

The Dynamic SWAP¹ Methodology

● Learning from Experience as an Entry to Group Innovation Processes ●

Dynamic SWAP in Short
Dynamic SWAP Handout
Introduction to Dynamic SWAP
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Steffen Powoden Metalog

by Martin Carnap,² CO, consultant, facilitator and coach

▶ Dynamic SWAP in short

Dynamic SWAP can be used to:

- Facilitate self-evaluation and provide feedback on effectiveness of projects toward development goals from stakeholders' view. >>
- Evaluate experience which evolves as a dynamic process over a period.
- Provide instruments for conflict-solving by groups, stakeholders and project staff themselves.
- Facilitate processes of change in projects, institutions and organizations.
- Overcome difficulties in accepting the poor as equal partners in development; and the difficulties that educated staff have listening to participants versus imposing their own views.

Why is the Dynamic SWAP method successful?

- It is quickly understood and easily applied by groups;
- It encourages all group members to take part;
- It structures discussions;
- It focuses on action and on problem-solving results;
- It identifies people who can take responsibility for specific tasks.
- By helping to solve problems it raises the group's standing and their pride in own achievement;
- It evaluates mistakes and uses them as an opportunity to learn.
- It may be used alone or can be easily combined with different methods.



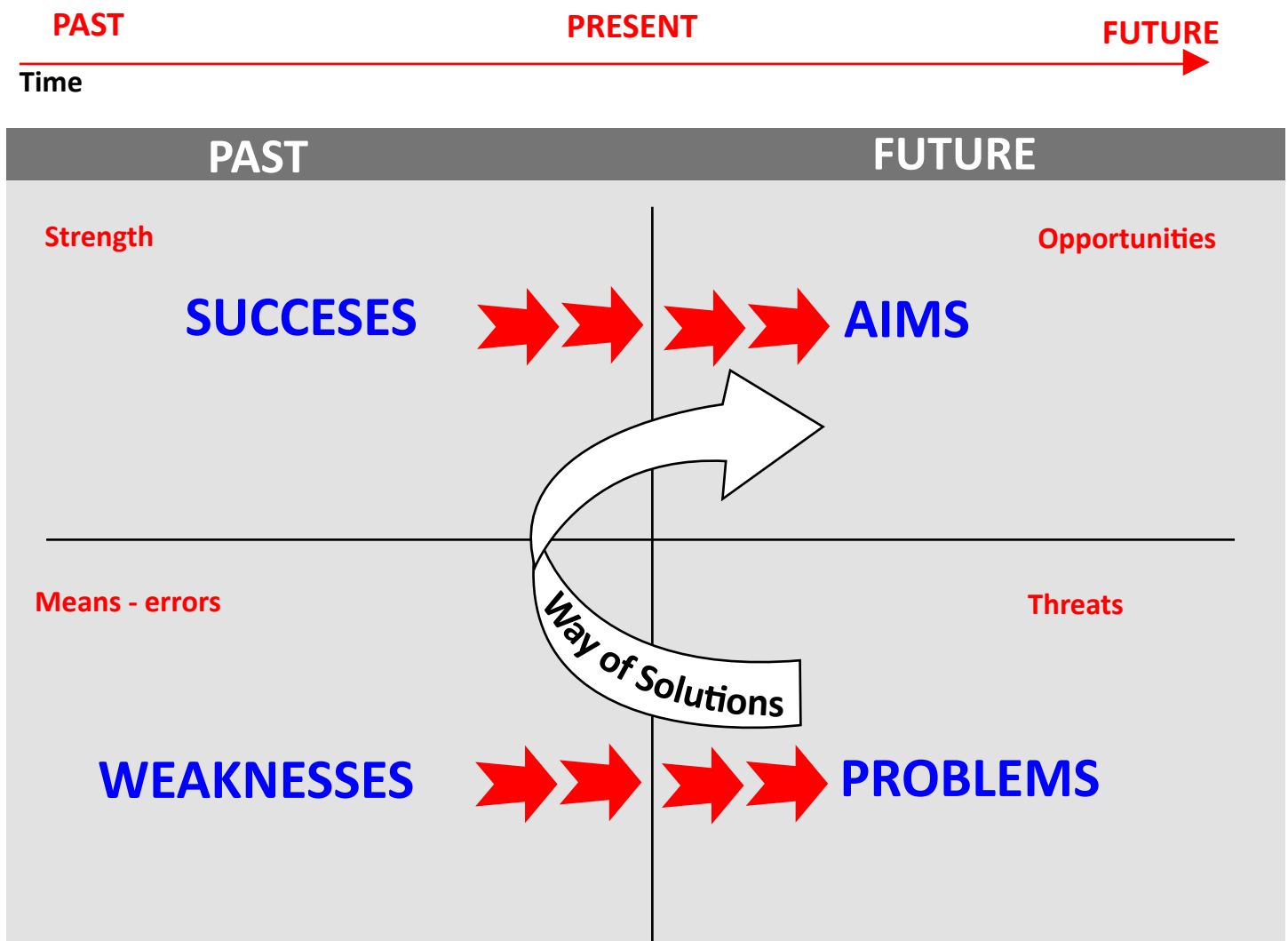
Dr. Martin Carnap

¹ Dr. Martin Carnap is a Senior Development Consultant and experienced workshop and conference facilitator. He emphasizes on facilitating project evaluation and active learning processes in institutions and organizations. Has worked through World Bank, IICA, GiZ throughout Latin America, Middle East and North Africa.

What difficulties have come up when using the Dynamic SWAP method?

- The attitude, behavior with groups and quality of training is crucial for the successful application of the method.
- Underprivileged subgroups and gender differentiation need to be addressed, e.g. through separate meetings.
- Dynamic SWAP is more suitable for those who can read and write, illiterate participants would need assistance writing.

► The Dynamic SWAP handout:



- Repeating successes leads us to our aims.
- Repeating errors causes us problems.

In order to find solutions we need to:

- Identify errors and related problems.
- Eliminate the most important errors.
- Identify and utilize alternatives that could lead to solving problems.

▶ Introduction to Dynamic SWAP

