SWOT

Analysis of Vocational Programs for English as a Second Language (ESL) adult students to improve employment and retention outcomes.

Abstract

Vocational English for Speakers of Other languages programs are much needed to prepare current and newcomer immigrants to be integrated into the workforce. Unfortunately, the adult educational system is not yet prepared for this challenge. The SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis for the existing VESOL programs proposed in this paper, can be used to analyze prevailing internal and external strengths and weaknesses within the organization, to find ways to improve those programs, and to be used as a model for the implementation of new ones in the future. Therefore, Vocational English plans will allow the maximization of their resources to help adult learners to become competitive employees in the United States.

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FEA Tool Description

The Name of the Tool:

SWOT analysis of Vocational Programs for English as a Second Language (ESL) adult students to improve employment and retention outcomes.

Overview:

What is this?

VESOL, Vocational English for Speakers of Other languages programs are much in need to prepare current and newcomer immigrants to be integrated into the workforce. Unfortunately, the adult educational system is not yet prepared for this challenge. There are not many vocational programs available that are successfully reaching this goal for this particular group; data to support this point has been informally gathered from the following programs that support immigrants employment and retention. There are programs such as WSLC, Refugee Assistance Program (RAP), Spanish Action League, Educational Opportunity Center (EOC), OCMBOCES, Access CNY, Liberty Resources Inc., and others that are willing to work with ESL adults' vocational skills toward employment as long as their English proficiency is good or they have translation services to aid through this process. So again, we come back to the initial point; Language, soft and hard skills, and life adjustments are just some examples of barriers faced by many of our immigrants while moving toward employment without a system that can carry them throughout all the employment phases from where they are.

On the other hand, external obstacles are also faced in the employment process. Employers seek for demonstrated in-house (US) job experience, professional references, and language proficiency in their candidates. In many cases, employers' lack of

willingness to give an opportunity and their narrowed vision while looking for candidates, also set the bars even higher. In the end, it seems that this process goes in an endless cycle where employers and immigrant employee candidates do not get to a conciliation in the employment and retention process in many cases.

It is understandable that in order to get a job in the United States, there are specificities that are part of the workforce requirements and culture. For this reason, it is highly recommended that those rules are followed for the success of the employee. Furthermore, vocational programs for ESL adults can benefit from strategic planning that can consider the strengths, weaknesses, existing opportunities and possible threads in those plans. This analysis can positively enhance VESOL programs functionality to reach their adult learners' employment and employment retention goals.

Therefore, I consider that the SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis for the existing VESOL programs can be used to analyze prevailing internal and external strengths and weaknesses within the organization, to improve those programs and to be used as a model for the implementation of new ones in the future. Therefore, Vocational English programs will allow the maximization of their resources and help adult learners to become competitive employees in the United States.

Background:

History of this tool.

At first, I found very little about the origins of the SWOT analysis. Interestingly, in an online web page from the Marketing Teachers[1] the author, Tim Friesner, makes reference to a list of events and people that did not receive any credits for their input in the development of the SWOT analysis tool. One of the interesting things in his publication is that Panagiotou (2003) introduced what was first called the Telescopic Observation strategic framework that mapped, in fact, the strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threads of a given program, but used a different acronym. TEL, acronyms used by Panagiotou, is an interesting alternative that stands for T=technological advancements, E=economic considerations, L=legal and regulatory requirements (Friesner, T., 2018). In the end, it is said that the SWOT analysis, which was accredited to the Harvard academics, specifically to Igor Ansoff, who gave his last name to the Ansoff's Matrix Frame in the 1960s, is just a part of the multiple attempts to improve business (Friesner, T., 2018).

I also found in the SWOT Analysis: *Idea, Methodology and a Practical Approach publication* by Nadine Pahl and Anne Richter (2009), that it was a method used in the US and UK. It made a reference to Philip Selznick as the first person who associated the organizational factors with the environment using the SOFT (Satisfactory, Opportunity, Fault, and Thread) framework with the aim to find out why corporate planning fails. It refers that later on, around the same time the Harvard Business General Management

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[1] (http://www.marketingteacher.com/[http://www.marketingteacher.com/history-of-swot-analysis/] Last Accessed [February 8, 2018])

School was developing the SWOT analysis tool as part of their business policy, Urick

and Orr changed the F in the SOFT tool for a W while in a seminar originating the

SWOT analysis in Gran Britain[2].

Another example that talks about the origins of the SWOT analysis tool is the

Planning and Management Tools reference book by Lisa Groenendijk. She mentioned in

her text book without much preamble that the SWOT analysis has its root in the work of

business policy academy at Harvard Business School among other American schools

from the 1960s.

