



Use SWOT Analysis as a Career Management Tool

Developed in the 1970s, SWOT analysis (an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) remains a “go to” framework for organizations five decades after its creation, which is a true testament to SWOT’s effectiveness. SWOT provides an objective look at how a company or person fits in the competitive landscape and market. Simple to use yet very powerful, it provides a visual way to organize multiple variables, making it easier to look at all the angles of a particular decision or objective.

SWOT Analysis in Career Management

SWOT’s effectiveness reaches far beyond the business environment. It’s easily adaptable and useful in career planning and decision making as well. Where do you want to head in your career? How will you get there? What could get in your way? These are important and *complicated* questions. And you need a lot of information to make informed decisions. How will you organize all the information? How will you determine which options make the most sense?

Use SWOT! Think about it. By analyzing your strengths, you’ll be better positioned to capitalize on opportunities — *some of which you never even spotted before*. And, with a clearer understanding of your weaknesses, you’ll be better positioned to eliminate threats that may prevent you from moving forward. And, therefore, the SWOT framework can help you:

- separate yourself from your competition in the job market (whether internally with your current employer or in its broadest sense),
- further enhance your unique set of talents, skills, and abilities,
- address barriers to achieving your career goals,
- increase your job satisfaction, and
- manage your career strategically.

To use SWOT in career planning and decision making, start by defining your objective. Write it down to keep yourself focused. For example, perhaps you’re interested in finding a new job, considering further training / education to advance in your career, or contemplating a career change. Once your goal is clearly defined, you can use the worksheet below as a guide throughout your SWOT analysis.



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SWOT WORKSHEET

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Internal Control (Things that are within your control such as education, training, credentials, work experience, professional network, etc.)		
	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
External Control (Things that are outside of your control such as job growth, the economy, competition, chances to increase skills, etc.)		

Your goal is to conduct a *critical evaluation of your situation* using each of the above categories.

- ✓ **Strengths:** What do you do well? What are your strengths in your current role? What other strengths do you have? What advantages do you have that some others do not (e.g., degree, certifications, special skills, unique expertise, connections, etc.)? What resources can you draw upon? What do others have to say about your strengths? Look at your knowledge, skills, and abilities in all areas.



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- ✓ **Weaknesses:** Where could you improve your performance or situation? Are you completely confident in your qualifications, education / training, and skills? If not, where are you weakest? What tasks do you tend to avoid because you are not confident when performing them? Do you have any negative work habits or traits that hold you back (*e.g., missed deadlines, disorganization, impatience, poor interpersonal skills, etc.*)? What might others say needs improvement? Who can help you? Where do you have fewer resources than others?
- ✓ **Opportunities:** How can you turn your strengths into opportunities? What new opportunities can you (and others) identify; are you open to these opportunities? What does the market look like (*e.g., industry growth, new technology, job availability, etc.*)? How can you leverage market growth opportunities and industry trends? Is there a need in your organization or industry that no one is addressing? If so, how can you fulfill it?
- ✓ **Threats:** What threats or barriers do your weaknesses expose you to? Which ones could cause you the most harm; in what ways? How can you minimize the impact? Who can help you? What does the competition look like? What are others in similar situations as yours doing to address the threats? How do your financial situation and / or personal relationships factor in? What is the impact of timing? Are the demands of your position or the work tasks you perform changing? How are technological advances changing your job? Could any of your weaknesses lead to new threats in the future?

Now you have a realistic look at your situation. Use the information to evaluate where to direct your energy and attention. Assess your strengths and opportunities to identify areas that look positive and promising. Also look closely at weaknesses and threats to identify areas to *avoid* as well as those that require attention and action.

Gap Analysis in Career Management

As is the case with SWOT, gap analysis (sometimes referred to as needs analysis) is commonly used in business environments to develop the best plan to remedy a weakness or achieve an outcome. Also like SWOT, gap analysis is easily adapted to career planning and decision making. Based on your SWOT analysis, assess the gaps that may be barriers to achieving your career goals. Then, use the information to develop your action plan to close the gaps.



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Information is the Key to Better Decisions

Complex decisions tend to have layers and there is rarely just one right answer. Therefore, these important decisions require honest self-reflection, energy, effort, and time. SWOT and gap analysis tools help you to organize information effectively, put your “thought processes” to paper, easily share your findings with others, and make informed career decisions.