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## CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
1.	<b>HIGH PERFORMANCE ORGANIZATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS IN BAPPEDA (DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING BOARD), ACEH- INDONESIA</b> <i>FIFI YUSMITA &amp; DR. VIMALASANJEEVKUMAR</i>	1
2.	<b>SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS IN BANGLADESH</b> <i>DEWAN MAHBOOB HOSSAIN &amp; MOINUL HOSSAIN</i>	7
3.	<b>IMPACT OF WORKING CAPITAL MANAGEMENT ON FIRM'S PERFORMANCE: EVIDENCES FROM LISTED COMPANIES OF INDIA</b> <i>DR. AVANISH KUMAR SHUKLA</i>	13
4.	<b>ENGLISH TEACHERS' EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON THEIR ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR IN SRI LANKAN SCHOOLS</b> <i>U. W. M. R. SAMPATH KAPPAGODA</i>	18
5.	<b>A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND ITS BEHAVIORAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL OUTCOMES</b> <i>MADIHAREHMANFAROOQUI</i>	23
6.	<b>LINKING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, STRUCTURE, AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS</b> <i>FAKHRADDIN MAROOFI, AFSHINGHASEMI &amp; SAMIRA DHGHANI</i>	29
7.	<b>SWOT ANALYSIS: AN INSTRUMENT FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING – A CASE STUDY</b> <i>GOMATESH M. RAVANAVAR &amp; DR. POORNIMA M. CHARANTIMATH</i>	35
8.	<b>THE ROLE OF HRM PRACTICES IN ORGANIZED RETAILING A STUDY OF SELECT RETAILERS IN BANGALORE CITY</b> <i>LAKSHMI NARAYANA.K, DR. P. PARAMASHIVAIAH &amp; DR. SREENIVAS. D. L</i>	41
9.	<b>WATER CRISIS AT COAL CAPITAL OF INDIA: A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF ROOT CAUSES, IMPACT AND SOLUTION OF WATER CRISIS IN REGIONS OF WORKING COAL MINES OF BHARAT COKING COAL LIMITED DHANBAD</b> <i>ABHINAV KUMAR SHRIVASTAVA &amp; DR. N. C. PAHARIYA</i>	46
10.	<b>PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT OF INDIAN MUTUAL FUNDS: A STUDY ON DIVERSIFIED EQUITY FUNDS PERFORMANCE</b> <i>E. UMA REDDY &amp; C. MADHUSUDANA REDDY</i>	50
11.	<b>A STUDY OF DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYEES ABOUT THE HRD CLIMATE PREVAILS IN THE ENGINEERING INSTITUTE ON THE BASIS OF AGE GROUP</b> <i>MUKESH KUMAR PARASHAR &amp; DR. MURLIDHAR PANGA</i>	54
12.	<b>INSTITUTIONAL FINANCING OF AGRICULTURE IN INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO COMMERCIAL BANKS: PROBLEMS FACED BY FARMERS – AN EMPIRICAL STUDY</b> <i>DR. KEWAL KUMAR &amp; ATUL GAMBHIR</i>	58
13.	<b>MULTIPLE FACETS OF ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION IN A TERTIARY CARE HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT, INDIA</b> <i>DR. PRAKASH.K.N, DR. CYNTHIA MENEZES, DR. ANNAPURNA RAMESH &amp; S. HARISH BABU</i>	61
