

SWOT Analysis in Thirukkural: Comparative Analysis with Humphrey SWOT Matrix

Dr. Alka Jain

Abstract: Modern SWOT analysis was explained first (not originated) by Albert Humphrey in the 1960 and 70s using data from Fortune 500 companies, when he led a convention at the Stanford Research Institute. Thirukkural SWOT model is an ancient model developed on the basis of observations of the composer almost 2000 years ago.

Thirukkural, the pancham veda (Fifth sacred book) of Tamilians is being looked at as a management handbook in this study. It has been analysed whether the book gives us an exact model of SWOT (Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis for an entrepreneur. The observations and readings lead to a more detailed SWOT model in Thirukkural. There are terms which are explained through a set of many verses. For example opportunity scanning has been explained in the chapter 49. The model is rediscovered in the chapters 47,48 and 49. The researcher has compiled the verses at one place in this paper to visualize a complete SWOT model which can act as a guiding path for an entrepreneur. In depth study of Thirukkural has made it possible. Further, usage of this model in modern businesses and new ventures has been discussed. Such studies may prove useful in handing over the knowledge of our ancestors to the future generations and make use of it in their business ventures. This way we can prove that western world is not the only promoter of management theories. India has also contributed in giving us prosperous and sophisticated economies. Gita, Tirukkural, Ramayana and Mahabharata are the eloquent testimonies of this statement. The research paper is just a step towards this goal. To quote Wikipedia would be appropriate here, "Humphrey himself does not claim the creation of SWOT, and the origin remains obscure." Isn't there a possibility that he came across this great book (Translated in English) and discovered SWOT model, then it was translated by him into SWOT matrix for the use of modern entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Management, SWOT analysis, Thirukkural, Jain literature, Tamil literature, ancient literature, Opportunity scanning, Threat analysis, environmental scanning, strengths, Weaknesses, SWOT Matrix, internal factors, external factors, Humphrey,

I. Purpose

SWOT analysis is important for both organizations and employees. It helps one in making an assessment based on understanding of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The proposed study attempts to rediscover management concepts from Thirukkural – a book written in 30 B.C. – more than 2000 years ago from today. Focus of this paper is to analyse if SWOT approach of analyzing strengths and weaknesses and scanning of opportunities and threats was considered important in that ancient era business also. SWOT is believed to be a very modern approach given to us by western management scholars. But this research may prove that these concepts used to exist almost two thousand years ago in ancient India and their importance was well known and practiced by management practitioners of that era.

Research Questions

1. Does Thirukkural have a model that covers Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunity and Threat analysis for an entrepreneur?
2. Is the model from Thirukkural complete and relevant in modern business world?
3. Is there any new lead from Thirukkural which can be taken forward?

II. Research Methodology

Tirukkural was studied to with a focus on finding management concepts in this great book. Exactness of this model was checked by analyzing it comparatively with the modern approach of SWOT analysis. Other details in the book Tirukkural were summarized to draw a complete model to suit the needs of modern business organizations.

Tirukkural: An Introduction

Thirukkural is an ancient piece of Tamil Jain literature. According to some historians it was written around 30 B.C. The book is divided into 113 chapters, each chapter is a collection of beautiful verses. Historians do not have a single view on authorship of Thirukkural, few believe that it was written by Elacharya,

a few by Kundkundacharya. But in South Jain community the book is respected a pious Jain ‘grantha’. The book is a guide to the reader’s social and spiritual upgradation. The poet has composed the verses in such a manner that the philosophy of life is reflected in simple language.

III. What is SWOT Analysis

“A SWOT analysis is a structured planning method used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats involved in a project or in a business venture.” (Wikipedia.org). It is a useful strategic tool that helps in evaluating strengths and weaknesses of a person/organization. It also helps in scanning the opportunities that an entrepreneur may avail and also foresee the threats he may have to face. Strengths and weaknesses act as internal factors whereas opportunities and threats act as external factors of an organization in this analysis. It is better understood through graphical representation called SWOT Matrix as shown in the diagram below:

SWOT Matrix (Humphrey)

Internal Strengths (Positive attributes)	Internal Weaknesses (Negative attributes)
External Opportunities (Favorable changes/activities in external environment)	External Threats (Unfavorable changes/activities in external environment)

