

# SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE OPPORTUNITY AND VALUE OF THE PERSONAL SWOT ANALYSIS AS PSYCHOLOGICAL TECHNIQUE

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## **Abstract**

*This paper is part of the area of studies which aims to draw attention to a device, an interdisciplinary product, which is considered efficient for personal self-knowledge and evolution. There's been made both a synthesis of the covered bibliography as well as an enunciation of personal views derived from the author's practical experience. One accentuates both the advantages as well as the most frequent difficulties encountered upon using the method. The objective necessity of such approaches and the existence of the possibility of realizing their practical value are underlined here.*

**Key words:** *psychological knowledge, objectives, strategies, personal development*

**JEL classification:** I21, M12

## **1. Description and history of the method.**

Knowledge society in the space of United Europe today claim to build, difficult to investigate topics, tools beyond the possibilities of a single discipline. Such is the case of the SWOT analysis, the qualitative evaluation method which is originally used in strategic planning processes to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats involved in a project or in a business. It covers both the internal reality and external reference of a product, event, system, community or person (2, 13).

The name: SWOT comes from acronym of the English words: Strengths – Weaknesses Opportunities - Threats. Strengths are the quality of the business or project which gives an advantage over others. Weaknesses are made out of features which place the analyzed item in disadvantage to others. Opportunities relate to external aspects that can be exploited by creating an advantage. Threats from the environment relate to elements which can cause problems for a business or project (13).

Historians specialized in this domain recognize the difficulty of finding the origins of SWOT. Perhaps they are in more places, or were forgotten. Some authors attribute authorship of the method to Albert Humphrey at Stanford Research Institute, which between 1960 and 1970 developed a research based on data from 500 companies (6).

Other authors link the initiation of the concept in the early 1950s, to the names of professors from Harvard Business School, George Albert Smith Jr. and C Roland Christensen contributions Weihrich's later (1982), Igor Ansoff (1987), Dealtry (1992), Wheelan and Hunger (1998), Panagiotou (2003), Shinno et al. (2006), perfecting it until the method has become what it is today(14).

Having originally appeared and having developed in the area of economic knowledge of the modern spirit of inter-and trans-discipline, SWOT analysis, due to its

quality, was taken over by social sciences disciplines, including psychology, with very good results.

## **2. Personal SWOT Analysis Content**

The method can be used both for personal self-knowledge, as well as an evaluation tool in psychological programs.

The formal aspect of the chart is the same as in economic analysis: strong points (Strengths) are positive aspects that can be controlled from the interior and used in advantage and weak parts (Weaknesses) which are the negative ones that, by control can be minimized and improved.

Regarding the external conditions which depend on the environment, opportunities (Opportunities) are positive external conditions, profitable, uncontrollable, and fears (Threats) are negative external conditions, obstacles, uncontrollable risks, the effect of which can be foreseen and avoided.

Yet the content differs, being adapted to the specific psychological approach.

To effectively complete personnel files, of the centralization of data which is the personal SWOT analysis, in the specialty literature (15) are considered relevant criteria as:

### a) Strengths:

- personal characteristic traits, positive;
- knowledge, skills, experience specific area of interest;
- higher education, training, awards and recognitions in the field or throughout their careers;
- culture and general education consistent transferable skills of communication, teamwork, leadership qualities);
- high indicators of sociability, contact number, best networking capabilities interpersonal involvement in groups or industry associations;
- enthusiasm and passion for the field;
- resistance to stress;
- effective time management capability;
- creativity;
- rapid response;
- availability for volunteering, etc.