14.	<b>FDI, TRADE, AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN SINGAPORE--EVIDENCE FROM TIME-SERIES CAUSALITY ANALYSES</b> <i>DR. G. JAYACHANDRAN</i>	66
15.	<b>AN EVALUATION OF MICRO CREDIT IMPACT ON RURAL POOR WOMEN – A CASE STUDY IN BELLARY DISTRICT, KARNATAKA</b> <i>K. S. PRAKASHA RAO</i>	77
16.	<b>APPRECIATION AND APPREHENSIONS OF INDIAN CORPORATE SECTOR ABOUT CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY</b> <i>DR. B. M. HARSHAVARDHAN, DR. A. PRASAD &amp; A V LAL</i>	84
17.	<b>SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING: THE NEXT FRONTIER (AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING PROSPECTIVE WITH REFERENCE TO PUNE CITY)</b> <i>GUNJN SINGH</i>	92
18.	<b>ROLE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN AGRICULTURE AND AGRO-BASED INDUSTRIES</b> <i>DR. B. RAMACHNADRA REDDY, E. LAVANYA &amp; P. HUSSAIN BASHA</i>	97
19.	<b>ADVENTURE TOURISM POTENTIAL: A STUDY OF KASHMIR</b> <i>FARHAT BANO BEG &amp; DR. ASHOK AIMA</i>	99
20.	<b>INVENTORY MODEL IN A FUZZY ENVIRONMENT WITH ITS ASSOCIATED COSTS IN EXPONENTIAL MEMBERSHIP FUNCTIONS</b> <i>K. PUNNIKRISHNAN &amp; K. KADAMBAVANAM</i>	102
21.	<b>EMPLOYEES PERSPECTIVE VIEW TOWARDS PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES PRACTICED IN SUGAR INDUSTRIES IN ERODE DISTRICT</b> <i>M. SELVI SRIDEVI &amp; DR. L. MANIVANNAN</i>	107
22.	<b>INTEREST IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION: THE CURRENT TREND AND ITS IMPLICATIONS</b> <i>VJENDRA KUMAR S. K. &amp; ANCY MATHEW</i>	116
23.	<b>IMPACT OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PRACTICES ON THE FIRM PERFORMANCE: AN EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF THE SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN INDIA</b> <i>PARTHA SARATHI PATTNAYAK &amp; DR. PRIYA RANJAN DASH</i>	119
24.	<b>A REVIEW OF HUMAN ERROR IN MAINTENANCE AND SAFETY</b> <i>ROSHAN KURUVILA</i>	124
25.	<b>SEARCH-EXPERIENCE FRAMEWORK: A CASE OF MOVIE INDUSTRY</b> <i>T. SAI VIJAY &amp; TANUSHREE GOSWAMI</i>	127
26.	<b>GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH: IN CASE OF PUNJAB</b> <i>DR. SANGEETA NAGAICH &amp; PREETI SHARMA</i>	132
27.	<b>ESTIMATION OF POPULATION MEAN USING RANKED SET SAMPLING</b> <i>DR. SUNIL KUMAR, DR. SANDEEP BHOUGAL &amp; RAHUL KUMAR SHARMA &amp; DR. KULDIP RAJ</i>	139
28.	<b>A GOAL PROGRAMMING FORMULATION IN NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT OF FERTILIZERS USED FOR RUBBER PLANTATION IN TRIPURA</b> <i>NABENDU SEN &amp; MANISH NANDI</i>	142
29.	<b>A STUDY ON THE FACTORS INFLUENCING INDIVIDUAL INVESTOR BEHAVIOR IN IT SECTOR</b> <i>SINDU KOPPA &amp; SHALINI .P</i>	145
30.	<b>RELIGION, LAW &amp; THE ROLE OF STATE</b> <i>NITUJA KUMARI &amp; MOHD YASIN WANI</i>	150
	<b>REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK</b>	154

