Conducting a SWOT
or (OTSW)

What is it?

The granddaddy of focus group data gathering processes is the traditional SWOT and its updated offspring, OTSW Analysis. You can SWOT (or OTSW) a concept, a program, a department, a school, or a new initiative. You can even SWOT a person, although one must be careful when doing so.

When doing SWOT Analysis, remember that the S and the W are INTERNAL and the O and T are external. Traditionally, facilitators begin with the organization's **Strengths** and **Weaknesses** and then move out to the external **Opportunities** and **Threats**. Recent thinking prompts consideration first of the opportunities and threats existing in the "outside world" against which the institution can leverage its strengths and find conviction to correct its weaknesses. We like this reversal of the traditional order because it helps an organization place itself in context.

Method

Group Process Technique: Brainstorming
Purpose: To generate a large quantity of ideas in response to a stated problem or question.

The group is asked to generate as many responses to the following questions within a limited time frame (10-20 minutes per question). All responses are recorded verbatim and ideas are not judged until evaluation time.

Group Size: Can be used with any number of participants (large groups can be broken into smaller groups of 6-10 to maximize output)
Resources: Flip chart and markers

Procedure

1. Explain basic rules of brainstorming[1]:

    a. Don't evaluate the idea; defer judgment.
    b. Quantity is the goal.
    c. The wilder the better.
    d. Record each idea verbatim.
    e. Tagging on or combining ideas is okay.

2. Begin brainstorming by asking the following questions:

    a. What opportunities exist in our external environment?
    b. What threats to the institution exist in our external environment?

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[1] The Facilitator's Fieldbook, Tom Justice and David Jamieson

Brainstorm these along the lines of:

- Political, economic, social, technology
- Market size and behavior
- Constituent behavior
- Benefits sought
- Potential new entrants
- Direct competitors' performance, strategies, capabilities, intentions

3. What are the strengths of our institution?
4. What are the weaknesses of our institution?

Brainstorm these along the lines of:

- Ability to design/innovate
- Ability to source and produce
- Ability to market and service
- Ability to finance
- Ability to manage

5. Record all ideas verbatim.
6. After all ideas have been storyboarded and the time limit is up, categorize ideas into thematic groupings.

Facilitator Notes To Wrap Up

1. Prioritization is a key factor in obtaining useful SWOT (OTSW) data, as the output from brainstorming will be significant. At the end of the small group reports, reduce the list of strengths and weaknesses to no more than five distinctive competencies and debilitating weaknesses:

    a. Strengths that are distinctive competencies

    Are those few things that your institution does best that constituents really care about and that set it apart from other market entries. Core competencies usually attract widespread agreement. An organization will focus on capitalizing on its distinctive competencies.

    b. Weaknesses that are debilitating

    Are those areas in which constituents expect and demand performance or competency and the institution is dangerously lacking. Debilitating weaknesses frequently attract widespread agreement. An organization will focus on correcting its debilitating weaknesses.

2. Reduce threats and opportunities to the five most critically important of each.

Questions to Consider when Evaluating OTSWs or SWOTs:

1. What will the institution gain if it does nothing? What will it lose?
2. What will the institution gain if it launches a successful initiative? What will it lose if it does not?

SWOT(OTSW) MATRIX

1. What are the Threats and Opportunities present in the external marketplace that effect this school, department, program, project?

2. What are the Strengths and Weaknesses present inside the institution that effect this school, department, program, project?

Opportunities	Threats
Strengths	**Weaknesses**

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