Where does this come from?

A document facilitated by Professor Rob Pusch, clarified some of the history gap

of the SWOT tool. It states that the SWOT analysis was originated from the research

piloted at SRI from 1960 to 1970 and founded by five-hundred companies, with the aim

of finding what has gone wrong with their corporate planning to create a system for

managing changes within a company. This research drew interesting findings that were

used to compose a set of questions that were set to guide the beginning of organizing the

SWOT issues into the six-planning categories as an approach to collect agreements and

commitments of those that were in charge of meeting the objectives, Humphrey, Albert

(December 2005.) To answer this question deeply, further research was still needed. Up

to now, SWOT analysis is a tool that has been used since the 1960s in the business

industry. Therefore, the SWOT analysis tool has come from the need of making business

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[2] Pahl, N. & Richter, A: *SWOT analysis. Idea, Methodology, and A Practical Approach.*
GRIN Verland, March 27, 2009

more efficient by addressing different internal and/or external issues while identifying

business strengths to choose the best possible opportunities for improvements.

Where does this apply?

SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) involves meaningful

information about internal and external factors might have, an impact in a given business.

It is a tool, a framework that facilitates the synthesizing of obtained insights from an

extensive analysis of important internal data of the company's strengths and weaknesses

combined with data collected from an analysis of the external opportunities and threats.

Therefore, SWOT analysis can be applied to many different contexts where a need to

identify ways of improvement and change exists. For example, it can be used as a simple

tool for a self-evaluation exercise or for a complex analysis on the failure of a business

plan. Furthermore, this analysis tool can be used in educational agencies, small and

corporate business planning, to compare business competitors, to build strengths and

minimize weaknesses, addressing individuals' issues such as career change, and more.

Purpose

Why/Rationale

With the increase of immigration throughout the years, more help has been

needed to aid them adjust to their new homeland. Government agencies have been in

charge of providing basic needs such as housing, healthcare, and food[3]. The government

has also connected with local agencies and the education department to provide other

essential aids such as ESL education and vocational education for ESL adults for

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[3] Information retrieved from: https://www.uscis.gov/tools/settling-us/government-benefits

employment placement and retention. Funding has been allocated for this end and many

agencies have stepped forward, increasing the opportunities for immigrants to obtain

better educational services and employment[4]. At RAP and WSLC for example many ESL

classes for all levels (literacy to advanced English skills) are being offered, as well as

vocational courses which include early childhood education preparation, computer skills

for entry level office workers, pre-employment, sewing for beginners, and basic

manufacturing skills for line workers. In other agencies such as EOC, OCMBOCES and

Spanish Action League, more ESL and vocational classes are being offered, but

unfortunately these centers, very specifically, demand a higher level of English

proficiency skills which add another level to the hierarchy of needs to those that would

like to access to Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses for employment purposes. All

these efforts to help ESL adult learners to integrate into the job force are still insufficient,

and better plans are in demand. How can these programs do better?

The purpose of the front-end analysis tool, SWOT, is to determine what parts of

their educational plan are failing to meet the ESL adult students' needs to obtain and

retain employment. This tool was developed as a generic and adaptable template that

agencies can use according to their specific needs. It will assist those agencies and

educational centers that are currently offering ESL courses of any kind, to analyze

external and internal forces that are preventing their clients, ESL adults, access to their

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[4] FACT SHEET: The Federal Role in Immigrant & Refugee Integration:
https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/07/16/fact-sheet-strengthening-communities-welcoming-all-residents

courses, successfully complete them, and to obtain a job as an educational outcome from the training, and to remain employed. This tool will help to determine what changes can be implemented to strengthen their programs by supporting ESL adults' employment and retention outcomes. In other words, this SWOT analysis tool will aid specific programs in obtaining a synthetized view of the current state of the educational centers to better plan their future toward where they must be according to their program goals.

Assumptions

SWOT Analysis tool is intended to be used in ESL adult schools, centers, and agencies that provide any kind of vocational training to ESL adult learners such as the programs mentioned above. The SWOT analysis tool has been characterized by its simplicity and ease of use, therefore, professionals in the education field, individuals or groups, such as administrators, program facilitators, or teachers that are directly responsible and possess knowledge of the current situation and knowledge about the mission and goals of the center itself, will be good candidates to use it. The SWOT analysis can be also used by an external front-end analyst hired by the interested parties to perform the entire analysis to come up with a comprehensive strategic plan.

