



November 21, 2012

Dear Friends,

Last month we shared with you resources from Firelight's own strategic planning process. This week we're sharing an additional resource from professor Kent Glenzer at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. If you would like to learn more about Kent's work, please

visit: <http://www.miis.edu/academics/faculty/kglenzer/node/23402>

If your organization is considering developing a Strategic Plan, are currently working on one, or have in the past, we would like to hear from you!

Please share with us anything you learned from the process of developing a Strategic Plan, and recommendations you have for organizations working on them.

We hope you enjoy this week's edition of the Newsflash!

Sincerely,

The Firelight Team

(Abilis Foundation) Small grants for organizations initiated by people with disabilities

(Funding Resource) Tips for Grant Seeking

(Resource) Keys to a More Useful Organizational SWOT Analysis

(Abilis Foundation) Small grants for organizations initiated by people with disabilities

ABILIS Foundation is a development fund, founded by people with disabilities in Finland in 1998. Its mandate is to support the activities leading to the empowerment of disabled persons in the Global South (developing countries).

ABILIS Foundation supports activities that contribute toward equal opportunities for disabled people in society through human rights, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. Special priority is given to projects on advocating

for human rights of disabled people and to activities developed and implemented by disabled women.

ABILIS Foundation gives small grants ranging from 500 to 10.000 Euros to projects initiated by disabled persons. They support organizations that are run by persons who have a disability, be it related to mobility, vision, hearing or any other type of disability. We also support organisations that are run by parents of children with disabilities.

Organizations from the following countries can apply:

- India
- Uganda
- Kazakstan
- Tanzania
- Ethiopia
- Kambodzha
- Mosambik
- Tadjikistan
- Kyrgyzstan

You can apply for a grant from Abilis if the following is true for you:

- You live in a country which the United Nations and the OECD have defined as qualifying for Official Development Assistance. See list of countries
- Your organisation has a certificate of registration. (If your group is not registered, please contact our office as sometimes we are able to make exceptions to this rule.)

Please visit this website for more

information: http://www.abilis.fi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=1&lang=en

(Funding Resources) Tips for Grant Seeking

This website provides tools, resources, and information for development organizations in Africa seeking grants from American and European funders. The tips and suggestions that have been gathered for this site come from interviews with several grantmaking organizations and associations in the United States and Europe that target the grassroots. The website will let you know what funders are looking for when they review your organization's grant applications.

Topics covered on the website include:

- Getting started- understanding the needs in your community, develop a sustainable model, and evaluate your work
- Getting noticed- the importance of marketing yourself online

-The application- matching your goals to the priorities of the funder, demonstrating a need, and creating systems for monitoring and evaluation

For more information, visit the website here: <http://granttips.wordpress.com/>

(Resource) Keys to a More Useful Organizational SWOT Analysis

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis (SWOT) is probably the most widely used analytic tool in the strategic planning processes of nonprofit organizations around the world. And for good reason: a well-done SWOT helps build shared mental models among staff about the underpinning – the rationale – for strategy choices. Shared understanding of these four complex elements of a nonprofit’s performance environment helps unleash innovation, provides a frame for creative thinking, and permits leaders to navigate in more explicit ways.

SWOT analyses are, however, sometimes superficial, drift from their original purpose: without a shared idea of what the object of the SWOT is, the analysis itself can seem haphazard. Below are five rules of thumb that, if followed, can provide a more useful SWOT analysis for Firelight Foundation.

RULE 1: Be in agreement on definitions.

A SWOT has two basic divisions: inside the organization, and outside the organization. Strengths and Weaknesses are internal issues. Opportunities and Threats are external. You can do something about your strengths and weaknesses through managerial action. You do not have much control over opportunities and threats: you navigate them, and constantly scan the horizon to see what is happening with them. You “jump on” opportunities – managerial/leadership action – but do not create the opportunity to begin with. You may take defensive action in the face of a possible threat – managerial/leadership action – but you do not have control over whether the threat arises.

