

Explore Your Potential Checklist



Introduction

You've likely come to Mind Tools because you care about your career and you're ready to do what's necessary to build a happy, satisfying and successful life. This involves working hard and building strong skills, so you can take advantage of opportunities, when they arise.

It isn't enough just to work hard, though. To fulfill your potential, you need to think about what's happening around you, and make intelligent choices based on this.

This checklist helps you do that. It gives you a quick and effective process for thinking through:

- What you're good at now, and how you can take full advantage of this.
- How the future is likely to unfold, and what options this will give you.
- What other opportunities you should explore in more detail.

From this, you can research and choose opportunities that interest you, and then set the goals you need for a satisfying, successful, and stimulating career.

Enjoy using this checklist!

1. Evaluate Your Strengths

You'll be happiest and most successful in situations where you can fully use your talents. To move into these, you need to understand and make best use of your strengths.

This is where [Personal SWOT Analysis](#) comes in useful. SWOT stands for **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats. It helps you uncover strengths, and the opportunities that come from them; and, by understanding weaknesses, it helps you manage issues that might otherwise undermine you.

Here, we'll focus on the strengths and opportunities part of SWOT. To understand where you shine, ask yourself these questions: What do you do well? What do other people see as your strengths? What resources, talents, skills, experience or qualifications can you draw on? Which of your achievements are you proudest of, and why?

Action:

Print off the worksheet on page 6. Answer the questions above on a blank piece of paper, and then list your top five strengths in the "Strengths" box on the worksheet.



2. Identify Strengths-Based Opportunities

Now you've had a chance to think about your strengths, you can explore any opportunities that they open up. For example, are you playing to your strengths now? If not, can you adapt your job to use them better? What future roles would suit someone with these strengths? And what types of role would use these strengths in the fullest, most enjoyable way?

There are many ways of taking full advantage of your skills and strengths. For example, do they fill a business-critical gap that is not being filled in your organization? Do you see important work being done badly, that you could do better? Or could you use your expertise to become your own boss?

Action:



Think about the questions above, brainstorm possible opportunities on a blank piece of paper, and then list the most interesting opportunities in the “Strengths-Based Opportunities” box on the worksheet.

3. Identify Socio-Cultural Opportunities

Personal SWOT Analysis looks at factors that come from within you. However, you also need to think about “big picture”, external factors that will affect your life and career.

You can do this with [PEST Analysis](#). PEST helps you think about opportunities and threats coming from the **P**olitical, **E**conomic, **S**ocio-cultural, and **T**echnological environment in which you live and work.

Socio-cultural and technological factors are often the key drivers of opportunity for individuals in advanced economies, so we’ll focus on these for now.

Socio-cultural factors are societal, demographic or lifestyle trends and changes that come from things like generational shifts in attitude and taste, increases in personal freedom, improvements to educational levels, differences in employment patterns and job market trends, shifts in lifestyle choices, and so on.

Action:



Think about these and other socio-cultural factors, and brainstorm possible opportunities (personal, as well as career) that they offer you. Then list the best of these in the “Socio-Cultural Opportunities” box on the worksheet.

4. Identify Technological Opportunities

Technology moves fast, and you don’t want to get left behind. More than this, changes in technology have opened up huge opportunities for people alert to them, and they will continue to do so in the future. If you keep your technology skills up to date and relevant, you can take full advantage of the opportunities that change in this area brings.

Ask yourself the following questions, and think about the opportunities that they present: What major changes in technology do you see? How will it affect the careers you’re considering? Could it support and give you an edge in your career? Are you particularly interested in any particular technology, and what could you do to excel with it? And are there existing technology hubs or groups you could work with?

Action:



Use the questions above to brainstorm ways you could take advantage of changes in technology. Choose the best of these, and list them in the “Technological Opportunities” box on the worksheet.

5. Identify any Other Opportunities

SWOT Analysis and PEST Analysis give you good, structured frameworks for thinking about opportunities, however, you’ll also have spotted other opportunities that are a match for your interests, skills, and circumstances.

For example, is there a labor shortage in an organization or industry that appeals to you? Is there an exciting, world-class industry based just around the corner? Are any parts of your organization or industry growing fast and looking for talented people? Or could you relocate to work in an industry hub that excites you?

If you keep your eyes and ears open for any opportunities, either obvious or “hidden,” you’ll eventually hit upon one that you can grab it with both hands! (Our article on [Identifying Career Opportunities](#) explores a six-step strategy that helps you do this.)

Action:



Brainstorm other opportunities that you might have noticed, using the examples above as a starting point. List the top five of these in the “Other Opportunities” box on the worksheet.

6. Choosing Your Top Five Opportunities

You’ll now have plenty of opportunities listed, and some of these should be really exciting! Spend a little time looking at these, and then pick your top five. (As part of this, you might want to think about how these opportunities tie in with your values and the type of work you really want to do. Our article on [The MPS Process](#) will help you with this.)

Action:



Look at the opportunities you’ve listed in steps 2, 3, 4 and 5. From these, choose the five opportunities that interest you most, and list them in the “Top Opportunities” box on the worksheet.



7. Create a Plan to Explore These Opportunities

These opportunities may look great, however, they may have hidden problems that you are not be aware of, and they may or may not fully suit you. This is where you need to do some research to learn more about them.

Action:

Put a research action on your To-Do List or Action Program to learn more about each of these opportunities, perhaps by visiting organizational websites, reading up on the industry, or talking to people doing the work you want to do (perhaps at job fairs, through contacts, or by calling company HR departments.)



8. Moving On

Once you've done this research, it's time to choose the opportunity you like the most, and then set the personal goals you need to take advantage of it.

Goal setting is beyond the scope of this PDF, however, you can learn more about it with our articles on Locke's Goal-Setting Theory, the Golden Rules of Goal Setting, and Backward Goal Setting. You can also take our self test How Good is Your Goal Setting? to find out more.

Have fun bringing your opportunities to life. Enjoy realizing your full potential!

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"Explore Your Potential" Worksheet

1. Evaluate Your Strengths

My Top Five Strengths
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

2. Identify Your Strengths-Based Opportunities

My Strengths-Based Opportunities
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

3. Identify Socio-Cultural Factors, and the Opportunities They Present.

Factors	Opportunities
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

4. Identify Technological Factors, and the Opportunities They Present.

Factors	Opportunities
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

5. Identify Any Other Opportunities

Other Opportunities I've Identified
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

6. Choose Your Top Five Opportunities

My Top Five Opportunities
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.