In order to successfully use the SWOT tool in educational centers that offer ESL courses, the individual or the group will perform a series of steps to gather data which will be used for the findings and the synthesizing of possible solutions that will be included in a strategic planning. Those steps will be linked to listing the educational center's strengths and weaknesses as internal to the center and identify opportunities and threats as external factors. Candidates to perform the SWOT analysis can use the given bibliography to learn the background of this tools and learn how they can be used.

Advantages

The advantage of using the SWOT analysis is that it helps to develop a clear understanding of the current situation to implement better strategic plans. In this case using the SWOT analysis instrument for ESL educational centers and schools will provide a better understanding of the causes of their failure or the reasons for not meeting the established outcomes in helping adult ESL learners to obtain and retaining a job. The SWOT analysis can help in indenting what the program as a whole is doing and what is insufficient. It can also help in tying loose ends such as lack of communication, lack of qualified staff, and lack of resources. This SWOT analysis can uncover external factors that may also be affecting programs' outcomes. By having these facts clear, programs may be able to identify new goals, initiate further analysis, and project better plans for a change.

Disadvantages

A formal interview to the Director of the Adult and Continuing Education, SCSD, confirmed that in order to perform any FEA analysis to any of the SCSD programs, it should be approved by the Education Department. Informal interview to facilitators and administrators of the above-mentioned centers draw the conclusion that staff qualification and willingness to aid in the SWOT process is not as strong as I thought. Funding to add/ change programs' plans in place needs to be approved by superiors as well. The lack of program facilitators' knowledge of current program's strategic planning and lack of access to it seemed to be a challenge in some of the mentioned programs. And the need of following specific protocols dictated by the stakeholders of other programs was also mentioned as a barrier.
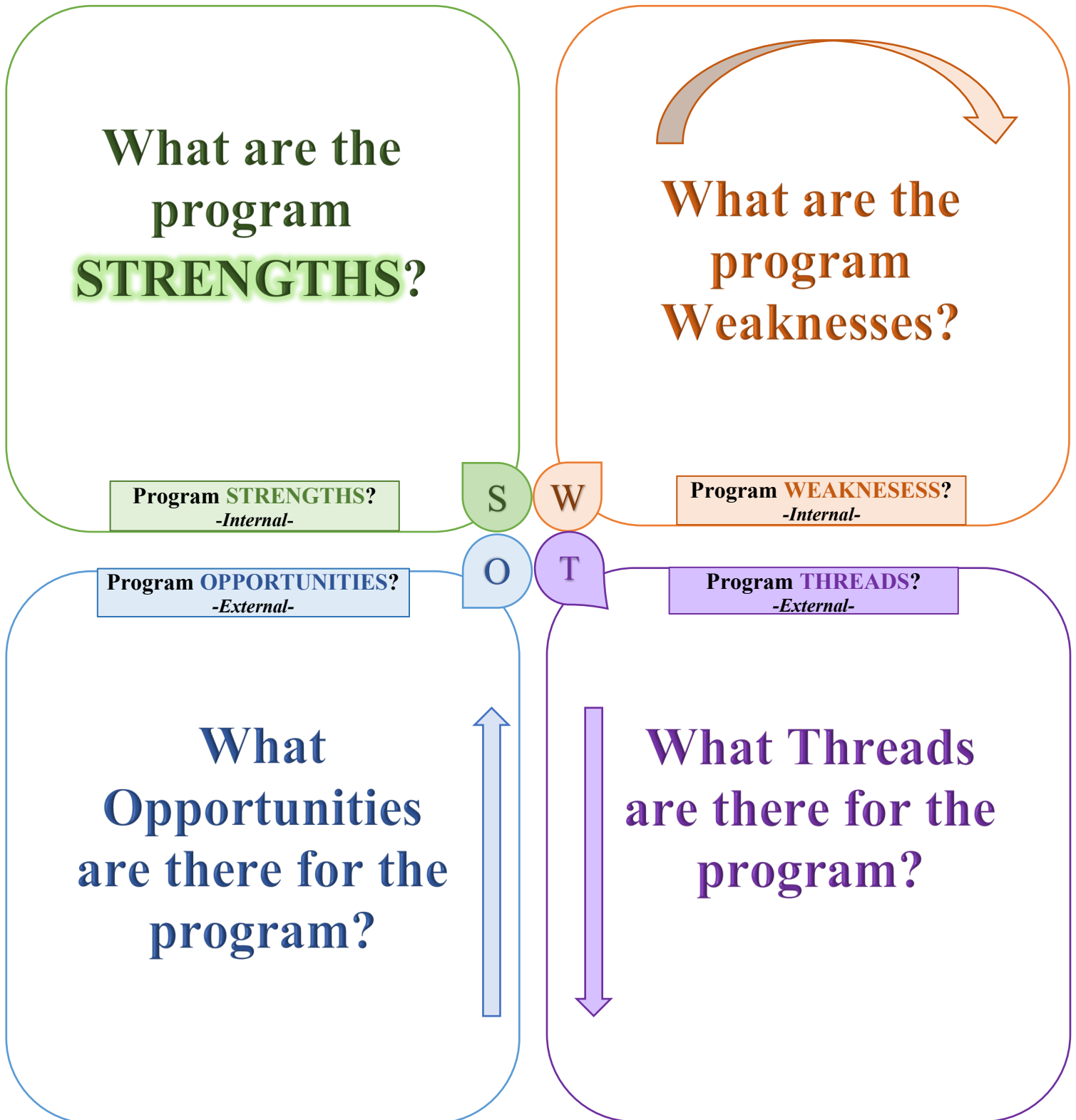
Upload: SWOT Tool

