**Undertaking a SWOT analysis**

This checklist is for those carrying out a **SWOT analysis**, SWOT being the acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. It is a simple, much-used technique, which can help to prepare or amend, plans, in problem solving and decision-making.

**Definition**

**SWOT analysis** is a general technique, which can be applied across diverse functions and activities, but it is particularly appropriate to the early stages of planning for a TIPD visit. Performing a **SWOT analysis** involves the generation and recording of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in relation to a particular task or objective. It is customary for the analysis to take account of internal resources and capabilities (strengths and weakness) and factors external to the organization (opportunities and threats).

# Benefits

**SWOT analysis** can provide:

* a framework for identifying and analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
* an impetus to analyze a situation and develop suitable strategies and tactics
* a basis for assessing core capabilities and competences
* the evidence for, and cultural key to, change
* a stimulus to participation in a group experience.

**Action checklist**

**1. Establish the objectives**

The first key step in any project: is to be clear on what you are doing and why. The purpose of conducting a SWOT may be wide or narrow, general or specific.

**2. Select appropriate contributors**

Important if the final outcome is to result from consultation and discussion, not just personal views, however expert.

**3. Allocate research and information gathering tasks**

Background preparation is a vital stage for the subsequent analysis to be effective, and should be divided among the SWOT participants. This preparation can be carried out in two stages: exploratory, followed by data collection, and detailed, followed by a focused analysis. Gathering information on Strengths and Weaknesses should focus on the internal factors of skills, resources and assets, or lack of them. Gathering information on Opportunities and Threats should focus on the external factors over which you have little or no control, such as social or economic factors.

**4. Create a workshop environment**

If compiling and recording the SWOT lists takes place in meetings, then do exploit the benefits of workshop sessions. Encourage an atmosphere conducive to the free flow of information and to participants saying what they feel to be appropriate, free from blame. The leader / facilitator has a key role and should allow time for free flow of thought, but not too much. Half an hour is often enough to spend, for example, on Strengths, before moving on. It is important to be specific, evaluative and analytical at the stage of compiling and recording the SWOT lists - mere description is not enough.

**5. List Strengths**

Strengths can relate to the group, to the environment, to perceptions, and to people. "People" elements include the skills, capabilities and knowledge of participants. Other people strengths include:

* friendly, cooperative and supportive participants
* appropriate levels of involvement through delegation and trust.

**6. List Weaknesses**

This session should not constitute an opportunity to focus on the negative but be an honest appraisal of the way things are. Key questions include:

* what obstacles may prevent progress?
* which elements need strengthening?
* are there any real weak links in the chain?

It is not unusual for "People" problems - poor communication, inadequate leadership, lack of motivation, too little delegation and no trust - to feature among the major weaknesses.

**7. List Opportunities**

This step is designed to assess the socio-economic, environmental and demographic factors, among others, to evaluate the benefits they may bring to the TIPD visit. Examples include:

* the availability of new technology

Bear in mind just how long opportunities might last and how the group may take best advantage of them.

**8. List Threats**

The opposite of Opportunities - which may, with a shift of emphasis or perception, have an adverse impact.

Weighing threats against opportunities is not a reason to indulge in pessimism; it is rather a question of considering how possible negative experience may be limited or eliminated. The same factors may emerge as both a threat and an opportunity, for example, Information Technology. Most external factors are in fact challenges, and whether the groups perceives them as opportunities or threats is often a valuable indicator of morale.

**9. Evaluate listed ideas against Objectives**

With the lists compiled, sort and group facts and ideas in relation to the objectives. It may be necessary for the SWOT participants to select their five most important items from the list in order to gain a wider view. Clarity of objectives is key to this process, as evaluation and elimination will be necessary to cull the wheat from the chaff. Although some aspects may require further information or research, a clear picture should, at this stage, start to emerge in response to the objectives.

**10. Carry your findings forward**

Make sure that the **SWOT analysis** is used in subsequent planning. Revisit your findings at suitable time intervals e.g. on return from you visit to check that they are still valid.

**Dos and don'ts for SWOT analysis**

**Do**

* Be analytical and specific.
* Record all thoughts and ideas in stages 5-8.
* Be selective in the final evaluation.
* Choose the right people for the exercise.
* Choose a suitable SWOT leader or facilitator.

**Don't**

* Try to disguise weaknesses.
* Merely list errors and mistakes.
* Lose sight of external influences and trends.
* Allow the SWOT to become a blame-laying exercise.
* Ignore the outcomes at later stages of the planning process.