

THE AMBITION BOX

Picking the right objective means considering:

- Your ambition for changing the overall problem;
- Resources and activities;
- Organizational strategy – on a revolutionary–managerialist spectrum.

These translate into three dimensions, creating the ‘ambition box’ of possible objectives:

- Size – how much of the overall problem does it represent (immediate yield)?
- Toughness – how hard do you have to try to achieve it?
- Significance – what consequential effect results from achieving the objective (longer-term yield)?

For a government agency or an organization charged with doing something about a problem in the most cost-effective way, the rational place to start is with the low-hanging fruit. For a campaign organization, the targets are likely to be tougher. After all, the low-hanging fruit has probably already been picked by someone else.

If you want a strategic effect, it is no use picking a target simply because it is ‘relevant’ or ‘connected’ to the problem. It might be a brick at the top of the wall. Pull it out, or if it’s tough, chisel it out, and the result is maybe not much. If, however, it is the keystone brick in an arch, then it may bring the whole thing down. This quality is not to do with the immediate ‘toughness’ or size of the target, but its *significance*, another dimension making up the 3D ‘objectives box’.

For example, in the Florida Everglades, the alligator acts as a ‘keystone species’ by creating dry-season ponds, which also allow a host of other species to survive. In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell gives numerous examples of how specific social dynamics can lead the spread of ideas to have big effects.¹⁶

Campaign groups may deliberately pick ‘hard nuts’ in order to draw attention to a problem. Exxon, for example, is unlikely to succumb to pressure from www.stopesso.com but is likely to remain deserving as a climate campaign target with huge political resonance.

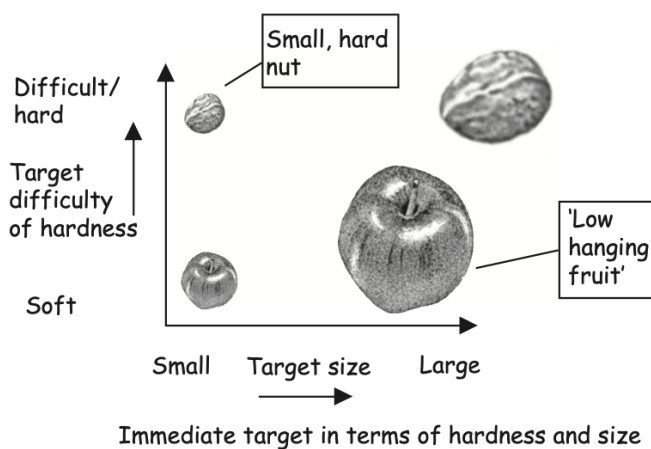


Figure 5.11 *Immediate target in terms of hardness and size*

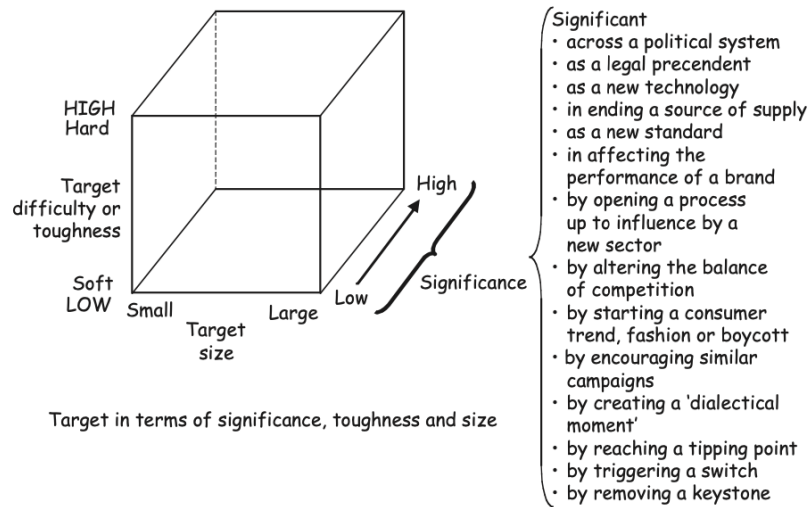


Figure 5.12 Target in terms of significance, toughness and size

Greenpeace's tryst with the PVC industry, eminently logical (PVC being a linchpin of chemical pollution), has proved a war of attrition because of communication problems – a less-resonant tough nut.

The Californian car market has proved itself to be a political–industrial keystone of great significance, from catalytic converters in the 1970s to electric vehicles in the 2000s. Eron Shosteck, spokesman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said in 2002: 'You can't make one car for California and another car for Washington, DC.'

In the Brent Spar campaign the target was known to be:

- Of strategic importance to the oil *industry* – as an industrial test case for a waste disposal option (sea dumping) for all North Sea 'brownfielding';
- A *political* precedent (within OSPAR) regulating the disposal of wastes in the North East Atlantic; and
- A *legal* precedent within the same framework.

Quite unexpectedly, it also became of strategic significance:

- As a symbol and trigger for change within Shell, including its view of its future as an energy company, rather than simply an oil company;
- As a touchstone and jumping-off point for a lot of corporate thinking about corporate social responsibility (CSR) – some, such as Stephen Colegreave, business development director at McCann-Erickson, say it is where the notion came from;¹⁷

- As a demonstration of what 'new politics' might achieve – consumers, businesses and NGOs negotiating an outcome, independent of government.

Disputes over which is the 'right' objective can often be resolved if the three dimensions are teased out and discussed separately.