SWAN Board retreat: possible strategic planning activities

We are using Bryson's 3rd edition "Creating and Implementing Your Strategic Plan: A Workbook for Public and Nonprofit Organizations" for inspiration on possible activities with the SWAN Board.

1. **Worksheet 1: Interviewing People About the Proposed Strategic Planning Process**

   We suggest completing this with SWAN employees and Board independently. The results can be compared afterwards by the Strategic Planning Committee. The SWAN Management Team is going to use this worksheet as a PDF form for discussion prior to the staff retreat scheduled for October 24th.

   Should this activity be completed by each board member separately or at the retreat in a group setting? Question 3 will identify the top 5 priority issues which could be completed with dot voting with the SWAN Board at its retreat.

2. **Worksheet 18: Stakeholder Identification**

   This activity would be completed by the SWAN Board at its retreat.

3. **Worksheet: 21 Power Versus Interest Grid**

   This is a very interesting exercise and one that the SWAN Board would surface the political stakes versus inquisitiveness of various stakeholders identified in the prior exercise with worksheet 18.

4. **Worksheet 2: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges/Threats**

   This should be modified to an in-person exercise typically completed using SWOT techniques.

WORKSHEET 1

Interviewing People About the Proposed Strategic Planning Process

Instructions. Those thinking about undertaking a strategic planning process should consider interviewing key decision makers and other internal and external stakeholders first about prior strategic planning efforts and reasons why a new effort might be pursued. The interviews may be very helpful in building support for strategic planning and making sure the process is designed in such a way that it will be most useful.

Consider interviewing those who might have an interest in sponsoring, championing, or otherwise leading the effort; and those who would most affect or be affected by the effort. Group interviews may also be useful but will need to be effectively facilitated, and an adequate record must be kept of ideas offered and conclusions reached. Group interviews can be a part of a targeted outreach and communications program designed to build support for a strategic planning process.

Some preliminary stakeholder analysis may be necessary in order to develop the appropriate list of people or groups to be interviewed. After the interviewees have been selected, those exploring the worth of a strategic planning process should do the interviewing. It may be wise to have two interviewers conduct each interview—to gain a clearer understanding of what is being said and not said, to improve note-taking accuracy, and to broaden identification of the implications for planning process design.

Consider using the following list of questions as a guide. Ask the person being interviewed to answer the questions from his or her own perspective, not from that of the organization as a whole. To promote candor, emphasize that all interviews will be kept confidential. To promote participation, note that summary information will be made available in the future.

_____

Interview Prior to Readiness Assessment for Strategic Planning

Date: _____

Name of interviewer(s): _____

Interviewee's (or group's) name: _____

Organization unit: _____   Function: _____

Personnel classification: _____

Contact information: _____

External stakeholder name: _____   Title: _____

Contact information: _____

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1. What do you think the most important reasons are for undertaking a strategic planning effort? Why do you think so?

Reasons for Engaging in Strategic Planning	Can You Say More About That?

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2. What are the major substantive and process issues that need to be addressed as part of the process?

Substantive Issues (for example, need to improve client satisfaction, need to address funding shortages, and so forth)	Process Issues (for example, need to ensure adequate participation, need for reasonable transparency, need to improve quality of decision making, and so forth)

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3. What are the 5 priority issues that you think should be addressed first? Please rank them from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important.

   (1)

   (2)

   (3)

   (4)

   (5)

4. What do you think needs to stay the same or endure as a result of the strategic planning process, and what should change?

Stay the Same	Change

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5. Who should have a role in the strategic planning process and why? Who should probably not have a role in the process and why?

Should Have Some Role	Should Probably Not Have a Role

6. For the strategic planning efforts to succeed, what do you think must happen? In other words, what do you think is absolutely necessary for success? Why do you think so?

Required for Strategic Planning Success	Why Is It a Requirement?

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7. Can you think of any key questions that we have not touched on?

8. Do you have any other insights, ideas, or suggestions regarding strategic planning for this organization?

Thank you for your time!

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WORSHEET 18

Stakeholder Identification

Instructions. The starting place for conducting a stakeholder analysis is to list the organization's stakeholders. Be as inclusive as possible the first time around in filling out the worksheet that follows. Later you and your group might consider deciding what importance each stakeholder has in terms of his or her positive or negative impact on the organization, its strategies, and its ability to fulfill its mission, meet its mandates, and create public value. A stakeholder analysis done early in the process can help you decide who should be involved in the process and when, how, and why. Additional stakeholder analyses are likely to be needed in the issues identification, strategy formulation, plan review and adoption, and implementation steps. Some stakeholders, like unions or policy board members, may be both internal and external stakeholders. Below you can see a very general example of how Worksheet 18 might be completed for a public agency. When filling out your worksheet, be more specific than the example is about stakeholder identities—in other words, say *which* state agencies and *which* nonprofit organizations are stakeholders. Have people fill out the worksheet as individuals first, and then develop a final version by discussing and pooling everyone's responses.

_____

Example: The figure on this page displays a very general stakeholder mapping exercise for a public agency. Be more specific when you fill out your own map on the next page.

