

Skillbook

Personal SWOT Analysis

Career
Skills



Mindtools

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Skillbook

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1. Introduction

S WOT is an acronym for:

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities.
- Threats.

When you analyze yourself and your goals using these four elements, you can start to make yourself stand out from the crowd, and further develop the specialized talents and abilities you need to advance your career.

You might have thought about your strengths and weaknesses already, but you may not have identified any opportunities or threats. What opportunities are out there, waiting for you to pursue them? Are there any threats that could derail your current course of action, or the one you dream of taking?

In this **Skillbook**, we'll focus on the essentials of conducting a personal SWOT analysis. We'll look at the tools you need to take a quick snapshot of your personal situation, and develop a meaningful strategy to accomplish your professional and personal goals. In around an hour, you'll learn how to:

- Identify what makes you stand out, and find out how this relates to the opportunities available to you.
- Understand the threats that your environment and your weaknesses expose you to.
- Use your SWOT analysis as the starting point for a solid career and life plan.

Let's get started!

2. What Is SWOT?

SWOT analysis is a classic tool that organizations use to analyze their strategic position.

It encourages companies to examine the external and internal factors that affect business performance, identify their best chances of success (strengths and opportunities), and what they should watch out for along the way (weaknesses and threats).

But it's possible to apply the process to yourself, too, by carrying out a personal SWOT.

By applying this model to your career, or to any other aspect of your life, you set yourself up to achieve your goals, and to eliminate the weaknesses that might undermine you or hold you back. And, you identify opportunities to exploit that you might not have thought of before.

In this Skillbook, we'll work through each of the four quadrants shown in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1 – SWOT Analysis Grid



3. Strengths – What Makes You Stand Out?

It's not boastful to acknowledge your strengths – it's a practical and necessary way to move toward your goals. But how aware are you of your strengths?

Doing “what comes naturally” might not seem anything special to you, or you might doubt your qualities when you're with apparently more confident coworkers. On the other hand, you could highly value aspects of yourself that no one else appreciates!

So, when you look at the “Strengths” quadrant of your SWOT analysis, ask yourself the following questions:

- What am I really good at?
- What skills do other people compliment me on, or associate me with?
- What do I do (or what skill do I possess) that is unique and sets me apart from my peers?

Remember, your strengths are internal factors that are largely under your control. Consider things like:

- Education/knowledge.
- Experience.
- Competencies/skills/abilities/aptitudes.
- Interests.
- Personality traits.
- Resources that you have access to, and connections that you can draw upon.

Action:



Brainstorm your strengths, and list them in the “Strengths” section of your SWOT analysis grid on the next page. And don't be shy! This is your chance to brag about yourself with no one else listening.

Don't limit yourself to the strengths you use in your current role. List all of them, even the ones you're not using right now. Pay particular attention to the skills that you have that others don't – how unique are they?

Ask other people in your personal and professional networks what they think your strengths are. Look at any differences between your list and theirs. What's surprised you and what's confirmed your beliefs? Note down on the grid what you've learned about your strengths, and which of them you'd like to make more use of.

Strengths (What Makes You Stand Out?)	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

4. Weaknesses – What Can You Improve?

We all have weaknesses. They can be things that only you know you about, or that you receive regular feedback on. They may be bad habits, or underdeveloped skills. Weaknesses can stop you achieving your goals, but you can work on them to improve your performance.

If you downplay your weaknesses, you risk setting yourself unachievable goals, so be honest about them, even if you find it difficult. Your weaknesses are as important as your strengths: only when you acknowledge and understand them can you work to eliminate or manage them.

Think about the following when you complete the “Weaknesses” section of your SWOT analysis:

- What do you lack that others around you have?
- What could you do better? (Many of us are masters of deception: we cover up our weaknesses and hide them from others. Even if other people don’t know what your weaknesses are, you will.)
- Are there things that you receive consistent criticism for?
- Do you have any habits or characteristics that plague you at work or at home?
- What do other people see as your weaknesses?

Action:



Fill in the “Weaknesses” section of your SWOT analysis on the next page. But remember... while it’s important to “get real” about your weaknesses, don’t beat yourself up over really small stuff. Focus on specific skills that you believe you need to improve.

Even the most honest of us tend to downplay our weaknesses, so finding out what others think is really important. Consider how their feedback compares with your own beliefs. Do they confirm what you thought, or are there surprises? Note down your findings on the grid.

