



Action Planning with SWOT Analysis

Intent	<p>To have a group devise a considered action plan to respond to a specific situation. This will be achieved by having them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a thorough analysis of the situation focusing on how the organisation is positioned in terms of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) with respect to the situation. • From the SWOT analysis, identify and agree the interests, objectives and approach before identifying actions. • List priorities and schedule actions that best meet the interests, objectives and approach. • Assign owners to the actions.
Use	With a group who have been brought together to develop a response to a specific situation.
Recommended Size of Group	3—10
Optimal Time Needed	4—8 hours depending on the scope of the situation being addressed and the relevant subject matter knowledge held by the group. Less time may be needed if few actions are required.
Level of Participation	High—group members are expected to identify and record all elements of the analysis and the plan, ideally hands-on. Individuals will also be expected to commit to owning actions and to resourcing them.
Difficulty to Facilitate	Expert—the facilitator will need to ensure the group does not identify actions or solutions too early, before the analysis is complete. Consensus will need to be managed as well as assigning ownership of actions.
Resources Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-drawn, large scale SWOT grid wall chart • Pre-drawn, large scale timeline wall chart with blank columns for generic or calendar timescales • Post-it notes, cards or paper sheets for the participants to record items on the SWOT matrix or the timeline • Optional—laptop, LCD projector, project planning software (e.g. Mindjet Mind Manager and MS Project—see Action Plan step below) • Adhesive tape, Blu Tak or pins for participants to attach notes to wall charts • Pens or markers for participants
Pre-work Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background research into the organisation and the situation to be addressed • Briefing of attendees • Preparation of wall charts

Follow-up Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalization of workshop outputs • Review and revision of the action plan to add further detail, owners, resources and costs
Flexibility	The process envisages a response that is required to a recent issue or threat facing the group or organisation. It works equally well with any challenge or goal set. The use of SWOT analysis is one of the many methods that could be used to help the group focus on interests and objectives and to help them think more laterally. Any method that achieves the same end may be substituted for use in the analysis step of the process.
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License	Free to all

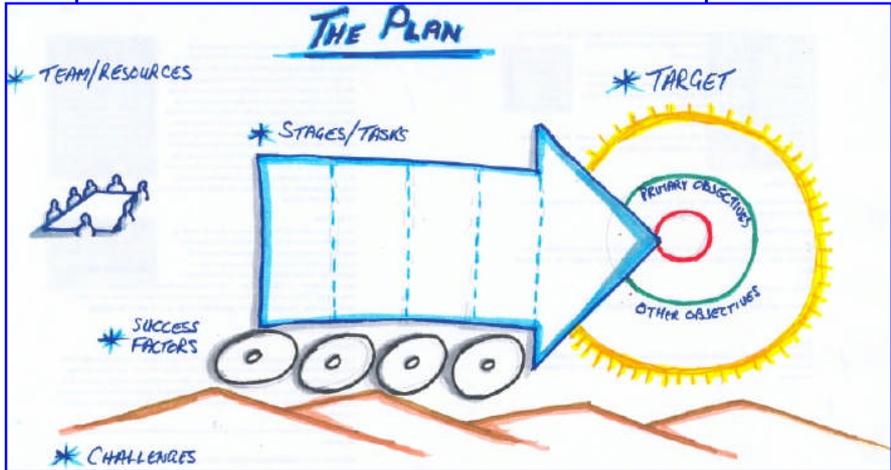
Procedures		
<p>Rational Aim: To have the group agree on a plan to address a specific situation. To promote individual and collective buy-in to the plan and ownership of the actions.</p> <p>Experiential Aim: To experience the value—effectiveness and efficiency—of considering objectives and approach and using these to identify, evaluate and prioritise actions.</p>		
Steps	Procedures	Notes
Preparation	<p>A room with large, clear wall space is needed for wall charts, flip charts and the display of laptop images (if being used).</p> <p>Arrange chairs in a semicircle facing the main wall that displays the SWOT and timeline wall charts. No tables between the participant chairs and the wall charts.</p>	<p>The intention is to get the participants on their feet placing notes on the wall charts and reviewing the material as it develops.</p>
Confirmation	<p>Assuming all relevant introductions have been made, the facilitator or the problem owner states the purpose and value of the workshop.</p> <p>Purpose: to devise an action plan to address the situation.</p> <p>Value: to eliminate a threat or realise an outcome of direct relevance to individuals in the group</p> <p>The facilitator or problem owner then briefly presents the background to the situation.</p> <p>The group is then invited to comment on their understanding of the situation (and NOT its solution). The facilitator will encourage the group to reach a common understanding of the situation. This understanding may be flip charted. Each individual will be asked to confirm they have the same understanding as their colleagues.</p>	<p>Stating the purpose and value of the workshop confirms to the participants the objectives of the session. Stating the value, in terms of value to the participants, captures their interest and helps motivate them to engage with the workshop and its outcome.</p> <p>Confirmation of the situation ensures everyone is on the same page before the real work starts.</p>

