

Analyzing District Planning Practices and Culture: SWOT Analysis

Identifying Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Related to Planning;
Using These Results in a Planning or Action Planning Process

What is a SWOT Analysis? “SWOT” is an acronym that stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. A SWOT analysis is a structured activity that a group can engage in to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing them in any given area.

Why This Step is Important: The *Planning for Success* SWOT analysis is useful in jumpstarting a planning or action planning process. Through this activity, a team can engage in frank conversation about challenges and potential barriers while establishing a shared understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the district in terms of its own planning practices and culture. This activity can be highly interactive, effective, and time-efficient. It results in a document that participants can reference throughout the planning or action planning process, ensuring that the plan they develop is appropriate for the district’s context and maximizes the opportunity that the planning process presents to the district.

The Superintendent’s Role: The SWOT activity can prove extremely valuable in the planning process—if participants are willing and able to engage in honest, sometimes difficult, conversation about the district’s current practices and culture. If the superintendent supports conducting the SWOT, it is very helpful if s/he encourages participants to be open and honest during this activity. Participants often look to the superintendent to model the way to do this work.

The SWOT Process: This activity represents a progression from individual reflection to small group work to whole group work. The resulting product of this activity is a list of common themes, generated by the whole group, that answer each of the SWOT’s four questions. The themes that respond to each question should be categorized as either “culture” or “practice.”

1. Allow each participant to silently reflect and note his or her answers to all questions on the SWOT Worksheet, which is below. This worksheet may be sent in advance of the session and completed as pre-work or completed during the session. If completed during the session, allow approximately 8 minutes for participants to reflect and record.
2. Organize into small mixed groups of 5 to 6 participants each. Follow the SWOT Protocol. Allow approximately 12 to 15 minutes for small groups to discuss and record strengths, 15 minutes for weaknesses, and so on. Small group work may take approximately 60 minutes to complete.
3. Reconvene as a whole group. Ask the facilitators of all groups to share strengths. Then ask all facilitators to share weaknesses, and so on. Identify and discuss common themes across group work.
4. Collect the charts/documented work from the recorders of all small groups. Type up and distribute results of the SWOT to team members. Continue to use and refer to this work throughout the planning process.

Time Required: The SWOT requires approximately 1 to 1.5 hours to complete, depending on the number of participants/number of small groups that will report out, as well as whether the worksheet is completed during the session or in advance.

Text for Facilitator Presentation Slides: Some suggested text for presentation slides for conducting a SWOT analysis is included below.

Slide 1: SWOT Analysis

- What are the strengths of your current practices and culture related to planning and implementation?
- What are the weaknesses of your current practices and culture related to planning and implementation?
- What opportunities might an improved planning process offer your district?
- What threats does the district face as a result of current planning practices and culture?

Slide 2: SWOT Protocol

- Organize into small groups
- Identify a facilitator and recorder
- Facilitator initiates whip-around, asking each member in turn to share one item
- Recorder charts ideas, distinguishing between practice and culture
- Members ask clarifying questions; goal is shared understanding, not shared agreement
- Continue until key items charted; move to next category and repeat until done
- Facilitator shares team's work with whole group
- Whole group discussion: *What themes do you see?*

SWOT Analysis Worksheet

Identifying Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of
Current District Planning Practices and Culture

Instructions: List what you consider to be the two highest priority items, of greatest importance or impact, in response to each question. Please bring a copy of your completed worksheet to leave with the facilitator.

Strengths

What are the strengths of your district's current practices and culture related to planning and plan implementation?

Practices

-
-

Culture

-
-

Weaknesses

What are the weaknesses of your district's current practices and culture related to planning and plan implementation?

Practices

-
-

Culture

-
-

Opportunities

What opportunities might an improved planning process offer your district?

Practices

-
-

Culture

-
-

Threats

What threats does the district face as a result of its current planning practices and culture?

Practices

-
-

Culture

-
-

Your name (optional):