Recommendation:

      It is very important, before starting any planning or analysis, to have a clear and concise goal that can be tested for its validity and viability and objective that in fact, serve the given goal. Objectives need to be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and in a given period of time. Think about what it is that the program needs to achieve or solve. Besides, it is important that all key stakeholders understand the importance of the goal and objectives of the program.

Tasks to conduct the above SWOT analysis:

1. Have/define your programs' goal and measurable outcomes toward to ESL students' employment and retention.

2. Reflect on the current activities you have in place for how to reach the above goal within your program.

3. Complete a SWOT analysis. You can use the above generic template to guide in identifying program's current strengths and realistically appraising program's current weaknesses. This can only be done involving other teachers, facilitators, employment specialists, and students.

4. From the present analysis identify factors which could be improved.

5. Identify opportunities that could be created.

6. Create a plan and set of measures if they are not in existence.

What are the program STRENGTHS?

What are the program Weaknesses?

Program STRENGTHS?
-Internal-

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Program WEAKNESESS?
-Internal-

Program OPPORTUNITIES?
-External-

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Program THREADS?
-External-

What Opportunities are there for the program?

What Threads are there for the program?

- Does the center have a well-defined mission and goals?
- Does the center's mission, goals, and objectives involve placing ESL adult immigrants into employment?
- Does the facilitator understand the mission and goals of the center?
- Are the teachers qualified in ESL/VESOL?
- Are the teachers highly-skilled and experienced?
- Is there an employment and retention specialist?
- Does the center facilitate pre-employment courses?
- Does the center maintain connections with local employers?
- Does the facilitator, teachers, and employment specialist maintain communication with each other?
- Does the employment specialist follow up on employment retention?
- Is there any needs assessment for students?
- Are there any course assessments/evaluations?
- Is there technology to aid employment education, search, and retention?

Program STRENGTHS?
-Internal-

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- Are the center's mission and goals well defined?
- Is employment and retention part of the program?
- Is the center accessible to all ESL adult learners?
- Are there specialty courses for ESL adult learners' educational needs?
- Does the facilitator comply with the goals and objectives?
- Is the facilitator entitled to make decisions and take actions toward changes?
- Are the teachers teaching life skills, civics, and level-appropriate English?
- Does the employment specialist help learners to understand the employment and retention process?
- Does the employment specialist maintain fresh connection with potential employers?
- Does the center maintain connections with other agencies that can help in the employment process?
- Is there any other staff member that handles other learners needs that prevent them from getting or retain a job?

Program WEAKNESESS?
-Internal-

Program OPPORTUNITIES?
-External-

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Program THREATS?
-External-

- Is there an opportunity to seek for qualified staff?
- Is there any budget available to employ more qualified staff?
- Are there professional development opportunities for staff?
- Are there volunteers that can support adult learners in acquiring the language skills they need for employment?
- Are there other employers willing to employ ESL adults?
- Are there any opportunities for on-site job skills support?
- Are there agencies that can act as a third-party to help adult learners retain employment?
- Can other significant connections with the community be made to support adult learners' employment and retention?

- Is budget a problem?
- Do people involved in decision-making understand the need of employment and retention for the ESL adult learners?
- Are staff members willing to participate in the activities related to employment and retention for adult learners?
- Are there qualified staff in ESL adult education that are willing to think "outside the box"?
- Are there enough ESL adult learns in need of employment to justify budget changes?
- Are there new policies that can affect services?
- Are there enough staff members to support the number of adult learners?

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