

SWOT ANALYSIS FOR CONFLICT AND CLARIFICATION

Strengths - Weaknesses - Opportunities - Threats

"So it is said that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you can win a hundred battles without a single loss. If you only know yourself, but not your opponent, you may win or may lose. If you know neither yourself nor your enemy, you will always endanger yourself." (The Art of War by Sun Tzu)

Introduction

This is a great quote to consider when we are talking about conflict. Conflict has a lot to do with understanding ourselves – how we think and react. Some of these opponents are neighbours, family and friends. When we “other” the other, we make them opponents and we lose the sense of the whole. We lose empathy for each other; we lose a sense of family and community.

When we are in conflict, most of us move into black and white or binary thinking. We lose our objectivity. We stop seeing out and only see in. This happens where I assess myself on my motivations and judge the other on their behaviour. In looking at my good intentions, I always think I am right and my opponent always wrong. This happens in marriage and parenting a lot. However, if I break apart this either-or mindset, I begin to see again.

Here is where the SWOT Matrix comes in.

SWOT Matrix

The SWOT Matrix, popularized in the 60s and 70s from the Stanford Research Institute, has been used for many years in organizational management to conveniently

summarize the assets and liabilities of a system. This has been helpful to me in attempting to understand the effectiveness of businesses, NGOs and other organizations where I have worked. It is also very helpful in understanding changes and stresses in marriages and families, and churches as well.



Strengths are the characteristics of excellence in the relational system. **Weaknesses** are that which place the family or business at a disadvantage relative to the desired outcomes. **Opportunities** are the potentialities that are not adequately developed or known. **Threats** are elements in the environment that could cause trouble for the system.

Strengths and weaknesses are those parts of our organization or system over which we have maximal control; they are attributes of our internal operations. Opportunities and threats are mostly external to our influence where we have less access to change or move. They are elements of our system that we are not responsible for.

Identification of the four elements of the SWOT is important in family function as well. Say for example, the family is considering moving from one town to a larger city. The three kids might have lots to say about it but may not have the vocabulary or feel that they have the permission to give their opinion. The SWOT provides a better than a

“Yes / No” paradigm. Used in a leadership disagreement (say in a community centre), the discussion in this format can inform the process to achieve the objectives of the team.

Matching and Converting

How do you approach a SWOT Matrix? **Matching** is used to discern appreciative change in the system by working with the combined strengths and opportunities to allow for a greater concentration of resources. **Converting** is to resource the strengths and opportunities in the service of managing our weaknesses and minimizing potential threats. Threats and weaknesses, if unaddressed or avoided, are harmful to the system.

If the threats or weaknesses cannot be converted, a system may need to make some structural change so as to minimize the harmful influence of those weaknesses and threats.

System Analysis Using SWOT with Churches and Families

Some churches or organizations are **S-focused**. These systems work to maximize their successes and worry less about their failures (e.g. strong social programs and church-related ministries). Many are **W-focused**; they are concerned overly about losses and setbacks (e.g. budget shortfalls or losing people). There are a number of churches (e.g. church planting) and businesses that are **O-focused** – every day is another opportunity for good. This appreciative approach to life and work is characteristic of people who are entrepreneurs. **T-focused** churches are a bit paranoid. Anxious at the heart, they worry about change and prefer what was. These backward focused organizations have a very hard time to see the forward opportunities.

Now I have given the example of a church system, but any system works similarly. Think of a family system. Is your current family (or your family of origin) more **S-focused** where there is little worry about failing? To count up and consider your assets reduces anxiety and fear. Perhaps you are **W-focused** in your family being so anxious about money or quality of living that you give little opportunity for Strengths. An **O-focused** focused family might see the glass half-full at the birth of a new child or having to change work. Sure, there are problems with change but the possibilities are what is important. And a **T-focused** family is so threat-sensitive that much of family energy focuses on anxiety. It is interesting that **T-focused** systems always find more evidence of threats to be anxious about.

80/20 Principle of Resources

If you as a business, say Apple Computers selling iPhones, and you have 100% capacity (or energy) to invest anywhere you want. You could put it in opportunities (e.g. Apple Watch) or in counteracting Android tech products and Samsung. Let's imagine that Apple has 20% problems in their iPhones. What percentage of their resources or capacity do you think that they should direct to solve the problems or weaknesses? You know the answer most often given – you put 100% of time, talent and effort into solving the problem. iPhone has to be perfect. This is the worst answer possible! What would happen to all their other products if they put too much energy, time and finances in solving the problems?

A better solution is to put 20% of the energy on the 20% problems and put 80% of the energy on what is going right and who are doing well. This is called “**equivalency effort.**”

This makes sense if you think about it. You got into your business as a leader or a pastor or a mother not to solve problems but to create life and impact your personal world. Focusing on problems creates more problems to focus on.

And if you focus mostly on strengths or capacity, you will discover more opportunities and have more energy.

Questions for Your Thinking

I would like you to imagine a problem you are currently facing. You might imagine that you are a principal in a community elementary school with an influx of Sikh children and families. Many of them are ESL families and children, who are capable and thoughtful but cannot effectively communicate with confidence. So here is the problem: how does your school effectively serve your community?

1. What are the things that work well currently that could be effective in serving your community? Please list 3 or more strengths.
2. What are the opportunities with this influx of people that you can see on the horizon? Please list 3 or more opportunities.
3. What are the weaknesses that you see right now in your school? And how do you think they can be remediated with your strengths and opportunities?
4. What are the threats that you can see for your organization and community over the coming months as you make your changes?