SWOT Analysis Model developed from Thirukkural

शक्तिं १. स्वस्य २. परस्य ३. सधीच	स्वसाधन १. वेत्सि साधनानि २. व्यय शक्तिं स्वस्य
अवसरम् यदि स्ववसरं वेत्सि	विघ्न विघ्नौघान् विस्तीर्ण व्यय नालिका

Chapter 47 and 48 of Tirukkural explain SWOT analysis. The very first verse of Chapter 47 says,

“व्ययः कियान् कियान्लाभो हानिर्वा का भविष्यति

इति पूर्व विचार्यैव कार्यं कुर्वीत् धीधनः]]”

What is the cost of this project, what is expected profit, what all losses I may have to bear - as an entrepreneur one must think on all these aspects and then act wisely.”

First verse of chapter 48 says,

“पूर्व संचित्य विघ्नौघान् शक्तिं स्वस्य परस्य च

सधीचस्तद् बलंचापि दृष्ट्वा कुर्वीत वाञ्छितं]]

“ When you start a task, look upon/think of all the obstacles, you may have to face in accomplishing it . After this evaluate your strength, your competitors’ strengths and the competitor’s supporters strengths. Only then you should start a task.”

Verse eight of this chapter displays a model of inflow and outflow in an organization:

“संकीर्णापि न चिन्त्यास्ति लोके पूरक नालिका

व्यय नाली न विस्तीर्णा यद्यस्ति गृहिणो गृहे]]”

If the drainage pipe into which the water is flowing in is shallow, you need not worry, but make sure that the drainage pipe to flow this water out should not be too deep n large.”

The whole chapter 49 is devoted to opportunity scanning. The readers should not be surprised if they come across exact terminology (of course after translation) used in modern business management world.

The whole chapter 49 is devoted to opportunity scanning by the name ‘अवसर विचार’. We shall focus on verse four of this chapter which completes the listing of all four elements of modern SWOT Analysis – Strengths ,Weaknesses,Opportunities and Threats.The verse says,

“यदि स्ववसरं वेत्सि साधनानि तथैव च
शक्नोषि निज वीर्येण विजेतुं जगतीतलम्”]

Meaning “If you select proper resources to avail opportunities in hand then you can win the whole world.”
If we compile the set of these four verses, we get an exact SWOT model for an entrepreneur. Let us analyse the terms used in this translation:

Task – Enterprise, new production unit, new department, product , a new task in hand etc.

Strengths – शक्तिं स्वस्य परस्य च सधीचस्तद् बलंचापि The composer of these verses advises an entrepreneur to analyse the strengths at three levels:

a) Your own strength : Such strengths may consist of size, growth, share, position, profitability , margins and technology positions.

b) Competitor’s strength : This can be translated into questions like ‘Who ar your competitors?,What are the strengths of your competitors?, what are their planning methods and How do we compete?This way an entrepreneur can analyse his competitive position and and their stages of product evolution can be plotted for future planning of strategies.

c) Competitor’s supporters’ strengths

Weaknesses - वेत्सि साधनानि , शक्तिं स्वस्य Unavailability of raw materials suppliers, no transportation, poor infrastructure are a few examples of weak business environment. This element also throws light on where you need to improve or what should be avoided from inclusion in your strategic planning etc.

Opportunities - यदि स्ववसरं वेत्सि In modern business world this term may mean good opportunities for your enterprise, favorable changes in government policies, technological advancements which may help you in better controlling and communication. At times changes noticed in social patterns and lifestyle changes also may act as opportunity. Occasional events may also be taken up as opportunities.

Threats – विघ्नौघान् Thirukkural has given us a similar term to threat “ “ obstacle. These threats may be in terms of quality standards, technological instruments which have entered the market and may increase the cost of production after being purchased, changes in specifications of customer’s recruiter’s requirements etc. This may also include cash flow problems which has been discussed in the verses above. At times non removal of weaknesses may also end up in threats. Competitors may also act as threats which has been discussed under the verse explaining ‘शक्ति’ in Thirukkural.

Result of this analysis is also discussed in each verse so that the entrepreneur is motivated. Thirukkural declares openly that it is the entrepreneur’s strength only that may make him beat all competitions. Live supporting examples of this statements are Narayan Murthy behind WIPRO, Bill Gates behind Microsoft and Steve Jobs behind Apple.

