# Chapter 2: Situation Analysis

### Vocabulary

**Mortality:** The state of being subject to death; the number of deaths in a given population or period.

**Morbidity:** The prevalence of illness or disease within a population; the state of being unhealthy or diseased.

**Volunteers:** People who willingly offer their time and services without being paid, typically for a cause or organization.

**Internal:** Relating to the inside; something located or occurring within a particular place, object, or group.

**Donors:** Individuals or organizations that contribute money, goods, or services to support a cause or charity.

**Legislature:** The branch of government responsible for making laws; a group of people with the authority to legislate.

**Demographics:** Statistical data relating to the population and groups within it, such as age, gender, income, and education.

**Ratio:** A comparison of two quantities by division; the relationship in quantity, amount, or size between two or more things.

**Biodegradable:** Capable of being broken down by natural processes into environmentally friendly substances.

**Consensus:** General agreement among a group of people; a shared opinion or belief reached through discussion and compromise.

### Situation Analysis

What is a situation analysis? While this concept can be defined in several ways in the terms of this course and your assignments, think of it as “the process of analyzing factors related specifically to the development of a communication strategy” (O’ Sullivan et al., 2003,pg. 2).

#### Identifying and Understanding the Problem

“The key to a successful health communication strategy is to focus on one specific problem at a time. Addressing too many problems at one time or too general a problem often creates messages that confuse or overwhelm the audience, limiting the impact of the communication” (O’ Sullivan et al., 2003, pg. 2).

Most health problems are associated with a multitude of other health issues, each one relating to a unique health behavior. It is important to identify the root of the health concern that you want to focus your communication campaign around. Be specific. Focus on specific issues and specific behaviors that you wish to change or influence.

When determining the root of the health concern, it is important to have current, unbiased information.Try to recognize any preconceived understanding you may already have about the health concern or your potential audience and in your research avoid information that is dated or rooted in political concerns.

#### Measurements: Prevalence, Incidence, Severity

There are three main concepts you will need to understand in order to have a clear picture of your health concern: prevalence, incidence, and severity. When beginning the map of your health communication campaign make sure you understand these terms and find their measurements for your particular concern.

Prevalence is defined as the number of people in your area of focus who have or struggle with the problem at the time of the campaign. For example: This month,15 percent of driving age teenagers (16–19) in North Carolina were pulled over for texting.

Since this measurement is dependent on time, it is typically subject to a certain amount of change.To balance that variability and use more accurate information, most public health communication specialists will couple prevalence with incidence to get a better understanding of the extent of the problem.

Incidence is defined as new cases of the health concern per one thousand people within your area of focus every year. For example: In North Carolina, driving age teenagers who are being pulled over for texting are increasing by one percent every year.

Knowing the incidence rate will help you to more accurately estimate what the prevalence rate will be at a time in the future. Both of these measurements are important when researching your health concern and both can typically be found on your country's Ministry of Health (MOH) website. Here is a great optional resource to find your country’s MOH: https://www.gfmer.ch/Medical\_search/Ministry\_health.htm

The third measurement to be familiar with is severity. This measurement gives you an understanding of the cost, both financially as well as emotionally, of your health concern on the community you are focusing on. Severity is measured by mortality rates, morbidity rate, and financial cost.

Mortality is defined as the number of people who die as a result of the health concern. Morbidity is defined as the number of people who are disabled, either permanently or temporarily, by the health concern. And financial cost is often measured by individual costs as well as costs to the society as a whole (O’ Sullivan et al., 2003).

Understanding the prevalence, incidence, and severity of your health concern are the first step in creating your health communication campaign. The next step is creating a SWOT analysis.

#### What is a SWOT Analysis?

(Chapter 3, Section 14. SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, n.d.)

SWOT stands for: **S**trength, **W**eakness, **O**pportunity, **T**hreat. A SWOT analysis guides you to identify your organization’s strengths and weaknesses (S-W), as well as broader opportunities and threats (O-T). Developing a fuller awareness of the situation helps with both strategic planning and decision-making.  
The SWOT method was originally developed for business and industry, but it is equally useful in the work of community health and development, education, and even for personal growth. The strengths of this method are its simplicity and application to a variety of levels of operation.

#### When to use a SWOT analysis?

A SWOT analysis can offer helpful perspectives at any stage of an effort. You might use it to do the following:

* Explore possibilities for new efforts or solutions to problems.
* Make decisions about the best path for your initiative. Identifying your opportunities for success in the context of threats to success can clarify directions and choices.
* Determine where change is possible. If you are at a juncture or turning point, an inventory of your strengths and weaknesses can reveal priorities as well as possibilities.
* Adjust and refine plans mid-course. A new opportunity might open wider avenues, while a new threat could close a path that once existed.

SWOT also offers a simple way of communicating about your initiative or program and an excellent way to organize information you've gathered.

#### Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

A SWOT analysis focuses on Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.   
Remember that the purpose of performing a SWOT is to reveal positive forces that work together and potential problems that need to be recognized and possibly addressed. 

