# Developing NGOs in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan: Expanding Kurt Lewin's Ideals

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## Abstract

Aim: This article reports the results of a research project on the leadership and governance patterns of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Azerbaijan, one of the states in the former Soviet Union. Sometimes referred to as the father of social psychology, Kurt Lewin (1890 – 1947) developed the force field analysis model that is applied to the changes in the nonprofit sector in a country that is still in its teenage years of independence. In order to understand how the nonprofit sector is changing and adapting, this article uses the competency-based framework for effective governance. Method: The research methodology included extensive interviews, both on-the-record and off-the record, with NGO leaders, clients, academics, government officials, politicians and two focus-groups of 24 randomly-selected senior citizens. Results: The findings show that many NGOs struggle to organize, function and meet the needs of the people they are registered to serve. Conclusion: The competency model transcends national boundaries, but that it has serious limitations in less-than-stable societies and with developing nonprofits.

## 1. Introduction

"If you want to truly understand something, try to change it." Kurt Lewin's (pronounced either 'Lew-in' or "La-veen', as he preferred and often referred to himself) famous statement applies to many facets for developing nonprofit organizations in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. Change is everywhere and yet progress is slow. Old habits die hard. The push for reforms includes external international pressure because of the oil-rich Caspian Sea and growing internal domestic needs. As the country shifts from the autocratic leadership of the Soviet system to an elected (albeit amid international concern) expanding democracy, new social structures emerge with both pain and aspirations. Yet Azerbaijan is in the bottom half of all countries in the "ease of doing business" and 159th out of 178 in "dealing with licenses." (World Bank, 2007, p. 106)

The classic Lewin, Lippitt and White study (1939) defined the characteristics of democratic, authoritarian and laissez-faire leadership styles in groups. Democratic groups had more effective results on their tasks because they defined leadership both as a function and a position. Thus authority can be based on what contribution each person can make to the whole, rather than seeing leadership as vested in one or two people.

On the other hand, more authoritarian group leadership showed less creativity and less successful decision making processes. The bifurcated hierarchical status (those on the top and the others) prevents lower power individuals from being able to contribute to the group's goals and processes. The laissez faire style does not succeed in many instances

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because it misses the need that individuals and groups have for boundaries, structure and a sense of the greater good and vision.

Although the research subjects were school children, the results spurred added investigation and this model has remains a classic after almost seven decades. Change from one style to another is complex, but it is often faster (more efficient, not necessarily more effective) to move from a democratic to an authoritarian style than from the authoritarian approach to a more open democratic leadership. This is true in groups and societies. Lewin's models explore both macro and micro issues of social change. (Lewin, 1948) Thus, the struggles faced by NGOs in Azerbaijan reflect the research findings that stress the difficulty of moving from authoritarian systems to democratic, open and civil society.

Repression, totalitarianism and autocratic leadership were more than just an academic interest to Kurt Lewin. The professional was personal. His mother died in a Nazi concentration camp and it took extraordinary efforts of the Emergency Committee In Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars to assist his escape to the United States. "In all, some 6,000 displaced scholars and professional persons from Europe appealed to the Committee. Of that number 335 were granted assistance." (New York Public Library, 2007) Thus, the freedom fighters and public rallies in Azerbaijan would certainly have resonated with Lewin's professional and personal values since he knew the horrors and dangers of repression.

Lewin's life work was influenced by the discrimination he faced as a child and as a professional. Because of overt and covert prejudices in Germany his academic career was limited to promotion to associate professor without civil service rank; it was the highest position available for Jews. Later in his academic career at Cornell, Iowa and elsewhere, he aggressively fought against anti-Semitism in the U.S. education system. Lewin argued "that if universities were required by law to admit students on merit and not on the basis of race or religion, the practice would bring new and more favorable attitudes." (Marrow, p. 204)

There is a curious recent revelation that shows how committed Kurt Lewin may have been to defeating Hitler and fascism. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), "Available information indicates that Lewin may have been used by OSS for a period of time during World War II." Documentation shows that he did apply to work as a "consultant" on March 25, 1942. OSS is the Office of Strategic Services which was established in mid-1942 and later became the CIA. (Central Intelligence Agency, 2005)

# 2. Force Field Analysis

People often refer to the status quo in order to show no movement, demonstrating an unwillingness to change, or being too lazy to 'push' for needed change. Kurt Lewin developed a model that shows why the status quo is more than just a moment in time, a laissez faire attitude. It is the result of opposing forces creating a quasi-stationary equilibrium.