Rule 2: Have a Clear subject for the SWOT

Many nonprofits undertake a generalized SWOT. It’s usually not that useful. Better is to do a SWOT against a concrete objective, goal, or desire. This may sound obvious, but doing a SWOT specifically in relation to your Mission is better than doing a SWOT related to the organization, in general. Or doing a SWOT in relation to your Vision, or in relation to an agreed overarching goal, or with regard to your Theory of Change will be better than a general SWOT. It is important to be explicit with yourselves and your staff that the SWOT is done in relation to your mission.

Rule 3: No laundry lists

A good SWOT follows the old 20-80 rule. You want to identify the 20% of elements that make up 80% of your performance environment. You are not trying to list everything possible. You are trying to list the, say, FIVE strengths, FIVE weaknesses, FIVE opportunities, and FIVE Threats that are the most strategically important. From an organizational development perspective that this is just crucial: staff have to get a clear idea of what needs to dominate their attention, the most important elements that they need to spend time on. Offering a laundry list of 75 strengths – without any kind of prioritization – does not help with either future decision making or in communicating your future strategy to staff, partners, your Board, and other stakeholders. It's not important you agree to five as the magic number. But when you talk together, and when you present to staff, the idea of trying to identify the most important is crucial.

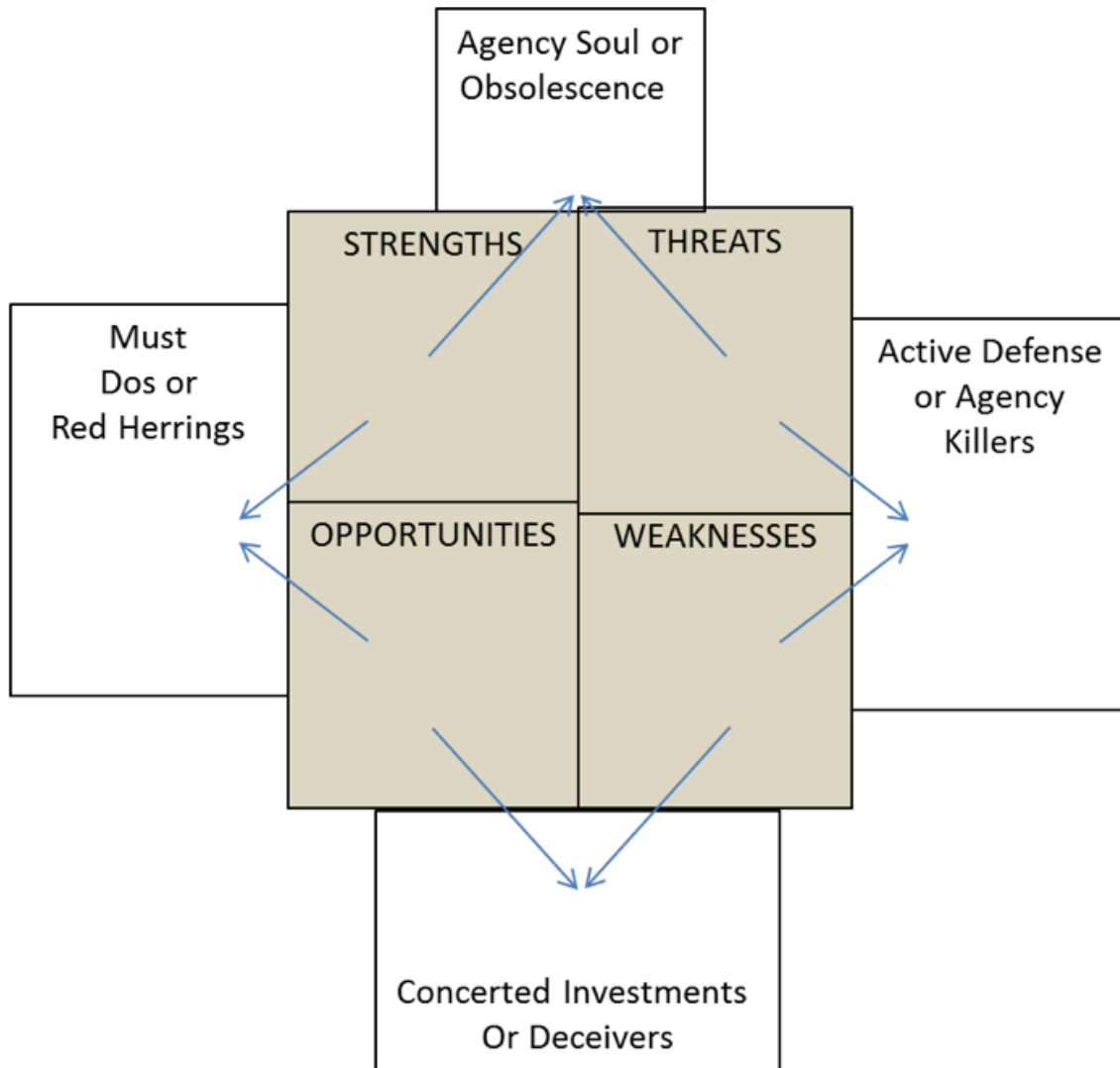
Rule 4: Avoid Inverses and Fudges

Often, I see SWOTs that simply list inverses, or opposites, in the Strengths/Weaknesses or Opportunity/Threat categories. Example: Our “strength” is that we are very participatory. A weakness is that we “aren’t participatory enough.” Another example: our strength is “strong committed and competent staff.” A weakness is “staff morale.” Be very careful of this kind of thing: it usually means that you are unable to really make a clear call on the element, and it comes off as disingenuous. Choose one place for an element, and keep it there. With Opportunities/Threats: Work in the here and now. In other words, it is easy to argue ourselves into a line of reasoning in which a threat now could be “turned into an opportunity” in the future. List it as a threat, not an opportunity. In addition: try to get beyond the generic obvious when it comes to opportunities and threats. Saying that “changing donor priorities” is a threat, for example, is a) I’m sure true, and b) is always true, for all nonprofits, all the time, now and in the future. Unless there is a very precise and real “threat” within such a basic fact of doing business, it shouldn’t make your top five list.

Rule 5: So What?

