

Tool 4 – S.W.O.T. Analysis

TOOL: The **S.W.O.T.** (**S**trengths **W**eaknesses **O**pportunities **T**hreats) **Analysis** is a methodology for analyzing how a person, system, program, project plan, or an organization can be improved.

WHEN: **S.W.O.T. Analysis** is an effective method of identifying our **Strengths** and **Weaknesses**, and to examine the **Opportunities** and **Threats** we face. Often carrying out an analysis using the S.W.O.T. framework will be enough to reveal changes that can be usefully made.

HOW: To carry out a **S.W.O.T. Analysis**, *first* agree upon exactly what it is that you are about to analyze. What is the subject of your analysis? A person? An organization? A project? A product or service? List some facts. Be specific. Describe the subject. Write it down. Now begin to analyze the subject by looking at it from **four** different perspectives.

1. Strengths – a strength is a resource or capability of the subject that you can use effectively to achieve its objectives. – Think internal environment. Consider this from your own point of view and from the point of view of the people you deal with. Don't be modest, be realistic. If you are having any difficulty with this, try writing down a list of your characteristics. Some of these will hopefully be strengths! Try brainstorming.

Write down answers to the following questions:

- What are our advantages?
- What do we do well?

2. Weaknesses – a weakness is a limitation, a fault, or defect in the subject that could prevent it from achieving its objectives. – Think internal environment. Again this should be considered from an internal and external basis - do others perceive weaknesses that you don't see? Does the "competition" do any better? It is best to be realistic now, and face any unpleasant truths as soon as possible. Try brainstorming.

Write down answers to the following questions:

- What could be improved?
- What is done poorly?
- What should be avoided?

3. Opportunities – an opportunity is any favorable situation in the subject's environment. It is usually a trend, or change of some kind, or an overlooked option, or a future program idea, or possible legislation. – Think external environment. Useful opportunities can come from such things as: a) Changes in technology and markets on both a broad and narrow scale; b) Changes in government policy related to your field; c) Changes in social patterns, population profiles, lifestyle changes, etc.; d) Local events

Write down answers to the following questions:

- Where are the good changes facing us?
- What are the interesting trends?

4. Threats – a threat is any unfavorable situation in the subject’s environment that is potentially damaging to its plans or vision. The threat may be a barrier, a constraint, or anything external that might cause problems. – Think external environment. Carrying out this analysis will often be illuminating - both in terms of pointing out what needs to be done, and in putting problems into perspective. Try brainstorming.

Write down answers to the following questions:

- What obstacles do we face?
- What is the “competition” doing? How will it affect us?
- Are the required specifications for our environment, products or services changing?
- Is changing technology threatening our position?
- Do we have funding problems?

TIPS: **1.** Do not underestimate the instruction to *first* agree upon exactly what subject you are about to analyze. If you are doing a S.W.O.T. in a group setting, this is crucial.

2. The first part of the S.W.O.T analysis is to collect a set of key facts about the subject and its environment. The second part of the S.W.O.T analysis is to evaluate the data and determine whether they constitute strengths, weaknesses, opportunities or threats to the subject. Look for patterns among the compiled response to the questions asked. Is there a theme? A direction?

During the analysis one could ask:

- How can this threat be considered an opportunity as well as a threat?
- How could this apparent strength turn out to be a weakness?
- How does this weakness really represent a strength?

The answer to these and similar questions may give new insights into choosing appropriate strategies.

3. The Project Management Institute (PMI) recommends S.W.O.T. analysis as an information-gathering technique in its Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide). It is an excellent tool for a new project team to use when the organization does not have a standard Project Risk Management methodology.

This “tool” is from **Tom Adams’ Problem Solvers Toolbox** which he compiled over his years of working as an Information Systems Analyst. These Problem Solving Tool Abstracts are *NOT* copyrighted; please share them. They are based upon the concepts of other problem solvers.

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