Field theory (Lewin, 1951) is grounded in the following principles: first, behavior results from the interaction of many factors operating at the same time. These forces create a "dynamic field." Accordingly, a change in one factor will have an impact on the others and the system as a whole. Actions and decisions are grounded more in today's reality than in our interpretation of the past or aspirations for the future. And, in order to understand a situation, the individual's life space must be understood. Thus, individual choices, organizational realities, public policies and global issues can be understood as "fields" which balance opposing factors. Called a force field analysis, the model demonstrates that situations look like this:
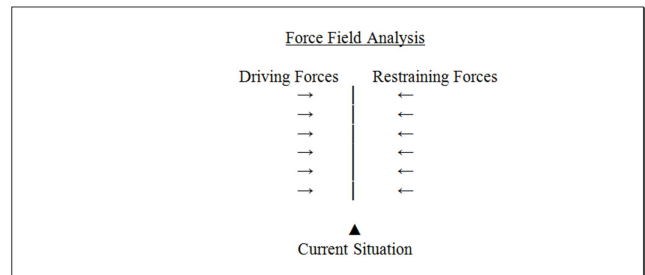


**Figure 1.** Illustration of Force Field in Balance.

DRIVING FORCES push in the direction of a desired change. Sometimes they push for any change, although this is not a wise micro or macro tactic. (It reflects the "Don't just stand there; do something" approach often taken by inept leaders to problem solving!) Examples of driving forces include weaker performance than expected, new leadership, newly-approved strategic plans and down-sizing.

Balancing these are RESTRAINING FORCES: those factors that minimize, deflect, or constrain the driving forces. Such barriers to change would include a lack of financial resources to implement the new strategic plan, personnel policies that prevent new leadership from reorganizing more efficiently, poor customer services skills, and dated technology.

Using this model, any existing situation is defined as the equilibrium balancing the driving and restraining forces. It is particularly useful diagnostic tool with strong action implications. It can identify and create both allies for change as well as help develop strategies to overcome resistances.

For planned change to occur, the leaders of any system, a person, a group, a small family-owned business or an international conglomerate, have three options: (a) reduce the restraining forces, (b) strengthen or add driving forces, and/or (c) do some of each.

Creating dis-equilibrium is the first step in the planned change process. Called unfreezing, this process involves preparing the system for change. It can come through policy ("Effective January 1st, full time employees with three years' service will receive an additional vacation day for each year of employment."), personnel ("Our new VP for Diversity is Mary Smith."), program plans ("Our new cooperative venture with the county hospital will expand services to the elderly.") or physical plant issues ("Our Facilities Committee has purchased land downtown.") Each of these will create dis-equilibrium and help prepare the system for change. Of course, any one of these can create anxiety, fear of the unknown – all key restraining forces.

When unplanned changed occurs, this model still has applicability, although it is less a prospective approach. Even when such changes occur (a hurricane, tsunami, terrorist attack, loss of a key organizational member), the system responds. Hopefully prior planning helps prepare for these emergencies.