External Stakeholders

Public

State Agencies   Community

Press   Nonprofit Organizations

Internal Stakeholders

Service Partners   Policy Board   Clients

                                  Union

Competitors   Management   Decision Makers

                        Technical
                        Employees

Federal Agencies   Support   Legislature
                     Employees

Peer Organizations   Governor

Regulators

External Stakeholders
(Be specific)

_____

_____   _____

_____   **Internal Stakeholders**   _____
(Be specific)

_____

_____   _____   _____

_____

_____   _____   _____

_____

_____   _____   _____

_____

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WORKSHEET 21
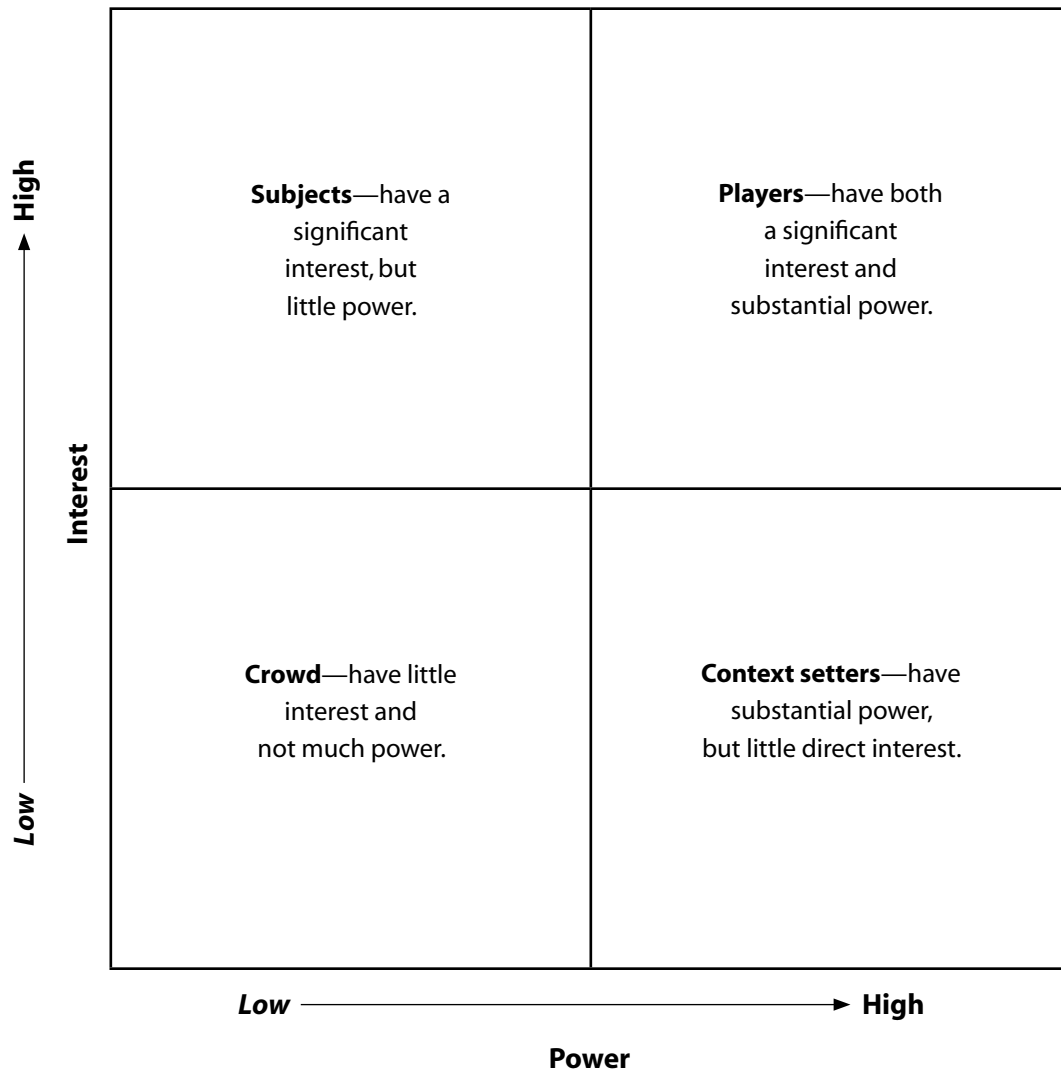
Power Versus Interest Grid

Instructions. A power versus interest grid arrays stakeholders according to two dimensions on a two-by-two matrix (often using Post-it® notes on a flipchart sheet). The dimensions are the stakeholder's interest or stake in the organization or the issue at hand, and the stakeholder's power to affect the organization or issue. *Interest* here means interest in a political sense; that is, having a political stake as opposed to simple inquisitiveness. In reality each of the dimensions is a range, from low to high interest and from low to high power, and stakeholders may be anywhere within those ranges. Nonetheless, it is often helpful to think of stakeholders as generally falling into four categories:

- *Players have both an interest and significant power*. They have a high potential to affect the strategic planning process and its outcome.