### b) Weaknesses:

- negative personal traits: shyness, low self confidence, low communicability, lack of motivation and poor work habits;
- insufficient or irrelevant experience, incomplete specialized training;
- lack of a solid education;
- employability, reduced contact network;
- lack of focus or career goals;
- low professional skills, poor capacity for management skills;
- low presence of personal skills as teamwork, the capacity for interpersonal communication;

### c) Opportunities:

- positive trends in the field, favourable period for the profession;
- enrolment in an unexpected project that allows for the development of new skills or for the capitalizing of their yet unasserted potential;
- increased demand on the labour market for the regarded specialty; creation of companies or new jobs;
- opportunities to supplement education level;
- compatibility between owned personal skills and the specific domain;
- favourable economic and geopolitical context;

- extension of their own interpersonal network;
- to release any job advancement opportunities;
- innovation of the industry;
- access to an influential person.

d) Threats:

- competitive aspects from other better prepared individuals, with a more vast experience;
- reduced compatibility between personal skills and domain requirements;
- restructuring the industry, reducing employment;
- changes in the market, with direct impact on the positions they hold;
- increased requirements of the profession, standard omitted upon assessment;
- an unfavourable decision at work;
- fewer opportunities for promotion because of competition, or the lack of open positions.

### 3. Possible uses and interpretation of data contained by the 4 fields

The first statement refers to the compulsoriness to specify the objective to be achieved and for which the analysis is done to estimate the chances of success.

By correlating data from four fields one can determine the degree of fit between strengths and opportunities, the internal dynamics of each field and the chart as a whole and the ability to convert weaknesses into strengths and threats into opportunities (13).

Implicitly one can confirm, correct or refute the goal under verification.

If the objective assessment does not appear feasible, it will be replaced by another, which also will be subject to verification. This may foreshadow steps in planning appropriate actions to achieve the objective.

Providing weights and priorities to the analyzed data, adds additional efficiency in the use of the method thus avoiding, for example, weak opportunities to appear as compensations for strong threats.

Internal factors can take different meanings depending on the effect they have on the objectives; the same factor can be considered strong relative to an object considered a weak spot for a different objective.

For example, possession of a driving license can be considered an asset for an aspiring medication distributor but yet a job with low relevance to the situation in which the person seeks to acquire competence in dietetics.

An external factor can sometimes be both a threat and an opportunity in the context of this review. For example, the emergence of psychological tests outperform those that are working at one time is capped psychologist threat to assuming that limit, but it can become an opportunity if one chooses to purchase the test and learn how to use it.

What gives value to the SWOT analysis is that it can highlight opportunities that otherwise would not have been spotted. Thoroughness in completing the field destined for opportunities, preparing a comprehensive list of factors and their prioritization focuses attention on the most significant: for example, the international fair of faculties, a manifestation frequented as an application to the course' subject matter by students which opted for the discipline "counseling for carriers" can show to some of them the possibility to get a Fulbright Scholarship in a prestigious American University.

In terms of actual achievement it is important to observe requirements and recommendations:

- to be noted only definite, verifiable data;
- the mentioned aspects should be as specific and relevant as possible;

- lists prepared in the field to be comprehensive and eventually prioritized;
- to be based on real insights;
- to determine possible actions;
- to promote the formation of strategies;
- to be repeated and revised after a break from the time of establishment;
- to be correlated with other analytical tools;
- should be given to others to obtain their perspective;
- to make use of brainstorming to identify general external aspects;
- to revise and update regularly;
- to be accompanied by a journal in which to record interpretations and decisions the fulfillment of the objective, and any corrections made in time.

#### **4. Example: Case Study.**

The method introduced by Le Play into sociological research and developed by W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki in studying the Polish emigrants consists in the analysis and debate of a given case ( e.g. the particular situation of a person, organization or institution, etc.) with the purpose of understanding it as a whole.

The case study can be used as a research method in medicine, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, economy, history, literature, etc., as a clinical method (a deep and prolonged observation of some individual cases) (5) but also in the psycho-pedagogical counseling context understood as a long lasting and complex process, as a method of transmission of the counseling content (similar to the active method of instruction and education in the didactic activity in schools). (7)

The basic material consists in what the counselor can hear and see during his talks with the subject, his observations being possibly enriched with information coming from other sources: testimonies of other people, documents, conclusions of medical or psychological investigations.

The data are then organized depending on the problems raised by the counseled person and on the targets aimed at by the specialist, on the one hand, and on his theoretical and methodological option, on the other.

The case presented in this paper is taken from the data base resulting from the practical activity developed in the cabinet of psychological support.

