
GUIDELINES ON STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS (SWOT) ANALYSIS

1. INTRODUCTION:

SWOT, is an analysis method, which is used in strategic planning for the Institutions and consists of the initial letters of concepts of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Strategic planning is a process in which future aims are determined together with the stakeholders and responsibilities & sources are allocated in accordance with these future aims. It is a process between the points an Institution stands presently and the points it tries to reach in a certain period of time. The concept of strategic planning is closely related with the concept of foresight. In this regard, strategic planning can be considered as the collection of systematic efforts of Experts for the best choice of the future.

The aim of strategic planning is to produce planned facilities, embody the appointed policies, follow the application efficiently and take the initiative and provide the effective participation. In the process of strategic planning, some of the fundamental questions are needed to be answered. Those are “Where are we?”, “How can we reach our desired goal? And “How can we evaluate our success?”

Institutions are expected to make a strategic planning to gain a better perception of ongoing quest for quality education and fulfilling it’s mission and realizing it’s vision.

2. SALIENT POINTS :

- As a medium of administration, SWOT analysis is used in making a plan, defining a problem and also solution of it, making a strategy and giving an analytic decision. It is a tool for auditing an Institution and its environment. It is a first stage of planning which helps to focus on key issues.
- The role of SWOT analysis is to take the information from the environmental scan and separate it into internal and external issues. SWOT analysis determines if the information indicates something that will assist the Institution in accomplishing its objectives or if it indicates an obstacle that must be removed or minimized to achieve desired results.
- SWOT analysis is scalable, collaborative, integrateable, simple and cost efficient.

3. STEPS TO CONDUCT A SWOT ANALYSIS:

(i) Teamwork and Stakeholder Participation:

The first step involves setting up a team of the key stakeholders of the Institution to carry out the consultations/brainstorming. The team essentially has to be participatory and should encourage all participants to be candid and constructive. Involving maximum students, faculty and staff in the brainstorming will help to bring out information, determine the most important Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, and prioritize the actions.

The brainstorming may be carried out in separate groups of students, using an appropriate facilitator for each group. Alternatively, the internal Strengths and Weaknesses could be identified separately by each group and brought together to discuss the external Opportunities and Threats, and the Strategic Planning. For a very large Institution, the SWOT analysis may be done department-wise to reveal the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

ii) Data Analysis:

Collect all the participants in a room with a blackboard/flip charts/computer projection. Explain the objective and process of the exercise to them. Encourage a congenial atmosphere for a free flow of information, insisting on focus, specificity and brevity. The facilitator should keep the discussion going and a rapporteur should be writing the points on the board/charts/computer for all to see.

Collectively list all strengths that exist. Then list all weaknesses by avoiding modesty and over-estimation. Be realistic.

List all opportunities that exist for the future. Then list all threats that exist in the future.

Data, which is gained through either formal or informal information, can be used in the process of strategic planning. By this way, with the help of SWOT analysis, it is easy to determine Institution's present situation and whether that Institution functions properly or not.

The Institution needs to review the SWOT analysis and do the strategic planning to meet the objectives, addressing each of the four areas.

iii) Strategic Planning:

a. STRENGTHS: The Strengths can be identified by thinking in terms of capabilities, recognition, competitive advantages, resources, assets, people (experience, knowledge, their culture, values, attitudes and behaviors), innovative aspects, marketing, quality of programmes, location, accreditations, qualifications, certifications, and processes/systems through the following:

- Resources and capabilities that can be used as a basis for developing a competitive advantage
- Strengths should be realistic and not modest
- Strengths should answer:
 1. Advantages of the Institution
 2. The activities the Institution can plan to do better
 3. The relevant resources on which the Institution has access to.
 4. Vision of others about Institution's strengths.
 5. Unique Selling Points (USPs)
 6. Financial reserves of the Institutions along with returns from fees and other sources

Method to use each strength: The strengths would normally support the achievement of the objective, may be useful to leverage other benefits.

b. WEAKNESSES: The Weaknesses can be identified by thinking in terms of disadvantages, gaps in capabilities; lack of competitive strength, reputation, financial, timescales/deadlines, weak core activities, distractions, morale, leadership, accreditations, continuity, robustness and processes/systems through the following:

- Internal forces that could serve as a barrier to maintain or achieve a competitive advantage, a limitation, fault or defect of the Institution.
- Weaknesses should be truthful so that they may be overcome as quickly as possible.
- Weaknesses should answer:
 1. The possibility of improvements
 2. Weak processes and systems and inadequate facilities
 3. Lack of competitive strengths
 4. Lack of Industry/network partners
 5. Plan predictability
 6. Financial situation, cash flow and cash-drain of the Institution
 7. Means to perform in a more effectively and efficient manner, changes in the Institutions to help them function more efficiently

Method to stop each Weakness : The Institutions need to identify the Weaknesses and take remedial measures to overcome them.

c. OPPURTUNITIES: The Opportunities can be identified by thinking in terms of market developments, competitor vulnerabilities, industry trends, and geographical partnerships through the following:

1. The good opportunities facing us
2. The interesting trends we are aware of
3. Technology development and innovation
4. Growing student demand
5. Increased attraction for qualified future faculty
6. Research in niche areas
7. Geographical expansion
8. Employment and industry trends
9. Unique Selling Points (USPs)
10. Industry Institution partnership
11. Innovations, product development, patent, business development
12. Global influences, opportunities

Method to exploit each Opportunity. These are attractive external factors that can help the Institution develop and improve. They need to be prioritized on the basis of their benefits to the Institution in the short (1-2 years), medium (4-5 years) and long terms (8-10 years).

d. **THREATS:** The Threats can be identified by thinking in terms of external forces that could inhibit the maintenance or attainment of a competitive advantage or any unfavorable situation in the external or internal environment that is potentially damaging present and future through the following:

1. Obstacles faced by the Institution - Social, Political and Managerial
2. Doings of the competitors
3. Change in the required specifications for services of the Institution
4. Threats of changing technology ~~threatening~~
5. Declining supply of qualified faculty
6. Loss of key staff
7. Declining quality of students
8. Difficulty of sustaining internal capabilities
9. Lack of new ideas and access to fast-changing technology
10. Lack of industry-Institution partnership
11. Financial status and sustainable financial backing of the Institution

Method to defend against Threats: These are external factors beyond the Institution's control, but the Institution must have a 'Plan' to address the ones that have a high probability of occurring and present a serious risk to the achievement of the objective. If there are sufficient Strengths and Opportunities in the Institution, all the risks need not be addressed.

4. **SWOT Analysis Limitations:**

The classification of some factors as Strengths or Weaknesses, or as Opportunities or Threats is somewhat arbitrary. For example, a particular Institution's culture can be either Strength or a Weakness. A technological change can be either a Threat or an Opportunity. Perhaps what is more important than the superficial classification of these factors is the Institution's awareness of them and its development of a strategic plan to use them to its advantage.