Programs supporting self-help, participation of stakeholders in decisions and activities for sustainability of their impacts are very complex, often support a great variety of micro-projects implemented by self-help groups, and have to accommodate frequent changes of plans and decisions by the independent groups. It becomes clear that only those support organizations that attempt to institutionalize learning mechanisms have a chance to reach their goals, which may also be changing in the process.

It originated from analyses of companies in industrialized countries, where employees gave their opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of their own working procedures in contrast to external Opportunities and Threats (SWOT). Stakeholders in development projects can use Dynamic SWAP to voice their opinions on past activities and the problems they experienced from today's perspective, as a simple tool for pre-implementation planning or as a self-evaluation and feedback method.

The Dynamic SWAP discussion begins much the same way most people start asking questions when they want to find out about a situation unknown to them. For example, to find out about the situation of people in a village, we would begin by asking what activities are done and what their past experiences were, and the advantages (successes) and the failures (weaknesses) of the activities. We would then ask who might contribute to eliminate those weaknesses, and how this could be done. Dynamic SWAP does not only seek to find information, its main purpose is to raise awareness about existing problems and promote initiatives, so that participants may agree to solve those problems together in their ambience. But Dynamic SWAP is not meant to stop at solving just one problem. Development is a process, therefore development methods must aim toward establishing processes conducive to development (projects, organizations, institutions).

The Dynamic SWAP method is based on the following rationale:

- **Life is a succession of activities in the past, present and future. This applies to individuals as well as to the life of organizations, institutions and projects. Successful past activities are likely to be remembered. We call these our successes, although we know that the level of success might not have been 100%, and that different individuals may judge successes differently.**
- **When we are able to repeat successes, we can reach our aims in life.**
- **Other activities in the past proved to be errors, mistakes, failures etc. These are our (project's, organization's, institution's) weaknesses.**
- **Weaknesses may not cause us too much harm if we learn from them and avoid repeating them in future. But if we begin to repeat our weaknesses often, we will have problems. When we analyze our problems, we will often find that many of our problems today are due to not resolving past weaknesses. These weaknesses consumed time and resources in the past and today. The question arises whether it is possible to overcome our weaknesses.**

About us?



