

SWOT DISCUSSION

Topics

WHY DO SWOT?

Administration edict, but ...

Universities under pressure to change (budget pressures, accountability, need to focus resources on common goals, etc.).

SWOT can have positive effects on the group.

- Helps coalesce group around shared perspectives.
- Can reduce group dissention, sources of conflict.
- Can focus group's efforts on common goals.
- Proactive participation gives group a voice in its future.

TECHNIQUE-BASED TIPS

What is the focal point of the analysis?

A: The group (College, Department, perhaps a committee).

- Group is a collection of attributes (strengths, weaknesses).
- Group resides in environment of everything outside the group (opportunities, threats).
- Strengths are building blocks of a future direction (the "strategic path").
- Weaknesses are relevant only if they affect ability to implement "strategic path".
- Group's task is to find "best" strategic path that:
 - Capitalizes on strengths.
 - Identifies weaknesses that need strengthening to achieve path.
 - Is responsive to stakeholder needs.
 - Operates within network of constraints.

COMMON PROBLEMS IN IMPLEMENTING SWOT TECHNIQUE

What are appropriate criteria for judging the "strategic path?"

A: See PowerPoint slides for criteria (competitive advantage, etc.).

What to do when a factor could be a strength AND a weakness?

A: This is normal. List it both places. Remember, SWOT is a recursive, iterative process. The factor's true status (strength, weakness, or irrelevance) should eventually be known as the final strategic path is determined.

What type of "bulleted lists" belong in the SWOT boxes?

- Keep in mind that SWOT should be a recursive, iterative process (as opposed to linear, sequential).
- Quickly fill in boxes without too much emphasis on reaching group agreement.
- Deduce the implied "strategic path" and discuss its reasonableness.
- Review bulleted lists for relevance & effect on strategic path.
- Add items to boxes, delete items that are irrelevant, & repeat the process until the final strategic path is determined.

Where do stakeholders & constraints fit into the analysis?

- SWOT is a coarse-grained tool.
- Generate separate list of stakeholders (missions/goals/objectives, students, faculty, political bodies, etc.).
- Generate separate list of constraints (resources for implementation, accreditation demands, etc.).
- Continually evaluate the "strategic path" in terms of responsiveness to stakeholder demands & network of constraints.

BEHAVIORAL-BASED TIPS

Resistance to the doing SWOT

Common form: Let's jump to endpoints now.

Point out SWOT benefits (coalesce around shared perspectives, reduce group conflict, etc.).

Perhaps add:

- SWOT sometimes forces resolution of differences in perspectives.
- Give group participants voice in the process.
- Reduces individual disenfranchisement.
- Enhances buy-in to shared goals.

Strive for group understanding that places faith in SWOT process in hopes of achieving benefits.

Lack of agreement on what constitutes agreement. Could be:

- Consensus.
- Majority.
- Substantial majority.
- Any of above, but persons of authority have more powerful vote.

Suggestion: Have group define terms of agreement.

Too much emphasis on arguing appropriateness individual bulleted points in SWOT boxes.

A fairly common problem.

Strive for group agreement that makes SWOT a recursive, iterative process (not linear, sequential):

- Quickly fill in boxes.
- Deduce strategic path.
- Evaluate strategic path in terms of implementability & desirability (stakeholder demands, constraints, wise use of strengths, weaknesses that can be strengthened, etc.).
- Review bulleted lists for appropriateness & revise as necessary.
- Repeat the process until the "best" strategic path is reached.

Too much emphasis on "means" to the extent that sight of "ends" gets lost.

Discussion of "means" (how we get there) can be healthy or cause decision processes to bog down.

Strive for group agreement that:

- Sets asides major discussion of "means" and focuses on "ends" (what we think we should accomplish).
- We will (& must) revisit discussion of "means" later.
- Once the focus on alternative "ends" becomes clearer we can revisit "means."
- Perhaps we will develop more than one "strategic path" accompanied by a statement that the group is willing to go in more than one direction provided resources for implementation ("means") can be provided.