

## PRINCE Analysis

In 1972, William Coplin and Michael O’Leary published *Everyman’s Prince: A Guide to Understanding Your Political Problems*. “Prince” was an acronym for the four steps in the process: “**P**robe, **I**nteract, **C**alculate, **E**xecute.” There was nothing earthshaking in their analysis—most of the ideas had been developed earlier, and the authors acknowledge their debt to Machiavelli. Nor was the method particularly complicated—the authors presented it in a fairly brief 25 pages followed by 6 case studies using the method. But what they *did* do was to provide, in one place, a technique for synthesizing all those ideas into a single analysis.

A PRINCE analysis is essentially a power analysis. In Coplin & O’Leary’s words, it is used in a situation “...in which you must get some other people to act or stop acting in a certain way in order to achieve a goal important to you” (p. 4). This description is important, because PRINCE analysis is only useful if two important conditions are met (p.9): First, the outcome that you desire must be described in *concrete* terms. A PRINCE analysis is specific to the desired outcomes; change the outcomes, and a different analysis will have to be performed. Second, PRINCE analysis focuses on changing the behavior of other individuals in order to accomplish the desired outcomes. It does not particularly useful when the problem is structural or systematic or due to external constraints. It is aimed at figuring out who needs to be moved and where there is leverage to move them.

So, consider the steps in order:

### Probe

There are 3 steps to this phase of the process:

1. *Is this a political problem?* Things don’t “just happen” (well, maybe sometimes they do—but then doing a power analysis is not going to get you anywhere). Sometimes the cause is outside one’s range of influence—a broken leg will not be amenable to persuasion (although maybe how you & your boss negotiate your work duties could be)—and, again, a power analysis will not be useful. But often when something happens you wish had not happened, or when something fails to happen that you wish would have, it is because (as Coplin & O’Leary put it) “you have lost a political battle” (p. 164).
2. *What is it worth to you?* The whole point of PRINCE is to develop a fairly close estimate of the costs of “winning,” but before you undertake the exercise it is important to estimate the shape of the field and where you are on it. If you set your goals too high, you might also be setting the price too high; but if you set them too low you might be settling for much less than you could have gotten. And in some cases what can be gained is not worth the “chips” it would take to get it. At this early stage, the point is to be as clear and precise as possible about what *you* want and need to achieve.
3. *Who are the players and what are their issues?* Begin with the people (or groups of people) who can most directly affect the issue with which you are concerned. You also need to identify *their* key issues, because politics is a process of building a network of common interests. In the process of identifying their issues, you will discover other players who, while not directly interested in your issue, *do* have influence on issues that are important to those who have influence on *your* issue. They, in turn, will have their *own* issues. And so the network of players will expand further with each iteration. Eventually, prune your list back to ten or so of the most influential people/groups, and all of their key issues.

### Interact

From your probe of the issue, you have identified the key players and their key issues. The next step is to analyze their *influence* on your issue. Influence is the combination of position, salience, and power.

- *Position* is whether one favors or opposes a particular solution to an issue. As John Dewey pointed out years ago (Dewey, 1924), any issue immediately divides everyone into one of three groups—those in favor, those opposed, and those who are unaffected. And for any issue the neutral group is usually the largest group, at least initially. Position is not “all or nothing.” Support or opposition may be anywhere

on a continuum from full-throated to lukewarm. Those positions which are closest to neutral (whether for or against) are the ones that are more easily changed, and bear close watching as your analysis develops.

- *Saliency* is the “strength” of the support or opposition. Often saliency and position are similar, but not always. One may be very interested in an issue (high saliency) but not have made up one’s mind (low position). In other cases, one might feel strongly about an issue (high position), but not be willing to do much about it (low saliency). It is when saliency and position are far apart that there might be a real opportunity to move an individual (for or against one’s own position).
- *Power* is the ability to make one’s preference on an issue happen. You may have strong supporters who are willing to work hard for your goals, but who are ineffective or who are simply poorly connected to others on this particular issue. In other cases, the people who have the authority to make the decision in your case may know very little about the issue and thus have little inclination to act one way or the other.
- In addition to position, saliency, and power, you should also gauge the degree of *affiliation* (friendship/hostility) between the players. Often people follow the principle, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.” While affiliation is not a formal element of influence, it can suggest where there is potential leverage for changing a player’s position on the issue.

You will gather information about position, saliency, power and affiliation in any way you can. Sometimes you can find out where people stand by talking to them directly. Some people will have already taken a stand by writing or speaking publicly on the issue. Still others, while not declaring a position, will have discussed the issue with others or might allude to it while speaking about other issues. And in some cases it will be necessary to make an educated guess.

## Calculate

However you gathered your information, the next step is to build a series of tables summarizing what you found. There is nothing magic about the numbers in the tables—they are shorthand for your best judgment of where the players come down on the issues. As your analysis of the situation and your experience of the players changes, you might go back and change some of the values in the tables. But the tables will allow you to summarize a lot of information and think about it in a schematic way. All of the tables are collected into a single spreadsheet Workbook here, each table having its own Worksheet within the Workbook, which is called [“PRINCE.”](#)

