



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Introduction to SOAR

Adapted from Colorado State University Talent Development

SOAR stands for strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results. It is alternative to SWOT analysis that is rooted in a philosophy of appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry uses questions to direct the focus of an individual or group toward the positive, actionable aspects of a situation. While SWOT analyses tend to be based on competition, iteration, and gaps, the SOAR model is based on possibility, innovation, and results (Newhard, 2020). The SOAR model was first put forth by Stavros and Hinrichs in 2019 (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2019).

To go through a SOAR analysis with a team:

1. Ask the **basic** or **expanded** set of SOAR questions (below)
2. Create a shared vision
3. Design strategic initiatives
4. Implement based on inspiration

SOAR Questions (Basic)

Strengths

- What are we good at?
- What can we build on?

Opportunities

- What are the possibilities?
- What is our diverse network of stakeholders asking for?

Aspirations

- What are our dreams and wishes?
- What do we care deeply about?

Results

- What are meaningful outcomes?
- How do we know we're succeeding?

SOAR Questions (Expanded)

Strengths

- What are we most proud of as an organization (division, department)? How does that reflect our greatest strength?
- What makes us unique? From this, what can we build on?
- What is our proudest achievement in the last year or two?
- How do we use our strengths to get results?
- How do our strengths fit with the realities of the marketplace?
- What do we do or provide that is world class for our customers, our industry, and other potential stakeholders?

Opportunities

- How do we make sense of opportunities provided by the external forces and trends?
- What are the top three opportunities on which we should focus our efforts?
- How can we best meet the needs of our stakeholders, including customers, employees, shareholders, and community?
- Who are possible new customers?
- How can we distinctively differentiate ourselves from existing, or potential competitors?
- What are possible new markets, products, services, or processes?
- How can we reframe challenges to be seen as exciting opportunities?
- What new skills do we need to move forward?

Aspirations

- What do we care deeply about?
- What can we be best at in our world?
- Reflecting on *Strengths* and *Opportunities* conversations, who are we, who should we become, and where should we go in the future?
- What is our most compelling aspiration?
- What strategic initiatives (i.e. projects, programs, and processes) would support our aspirations?

Results

- Considering our *Strengths*, *Opportunities* and *Aspirations*, what meaningful measures would indicate that we are on track to achieving our goals?
- What are 3-5 indicators that would create a scorecard that addresses a triple bottom line of profit, people, and planet?
- How do we know we are making a difference? Succeeding? Completing strategic initiatives?
- What resources are needed to implement our most vital projects?
- What are the best rewards to support those who achieve our goals?