

Conducting a SWOT Analysis

Description:

This tool provides a step-by-step guide to conducting an effective SWOT analysis. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

How it can be used:

Conducting a SWOT analysis is a simple yet comprehensive way of identifying your organization's internal strengths and weaknesses as well as the external opportunities and threats. A SWOT analysis will assist you in making strategic plans and decisions and can be helpful in assessing the relevance and value of both your current and potential objectives.

Through the SWOT process, you will be guided to:

- build on your strengths
- understand your weaknesses
- recognize opportunities
- counteract threats

Use the SWOT analysis as the basis for creating an action plan which identifies the necessary activities, who is responsible for each activity, and the timelines for completion. Ensure that the action plan has the commitment of all key decision-makers.

Why use a SWOT analysis?

- Explore the possibilities of new objectives or solutions;
- Help make decisions about new directions;
- Clarify where change is possible;
- Review and adjust current programs in response to a changing environment.

Conducting a thorough SWOT analysis helps uncover both the issues and the strengths that can be used to address them.

Conducting a SWOT analysis: Set the stage

Follow these guidelines for your SWOT process and increase your probability for success.

- Include as many stakeholders as possible; each brings a different perspective. Staff will be more engaged in implementation if they have been involved in the process.
- Commit to ongoing follow-up by engaging with the people who have the authority and ability to implement the actions.
- Review the action plan on a regular basis. Ensure the plan contains realistic objectives and an evaluation strategy.
- Be specific when describing the elements of the SWOT analysis.
- Be realistic when describing your weaknesses and strengths. This exercise is only effective if it is accurate.
- Consider both the current context and what the future could hold.
- Keep the process simple and clear and a reasonable length.

Conducting a SWOT analysis: The Steps

1. Assign someone to lead and/or facilitate the process. This person must be able to listen to and process a lot of information, keep the group on task, and ensure the process moves clearly and efficiently.

2. Assign someone to record the responses in order to produce a report after the session. Use flip charts and/or whiteboards to record the group's discussions.
3. Explain the SWOT analysis and why this is being undertaken. It might be helpful to demonstrate a quick example to clarify the difference between internal and external factors.
4. Divide your stakeholders into small groups. Consider mixing up the types of stakeholders to ensure a broad mix of perspectives. Ensure the breakout groups are no larger than ten people to facilitate good participation.
5. Have each group assign a recorder and provide supplies (newsprint, flipchart, whiteboard) and a format for recording their input (a matrix or columns are effective).

Conducting a SWOT analysis: Thinking *Inside* the Box

6. Allow 20-30 minutes for groups to brainstorm and identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats from their perspectives. Remind them not to rule out any ideas. Consider posting the following questions to help stimulate discussion.
 - a. Questions that help identify strengths
 - i. What do we do well?
 - ii. What makes us feel proud?
 - iii. What resources do we have and use well?
 - iv. How would others identify our strengths?
 - b. Questions that help identify weaknesses
 - i. What do we feel we could do better?
 - ii. What have we been trying to improve upon without success?
 - iii. Where do we see recurring issues?
 - c. Questions to help identify opportunities
 - i. What is happening in the community that provides us with opportunities to help?
 - ii. What trends should we be aware of that positively affect our services?
 - d. Questions to help identify threats
 - i. What trends should we be aware of that could negatively affect our population or our ability to provide services?
 - ii. Are we adapting to changes in the environment (e.g., technology, demographics, etc.)?
 - e. Offer the following suggestions:
 - i. Record all ideas that the group offers. You can sort them later.
 - ii. Once there have been many comments generated about your organization, start to categorize them.
 - iii. To prepare for presenting to the larger group, attempt to limit your lists to 10 or fewer points that are specific.
7. Reconvene the large group. Collect and organize the groups' ideas and perceptions in a matrix or column format.

SWOT ANALYSIS		
INTERNAL	<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
These are elements within our organization; within our control	Examples: expertise, strong community relationships, etc.	Examples: high staff turnover, lack of financial capability, etc.
EXTERNAL	<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Threats</u>
These are factors outside the organization; not within our control	Examples: provincial funding for skills development, lowered rates of TB, etc.	Examples: band elections, government funding cuts, etc.

8. Begin filling in the matrix or columns and consider the following approaches:
 - a. Involve the groups:
 - i. Ask each group to report, varying which group starts each section to ensure that no group ends up having to repeat points made by others, or
 - ii. Open the floor to all groups (i.e., 'What strengths did your group identify?') for each category until all groups have contributed and the matrix is complete.
 - b. Fill in content:
 - i. Proceed in S-W-O-T order, recording strengths, then weaknesses, then opportunities, then threats, or
 - ii. Record the top or most urgent priorities in each category (strongest strength, most dangerous weakness, biggest opportunity, worst threat) and continue to enter ideas into each category.
 - c. The facilitator or recorder should keep writing until input from all groups is recorded. Make a note of items that are repeated by different groups as this signifies that it is important.
9. Be prepared to discuss items that are cross-connected; for example, 'this strength can be used to overcome that threat'.
 - a. Keep the process moving until the chart is complete. If there are ideas that are outside of the current matrix, consider adding a 'working ideas' column.
10. Discuss and record the results. If required:
 - a. Come to a consensus about the most important items in each category.
 - b. Relate the analysis to your vision, mission, and goals.
 - c. Translate the analysis to action plans and strategies. Clearly identify who is responsible, and what the timeline is for each of the action items.

Conducting a SWOT Analysis: The Follow-up

11. If appropriate, prepare a written summary of the SWOT analysis to provide to participants.
12. Use the SWOT analysis as a 'snapshot' that:
 - a. clarifies the positives and negatives of your program;
 - b. helps you identify issues that need to be changed;
 - c. reaffirms goals;
 - d. creates an action plan.
13. Complete a SWOT analysis once or twice a year to reveal the key issues, both internal and external, and confirm that your plans are relevant.