forces appearing equal, it might be useful to use a scale (strong–weak) to differentiate and prioritise.

- 5 Analyse the forces. Identify the resisting forces that have the strongest impact. Working on these will progress the driving forces more quickly
- 6 Create an action plan. Draw up an action plan to tackle the strongest resisting forces.

Mind mapping

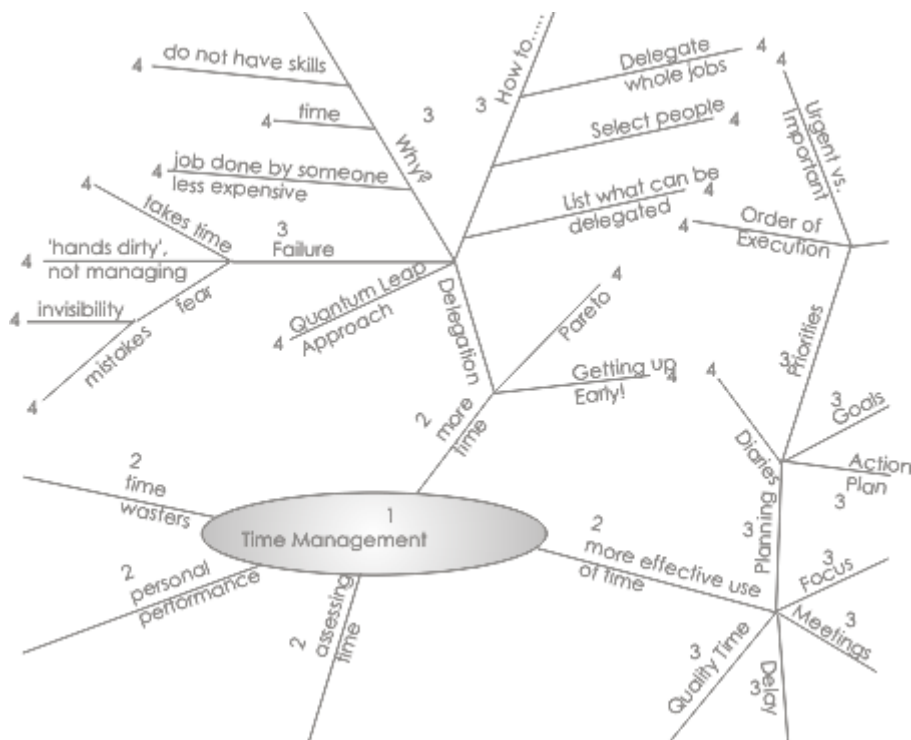
Benefits of using mind mapping technique:

- Easy and effective way to take notes
- Provides an opportunity for creative problem solving
- Enables a quick grasp of the structure of a subject/problem
- Provides a way to show how pieces of information link together
- Encourages creative thinking/problem solving
- Hold information in a way that the mind can remember or quickly review

Mind mapping is useful for:

- Summarising information
- Recording information or ideas for current or future reference
- To communicate with others
- Generate debate and build relationships
- Consolidating information from a variety of sources
- Thinking through complex problems
- Presenting information in a format that shows the overall structure of the subject
- Develop action plans, identify order of priority and set time scales

An example of a mind map



http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newISS_01.htm

Creating a mind map

- 1 The starting point is to identify the topic and write it in the centre of the page.
- 2 Brainstorm the main elements of the topic and add each as a branch to the topic.
- 3 For each branch brainstorm the different parts that are relevant and add those as branches to the main branch.
- 4 Some people may like to use pictures or different colours for the different branches to distinguish between them.
- 5 Identify any links between the branches.
- 6 Review the mind map for completeness and clarity, adding anything else that comes to mind.
- 7 The results can then be used as mentioned above.

Mind mapping software

There is a variety of software packages offering Mind Mapping functions. MindJet Mind Manager is available on University program directory.