<p>Explanation</p>	<p>The facilitator then briefly outlines the process and the value it brings. A simple example of the value of this process to the participants might be:</p> <p>“The <i>[situation]</i> has arisen. It is tempting to dive straight in and start planning all kinds of action in response. However, your first step should be to undertake a short, sharp and dispassionate assessment. This will help you take more effective action, save money and may even turn up some opportunities to advance your business/organisation.”</p> <p>It is important that the group understand they are being asked to work quickly and with concepts (“headlines”) and not a detailed “how to”. The workshop will identify key actions, priorities and owners. The plan produced will be high level, sufficient to establish a clear direction and timetable. This framework can be expanded upon following the workshop.</p>	<p>The group understands the method they will use. They also begin to understand the benefits of the underlying approach.</p>
<p>SWOT Analysis</p>	<p>Introduce the SWOT wall chart. Explain how SWOT is a classic, simple and yet effective tool with which to assess the situation. SWOT is: Strengths; Weaknesses; Opportunities; Threats.</p> <p>Get the group to begin making notes on the Post-Its, cards or sheets provided – one idea per sheet. Explain to them, “At this stage just make lists under each of the SWOT headings – don’t be tempted to leap in and think about solutions just yet. Be disciplined – stay within the specific context of the situation under review.”</p> <p><i>[For the remainder of this process step we will use a simple example situation to describe the procedure. The situation is the imminent arrival of a new competitor.]</i></p> <p>Ask the group to focus on their organisation’s Strengths and Weaknesses first. For instance, Strengths may include an intimate knowledge of the local market and long-standing, valued customer relationships. Alternatively – and remind the group to be dispassionate here, they should not get defensive – Weaknesses may include not having spent much on marketing in the past and not spending enough time with customers.</p> <p>Opportunities and Threats are external to the organisation – the obvious Threat being the new competitor in our example. Ask the group to dig down into this Threat and think about the specifics. As the new kid on the block they probably have a big marketing budget, may plan to offer lower prices and their products or services may have different selling points.</p> <p>Opportunities could stem from their local knowledge, timing or their strategy. For instance, there may be an imminent local event that they know how to make the best of. They may also have time to act before the competitor launches – they might get in ahead of them and steal their thunder. Or now may be the time to reposition the business offering – maybe to focus on the higher value end of the market.</p>	<p>Asking the group first to work helps generate early participation from those who are less comfortable with group working or whose preferred working style is with words and lists.</p> <p>Getting the group on their feet, and keeping them there – moving Post-Its around, for instance - encourages them to engage conceptually and physically with the ideas and their review.</p> <p>At this stage, those who prefer to talk and discuss ideas get the chance to do so. Those who are more introverted may continue to contribute as they write down new ideas or move the notes around on the wall chart.</p>

