**Analyzing District or School 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 as a first step in a planning or action planning process. Through this activity, a team can develop a deep and shared understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the district or school in terms of its own planning practices and culture. This activity relies on team members’ ability and willingness to engage in frank conversation with one another, in order to identify challenges and potential barriers to improvement. The goal of the SWOT is shared understanding, not shared agreement. The activity can be highly interactive, effective, and time efficient.

The SWOT analysis activity 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 or school context and addresses identified weaknesses and threats. Even more importantly, participants can continue to refer to the opportunities they identified that an improved planning process offers the district or school. This list of opportunities can serve as a set of criteria for the planning process itself, and the facilitator can refer back to and revisit this list of opportunities with the team in order to ensure that the planning process itself is maximizing these opportunities.

**The Leader’s Role in Granting “Permission”**: 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 or school’s current practices and culture. The Superintendent or Principal should consider this need and their comfort with and support of it. If the leader supports conducting the SWOT, it is very helpful if they encourage participants to be open and honest during this activity. Participants often look to the Superintendent or Principal to model the way in 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 participants to silently reflect and note their responses to all questions on the SWOT Worksheet, which is attached. This worksheet may be sent in advance of the session and completed as pre-work, or used as a prompt during the session. If used during the session, allow approximately 5-8 minutes for participants to silently reflect and record.
2. Organize into small groups of 5-6 participants each. To increase opportunities for group members to hear and learn from perspectives different from their own, facilitators will want to construct small groups that are mixed by role, grade span, etc.
3. Follow the SWOT Protocol. Allow approximately 10-15 minutes for small groups to discuss and record strengths, 10-15 minutes for weaknesses, and so on. Small group work may take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete.
4. Reconvene as a whole group. Ask the facilitators of all small groups to share strengths. Then ask all facilitators to share weaknesses, and so on. Identify and discuss common themes across group work.
5. 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, particularly the opportunities identified by the team for the planning process.

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

**Note to Facilitators:** The PfS SWOT activity provides participants with sample responses for each of the four SWOT questions that are identified as “culture” or “practice.” The activity does not provide participants with definitions of the terms “culture” and “practice” in advance, preferring to let participants discuss and construct their definitions of these terms as they work together identifying their responses as “culture” or “practice.” Facilitators may provide definitions of these terms up front, as part of the activity, should they prefer to do so.

**Text for Facilitator Presentation Slides:** Some suggested text for presentation slides for conducting the PfS SWOT analysis is included below. It can be helpful to share examples of other teams’ work before conducting the protocol, in order to provide team members with a better sense of the SWOT process and explore differences between practice and culture. Slides with examples of responses in each category are included below, with culture and practice observations noted.

**Slide 1: SWOT Analysis**

* What are the strengths of your current practices and culture in planning and implementation?
* What are the weaknesses of your current practices and culture in planning and implementation?
* What opportunities might an improved planning process offer your district or school?
* What threats does the district or school face as a result of current planning practices and culture?

**Slide 2: Examples: Strengths**

* Norms-driven meetings (practice)
* Focusing on a few initiatives (practice)
* Critical feedback…because of TRUST (culture)
* “Can do” spirit of collaboration (culture)

**Slide 3: Examples: Weaknesses**

* Coordinating actions over extended time (practice)
* Inconsistent follow through due to lack of accountability (practice)
* Some team members don’t want to put themselves out there (culture)
* Inequity causes tension (culture)

**Slide 4: Examples: Opportunities**

* Vertical alignment of message/practices (practice)
* Streamline for better understanding and success (practice)
* Fosters willingness to take risks (culture)
* Allow staff to see consistent follow through (culture)

**Slide 5: Examples: Threats**

* Lost credibility if we lose focus, change direction, “don’t stay the course” (practice)
* Lack of understanding about how schools run (practice)
* Teacher burnout with too many other initiatives hijacking focus (culture)
* Lack of cohesiveness within group (culture)

**Slide 6: SWOT Protocol**

* Organize into small mixed groups
* Identify a facilitator and recorder
* Facilitator asks each member to share
* Recorder charts, distinguishing practice/culture
* Members ask clarifying questions; goal is shared understanding, not shared agreement
* Continue until key items charted; move to next category and repeat
* 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 Planning Practices and Culture

*Instructions: List what you consider to be the highest priority items, of greatest importance or impact, in response to each question.*

**Strengths**

What are the strengths of your organization’s current practices and culture in planning and plan implementation?

Practices



Culture



**Weaknesses**

What are the weaknesses of your organization’s current practices and culture in planning and plan implementation?

Practices



Culture



**Opportunities**

What opportunities might an improved planning process offer your organization?

Practices



Culture



**Threats**

What threats does your organization face as a result of its current planning practices and culture?

Practices



Culture



| Your name (optional): |
| --- |