The goals and aspirations of any planned change effort must support the system's vision and become the target for the re-freezing point. This is where the system hopes the new equilibrium will occur: higher production levels, a responsive customer service culture, and new compensation programs. As Schein clearly notes, "For change to occur, this force field had to be altered under complex psychological conditions because just adding a driving force toward change often produced an immediate counterforce to maintain the equilibrium. This observation led to the important insight that the equilibrium could more easily be moved if one could remove restraining forces since there were usually already driving forces in the system." (Schein, 2007)

# 3. NGOs and Change in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan

One of Lewin's concepts was Genidentity, the belief that objects kept their identity over time. Can this principle be applied to societies? Lewin certainly believed it could. He became an advocate for democratic societies, the approval of the State of Israel, community relations and racial understanding "as part of the changing social world." (Marrow, p. 163) As a supporter of the creation of Israel, it is not a stretch to conclude that Lewin would have supported the independence of the states of the former Soviet Union.

Azerbaijan is an emerging democracy and thus changing its life forces, social institutions and relationships between the government and the people. NGOs are part of this shifting landscape, even though they face many obstacles.

Azerbaijan is located in southwest Asia on the Caspian Sea, sharing borders with Russia, Armenia, Georgia and Iran. About the size of the State of Maine, this nation gained its independence on August 30, 1991 and was admitted to the United Nations (2007) on March 2, 1992. Ninety percent of its approximately 9 million people are Azeri and almost 95% are Muslim. The 19% inflation rate in 2007 hurt NGO budgets severely (*Azer News*, 2007a).

The capital city of Baku enjoyed an economic boom which abruptly ended when international oil process plunged. Its expanding economy had been fuelled literally by oil from the Caspian Sea and a BP-lead construction of the pipeline to the Mediterranean Sea. In 2016, the economy still ricochets wildly; annual inflation rates from 2011 – 2015 were; 5.6%, -0.3%, 3.6%, -0.2% and 7.5% (focus-economics, 2016).

Yet, just because Azerbaijan is increasingly open to Western ideas, dress, music, need for oil, travel, tourism and technology, one must not forget that this is a secular Muslim country. Calls to prayer can be heard during the day. There are both religious and non-religious holidays. In addition, there are other, equally important aspects of this culture that one must be prepared to know - and to avoid. For example, if one gives flowers, it is important to give an odd number since an even number of flowers is associated with funerals. When meeting or greeting an Azeri, men often shake hands and give a kiss on the cheek while saying hello; women generally hug each other and place one kiss on the left cheek but do not usually shake hands. When a man greets a woman, it is best to wait for the woman to extend her hand first before reaching out; that avoids embarrassing both parties. The family is the basic social unit in Azerbaijan. While the country is no longer as rural and agricultural as it once was, the tradition of families providing mutual aid, protection and support still remains. As such it is not uncommon for a bride to move in with her husband and his parents for perhaps a year after the wedding.

These traditions have mixed consequences on the developing role of NGOs. On one hand, there is a tradition that the family will take care of its own members. Turning to the government or outside organizations does not have deep roots. Under Soviet domination, the government with its records and reports was a force to be avoided. Thus, how do NGOs meet the growing need for their programs and services, especially when they are required to 'register' with the government? An official Azerbaijan government report (2006) entitled "State Program on Poverty Reduction and

Economic Development: 2003 -2005" is notable for the almost total absence of any role for NGOs in alleviating the "sharp decline in living standards of the population. (p. 11). "It is estimated that 49% of the population is living in poverty [as the government itself defines the term]." (p. 13)

Several factors impede the development of NGOs in Azerbaijan. It is not for a lack of public need in the arts, social services, medical, health and educational fields. First, it requires diligence, patience and political power just to establish a nonprofit organization. A USAID Report (2002) concludes: "The Ministry of Justice, which is responsible for NGO registration, utilizes internal instructions and regulations that are not available to the public to regulate the registration of NGOs. This has resulted in a near halt in registration of new organizations over the past two years. Some NGOs experience few problems navigating the government's rules and regulations. For example, "the Azerbaijan Marketing Society (2007, p. 3) was established on July 7, 2000 and registered on August 16, 2000." It appears that NGOs with business and commercial missions receive preference over those with humanitarian, social service and human rights agendas. One municipal official believes "NGOs do their best work when they do humanitarian work, but they should not try to make policy alongside the government."