- *Subjects have an interest but little power*. It may be important to support and enhance subjects' capacity to be involved, especially when they may be affected by the planning process or its outcomes, as might be the case with program participants.

- *Context setters have power but little direct interest*. It may be important to increase the interest of context setters in the planning process or its outcomes if they are likely to pose barriers to progress through their disinterest.

- *The crowd consists of stakeholders with little interest or power*. The crowd may need to be informed about the process and its outcomes. Of course, if communication is badly done, controversy may quickly turn an amorphous crowd into a very interested mob.

Place each stakeholder name identified in Worksheets 19 and 20 in the appropriate place on the grid. As discussed, the dimensions are ranges, so that, for example, within the player category some players will be more powerful or have a stronger interest than other players. Once the stakeholders are arrayed appropriately, discuss the resulting pattern or patterns and what they mean for the organization and the strategic planning process.

Power versus interest grids typically determine which players' interests and power bases *must* be taken into account in order to produce a good strategic planning process and set of outcomes. More broadly, the grid may also highlight coalitions to be encouraged or discouraged, behavior that should be fostered, and stakeholders whose buy-in should be sought and who should be co-opted. The grid does this, in part, by revealing which stakeholders have the most to gain (or lose) and which have the most (or least) control over the direction of the process and plan. The information provides a helpful basis for assessing the political, technical, practical, and other risks as the process goes forward. (Note that Worksheet 21

relies primarily on worksheet preparers' perceptions; in some circumstances it may be necessary to gather additional information in order to be sure about relative placements of stakeholders on the grid.)

	Subjects—have a significant interest, but little power.	**Players**—have both a significant interest and substantial power.
Interest (High ↑ Low)	**Crowd**—have little interest and not much power.	**Context setters**—have substantial power, but little direct interest.

Low ──────────→ High

Power

Source: C. Eden & F. Ackermann, *Making Strategy: The Journey of Strategic Management* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), p. 122.

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WORKSHEET 2

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (or Threats)

Instructions. The *readiness* or capacity of an organization to undertake a strategic planning process successfully should be clearly understood by the organization and its leaders before the process is begun. Organizational barriers to success should be identified and evaluated, and a plan or strategy should be developed to address them (see Worksheet 3).

The following organizational areas should be explored through interviews, focus groups, or the use of tailored questionnaires: mission and vision; budget, human resources, and information technology; communications; leadership, management, organizational structure and design, and culture.

I. Mission and Vision

Successful organizations possess a clear understanding of their mandates, and they have established and communicated an inspiring organizational mission and/or vision to their stakeholders.

_____

Please comment below on any significant organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (or threats) in the areas of mission and vision. (Use additional space as necessary.)

Examples:

•   We have too many mandates. (A weakness or a challenge, or both)

•   Our current mission statement is an effective statement of organizational purpose. (A strength)

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II. Budget, Human Resources, and Information Technology

Successful organizations and managers achieve their mandates, fulfill their mission, and create public value by effectively managing their resources.

Please comment below on any significant organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or challenges (or threats) in the areas of budget, human resources, and information technology. (Use additional space as necessary.)

Examples:

- We are short-handed in several key areas of operation (or certain skill sets, specific units, or particular substantive areas, and the like). (A weakness or a challenge, or both)

- How do we find the time to engage in an effective strategic planning effort? (A challenge)

- We have the technology we need to do our work. (A strength)

- We do not appear to have the resources we need to do a good job of strategic planning and especially of implementation. (A possible weakness or a challenge, or both)

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III. Communications

Successful organizations transmit clear messages, have well-developed communication networks, and have adequate forums to promote discussion, dialogue, and shared understanding. *Messages* are concise, they are targeted toward specific stakeholders, and are designed to produce specific responses. *Networks* effectively convey appropriate information to targeted stakeholders, both internal and external. *Forums* engage appropriate stakeholders in appropriate ways to foster necessary discussion and dialogue.

Please comment on any significant organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or challenges in the area of communications.

Examples:

- Internal communications related to human resources are effective. (A strength)

- External communications with some important funders are fragmented and unfocused. (A weakness)

- There are technology-poor areas in our organization. (A challenge)

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IV. Leadership, Management, Organizational Structure, and Culture

Successful organizations enjoy effective leadership and competent management and organize themselves strategically. *Leadership* means making sure that the organization is doing the right things. *Management* means making sure that those things are being done right. The *organizational structure and design* should have well-defined groupings and relationships horizontally and vertically, formally and informally, which will help it carry out specific strategic initiatives. The organization's *culture* and *values* should foster a commitment to fulfilling the mission, meeting the mandates, creating public value, and satisfying key stakeholders.

Please comment on any significant organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or challenges in the areas of leadership, management, organization, and culture.

Examples:

- The organization's top leaders are committed to strategic planning. (A strength)
- Middle management is not committed to strategic planning. (A weakness)
- Our organization's formal structure is antiquated given our mission. (A challenge)
- We do not reward risk taking and indeed punish entrepreneurial behavior. (A weakness)

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