	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 10px; vertical-align: top;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <i>Local knowledge</i> * <i>Strong customer relationships</i> * <i>etc.</i> </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 10px; vertical-align: top;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <i>Own marketing spend is low</i> * <i>Some relationships neglected</i> * <i>etc.</i> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 10px; vertical-align: top;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <i>Business fair in near future</i> * <i>Time to get in before competitor</i> * <i>Resposition the business</i> * <i>etc.</i> </td> <td style="padding: 10px; vertical-align: top;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <i>Competitor's marketing plan</i> * <i>Undercutting on price</i> * <i>Different selling points</i> * <i>etc.</i> </td> </tr> </table> <p style="margin-top: 10px;">Example SWOT Analysis</p> <p>Once each group member has created several notes or sheets, encourage each individual to stand by the SWOT wall chart and place their notes under the relevant SWOT heading. Once the notes are up, ask the group (still standing) to review the initial ideas and to check their understanding of each other's notes. Encourage them to add new notes arrived at through association and discussion.</p> <p>The facilitator should help the group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seek understanding of each other's ideas, whilst avoiding conflict ● Write down every idea so nothing is lost ● Sort, sift and summarise ideas to produce consolidated lists <p>Achieve consensus that the lists are complete, accurate and relevant.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <i>Local knowledge</i> * <i>Strong customer relationships</i> * <i>etc.</i> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <i>Own marketing spend is low</i> * <i>Some relationships neglected</i> * <i>etc.</i> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <i>Business fair in near future</i> * <i>Time to get in before competitor</i> * <i>Resposition the business</i> * <i>etc.</i> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <i>Competitor's marketing plan</i> * <i>Undercutting on price</i> * <i>Different selling points</i> * <i>etc.</i> 	
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Interests and Objectives	<p>The facilitator should now introduce a short time period to reflect on what has emerged from the SWOT analysis. Encourage the group to identify the interests to be met and to list any high level objectives to help focus the action planning.</p>	<p style="color: red;">Again, help the group avoid developing solutions at this stage. If necessary park any solutions which arise</p>				
Actions	<p>By now the group will have short, focused lists under each of the SWOT headings.</p> <p>The facilitator now gets the group to brainstorm what they might do for each item in these lists. Again, start by having them work as individuals, creating one note for each action.</p>	<p style="color: red;">As before, keep the group working at the wall chart, allowing them to continue to interact as a</p>				

	<p>If there are many items to work with, it may be useful to first have the group stand back, select the winners and begin listing actions only for these items.</p> <p>The facilitator should position fresh flip chart sheets around the SWOT wall chart to allow the group to add their ideas on actions. Get the group to identify which SWOT item their action relates to (number each SWOT item and have this number noted as part of each action).</p> <p>Then get the group back on their feet, pinning up their actions. As before, encourage review and discussion. Remind the group not to judge the actions until they have run out of ideas. Ask them to consider all four lists together – explain how links between them may spark new ideas.</p> <p>The facilitator should ensure the group evaluates the actions against the SWOT items to ensure a good fit.</p>	<p>group whilst allowing for different personalities and working styles.</p> <p>Reference to the SWOT lists can also provide a method of resolving disagreement in the same way that a facilitator will use “interests” to overcome blockages arising from “positions”</p>
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<p>Action Plan</p>	<p>Once the action list appears complete (at least for the time being), move to the timeline wall chart. First agree with the group what would be the most useful unit of time (“now, soon, later” or “month, quarter” etc.).</p> <p>From the action list around the SWOT wall chart, take each action and have the group position the action on the timeline. (It may be useful to make copies of each action so that the association with the SWOT analysis is not lost.)</p>	<p>As before, encourage the group to do this work for themselves and on their feet.</p>
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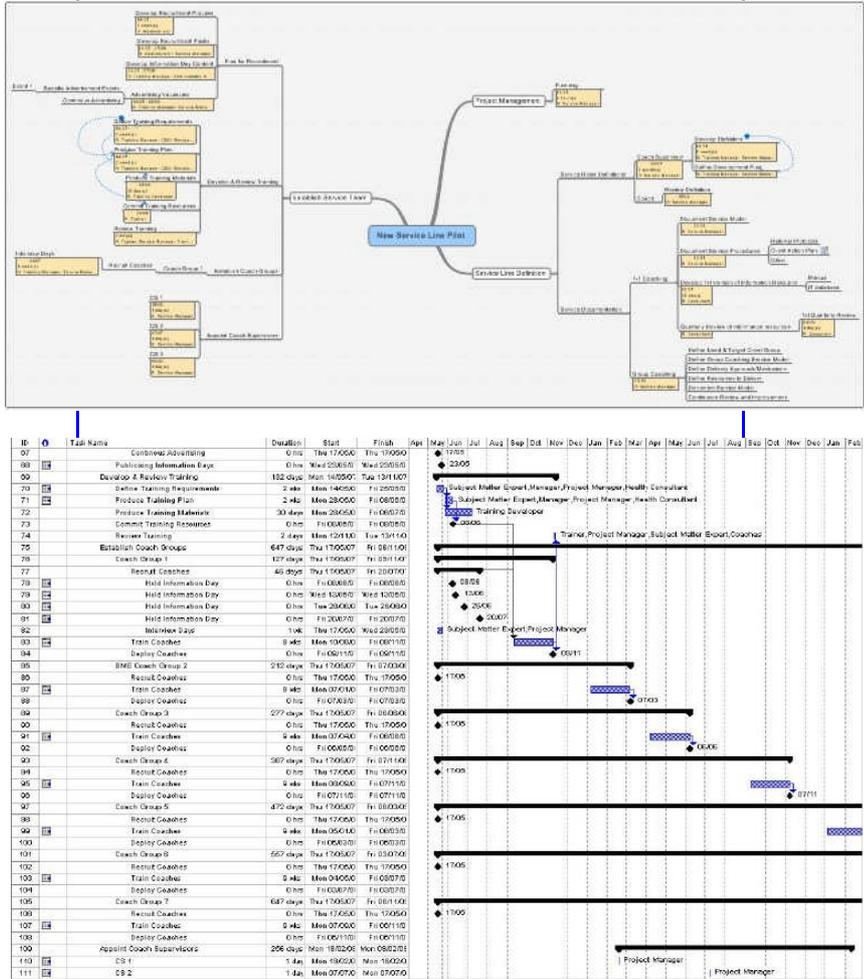