This gap seems likely to remain for the foreseeable future. As a board member stated, "The government still has Soviet-thinking so people do not trust government or NGOs which the government supports. It worries that younger people will want to change the system; it is afraid of that." This mistrust is often mutual. When a group of mid-level government officials were asked to describe what animals NGOs brought to mind, responses included "snakes, rats, chameleons, cats (take a lot but give little back) and dogs (loud and make a mess for others to clean up)." [Author's note: All interviews were conducted by the author in Baku during November 2007; each participant signed an Informed Consent form, which was witnessed by a third party.]

"Azerbaijan's NGOs are falling on hard times after the authorities amended the country's grants legislation to repeal tax breaks. The changes mean that organizations which receive grants now have to pay more than a quarter of their payroll fund and two per cent of every salary into the Public Social Security Fund." (Relief Web, 2003) In addition, NGOs pay over 20% taxes on revenues from services or investments. Since the national tax codes do not provide deductions for individual or corporate charitable donations, philanthropy is neither in the national consciousness or public culture.

The government does not "trust NGOs and aspires to have greater control over the third sector."(USAID, 2005) According to data released by the NGO-Forum, the number of NGOs in Azerbaijan is increasing. The Forum reports some progress in registering NGOs; as of November 2005 the NGO sector consisted of approximately 3000 organizations, 60% of which are registered. Only 600 or so are active and visible especially in humanitarian relief, environmental protection, youth services, human rights, civic and legal education, and economic development. NGOs are forbidden to monitor elections or become involved in the political process except in special circumstances.

# 4. Nonprofit Board Competencies

One of the key issues for this study of nonprofit boards is how do research-based board competencies relate to non-US NGOs? This question was partially reviewed by Emslie (2007) who studied England's National Health Service boards. His findings strongly document that the competencies transcend national boundaries. But, to date, there is no literature on these board competencies in Azerbaijan or other post-Soviet countries.

Based on research findings, Chait, Holland and Taylor (1996), Holland, Ritvo and Kovner (1997) and others developed and expanded a competency-based model that characterizes effective boards in a variety of nonprofit organizations. The primary, but not exclusive, duties of a nonprofit board include (but are not limited to):

Recruiting, hiring, retaining, evaluating and terminating the CEO,

Developing and monitoring strategic plans,

Ensuring all resources (human, physical fiscal, etc) are used appropriately,

Representing the nonprofit to stakeholders and external constituencies,

Evaluating its own performance, and

Recruiting new members.

These responsibilities were carried out in highly effective programs, policies and procedures in the research sample of over 100 nonprofit organizations in the United States. Through interviews and questionnaires with board members and top organizational leaders, the six competencies described below emerged as critical to organizational success. Not every board member must be skilled in all six areas, but the board as a whole helps ensure high performance when these skills are present within the members as a group, team and board. And, as

research documents, having these competencies and maintaining them over time require different skills and approaches. Each of the following sections defines the competency and relates Azerbaijani NGO experiences. Interviews were held during November 2007 in Baku, Azerbaijan. Not all participants signed the approved Informed Consent form; anonymity was guaranteed whether or not the forms were signed. In two government ministries, only one person signed the form; it is against formal policy to discuss NGOs without formal written approval from one's supervisor.