Strengths	Weaknesses (What Can You Do Better?)
Opportunities	Threats

5. Opportunities – What Is Possible?

Think about how you want your career to develop and grow. You likely want to learn new skills, and take on new responsibilities. But opportunities to do so may not always be obvious. They could arise suddenly, and they might not be around for long, so you need to be prepared to make the most of them.

Try to make your own opportunities. Waiting for exactly the right opening to come along may mean that you miss out. Ask about taking on new responsibilities or volunteer for projects that interest you.

Many people talk themselves out of progressing in their careers. They feel they don't deserve opportunities, or aren't qualified. This negative thinking is self-sabotaging, so recognize it, challenge your assumptions about yourself, and approach things with a "can do" attitude.

Think about the following to identify possible opportunities in your professional or personal life:

- How can you turn your strengths into opportunities?
- How can you create opportunities by enhancing your strengths?
- How can you create opportunities by managing or eliminating your weaknesses?
- What is happening in your organization that may provide an opportunity for you?
- What is happening in an industry that you've had your eye on for a while?
- Are there any general political, economic, technological, demographic, and social trends that you can take advantage of?
- Do any changing circumstances in your personal life present an opportunity for you to capitalize on?
- Are you working on any goals that will provide opportunities once you've accomplished them?

Action:



On the next page, spend a few minutes brainstorming your opportunities, using the bullet points above as a starting point. Find out what people you trust think, too. Consider how their feedback compares with your own perception. Do they confirm your beliefs or are there surprises?

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p data-bbox="220 432 659 466">Opportunities (What Is Possible?)</p>	<p data-bbox="1263 1142 1370 1176">Threats</p>

6. Threats – What Might Harm You?

Threats are any events or trends that have the potential to jeopardize your success. You can't control them directly, but you can often manage, contain or neutralize them, so that they don't cause you harm – as long as you know about them in advance.

Career threats can seem to be out of your control, particularly if they're caused by strategic changes in your organization, or problems in the wider economy. Nevertheless, being able to anticipate them and adapt your career plans accordingly puts you at an advantage.

The key to filling in the "Threats" section of your SWOT analysis is to be far-sighted enough to spot the problems you might face, without worrying excessively about things that aren't likely to happen.

Threats can come from many different angles, so look closely at what you hope to accomplish, and list as many things that can go wrong as you can think of.

Remember, a threat is only dangerous if you don't address it. By identifying your threats, you're being proactive and taking control of your success.

Ask yourself the following:

- What obstacles do you face?
- Are your peers doing things that you haven't started yet?
- Does changing technology threaten your position?
- Is your current role changing (or even disappearing)?
- Are any of your weaknesses significant enough to threaten your overall success?

Action:



Take a few minutes to fill in the final section of your personal SWOT analysis on the next page.

Find out what people you trust think, too. Consider how their feedback compares with your own perception. Do they confirm your beliefs or are there surprises? Note these down in the grid.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats (What Might Harm You?)

7. Your Action Plan

Now that you've completed your SWOT analysis, your final step is to prioritize and plan the actions that you'll take next. This is what makes the whole exercise worthwhile.

Action:



1. Look back at the previous chapters and, on the next page, list the key learnings and possible actions that you've identified during your SWOT analysis.
2. Categorize each by whether it is a **Quick Win** (something you can do right away), a **Habit** to change (a behavior you need to start or stop soon), something to **Learn** (longer-term research, study or reflection), or involves **People** (individuals or groups you could build – or break – connections with).
3. Now it's time to act. Be realistic, but avoid procrastinating. Plan and schedule when you're going to put your action plan into practice, and go for it!

Tip:



Be sure to look at all four areas of your SWOT analysis. Don't list only your strengths and weaknesses, for example!

Finally, remember to review and repeat your analysis regularly, so you are always on top of your game.

	Key Learnings	Possible Actions	Quick Win	Habit	Learn	People	Date and Time
S							
W							
O							
T							

8. Key Points

You are most likely to succeed in life and in your career when you are able to make the most of your strengths, and mitigate your weaknesses.

You also need to take advantage of opportunities when they arise – and pick the ones that will allow you to get to where you want to be, while avoiding any threats that might come your way.

A great way to do this is by carrying out a personal SWOT analysis. SWOT stands for:

- Strengths.
- Weaknesses.
- Opportunities.
- Threats.

SWOT can help you to take control of your career by identifying opportunities that you may not have thought about otherwise. It can also help you to understand your unique strengths – the things that set you apart from others — as well your weaknesses, and what you can do to overcome them.