

## **Minute QI** - Performing a QI project Risk Assessment using a SWOT analysis

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Performing a risk assessment of your Quality Improvement (QI) project using a SWOT analysis is important to identify internal and external factors that could impact its success. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Here's how to apply it to your project:

Step-by-Step SWOT Analysis for QI Project Risk Assessment.

### 1. Strengths (Internal, Positive Factors)

Identify the strengths within your team, processes, or organization that can support the success of the project.

Ask yourself:

- What advantages does your team or project have?
- What resources or expertise can you leverage?
- Are there existing processes that can help achieve your project goals faster or more efficiently?

Examples for a QI Project:

- A strong, multidisciplinary team with experience in QI initiatives.
- Leadership support and buy-in from key stakeholders.
- Availability of reliable data to measure and track improvements.

Risk Mitigation: Use your strengths to counter potential risks. For example, if your team is experienced, they can identify and respond to challenges quickly.

### 2. Weaknesses (Internal, Negative Factors)

Examine the internal challenges or limitations that could hinder project success.

Ask yourself:

- What limitations do you face in terms of skills, resources, or team dynamics?
- Are there gaps in expertise, staffing, or data collection capabilities?
- What processes or systems could be a barrier to success?

Examples for a QI Project:

- Lack of time or competing priorities for team members.
- Limited access to real-time data or outdated data collection systems.
- Resistance to change among staff or frontline workers.

Risk Mitigation: Address weaknesses by creating action plans. For instance, if staff are resistant to change, provide training and education to improve buy-in.

### 3. Opportunities (External, Positive Factors)

Identify external factors that can be leveraged to improve your project's success.

Ask yourself:

- What external trends, technologies, or initiatives can support the project?
- Are there opportunities for collaboration with other departments or external partners?
- Are there external incentives, like regulatory changes or industry benchmarks, that align with your project goals?

Examples for a QI Project:

- Advances in technology (e.g., new EMR systems) that improve data collection.
- National or local initiatives that prioritize the area you're improving (e.g., patient safety campaigns).
- Availability of grant funding or external support for improvement projects.

Risk Mitigation: Capitalize on opportunities to mitigate risks. If a national initiative supports your project's goals, align your project with that for additional resources and recognition.

### 4. Threats (External, Negative Factors)

Identify external risks that could negatively affect your project's outcomes.

Ask yourself:

- What external challenges could derail the project (e.g., regulatory changes, resource constraints)?
- Are there competitors or competing projects that could limit resources or attention?
- What external factors are outside your control, such as economic pressures or shifts in organizational priorities?

Examples for a QI Project:

- Changes in healthcare regulations that require additional compliance efforts.
- Staffing shortages due to broader organizational issues.
- Changes in leadership or shifts in organizational priorities that could reduce support for the project.

Risk Mitigation: Develop contingency plans to address threats. For example, if staffing shortages are a concern, cross-train team members or develop partnerships with external consultants to fill gaps.

### Bringing It All Together

Once you've completed the SWOT analysis, use its insights to create a risk management plan for your QI project. Here's how:

1. Maximize Strengths: Build your project plan around your internal strengths to create a solid foundation.
2. Address Weaknesses: Acknowledge and actively address weaknesses. This might involve additional training, securing more resources, or adjusting timelines to account for capacity issues.
3. Leverage Opportunities: Look for ways to incorporate external opportunities into your strategy. Collaborate with other departments or initiatives, and use external incentives like grants or recognition programs to boost project momentum.
4. Prepare for Threats: Identify the biggest external threats and plan for how you'll manage or mitigate them. For example, if a regulatory change could complicate your project, ensure you have a compliance expert on the team or develop a flexible project timeline.

Example:

Project: Reducing patient wait times in the emergency department.

Strengths:

- Strong, experienced team familiar with QI projects.
- Established leadership support.
- Availability of patient flow data.

Weaknesses:

- Limited staff to dedicate time solely to the project.
- Staff burnout from previous QI initiatives.
- Gaps in communication between different departments.

Opportunities:

- Implementation of a new electronic patient tracking system.
- National focus on reducing patient wait times as part of a quality care initiative.
- Potential for funding through a government health program.

#### Threats:

- Potential budget cuts affecting resource allocation.
- Regulatory changes requiring compliance adjustments.
- Risk of competing organizational priorities diverting attention.

#### Conclusion

Performing a SWOT analysis allows you to assess both internal and external factors that can impact your QI project. By identifying these factors upfront, you can proactively address risks, leverage opportunities, and ensure your project is positioned for success.