

SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is a classic strategic planning tool. Using a framework of internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats, it provides a simple way to assess how a strategy can best be implemented. The tool helps planners be realistic about what they can achieve, and where they should focus.

Detailed Outline of the Process

The SWOT framework – a two-by-two matrix – is best completed in a group with key members of the team or organisation present. First, it is important to be clear what the policy change objective is, and on what team or organisation the analysis is being carried out. Once these are clarified and agreed, begin with a brainstorm of ideas, and then hone them down and clarify them afterwards in discussion.

An assessment of *internal capacity* helps identify where the project or organisation is now: the existing resources that can be used immediately and current problems that won't go away. It can help identify where new resources, skills or allies will be needed. When thinking of strengths it is useful to think of real examples of success to ground and clarify the conversation. Typical focus questions to help think through these issues might include the following:

SWOT analysis

Strengths • <i>Skills and abilities</i> • <i>Funding lines</i> • <i>Commitment to positions</i> • <i>Contacts & Partners</i> • <i>Existing Activities</i>	Weaknesses
Opportunities • <i>Other orgs relevant to issue</i> • <i>Resources: financial, technical, human</i> • <i>Political and policy space</i> • <i>Other groups or forces</i>	Threats

- What type of policy influence does our organisation / project currently do best? Where have we had the most success?
- What types of policy influencing skills and capacities do we have?
- In what areas have our staff used them most effectively?
- Who are our strongest allies in policy influence?
- When have they worked with us to create policy impact?
- What do staff consider to be our main strengths and weaknesses? Why is this? What opinions do others outside the organisation hold?

An assessment of the *external environment* tends to focus on what is going on outside the organisation, or areas which are not yet affecting the strategy but could do – either positively or negatively.

The grid above summarises some of the subject areas that might need considering under both internal and external factors. These can be used as topic headings if working in small break-out groups (a good idea if your group is larger than about eight).

Back in plenary it is often useful to rate or rank the most important strengths and weaknesses (perhaps with symbols: ++, + and 0). In a larger group participants might like to assign their own scores, perhaps by assigning sticky dots. The results can then be discussed and debated.

It is important to keep an eye on possible actions or solutions that emerge and round up with an action-oriented discussion. How can our group build on strengths to further our aim and strategy? What can be included in the strategy to minimise our weakness? And so on.

The SWOT analysis is a versatile tool that can be returned to at many different stages of a project; to structure a review or provide a warm-up discussion before forward planning. It can be applied broadly, or a small sub-component of the strategy can be singled out for detailed analysis. The SWOT often forms a useful complement to a Stakeholder analysis. Both are good precursors to Force field analysis and Influence mapping.

A Good Example

The example below shows a possible analysis for a small, start-up NGO considering how to use its new research study to influence government.

Example of SWOT analysis for small NGO

Strengths:

- We are able to follow-up on this research as the current small amount of work means we have plenty of time;
- Our lead researcher has strong reputation within the policy community;
- Our organisation's director has good links to the Ministry.

Weaknesses:

- Our organisation has little reputation in other parts of government;
- We have a small staff with a shallow skills base in many areas;
- We are vulnerable to vital staff being sick, leaving, etc.

Opportunities:

- We are working on a topical issue,
- The government claims to want to listen to the voice of local NGOs,
- Other NGOs from our region will support us.

Threats:

- Will the report be too politically sensitive and threaten funding from sponsors?
- There is a pool of counter-evidence that could be used to discredit our research and therefore our organisation.

The NGO might therefore decide, amongst other things, to target the report to specific patrons in one ministry, use their lead researcher to bring credibility to the findings and work on building up a regional coalition on the issue.

Further Information

- A New Weave of Power, People and Politics. The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation. Lisa VeneKlasen with Valerie Miller, World Neighbours 2002. www.justassociates.org/ActionGuide.htm
- The Marketing Teacher provides online tools for those involved in marketing and managing. Their resources include a SWOT analysis: www.marketingteacher.com/Lessons/lesson_swot.htm
- Useful introductions to the SWOT can also be found at www.mindtools.com/swot.html and www.tutor2u.net/business/strategy/SWOT_analysis.htm