# 5. Board Competencies

A board engages its Contextual Competencies when it focuses on the broad issues which do, or may, have an impact on their system. For example, how does the nonprofit's mission and values fit into the larger social context? In Azerbaijan, contextual competencies also include the need to understand the organization's place, role and function in the larger society. This includes its work with, around, through, and in spite of the rules and regulations of different levels of government. Quotes from interviews with current or former NGO board members include:

"NGOs help the country and its people develop." (former board member of a small children's service organization)

"Azerbaijan's economy develops because of these organizations." (CEO of an arts organization in the capital region)

"NGOs play an important role in developing democracy and building a civil society. NGOs promote democracy by giving people an opportunity to express their points of view and to be involved in important social tasks." (director serving on three NGO boards)

A national issue that affects many NGOs concerns the Karabakh region. This is an area of land representing about 16% of Azerbaijan's land that Armenia occupied by force almost 2 decades ago. It remains a scar on the national psyche of most Azeri's, including its political leadership (Ismailzade, 2006). On one hand, there is a growing national problem of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) created by the Armenian occupation on this land. By law, contact with Armenian NGOs is forbidden; thus NGOs are not able to assist in one area that receives national attention on a regular basis. [Author's note: Internally Displaced Persons are not refugees who are defined as coming from another country. One might recall the debate in the United States after Hurricane Katrina: were the people who fled New Orleans refugees or evacuees?]

Strategic competencies help keep the board's collective eye on the future. Board decision making must include current information on public policies, community needs, labor force issues, monetary and fiscal changes, competitors' efforts and demographic trends. With inaccurate or incomplete information, boards will tend to rely solely on internal impact data: how did these trends affect the system? By then it is too late to develop coherent, responsive longer term strategic plans when the thinking is myopic, short term and internally focused. In Azerbaijan, these strategic competencies were noted as very low: long term planning, conversations about mission, values, goals and objectives rarely occur. The USAID Report notes that "NGOs work mainly from project to project and rely heavily on a top-down management structure. Few NGOs develop or utilize constituencies, strategic plans, mission statements, or maintain permanently paid staff. "A very small number of NGOs are beginning to apply some strategic planning techniques."

Only a small portion of the NGO sector, mostly in Baku, is technically well equipped. In terms of capacity, Baku-based NGOs are generally more advanced than their counterparts in the regions." Thus, the competency may be of value, but when organizational survival is a daily issue, long term thinking is driven out. The USAID report notes that most NGOs do not understand the concept or purpose of a mission statement.

Analytical competencies are needed for the board to dissect the complexity of issues before it takes action. For example, employees in most organizations expect pay increases on an annual basis, whether across the board or merit based. But, the board must also analyze the total cost to the system, including the less visible impact on benefits, what one's competitors in the marketplace are doing and the impact on revenue streams. After all, there is a limit to how much the public is willing to pay to visit the local museum. How does the board understand what resisting forces exist and what strategies does it develop to respond to them? NGO leaders face an added problem? In terms of the governing process, it is critical that top leadership continually monitor the organization's stakeholders, competitors, clients, partners and of course the government so they can be prepared before changes occur. This approach can strengthen the board's strategic and analytic competencies.

The USAID Report also notes that "Though legislation formally provides NGOs with the right to work without restraint, in reality this is not the case…The government uses spontaneous tax or labor inspections to place pressure on NGOs to conform or in some instances to dissolve them. In fear of being visited by these agencies, most NGOs do not involve themselves in political or social concerns if their

involvement may be seen in an unfavorable light by the government. In other words, self-regulation is frequently practiced by NGOs in Azerbaijan." And, any decision analysis must take into account that public law forbids NGOs from monitoring the political process and elections if funds from foreign entities' domestic organizations with largely international ownership are used. But, as a board member of school day care program, noted "Most NGOs that get registered and last receive money from foreign sources." In 2016, Human Rights Watch stressed that this situation continues unabated and apparently gets worse annually. "The government's unrelenting crackdown decimated independent nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and media."

"In addition, the existing Law on the Registration of Legal Entities requires that written notifications be provided to the applicant within ten days of an application being received and provides for a written explanation for any rejection. However, the Ministry does not issue receipts when applications are submitted and they very rarely proffer loosely written rejection letters, thus providing the applicant with no recourse for challenging the Ministry's decision. Due to the severity of the problem, several inter-national donor organizations and diplomatic missions are working with Azerbaijani NGOs to solve the registration problem." It is the old 'catch-22'... NGOs must register to exist but cannot.