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**SWOT ANALYSIS: AN INSTRUMENT FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING – A CASE STUDY**

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**ABSTRACT**

SWOT (acronym for ‘Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats’) is an instrument for analysis and evaluating various aspects of the functioning of an organisation. It is a tool that not only generates the data regarding the internal functioning of an organisation but also helps to outline the future course of action for its growth and development. While ‘Strengths’ and ‘Weaknesses’ will help to realise the data on internal functioning, analysis of ‘Opportunities’ and ‘Threats’ depicts the external factors that impinge upon its present day working. SWOT can also influence the decisions on the future prospects and plan of action of an organisation. Thus while it evaluates existing situation in an organisation, it is also futuristic. It shows the road that an organisation can take and the difficulties and problems it is likely to face in its march towards growth and development. Thus this is a tool many organisations use for strategic planning as well. The present paper describes the different steps to carryout SWOT analysis of an educational institution with a case study of a rural engineering college. The paper puts forward major recommendations in the form of strategic actions for bringing about significant quality improvements for making an engineering college more efficient, effective and responsive.

**KEYWORDS**

Strategic Planning, SWOT Analysis.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The success of an organisation depends upon its planning process and effective execution of these plans. Almost all organisations make use the most basic and efficient technique “SWOT Analysis” as a strategic planning tool for their growth and development. ‘Strengths’ and ‘Weaknesses’ of an organisation are its internal determinants that can be analysed by scanning four elements (4 P’s) representing People, Properties, Processes and Products. In case of an engineering college, people means management people, faculty, staff, students, parents and alumni, Properties represent infrastructure, equipment, machine etc., Processes refer to teaching-learning process, admission process, evaluation process and Products implies to pass out students. The ‘Opportunities’ and ‘Threats’ are the external determinants of effectiveness. For the convenience of carrying out an analysis of external determinants, an evaluation is made of Social, Technological, Economical, Environmental and Political (STEEP) factors contributing to the success of an organisation.

**1.1 SWOT ANALYSIS –PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

SWOT is an instrument for analyzing and evaluating various aspects of the functioning of the institutions. It is a tool that generates data regarding the internal functioning of the institutions and also helps in outlining the future course of action for its growth and development. While ‘strengths’ and ‘weakness’ will help to realize data on internal functioning, analysis of ‘opportunities’ and ‘threats’ provides a portrayal of the external factors that impinge upon its present-day working and can also influence the decisions on the future prospects and plan of action of the institutions. Thus, while it evaluates existent situation in the institutions, it is also futuristic. It shows the road that the institutions can take and the difficulties or problems it is likely to face in its march towards growth and development. Thus this is a tool many institutions use for strategic planning as well.

An important pre-requisite for obtaining fully representational and authentic information and data is that those who carry out the SWOT exercise should be open and objective. Otherwise the data will not give a realistic picture, leading to a distorted portrayal of the organization and a false sense of satisfaction. SWOT is used to develop a plan or find a solution that takes into consideration many different internal and external factors and maximizes the potential of the strengths and opportunities while minimizing the impact of the weaknesses and threats.

**1.2 STEPS TO PERFORM SWOT ANALYSIS:**

**STEP 1**

First consider the two quadrants of the SWOT Matrix (Figure 1.) namely, strengths and weaknesses of the educational institution. In the quadrant of ‘strengths’, write all the elements or factors which are considered as strong or positive points of the institution. These are the assets of the institution and the advantages that the institution enjoys. There is nothing absolute about these elements or factors. For instance: the infrastructure facilities of the institution; its location; or the professional level of its teaching staff may be the strengths or assets of one institution but with respect to another, these elements may be regarded as its weaknesses or liabilities.

**FIGURE 1: A SWOT MATRIX**

<b>Strengths</b> (Assets)	<b>Weaknesses</b> (Liabilities)
<b>Opportunities</b> (Possibilities of growth and developments)	<b>Threats</b> (from competitors and other external factors)

In the second quadrant of ‘Weaknesses’, list out all possible elements or factors which can be considered as disadvantages or liabilities for effective functioning of the institution.

Remember that the two above cases, the focus should be on internal environment of the institution. This analysis will be typical to the institution and truly reflect its existent state of affairs.

**STEP 2**

Now turn the attention to the analysis of the external environment. Some key elements that constitute the external environment are:

Situation in other similar educational institutions and the way they are functioning. Changing scenario of education and its elements that are relevant to the institution, Lifestyle of the adolescents in the areas from where the students come and its impact on their choices and expectations with regards to college education, Facilities and activities in the institutions, Views and preferences of the parents about the college education of their children, General pattern of educational opportunities available to college students especially in the area served, Perceptions of the community about this and other institutions, Government policies, rules and regulations appropriate to the institution, Support mechanism – government agencies, other organisations and individuals, Availability of funds and other resources from external sources etc. This is not an exhaustive list and however many other elements those are present in the external environment may be added. It is also likely that all these elements are not relevant to the institution under consideration.

**STEP 3**

Considering these elements, a catalogue of 'Opportunities' should be prepared that could be available to the institution for sustenance, growth and development, on a short and long term basis.