Example Timeline Wall Chart
(after Grove Consultants International)

- For each action have the group write on the notes on the timeline wall chart:
- Responsibilities
 - Priorities
 - Duration
 - Internal and external resources
 - Estimates of possible costs.

[Instead of (or in addition to) the timeline wall chart, you may wish to use software to capture the actions, task information and to schedule them.

For instance MindManager can be used to:
Record the actions
Review task information against each action
Export the resulting data to MS Project.



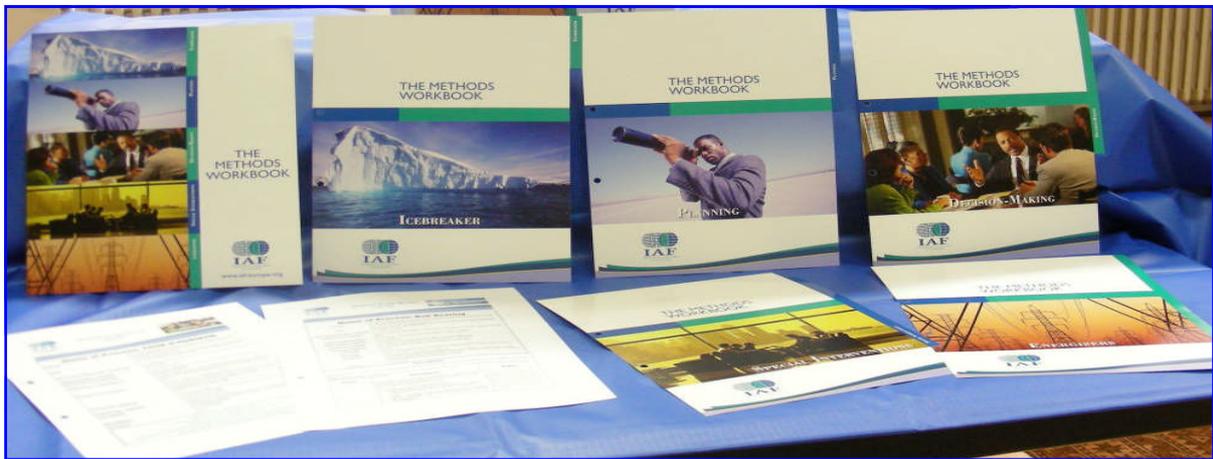
MS Project can then be used to review and refine the schedule to produce a first cut project plan.]

Have the group review the resulting high-level plan and make any initial amendments to it. The facilitator should ensure that the group does not get lost in detail or begin to debate solutions or positions.

Review, Next Actions and Closure

The facilitator now takes the group through the work they have completed, providing a summary of the groups achievements. The problem owner should be invited to participate and comment favourably, thanking the participants for their contributions.

	<p>The group should be taken back to their original statement of the situation and asked how well they believe their action plan will address it.</p> <p>The facilitator then leads a short discussion on immediate next steps and notes these on a flip chart. These will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalisation of the workshop outputs • Review of the objectives, approach and high level plan • How the plan may need to be taken forward and how it will be owned • The immediate next actions called for by the action plan itself. 	
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