Political competencies do not refer to the public political electoral process. Rather, it is the process of reconciling differences in values, reaching effective compromises that move toward goals, and allowing input from those who are affected by decisions. For example, assuming limited funds, should a small NGO use its resources to educate people on ways to prevent HIV/AIDS? Should it fund services to some people who are HIV positive or should it sponsor research to help understand and stop this international pandemic? Each of these options represents different values. Research is a long term process with many failures' education must be reinforced and does not always lead to behavior change; services to those who already have HIV may require long term commitments. Which should an organization choose? How will its leadership decide?

Using political skills has a different meaning in Azerbaijan. When disputes arise that cannot be resolved easily, one mediation and arbitration method involves the agh sakkal. Translated to mean "the white beards," this council of elders (all male) often becomes the deciders, rather than using the board's own resources or the legal system as is common in many countries, including the United States. When value-driven choices must be made, the agh sakkal offers a guiding hand. (kwintessential: Cross Cultural Solutions, 2007)

Effective political skills help create "cobwebs" of agencies

attempting to serve larger populations. For example, the National Council of Azerbaijan Youth Organizations began in 1996 as a consortium of 46 NGOs. (Society for Humanitarian Research, 2007) But not all such well-intended efforts succeed. The Association of Lawyers in Azerbaijan may be typical. After a long struggle to get registered, they were finally denied. "Unfortunately, the lack of an office, equipment and financial resources has hindered the ALA from expanding its scope and functioning more effectively." (International League of Human Rights, 2007)

Educational competencies focus on the question "How does a board learn?" In addition to learning from experience, this competency includes developing new members' skills and information base. It involves gaining a clear understanding of client and staff needs so leaders can establish functional and attainable priorities.

Most importantly, it involves information. One of the major impediments to developing strong educational competencies is the government's general approach sharing information; it prefers not to. An example from a Yale Law School Report (2005) shows how defiant the system can be. Although it is a signatory partner on international efforts to improve children's rights, health and social conditions, "Azerbaijan has so far not met the requirement of the Convention - to disseminate it widely within country." This has a serious impact on local NGOs which strive to help children. In addition, "NGOs do not take sufficient efforts to create a positive public image. They do not promote transparency in their activities and they remain closed from the general population. As a result, public awareness about NGOs and their activities remains low." (USAID Report)

Interpersonal competencies help board members work together effectively as a group. They reflect the axiom "There is no "I" in team." How are differences resolved? Is there an open appraisal process for the CEO and the board members themselves? How does the board cultivate new leadership? Is power shared or held closely by an elite subgroup? Just having powerful individuals does not assure effective work at the group level. Board members usually benefit from process time to reflect on how decisions were made, and were the best decisions reached when reviewed a year later. These competencies do not happen by accident; they require effort, planned agenda time and often an outside facilitator to guide the process.

Each board can, should and must develop appropriate mechanisms to raise and resolve interpersonal conflicts. Options could include focused team building sessions, building time into each meeting to conduct a 'check-in/check-out" so members can share concerns and develop options for resolution. Perhaps the biggest interpersonal issue

that can emerge on a board centers on the CEO. The single most important duty of any board is to recruit, hire, retain, evaluate and when needed fire the systems chief executive officer. This process demand clear annual objectives, a transparent assessment process and candid feedback that is specific, timely and relevant.

The interpersonal competencies as defined above clash with many Azeri cultural values that place hierarchy, a sense of place, and sometimes adherence to religious edicts, family needs and tradition above public law and policy. Similarly, status, title, position, who enters a room first, who sits where and in what order are all part of the cultural environment of both large and small organizations. Thus, these are not intrusions on interpersonal competency; rather they help define acceptable behavior in that culture.