**Strengths include your resources and experiences. General areas to consider are the following:**

* Human resources - staff, volunteers, board members, target population
* Physical resources - your location, building, equipment
* Financial - grants, funding agencies, other sources of income
* Activities and processes - programs you run, systems you employ
* Past experiences - building blocks for learning and success, your reputation in the community

Don't be too modest when listing your strengths. If you're having difficulty naming them, start by simply listing your characteristics (for example, we're small, we're connected to the neighborhood). Some of these will probably be strengths.

Although the strengths and weaknesses of your organization are your internal qualities, don't overlook the perspective of people outside your group. Identify strengths and weaknesses from both your own point of view and that of others, including those you serve or deal with. Do others see problems—or assets—that you don't?

Cast a wide net for the threats part of the assessment. No organization, group, program, or neighborhood is immune to outside events and forces. Consider your connectedness, for better and worse, as you compile this part of your SWOT list.

**Forces and facts that your group does not control include:**

* Future trends in your field or the culture
* The economy - local, national, or international
* Funding sources - foundations, donors, legislatures
* Demographics - changes in the age, race, gender, culture of those you serve or in your area
* The physical environment (Is your building in a growing part of town? Is the bus company cutting routes?)
* Legislation (Do new federal requirements make your job harder or easier?)
* Local, national or international events

#### How to create a SWOT Analysis?

Remember that the purpose of performing a SWOT is to reveal positive forces that work together and potential problems that need to be recognized and possibly addressed.

We will discuss the process of creating the analysis below, but first here are a few sample layouts for your SWOT analysis.

Ask these simple questions: what are the strengths and weaknesses of your group, community, or effort, and what are the opportunities and threats facing it?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Internal** | **External** |
| Strengths | Weaknesses | Opportunities | Threats |
|  |  |
|

If a looser structure helps you brainstorm, you can group positives and negatives to think broadly about your organization and its external environment.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Positives** | **Negatives** |
| * Strengths * Assets * Resources * Opportunities * Prospects | * Weaknesses * Limitations * Restrictions * Threats * Challenges |

Below is a third option for structuring your SWOT analysis, which may be appropriate for a larger initiative that requires detailed planning. 

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **STRENGTHS**  1.  2.  3.  4. | **WEAKNESSES**  1.  2.  3.  4. |
| **OPPORTUNITIES**  1.  2.  3.  4. | Opportunity - Strength (OS) Strategies Use the strengths to take advantage of opportunities  1.  2. | Opportunity - Weakness (OW) Strategies Overcome weaknesses by taking advantage of opportunities  1.  2. |
| **THREATS**  1.  2.  3.  4. | Threat-Strength (TS) Strategies Use strengths to avoid threats  1.  2. | Threat-Weakness (TW) Strategies Minimize weaknesses and avoid threats  1.  2. |

The following is an example for Campbell Soup Company that stresses financial goals, but it also illustrates how you can pair the items within a SWOT grid to develop strategies. (This version of the chart is abbreviated).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **STRENGTHS**   * Current profit ratio increased * Employee morale high * Market share has increased | **WEAKNESSES**   * Legal suits not resolved * Plant capacity has fallen * Lack of strategic management system |
| **OPPORTUNITIES**   * Western European unification * Rising health consciousness in selecting foods * Demand for soups increasing annually | Opportunity - Strength (OS) Strategies   * Acquire food company in Europe (S1, S3, O1) * Develop new healthy soups (S2, O2) | Opportunity - Weakness (OW) Strategies   * Develop new Pepperidge Farm products (W1, O2, O3) |
| **THREATS**   * Low value of dollar * Tin cans are not biodegradable | Threat - Strength (TS) Strategies   * Develop new biodegradable soup containers (S1, T2) | Threat - Weakness (TW) Strategies   * Close unprofitable European operations (W3, T1) |

This example also illustrates how threats can become opportunities (and vice versa). Don't be surprised if your strengths and weaknesses don't precisely match up to your opportunities and threats. You might need to refine, or you might need to simply look at the facts longer, or from a different angle. Your chart, list or table will certainly reveal patterns.

#### HOW DO YOU USE YOUR SWOT ANALYSIS?

Better understanding of the factors affecting your initiative puts you in a better position for action. This understanding helps as you do the following:

* Identify the issues or problems you intend to change
* Set or reaffirm goals
* Create an action plan

As you consider your analysis, be open to the possibilities that exist within a weakness or threat. Likewise, recognize that an opportunity can become a threat if everyone else sees the opportunity and plans to take advantage of it as well, thereby increasing your competition.

Finally, during your assessment and planning, you might keep an image in mind to help you make the most of a SWOT analysis: Look for a "stretch," not just a "fit." As Radha Balamuralikrishna and John C. Dugger of Iowa State University point out, SWOT usually reflects your current position or situation. Therefore one drawback is that it might not encourage openness to new possibilities. You can use SWOT to justify a course that has already been decided upon, but if your goal is to grow or improve, you will want to keep this in mind.

### References

Chapter 3, Section 14. SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. (n.d.). Community Tool Box. https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/swot-analysis/main  
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