Alongside, keeping in view of these elements, recognise the 'Threats' also that are present in the external environment and can act as constraints or even jeopardise the present position or future prospects of growth and development.

Going over the list of Opportunities, now match each of these against Strengths and weaknesses, assessing which of these can be translated into accomplishments and added to the portfolio of the institution, without the investment of additional resources or efforts i.e. on a here-and-now basis.

Review the list again and identify those Opportunities that are significant to the growth and future of the institution but will require further efforts – in terms of resources, infrastructure facilities, level of proficiency of the teachers, general governance of the institution, etc. – on the part of the institution if required to make the most of them.

On the basis of the assessment, develop a realistic, practical and appropriate strategy – keeping in view the vision of the institution, overall policy and methods of working, programmes and availability of resources – to further reinforce the Strengths to ensure that these become stronger supporting factors for the Action Plan. It is also important to address the weaknesses and consider what steps are necessary to either minimise their adverse impact on the functioning of the institution or eliminate them from the list of weaknesses. In other words, once again it is required to go back to the internal environment, because that is where greater control on the factors and circumstances can be exercised. This is perhaps the only legitimate way for controlling or mitigating the Threats.

**STEPS 4**

On the basis of the above data, now it is ready for preparing the strategic plan for the growth and development of the institution. The data generated by this analysis become meaning and suggestive only when potential implication of the information for the present and future of the institution are examined and interpreted.

**1.3 SIMPLE RULES FOR SUCCESSFUL SWOT ANALYSIS**

- Be realistic about the strengths and weaknesses of the organization when conducting SWOT analysis.
- SWOT analysis should distinguish between where the organization is today, and where it could be in the future.
- SWOT should always be specific. Avoid grey areas.
- Always apply SWOT in relation to the competition i.e. better than or worse than your competitors.
- Keep the SWOT short and simple. Avoid complexity and over analysis.
- SWOT is subjective.

**2. A CASE STUDY: SWOT ANALYSIS FOR BAHUBALI COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING (BCE)**

BCE was established in the year 1997 and is situated in a rural place namely Shravanabelagola. Though Shravanabelagola is a world famous tourist centre and religious place as well, it has limited facilities. College is facing few challenges to run effectively and efficiently compared to other colleges in urban places.

SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses/Limitations, Opportunities, and Threats involved in an organisation. It involves specifying the objectives of the organization identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieve those objectives.

SWOT analysis was conducted in BCE with the following objectives in mind:

- 1) To understand the present status of the college.
- 2) To discover relative priorities of expectations of the customers.
- 3) To discover the customers dissatisfaction.
- 4) To discover the college performance with the competitors.
- 5) To determine opportunities for improvement.
- 6) To prepare next five years plan for the college.

**3. METHODOLOGY****3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Exploratory research design was chosen to carry out this research project of SWOT analysis of the college. Four sets of open ended questionnaire were prepared and feedback from Faculty, Parents, Students and Alumni were obtained. All the responses were tabulated. The similar responses were grouped in the order of their preferences. SWOT matrix was prepared. Finally the recommendations and action plan for the engineering college was given.

**3.2 SAMPLE PLAN**

Four separate samples of faculty, parents, students and alumni were selected. The technique of selecting these samples was purposive random. Responses from a sample of 143 students, 43 teachers, 44 parents and 43 alumni were collected for the analysis.

**3.3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

Since the study was exploratory in nature and being conducted first time for the engineering college, it was decided to go for first hand data information collection. For achieving this objective, four sets of questionnaire were designed (Table 1-4), one each for faculty, parents, students and alumni. The questions were open ended to explore all frank and independent attitudinal aspects of the respondents. These questionnaires were pilot tested and validated for reliability. The data collected were tabulated. But before collecting primary data, secondary data sources were also explored. Earlier studies were scanned for studying SWOT analysis of educational institutions.

**TABLE 1: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE STUDENTS**

1	What did you like in BCE?
2	What did you not like in BCE?
3	What two things should BCE address immediately?
4	What are the strengths of BCE?
5	What are the weaknesses of BCE?

