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APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

SOAR – Strategic Inquiry Model

By Coach Cora In Appreciative Inquiry, Strategic Planning



SOAR is a strengths-based whole system approach to building strategic capacity.

As the facilitator, Cora Whittington uses The SOAR Appreciative Model to identify *Strategic Directions and Strategies* and The Golden Circle Model to clarify the *Vision and Mission*.

This article contains highlights and descriptions from the work of Appreciative Inquiry experts *Jackie Stavros and Gina Hinrichs*

SOAR Process



- Identify the positive core of the organization (strengths and opportunities)



SWOT Vs SOAR

After an audit of the current and past situation, a SWOT analysis provides an environmental scan. Data are collected to answer questions about the present and future of the organization and the markets or industry served. The forces that determine the present and future of the organization are segmented into internal and external variables using the SWOT format. Here is the model

Internal Assessment	Strengths Where we can outperform others?	Weaknesses Where can others outperform us?
External Assessment	Opportunities How we might enhance our successes?	Threats What/who might threaten our success?

Recommendations are made regarding strategic alternatives.

From there, policies are reviewed or created to link the formulation of strategy with implementation.

Policies and guidelines guide employees in implementation, often in the form of programs, budgets and procedures.

Evaluation and control mechanisms measure activities and performance results.

SWOT's central focus and desired outcome is being better than the competition.

The SOAR Framework: The Why, What and How



Create individual and organizational **Aspirations** to achieve measurable **Results**.

The SOAR framework builds upon SWOT, in the same way as strategic leadership builds upon strategic management. Like SWOT, SOAR works to be better than the competition.

However, *SOAR strives for more* by taking the organization beyond competition to become a better organization than it had conceived it could be. Instead of achieving incremental results, *SOAR seeks breakthrough* – movement toward a most preferred future.

The What

SOAR involves a strengths-focused, relational process for creating an organization's future.

This framework allows its leaders to identify and appreciate the purpose, values and strengths that have allowed the organization to succeed, and to establish a vision which is built on these strengths.

SOAR allows organization stakeholders to co-create the vision that leads to the energy and commitment to achieve results.

It helps leaders in the organization to identify, understand and communicate: organizational values; purpose; direction; core and unique capabilities; opportunities; strategic initiatives; strategies and tactics; and structures and systems to create a positive organizational environment which builds on the positive core of the organization's unique value offering.

Strategic Inquiry	Strengths What are our greatest assets?	Opportunities What are the best possible opportunities?
Appreciative Intent	Aspirations Who do we want to be and what is our preferred future?	Results What are the measurable results we want to achieve?

The SOAR framework offers several additional benefits.



- The SOAR framework *invites stakeholders* (or representatives of the stakeholders) into the strategic planning process.

The How

The SOAR framework can be seen as an outgrowth or specific application of [AI \(Appreciative Inquiry\)](#). Appreciative inquiries are conducted throughout the strategic planning and execution.

An initial inquiry is conducted to best understand the organization's values and peak moments: *what has worked well in the past*. The inquiry also includes questions about the *core factor that gives life* to the organization and its *wishes for the future*.

Environmental challenges are reframed into opportunities to place the organization in a proactive position to leverage its strengths and if necessary acquire new strategic strengths.

SOAR's strategic inquiry is followed by creating an appreciative intent (a commitment) that builds on strengths and opportunities. By investigating aspirations and positive outcomes leadership can go beyond engaging body and mind to accessing heart and spirit.

At this transformation point, participants affirm their values and create or re-create a vision and mission statement.

This strengths-focused innovative approach transforms the SWOT model into the SOAR framework.

It creates energy and allows focus on what really matters: the future of the organization and people serving the community.

A SOAR strategic planner or facilitator guides the process through crafting questions to discover the organization's core values, vision, strengths and potential opportunities, aspirations and results. This becomes a strategic inquiry with an appreciative intent.

SOAR brings about desired *transformational change* not only at the strategic business unit level, but also at the corporate and functional level.

Beyond achieving measurable results, organizations:



[Contact Cora for a free consultation](#) about how you can use the SOAR inquiry in your next Strategic Planning process.

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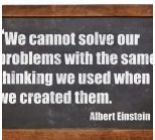
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