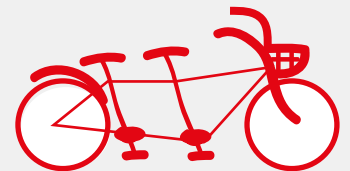
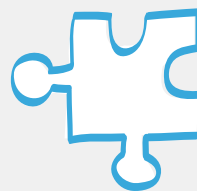
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● **Metaaccion** provides training for facilitator facilitation and learning projects with the objective of moderating effective spaces and meetings with highly satisfactory results. E-meta diagnosis, prepares organizational development. We have a network of international consultants certified in the active learning method.

● Facilitation techniques make the dialogue between people and groups efficient, effective, inclusive, productive and meaningful, social skills are developed and agreements and decisions are agreed upon with the necessary actions, respecting and including in the process all points of view; Including specialized support when required.

Active Seminars

● Our International Certification seminars on methodologies allow participants to make their training topics - whether technical or soft skills development - dynamic, participatory and interactive spaces. We offer tailor-made seminars where, in working groups, the skills and abilities associated with the identified theme are developed. With e-meta, we perform a previous evaluation of the variables.



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This can often be achieved by simply becoming aware of the weaknesses or better say errors, including their causes and effects, and then eliminating them. This way we save time, money and other resources. But these savings are only one advantage. We can benefit even more by investing savings in new activities with greater chances of success.

This basic concept of Dynamic SWAP is elaborated into several steps (see chapter on Dynamic SWAP application), designed to focus and structure the discussions to reach common understanding of the causes and effects of weaknesses, and to agree on actions to be taken, and by whom, to remove or to alleviate them. Dynamic SWAP thus, smoothly transitions from problem analysis tool to project planning and allocation of responsibilities.

The method has been used for development work since about 1992, in discussions at the village level, in organizations, enterprises and institutions on different levels, from 1998, on occasions in Mexico, Jamaica, Venezuela, Columbia, Costa Rica and others.

For example, participants have easily adopted the method-provided the rationale and each new step were explained to them. Because the facilitator wrote each contribution on cards and asked for confirmation that he had correctly perceived its meaning, participants could see that each contribution was appreciated by the facilitator and was not lost. This repetition also led to renewed discussion on some points, increasing discussion depth. Participants themselves think that they can analyze even complex village issues easier with the method and thereby agreement can be reached soon. Even many participants can be heard while the discussion remains structured. The groups concentrate

on their own experiences and on the problems which they think they can solve under their own control.

Public service agents sometimes had difficulty accepting the concepts of reflection and self-reflection, generally due to their top-down training and work in hierarchies. They tend to:

- Be inclined to emphasize their status and find it difficult to accept the poor as equal partners in development.
- Be trained to convince the participants (or worse, to use authority) and they often do not see how ineffective these methods have been. Consequently, they are unable to see the need to transition to a facilitating role, which would enable the participants to find their own problem solutions, assisted by the civil services where needed.
- Have difficulties listening to stakeholders instead of promoting their public organization's solutions.

Training NGO personnel or villagers as facilitators has usually been much more effective in achieving valuable interaction. When suitable villagers were found, training them was easier because they had the appropriate attitudes and behavior towards the poor. This applied even more to experienced NGO personnel, for whom terms such as capacity building, empowerment, poverty alleviation, participation, and partnership etc., have a meaning drawn from everyday work. When training village facilitators, support programs must exist to ensure that they are not left ineffective when the program ends.

Successes of the Dynamic SWAP method:

- Despite difficulties of transiting to a facilitator role during the introduction (which limit all Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods when they work with government institutions), Dynamic SWAP has proven to be a relatively fast, simple and cheap method. It is designed to concentrate on the perception and initiatives of the participants, and it keeps the role of the outsiders small.
- Dynamic SWAP is quickly understood and easily applied, provided its different steps-which are the result of many experiences-are adhered to and the results analyzed after each meeting.
- The discussions of problems, not only once but as a continuous learning process between the community members, leads to increased awareness in the community. The DynamicSWAPmethod makes this learning process more effective by structuring the discussion and by recording it for later self-evaluation.