**TABLE 2: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE FACULTY**

1	What are the top two things that BCE does well?
2	What does BCE do poorly?
3	What two things should BCE address immediately?
4	What does BCE do better than its competitors?
5	What do people outside BCE see as its strengths?
6	What do people outside BCE see as its weaknesses?

TABLE 3: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE PARENTS

1	What are the top two things that BCE does well?
2	What does BCE do better than its competitors?
3	What two things should BCE address immediately?
4	What does BCE do poorly?
5	What do people outside BCE see as its strengths?
6	What do people outside BCE see as its weaknesses?

TABLE 4: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE ALUMNI

1	What are the top two things that BCE does well?
2	What two things should BCE address immediately?
3	What does BCE do poorly?
4	What should BCE preserve at all costs?
5	What is changing in the environment, which could adversely affect BCE?

**4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

To derive full benefits of the SWOT analysis, it is important to use the tool in the right manner. Listing out the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the organisation by itself cannot be of any value. The data generated by the analysis become meaningful and suggestive only when potential implications of the information for the present and future of the institution are examined and interpreted. Needless to emphasise, this appraisal of the data should be characterised by a sincere and open approach.

Keeping these things in mind, data was collected from the outgoing batch of the students with an understanding that they are well versed with the strengths and weaknesses of the college as they stayed in the college for four years and have experienced with the different factors. The data was collected at the end of their semester so that they will be open and frank to give the real picture of the college. Data was collected from the faculty and from the parents during their respective meetings. The feedback was taken from the alumni through internet and also during Alumni Meet. The total numbers of opinions / remarks given by the Students, Faculty, Parents and Alumni are shown in the Table 5.

Collected data was tabulated, analysed and interpreted. The filled questionnaires received were examined for the correctness and few responses (4%) which were incomplete were rejected. Simple statistical techniques like weighted averages, percentages were used to analyse the tabulated qualitative data. The analysed data was interpreted to draw inferences and conclusions. On the basis of analysis and interpretation thrust areas and recommendations were put forward.

TABLE 5: TOTAL NUMBERS OF REMARKS/OPINIONS RECEIVED

S.No.	Questions	Students	Faculty	Parents	Alumni
1	What did you like in BCE?	252	**	**	**
2	What did you not like in BCE?	266	**	**	**
3	What 2 things should BCE address immediately?	180	42	73	50
4	What are the strengths of BCE?	202	53	50	**
5	What are the weaknesses of BCE?	214	47	29	
6	What are the top 2 things that BCE does well?	**	63	87	81
7	What does BCE do poorly?	**	38	25	29
8	What does BCE do better than its competitors?	**	49	40	**
9	What should BCE preserve at all costs?	**	**	**	27
10	What is changing in the environment which could adversely affect BCE?	**	**	**	30

\*\* Questions not asked

Most common remarks/opinions from each category were then grouped and calculated in terms of percentage. The top ten preferences as given by the students, faculty, parents and alumni are shown separately in the Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as suggested by the stakeholders are represented in the SWOT matrix (Figure 6.)

