

Pause and Reflect

SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats



Pause and Reflect

Throughout the life of any project, it is important to take a step back from the day-to-day tasks (**Pause**) and think more strategically about where you currently are, where you want to be, and how to get there (**Reflect**). As much as possible, data and contextual understandings should be the foundation for this exercise. There are many tools to facilitate a pause and reflect exercise. This handout will provide details on one approach and provide links to other tools and resources related to this topic.

SWOT

The SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) tool provides a structure for looking at both internal and external bottlenecks and enablers. Once we understand why we are getting stuck and what we can do to unlock blockages, it becomes easier to chart a path forward.

Image 1. SWOT Framework

Strengths	Weaknesses
Internal (organizational) resources that can be deployed to achieve objectives	Internal (organizational) attributes that make it difficult to achieve objectives
Opportunities	Threats
External conditions that allow organization to achieve its objectives	External conditions that make it difficult for organization to achieve objectives

The goal of a SWOT analysis will be to¹

- (1) **Build on strengths:** Pinpoint what the organization or project is doing well and understand the cause of this success, to replicate in areas of weakness.

- (2) **Minimize weakness:** Be realistic about what is not going well internally and think about how to improve internal capacity in this area or outsource key tasks.
- (3) **Seize opportunities:** Utilize external factors such as positive political shifts, market dynamics, or new funding opportunities to catalyze progress.
- (4) **Counteract threats:** Identify external factors such as negative political shifts, demographic changes or cuts in funding that may have a negative impact on progress.

How to facilitate a SWOT Analysis



1-2 hours depending on the number of people and areas of focus.



5-20 people: MoH staff instrumental in operationalization of DMPA-SC plan, private sector and SMO actors, and FP implementing partners implicated in various aspects of scale-up.

Process²:

1. Review or define the “desired end state” for a specific programmatic area related to DMPA-SC introduction (demand generation, supply chain management, self-injection introduction) based on national plan or strategy.
2. Have a flip chart with the four quadrants for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (see image 1). Describe what is required in each quadrant, and then give participants 10-15 minutes to brainstorm ideas, writing one idea per sticky note for all four quadrants. Remind participants to review the data available on scale up progress to inform this brainstorm. This can be done individually or in small groups. After the brainstorm, have participants bring their sticky notes and attach them to the corresponding box.
3. Starting with Strengths, begin grouping ideas together, creating clustered groups. Keep outliers in the corresponding boxes for probing later. Do this out loud,

¹ <https://www.business.qld.gov.au/starting-business/planning/market-customer-research/swot-analysis/uses>

² <https://gamestorming.com/swot-analysis/>

so the participants can weigh in and explain sticky notes if needed. Continue this grouping process for weaknesses, opportunities, and lastly, threats.

4. After sorting and clustering, in a large group agree on a descriptor for each of the clusters of ideas. When the group agrees on the descriptor, write this on the flip chart. When appropriate, ask the group which data they used to come to a certain conclusion. Continue to use the available data to probe into the group's thinking.
5. Give participants a few minutes to study the output so far. Have participants take a green marker and using a dot, vote for 2-3 of the most relevant insights from each square.
6. As the facilitator, circle or mark the categories in each box that got the most votes. Also, make note of outliers that got a vote. Summarize for the group.
7. Facilitate a discussion on the implications for the "desired end state":
 - a. What does this SWOT tell us?
 - b. How do we know? What data is backing this up?
 - c. What decisions need to be made now?
 - d. How can we leverage our strengths to overcome the identified weaknesses or threats?
 - e. Do we have the time, resources, and political will to capitalize on the opportunities?
 - f. What should be done now to minimize or mitigate the threats? We can be proactive?

How and when this can be used in the context of DMPA-SC scale-up?

This is a great tool to use to facilitate a quarterly review meeting to assess progress against a national plan. It can also be used periodically with the national Technical Working Group (TWG), steering committee or other stakeholder engagement meeting. Depending on the focus of the pause and reflect moment, it might be led by the MOH or by a private sector entity trying to refine their operational strategy.

Other pause and reflect activities, tools and resources

In addition the SWOT there are a number of other pause and reflect techniques. Details on how to facilitate each of these approaches can be found by doing a quick google search.

After Action Reviews: A participatory assessment that can be done following a major activity to assess what we were supposed to do, what we did, what worked well, and what did not work well, and then strategize next steps.

Hot Wash: Similar to an after action review, but less formal. It provides a structure to gathering immediate feedback on issues, concerns, and improvements from activity participants.

Post the Path: An activity for a group to quickly identify all the steps needed to complete a particular process. This helps in being more realistic in resource allocation, for both time and money.

Chalk Talks: A silent activity that can be used at the start of a pause and reflect meeting to get participants to reflect on a particular topic. By not talking, participants are able to democratize opinions and experiences.

Appreciative Inquiry: A facilitated process for change management that focuses on what is working well and why, and then building solutions based on doing more of what works well.

Circles and Soup: An activity that allows a group to reflect on what their team controls (directly manages), what their team influences (actions to move forward), and "the soup" (the environment in which your team is operating). Using these categories, the team can identify opportunities for improvement for a project.

Peer Assists: This activity creates a forum for a colleague, or peers, who is struggling with a particular issue to learn from their peers' previous experience. This is generally focused on a specific issue or task.

Online resources include

Usaidlearninglab.org

Gamestorming.com

Ideo.org

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