A list of SWOTs doesn’t answer the most important question. So What? So what if these are the most crucial strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats? Why do we care? What’s this do for us? I use the analytical tool below when I facilitate SWOTs: it pushes leadership/management to start making active use of the SWOT, to start identifying its ramifications for strategy/action.

The idea is basic and straightforward: SWOT analysis becomes a strategic decision aid when we match the categories in four ways: Strengths/Opportunities; opportunities/weaknesses; weaknesses/threats; threats and strengths. The idea of this analytical tool is to make it clearer that strategic choices will result in positioning your organization in a different scenario, related to each of these comparisons.



STRENGTHS/OPPORTUNITIES

Looking at how these elements come together needs to push us into a conversation about whether the opportunities are crucial for us to act on (“MUST Dos”) or are actually, perhaps, part of our past but not our future (Red Herrings).

OPPORTUNITIES/WEAKNESSES

Looking at how these categories come together pushes us into a conversation about whether the organization needs to engage in concerted/concentrated investment (to turn a weakness into a strength and so take advantage of the

opportunity) or to a decision that we are being deceived: the opportunity is there, but it doesn't mean that we should do anything about it.

WEAKNESSES/THREATS

Pushes us to ask the question: do we need to put in place a strategy to actively defuse or manage the threat? Pushes us to acknowledge the possibility that a threat could radically undermine the organization. For example: while we might be the best donkey cart providers (our strength), what happens when the threat of motorcars (we're weak on new technology) wipes out our business?

THREATS/STRENGTHS

I find this the most interesting analytical category. Threats can either remind us who we are and why we do what we do, as we overcome them. Beating back a threat using our strength rallies staff, partners, stakeholders, etc. However, the donkey cart analogy above also holds here: imagine we put everything into our strength (donkey carts) but the world's changing in a way that this just doesn't matter? We become obsolescent.

As part of the Firelight Foundation's Capacity Building Program, Firelight provides "Newsflashes" to share relevant resources and information with our active grantee-partners via weekly emails and via post on a monthly basis. We hope that by facilitating access to information for grassroots, community-focused organizations, programming for children and families, as well as organizational development, is enhanced. Past editions of the Firelight Newsflash can be found on our website: <http://www.firelightfoundation.org/newsflash.php>. We welcome your comments, feedback and ideas for upcoming Newsflashes at newsletter@firelightfoundation.org.

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