# 6. Conclusions

Lewin's ideals for community relations and democracy survive his death 6 decades ago. This publication provides ample testimony to the enduring power of his work and how it applies today. Several questions provided the impetus for this research. First, can force field analysis be used to understand the problems at the macro and micro-level and in a post-Soviet country? The answer is strongly affirmative. The forces for change and its impediments are different than at the individual level. But because they form a life space and field, the model applies as a diagnostic tool. Figure Two below shows both Driving and Restraining Forces.

Force Field Analysis

Summary of Pushing and Restraining Forces on NGOs in Azerbaijan

**FORCES**

| Driving | | | Restraining |
|---|---|---|---|
| Government can not meet all the needs of its people ⇒ | **C** | ⇐ | Little public support |
| The post-Soviet generation that expects change ⇒ | **U** | ⇐ | Soviet mentality – fear of central authority |
| Committed volunteers ⇒ | **R** | ⇐ | Some boards exist on paper only |
| Successful NGOs pave way for others ⇒ | **R** | ⇐ | Suspicious populations |
| Record of incremental successes ⇒ | **E** | ⇐ | Little public support |
| Political figures see benefits in NGOs ⇒ | **N** | ⇐ | Lack of philanthropic culture |
| More NGOs applying for government registration ⇒ | **T** | ⇐ | Few transparent financial reporting systems in place |
| | | | |
| Growing needs of the Azerbaijani population ⇒ | **S** | ⇐ | No ethics statements |
| Emerging democratic system is under scrutiny ⇒ | **I** | ⇐ | Oppressive tax codes hinder generating funds |
| Armenia's occupation of its land ⇒ | **T** | ⇐ | Legal restrictions |
| ⇒ | **U** | ⇐ | |
| Caspian Sea Oil brings international inspection ⇒ | **A** | ⇐ | Small professional staff limits programs & services |
| Increasing international interest ⇒ | **T** | ⇐ | Few national success models (e.g. Red Crescent) |
| ⇒ | **I** | ⇐ | |
| ⇒ | **O** | ⇐ | |
| Tourism brings outsiders who understand NGOs ⇒ | **N** | ⇐ | Little experience with fundraising |

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**Figure 2.** Force field analysis of pushing and restraining forces on NGOs in Azerbaijan.

A second question for this effort regards the leadership for NGOs. Do the board competencies used by several researchers apply in Azerbaijan? If any conclusions can be drawn from this research, it is that the six board competencies do not directly apply with as much vigor in an emerging democracy as they do elsewhere. This is not because many dedicated individuals are not trying; they are. Rather, the emphasis is less on long-term leadership than on nearer-term program management and service delivery. Strategic planning is a luxury when one is busy trying to survive. Since most NGOs are in their embryonic state, many will not survive; most will never even meet the requirement that they register with the government.

Of the competencies, the most salient appears to be contextual while the least emphasis fell on strategic and political. Interviews document that NGO leadership understands the world in which they operate. The long term perspectives on issues required for strategic competencies to be used effectively are muted by the needs of daily survival. Political differences are often minimized because the board members themselves often work as volunteers at the program level, planning and then offering the NGO services.

What does the future hold? According to Azerbaijan's Embassy in the United States (2007) "The Government Initiative to Bolster Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) was approved on July 27, 2007 by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This is a part of the Administration's ongoing effort to strengthen Azerbaijan's civil society – in particular NGOs and independent media. This new Executive Order will provide government financial and logistical support to NGOs, as well as improve the legal environment for their operations." Change is in the air and the restraining forces are modifying. This supports Lewin's thesis.

"The four elements of empowerment – information, inclusion/participation, accountability and local organizational capacity – can be combined to create more effective, responsive, inclusive, accountable institutions." (Narayan, 2002, p. 31) Lewin's aspirations help individuals and societies. Former President of the World Bank James D. Wolfensohn best summarized the challenge for the future; referring to the relationships between NGOs, governments and the World Bank, he stressed "We are really interdependent. But we must build mutual trust" (Wolfensohn and Kircher, 2005, p. 38). And therein lies the future of NGOs in Azerbaijan.

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