Weaknesses of the Dynamic SWAP method:

- As elaborated above, the most important weakness the method faces is that its success depends largely on the quality, attitude and behavior of the facilitator. This is also the case with many other participatory methods, especially when civil servants are involved.
- There is a danger with government, as well as with village facilitators, that discussions may be dominated by village fractions. Also, rural gender differentiation obstructs problem analyses.
- Some organizations have used similar but more complex methods than Dynamic SWAP. Dynamic SWAP was then introduced because it's simple structure makes utilization possible with less training. However, after facilitators became used to the method they often simplified it further at their own discretion. Its participatory objectives were often lost.
- Dynamic SWAP is more suitable for those who can read and write, although it has also been used successfully by illiterate people. Success depended on the quality of the facilitator.

Application of Dynamic SWAP

The simple basic concept of Dynamic SWAP can be employed in project design and evaluations and especially self-evaluations in the following manner:

Step by step

Step 1: Preparation

- The meeting is introduced by presenting the Dynamic SWAP scheme and rationale, and reaching consensus on the themes to be discussed (two or three major fields of activities) and their formulation.
- The interviewers, single or in pairs, make an informal stakeholders visit and hold discussions with different people in their places of work. They give a first impression of the situation in the community and then concentrate on 2 or 3 of the major project activities that are important to the stakeholders.
- A workshop is arranged with a relevant section of the target group, for example some inhabitants of a village, key members of an organization, etc. A facilitator capable of structuring a meeting and with a good understanding of the method's various steps is appointed. The facilitator will be assisted by one or two people (perhaps teachers or other public service members) who will write participants' contributions in the local language on cards.

Step 2: Determining main successes and weaknesses



Photo: carnap2015
Presentation of grouped successes / Volkswagen 2015 - Mexico



Photo: carnap2015
Presentation of grouped errors / Volkswagen 2015 - Mexico

- Stakeholders are asked to describe and discuss their successful experience (a person, a thing, an activity, time/period, a positive impact exceeding the effort) within the subjects of discussion. These are listed on green cards which are pinned to a wall, or if the meeting is held outdoors, just held up by the facilitator. When the relevant successes have been named, they are again read to the participants by the facilitator for confirmation or altering. Fazes are noted down first in local language and translated for the report if necessary, only after the workshop.

- The weaknesses or error (a person, a thing, an activity, time/period, an small impact, at least minor to the effort) contained in successful and other relevant activities are listed similarly, but on red cards. At the end they are also read aloud by the facilitator for confirmation or altering.
- The weaknesses are then divided into those which are largely due to external factors (which are important as background information but cannot be influenced by the participants) and those which can be influenced by participants in the discussion or the project in question.

Visual facilitation of discussions and its results the best instrument for workshops.



The ideas of participants are noted down on rectangular colored cards with dimensions of 9,5 cm x 20,5 cm. You use best black ink markers with wedge- shaped nibs of 2 x 6 millimeters.

The best is to note down only one idea on one card using three lines for clear expression. The sentence should clearly be seen from 8 meters distance.

For nice examples please contact: www.metaaccion.com

Step 3: Promoting initiatives and eliminating weaknesses

- Each of the weaknesses that are within the influence of the participants is read aloud again. The participants must reach agreement as to whether or not they want to resolve it, because some weaknesses or errors are considered unimportant, they do not lead to problems and they have become accepted as part of life. The most important weaknesses are chosen.
- The persons who may be able to eliminate each of the important weaknesses are identified. The discussed and agreed upon solutions and their time frame are written on the back of the weakness cards. When all are finished, they are read aloud. This may be considered as the first planning step for alleviating the recognized weaknesses. This point will usually be the end of the meeting. If necessary, the persons who are considered capable of alleviating the weaknesses draw up a plan on how to overcome them in the near future, together with some of the participants. If the local authorities are not present at the meeting, they will be informed by the participants of the results of the workshop, as far as it concerns them.
- Within the village, with help from the project if required, but not only among visiting experts participants proceed to alleviate the weaknesses. Follow-up meetings are necessary to confirm that the weaknesses have been eliminated and to plan further action. Finally, the participants use the Dynamic SWAP method to assess and evaluate the experiences they made while solving the problems and weaknesses.