M.M. aged 34, a university graduate, married, having a 4 years old child, housewife, asked for specialized help in improving her life, perceived as dissatisfactory and discomfort generating.

She was included in a counseling programme based on the Egan theoretical model (3) .

In the first phase she was evaluated psychologically through samples that hinted at some cognitive emotional and moral-willing aspects and so was identified her problem raising area.

The data resulting after examination were the source of appreciations contained in the four fields of the personal swot analysis ( fig. 1) The next step was to establish, by agreement with the counseled person, the objectives of intervention, among which re-taking up her professional activity occupied a central place. The third step , the intervention based on a concrete plan of action, made it possible to reach the objective and implicitly, to solve the problem that needed psychological counseling.

#### **Matches strengths and opportunities**

- For existing jobs as per the offer - the desire to be employed;
- Competence and motivation according to job description.

#### **Conversion capabilities:**

- Dynamism, the desire to be involved in activities, creativity may encourage

leaving the reserve, diminishing shyness and expanding the network of contacts;

- The ability to manage time effectively may counteract short-term training for the job;
- Family support can reduce load of personal responsibility.

**Issues that require intervention by psychological assistance:**

- Improving public shyness to withstand exposure;
- Increase resistance to stress to optimally manage crossing the job interview, job's demands, demands of multiple life.

**Conclusion:** The favorable estimation of the chance of reaching the target as conditioned by psychological help.

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
<b>I N T E R N A L  F A C T O R S</b>	<p><b><u>STRENGTHS</u></b> (positive personal traits competencies, work experience ...)</p> <p><u>Interest in her profession;</u> Capacity of effort; <u>Spirit of discipline;</u> <u>University degree in the required specialty;</u> Proper cultural and educational level; <u>Ability to effectively manage time;</u> Creativity; Dynamism, desire to be involved in activities;</p>	<p><b><u>WEAKNESSES</u></b> (Negative personal characteristics and poor work habits ...)</p> <p><u>Reserved, almost shy;</u> Transient problems of somatic health; <u>Reduced network of contacts;</u> <u>Limited work experience;</u> Diminished competitive spirit; Reduced resistance to stress;</p>
<b>E X T E R N A L  F A C T O R S</b>	<p><b><u>OPPORTUNITIES</u></b> (specific job opening, an upcoming company project..)</p> <p>The possibility of employment in a job of specialty; Compatibility between personal skills and specific domain owned; Support from family circle; Chance of completion of studies; Attractive salary in the eventuality of landing a job.</p>	<p><b><u>THREATS</u></b> (changing market Requirements and their impact on your employer ...)</p> <p>Time pressure; The description of the future job involves public exposure; Competition from people with More experience and higher relationship skills; Multiple responsibilities in the family.</p>

Figure 1

In this particular case, the personal SWAT Analysis performed by the counselor fulfilled the functions of: a centralizer for the information resulting from the investigation, a binder for the parts of the programme, a monitoring tool for the process

of intervention. At the same time with the remedial type effects obtained, an effect of personal development of the counseled person was produced as she gained the ability of making variants of the Matrix, according to other objectives, contexts and moments. Thus she improved her capacity of self-knowledge and self-development.

### **Conclusion: diagnostic value and intervention.**

Career counseling was the first area of applied psychology that borrowed and used personal SWOT analysis as a tool for self-discovery and self-demonstrating and efficiency.

Advantages of the method are: simplicity, accessibility, intuitive in presenting large quantities of information, widespread applicability, but have recommended it to other ways of use which are more professional.

The psycho-diagnostic evaluation tool is part of a battery of investigation that can ensure the synthesis of the data concerning the examined person by placing them in hierarchy.

This makes it possible to design an intervention program which content is the recovery or formative psychological assistance.

The limits of the method are in relation to the dose of subjectivism incorporated also by the descriptive character of the present information.

The recommended usage that enhances application includes: developing a profile of internal resources (strengths and weaknesses), taking into account the fact that evaluations are sometimes indicative only, indicating the level of confidence of information about its source (results of standardized tests applied by a qualified specialist, empirical investigations, subjective self-evaluations), construction of matrices for external aspects (opportunities and threats).

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