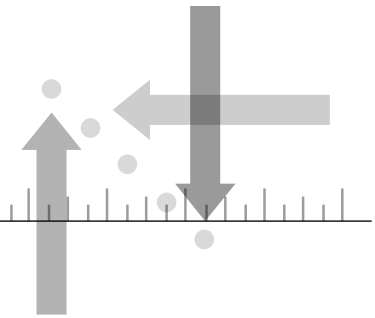

SWOT+

Purpose

The purpose of conducting a SWOT is to identify, organize, and prioritize the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (or SWOTs) that influence the planning, design, development, implementation, and evaluation of almost any program or project.

Needs Assessment Applications

Identifying a list of SWOTs is a common brainstorming technique used in organizational planning. Developing a list alone, however, rarely provides the useful information required to guide a needs assessment. Instead, you should combine the benefits of brainstorming with an approach that defines the relationships among the identified SWOT factors, and then you should use those relationships to guide decisions about what to do next.

The resulting SWOT+ technique asks SWOT informants to assign values to each of the items on the SWOT list. Thus, in certain cases, the items on the list that are of highest value may be acted on first, and the items with lesser importance might need to be recognized but never acted on.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages

- A SWOT builds on the value of a process that is already familiar in most organizations.

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- SWOT factors are prioritized in relation to other SWOT factors, rather than simply listed and given equal value.
- A SWOT engages a group in defining the relationship among SWOT factors.

Disadvantages

- Assigning of values to each SWOT factor can be challenging for group members.
- Additional time is required to move from the SWOT factors to their relationships to the recommendations about what should be done next.

Process Overview

1. Decide on a focus for your SWOT+ analysis. For instance, are you looking for SWOT factors that influence just your project or unit, or SWOT factors that affect the entire organization? This context will provide boundaries for the discussion and will help you identify SWOT factors that will best guide your needs assessment.
2. Identify internal and external stakeholders for the SWOT analysis. These partners should represent an array of perspectives around the performance issue at the center of your needs assessment.
3. In a meeting (or by e-mail), have group members identify SWOT factors from their perspectives. In most situations, begin your SWOT analysis by asking participants to simply brainstorm ideas to fit into the following four categories:

   Strength: An internal competence, valuable resource, or attribute that an organization can use to exploit opportunities in the external environment

   Weakness: An internal lack of a competence, resource, or attribute that an organization requires to perform in the external environment

   Opportunity: An external possibility that an organization can pursue or exploit to gain benefit

   Threat: An external factor that has the potential to reduce an organization's performance

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4. When you have identified an adequate number of SWOT factors (6 to 10 per category is typically enough), sort them into a SWOT matrix (see table 3A.4).
5. To enhance the SWOT factors, ask the group members to define their relative value or importance within the context. Do this by using a continuum along each of the X and Y axes of your SWOT matrix (see figure 3A.1). Use the continuum of internal-to-external control for the X axis and the asset-to-liability continuum for the Y axis. Individual factors can then be plotted within the matrix according to their relationships to other factors.
6. Place a mark (for example, S1, S2, and so on) for each SWOT factor where it intersects along the two continuums, thus defining its relationship to other SWOT factors. Figure 3A.1 shows how value assignments were given to each item on the SWOT list (from table 3A.4) and were plotted on the matrix.
7. Use the plotted SWOT factors to determine which factors should be fixed immediately, which should be improved on over time, which should be sustained, and which should be monitored (see figure 3A.1).

Table 3A.4 Traditional SWOT Matrix

SWOT Analysis

Community Public Transportation SWOT

Strengths	***Weaknesses***
S1 = Four new subway stations have been completed in the past year; three more are expected in the next two years.	W1 = Approximately 18% of subway and bus mechanics are expected to retire in the next five years.
S2 = There is a growing demand—a 15% increase in subway riders in the past year.	W2 = Development of new bike lanes in the city center has been delayed.
S3 = The past year saw a 3% increase in "overall satisfaction" among subway riders.	W3 = Increased subway and bus fees have reduced the ability of poorer citizens to afford public transportation.
Opportunities	***Threats***
O1 = Increasing fuel costs may push more people to public transportation.	T1 = Increasing fuel costs increase bus costs.
O2 = Biking and walking to work are becoming more popular.	T2 = The roads in the city center are clogged during rush hours, increasing commuting times and delaying bus schedules.
O3 = National subsidy is possible to help finance reduced fee transit cards for elderly and disabled populations.	T3 = Labor costs are increasing.
	T4 = Delays in delivery of new buses and subway cars from manufacturers are averaging 4–6 months behind schedule.

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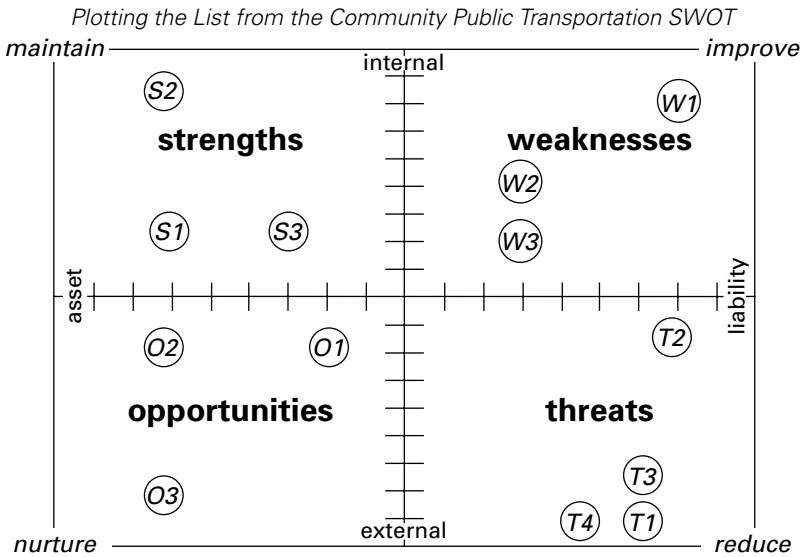
Figure 3A.1 Expanded Versions of the SWOT Matrix (SWOT+)



Note: The letters and numbers within the quadrants correspond to information provided in table 3A.4.

8. With each SWOT factor plotted into the matrix from table 3A.4 , prioritize the factors in order of importance for achieving desired performance objectives.
9. Use the prioritized list of SWOT factors to guide your decisions. You can see that with this information visually plotted, the participants can go a step further and can discuss the relationship among the items plotted; (a) which items to act on and in what order and (b) which items can possibly be monitored for now, but perhaps never acted on.

Tips for Success

- When identifying SWOT factors, use an open brainstorming process that allows all participants to share their ideas.
- Avoid ambiguous SWOT factors; link each factor to a specific and measurable indicator to ensure that everyone is using the same operational definition of the factor.

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- Work to build consensus around the placement of SWOT factors within the matrix; keep in mind that often there are many opinions about where individual factors should go on the continuums of internal–external and asset–liability.

References and Resources

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