Organizational aspects

Time: The Dynamic SWAP meeting must be prepared the day before by informal discussion when the project staff visits the stakeholders where they are working. The

Dynamic SWAP discussion usually requires at least half a day. It should closely follow the procedure set out above, which is the result of many trials.

- **Moderating:** The Dynamic SWAP meeting can be moderated by one experienced person, but it works better with two, because one can do the recording. Their role is not that of an interviewer, but of a discussion stimulator and of a recorder. They should make sure the method is adhered to but they should not steer the discussion. Questions are their tools, not answers. They will soon realize that they will achieve the best results when a lively discussion develops among the participants. But they must make sure to also give the less outspoken participants opportunity to speak, as they may want to talk but are interrupted by the more dominant individuals.
 - **Analysis of the Dynamic SWAP discussion:**
- It is essential that each Dynamic SWAP meeting be analyzed by the facilitator and support project personnel the evening or the day after it has taken place, with the aim of improving future meetings by learning from the experience. Even well-skilled facilitators benefit from such a reflection. Therefore, in some form it must always be part of the method, even when time is at a premium.
- **Records:** The records of the Dynamic SWAP discussion, in the form of the cards, contain valuable information about the situation and participants' experiences. This situation analysis can be used in self-evaluations, documented and the cards should be kept by the village, community or group.

Experiences with Dynamic SWAP

Dynamic SWAP was tested and used in many countries. It is used by the Swiss development organizations KECK and Intercooperation. In German technical cooperation projects it was first introduced in 1992 as a simple and effective method for applications in the field of organizational and community development. There it was used in Morocco, Yemen, Nepal, Tanzania, Rwanda, Cameroon, Ghana, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Mexico, Venezuela and Columbia, and others. It has proved its suitability for project finding missions, planning of micro-projects and self-evaluations. It is a relatively cheap and fast method and it shows the level of problem awareness and the possibilities for solutions of the people who are to be supported in their own development.

But to anyone wanting to use Dynamic SWAP a word of caution is necessary. Experience shows that, just as any tool, Dynamic SWAP can also be used wrongly. In several cases people became over-confident when they gained experience after using the method with several groups. They were not patient enough with an inexperienced group and pushed the members to decisions that were not acceptable to all. They influenced decisions too strongly. But the group members are the ones who should develop and make the decisions. Another frequently observed fault is that interviewers use Dynamic SWAP for the same objectives they are using questionnaires, for gaining knowledge about the situation participants and rural people live in and what they think and do. But Dynamic SWAP is intended to be a participation tool, to give a voice to those people who were silent before, to give them a forum to discuss their common problems, and finally to enable them to find ways of solving their own problems. Using Dynamic SWAP just to generate knowledge for outsiders of the group is to misuse the method.

Where Dynamic SWAP has been used wrongly, two main causes can be seen: First, training was too short and not backed by enough practice aided by experienced tutors. Second, monitoring and reflection of the Dynamic SWAP meetings was too superficial, which prevented learning from mistakes and experiences, and led to erroneous conclusions.

The link with articulation of networks

The Dynamic SWAP process links past experience with future perspectives. It activates group memory and focuses new approaches for planning and next steps of groups. Therefore, this process is most promising linked with the articulation of networks. The Articulation of networks seminar leads to discover and successfully shape the effectiveness and the work climate of the team. The instruments are built on the logic of the Dynamic SWAP process and provides to be aware of one's contribution and process to the team. It aims to improve communication and interfaces as to optimize collaboration on projects. Thus, teams are likely to face, speak out and solve problems quickly. [\(see an example of application in CARNAP and GONZÁLEZ 2017\)](#). Depending on opportunities, experiences with the instruments provided will be collected, analyzed and reported in the near future.

Further Readings on Dynamic SWAP Application

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