IV. Comparative Analysis of Modern SWOT and Thirukkural SWOT Model

1. Thirukkural model can be generalized for social, spiritual and other platforms of life also where one comes across a decision making situation, while modern SWOT analysis is restricted towards business ventures only. Ryan Goodrich’s statement is worth quoting here, he says that, “A SWOT analysis is commonly used in marketing and business in general as a method of identifying opposition for new venture or strategy. This allows professionals to identify all of the positive and negative elements that may affect any new proposed action.”
2. **Origin:** of modern SWOT analysis was explained first (not originated) by Albert Humphrey in the 1960 and 70s using data from Fortune 500 companies. On the other hand Thirukkural model is an ancient model developed on the basis of observations of the composer almost 2000 years ago.
3. **Criticism:** Heinz Weirich has criticized Humphrey’s SWOT matrix. He says that some users found it difficult to translate the results of the SWOT analysis into meaningful actions that could be adapted within the wider corporate strategy .Thirukkural model starts from those meaningful actions and removes all doubts and confusions of the user. Nikki Pfeiffer also opines that many small business owners do not know how to properly use a SWOT analysis to guide their business, whereas Thirukkural SWOT model accomplishes this in four straight forward step that a lay person can also understand. These steps have been discussed above.
4. Improvements in modern SWOT Matrix have been made by western management scholars like Heinz Weirich in the form of TWOS Matrix (www.usfca.edu/fac_staff/Weirich/docs/tows.pdf) .On the other hand SWOT model of Thirukkural was lying unattended for a long time and if some work is in progress on the same , it is not known much.
5. Modern SWOT is a part of overall strategic plan where as Thirukkural explains it with a proper beginning and end highlighting what is the most powerful resource of an entrepreneur.

6. Modern SWOT matrix talk about strengths as an internal factor only but Thirukkural model treats this element as an internal as well as external element. This can be seen from the Thirukkural matrix shown above.
7. **Goal determination:** is the first and foremost requirement of both the models. If Thirukkural says 'पूर्व कार्य', modern scholars name is 'specifying the objective'. It is rationally important to have an achievable goal for an organization.
8. Both the models emphasise on analysis of internal and external factors.
9. Both the models act as a vision towards supportive and unfavourable factors in the internal and external environment. They try to foresee the threats beforehand.
10. Thirukkural verses help in guiding an entrepreneur to turn his threats into oppoties whereas modern SWOT endsup in listing them. It leaves it upto the strategy manager to do this job.

V. Limitations

The researcher is not a Tamilian, hence she had to use Sanskrit, Hindi and English translations of the Tamil book for the research purpose. Sole dependence on translations may bring in some additions and may skip some important facts. One more problem with these translations is that all of them vary in the format, some of them have used the chapter format and hence the serial of verses differs from those which have used universal pattern of serial number of verses. This varied pattern may be responsible for variation in numbers while citing.

VI. Conclusion

Rediscovering such ancient business models can be generalized for other spheres of life also. On the other hand social or life models given in Tirukkural may be used for business purposes to move forward to a prosperous economy. This model may help in mapping accurately all the angles for correct evaluation. SWOT model of Thirukkural is a complete analysis model of any problems that an entrepreneur may have to face while starting a new business. N the other side of the balance is an analysis of his strengths. Finding more management models from management treasure 'Thirukkural' may be further scope of study. Or both the models can be integrated to get a collaborative model useful for everyone as they help people in enhancing strengths, minimizing weaknesses, take advantage of opportunities and remove threats out of the way.

References

- [1]. Ka Naa Subramanyam, 'Thiruvalluvar and His Thirukkural' Bhartiya Jnanpeeth, New Delhi, 1987.
- [2]. Dr. Inderraj Baid, 'Jain Tamil Sahitya aur Thirukkural' Samyaggyan Pracharak Mandal, Jaipur, 1987.
- [3]. Govind Rai Jain Shastri, 'Kural Kavya', Vitrag Wani Trust Registered, TikamGarh, M.P., 2001.
- [4]. P. S. Sundaram, 'The Kural. Penguin Books: London, 1990.
- [5]. En.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT_analysis, retrieved on 12/12/2014.
www.usfca.edu/fac_staff/Weihrich/docs/tows.pdf retrieved on 12/12/2014.
- [7]. Ryan Goodrich, 'SWOT Analysis: Examples, Templates and Definition' Business news Daily, October, 2013.