- *Position Matrix*: List the key players down the side and their significant issues across the top of the matrix. “Players” may be individuals or groups of individuals. Assign a numerical value (+/- to indicate “pro” or “con,”) and a number (from 0-10) to indicate the strength of support/opposition for each issue. Remember that it is possible that a player has no position (either no position yet or a “firm” I don’t care) on an issue. Those players are assigned a “0” for that issue. The sum of the actors positions on each issue tells you how much overall support there is for each issue. Keep in mind that a strong opposition and a strong proponent will have the same effect as two undecideds—the value of the sum may be less informative than how it was constituted.
- *Power Matrix*: The second worksheet records the power, or ability of each actor to influence the outcome on each issue, again using a scale from 0-10. Note that the power of any single actor is likely to be different on each of the issues. Also note that there is no “negative” power (even if it feels that way sometimes). It is possible to assign “0” on an issue, but if you find that happening a lot it may mean that you do not have the right combination of players and issues (remember, the matrix is supposed to include the key players and their most important issues).
- *Power x Position Matrix*: The combined weight of a player’s position on an issue and a player’s ability to affect that outcome gives a clearer picture of the likely outcome. This matrix multiplies the value of the power and the position scores to produce a snapshot of what *could* happen. There is no need to enter any data into this worksheet, it takes the information it needs from the previous worksheets.
- *Saliency Matrix*: Not all players are equally concerned about all issues. Human energy is a finite (some would say scarce) resource. Some players might be passionately concerned about a few issues, others might divide their attention more evenly across a number of issues. The saliency matrix rates the players’ willingness to engage in any given issue (again, on a scale from 0-10).

- *Influence Matrix*: The Influence Matrix calculates the *likely* outcomes, given the salience of the issues and each player's power and position on those issues. The sum of the support for any issue is a measure of the likelihood of achieving the desired outcome. The art of politics lies in increasing the position, power, or salience of those who support your issue, and decreasing those factors in those who oppose you.
- *Affiliation Matrix*: The last matrix does not directly affect the "bottom line," but it can provide some insight into the stability of the coalition which will be supporting or opposing your issue. It will also suggest where you might find potential allies (or opponents). The scoring here is +/- (to indicate friendship or hostility) and 0-10 (to indicate the strength of the feeling). The scoring need not be symmetrical (because A is strongly positive to B does not mean B feels the same about A). You would want to see positive scores not only from your supporters to you, but also from your supporters to each other. Friendships between your supporters and your opponents indicate areas where a shift is possible (in either direction, be advised).

There are thousands of possible calculations using the four tables of the PRINCE analysis, Coplin & O'Leary suggest 6 major ones (pp. 168-170):

- *Likelihood of Occurrence*: The sum of the columns in the Influence Matrix provide a measure of the likelihood of an outcome occurring. The higher the positive number, the more likely the outcome; the higher the negative number, the less likely the outcome.
- *Likelihood of Support*: The sum of the rows in the Influence Matrix provides a measure of which players are likely to support your issues (again, the higher the number the more likely the occurrence, +/- indicating whether it will go for you or against you).
- *Relative Importance*: Examine separately the Position, Power, and Salience matrices to find instances where the Influence Matrix was influenced by "off pattern" scores (e.g., low power with high position and salience, or high salience with low position and power). These indicate areas of potential instability in the analysis, which may be an opportunity or a threat for your position.
- *Pressure Points*: Players who consistently express more friendship than is reciprocated by the other players are susceptible to pressure from the other players. If the sum of a player's row (how that player feels about the other players) in the Affiliation Matrix is significantly greater than the sum of a player's column (how the other players feel about that player), that player is at risk of political pressure from the other players.
- *Temperature Check*: Most networks have a mixture of both friendships and hostility. The higher the value of all the scores in the Affiliation Matrix, the more friendly (or hostile) the network.
- *Polarization*: Rank all pairs of players from most friendly to most hostile. In a completely depolarized network, there will be players who provide a friendly link to both sides of each hostile pair. To the extent that there are hostile pairs with no players to provide friendly links, there is the possibility of polarized divisions forming.

## Execute

Finally, having analyzed the power in the network, the last step is to formulate and execute a strategy. On the assumption that the outcome is not a "sure thing" (because if it were you would not have bothered to do a formal analysis), there are only four tools at your disposal to increase the likelihood of the outcome you desire:

- Change the position of one or more players on your issue
- Increase the salience of your issue for those players who side with you, or decrease it for those who oppose you.
- Build the power of those players who side with you, or weaken the power of those who oppose you.
- Make friends and win over your enemies.

Coplin & O'Leary describe four strategies that you can employ (pp. 171-174):

1. *Consensus*: Easiest and most efficient. Find compromises and agreements that can accomplish your goals within existing power, position, and salience. This carries the least cost, because it involves the least change. But it does require luck (as well as skill).
2. *Limited Conflict*: This is a strategy of "focused pressure." Attempt to change the power, position, and/or salience of a limited number of players and push for a decision before the entire network

becomes thoroughly involved.

3. *Change the Power Distribution*: If you cannot achieve your goals by applying discrete pressure at a few points, you might be able to achieve them by changing the power distribution of the network. This is always costly and always time-consuming and never easy, and few players have the patience and the strength to see it through. But it is better than the last alternative:
4. *Unlimited Conflict*: Raise the salience of every issue in the system. This will create possible opportunities for bargaining. It will also probably lead to stagnation because raising the salience of issues will highlight the differences among the players and make cooperation on anything more difficult. This strategy is rarely successful (although the *threat* of this strategy can be effective) and is highly unpredictable. Because it destabilizes the affiliation matrix and the position matrix, it can also transform the power matrix in ways that would not have been predicted.

Of course, most of the time you will not sit down and do a full-scale PRINCE analysis (just as you won't always do a full-scale Benefit/Cost analysis). The point is to develop the discipline of thinking in terms of position, power, salience, and affiliation, and the trade-offs between them. And, in important cases where the outcome *is* in doubt, it can't hurt to sit down and think it through very carefully.



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