FIGURE 2: TOP TEN PREFERENCES GIVEN BY THE FACULTY

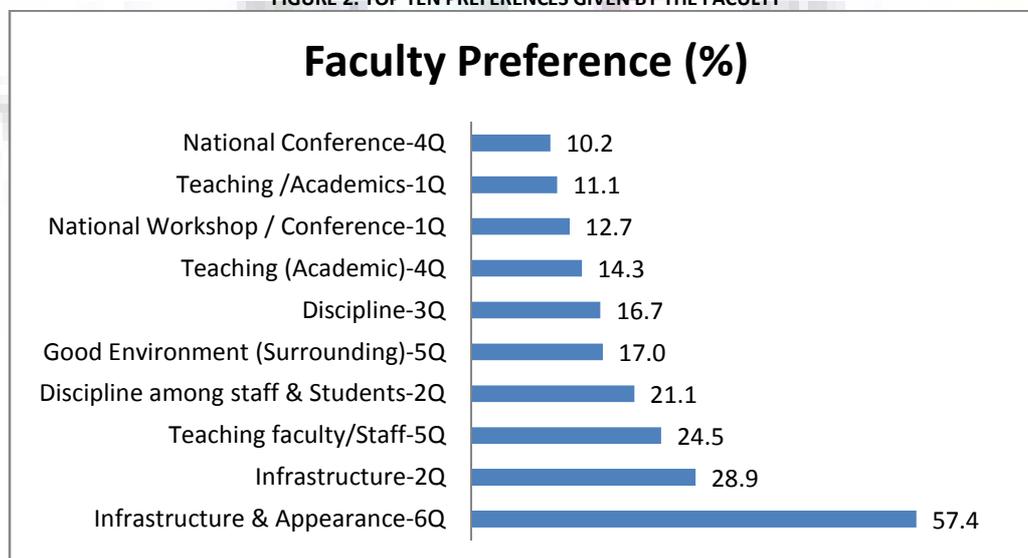


FIGURE 3: TOP TEN PREFERENCES GIVEN BY THE STUDENTS

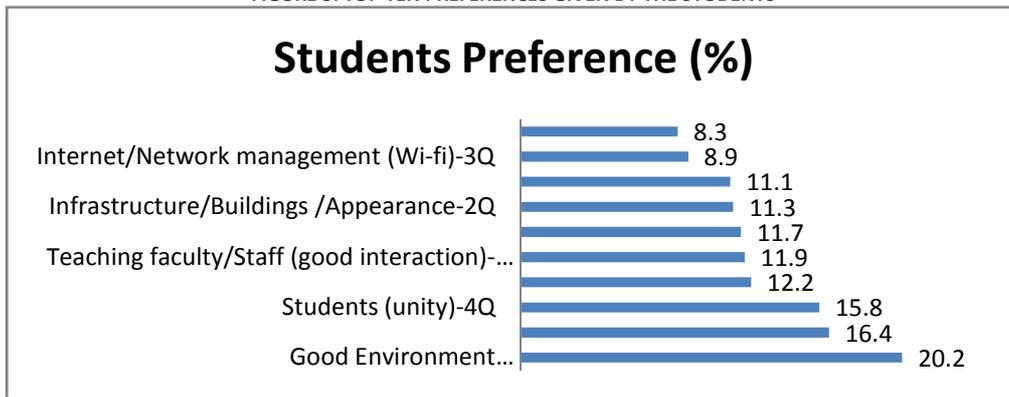


FIGURE 4: TOP TEN PREFERENCES GIVEN BY THE PARENTS

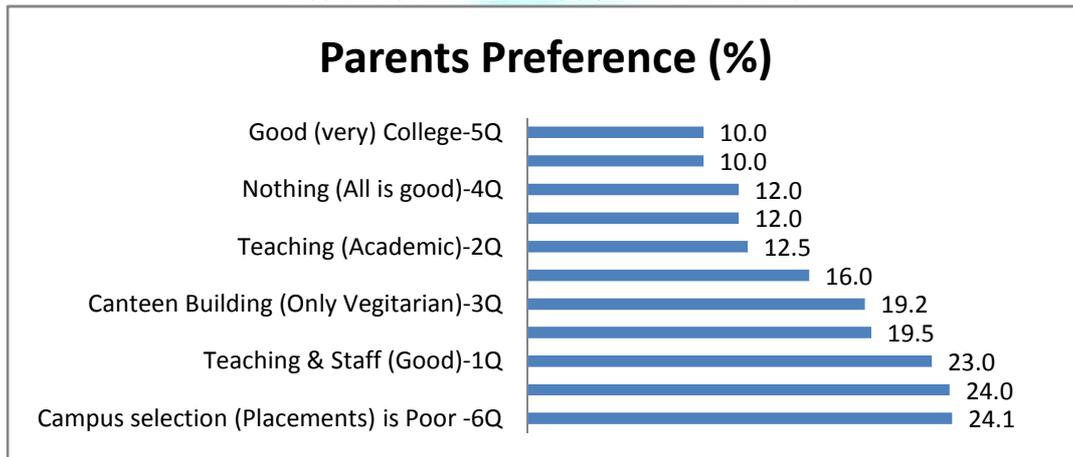


FIGURE 5: TOP TEN PREFERENCES GIVEN BY THE ALUMNI

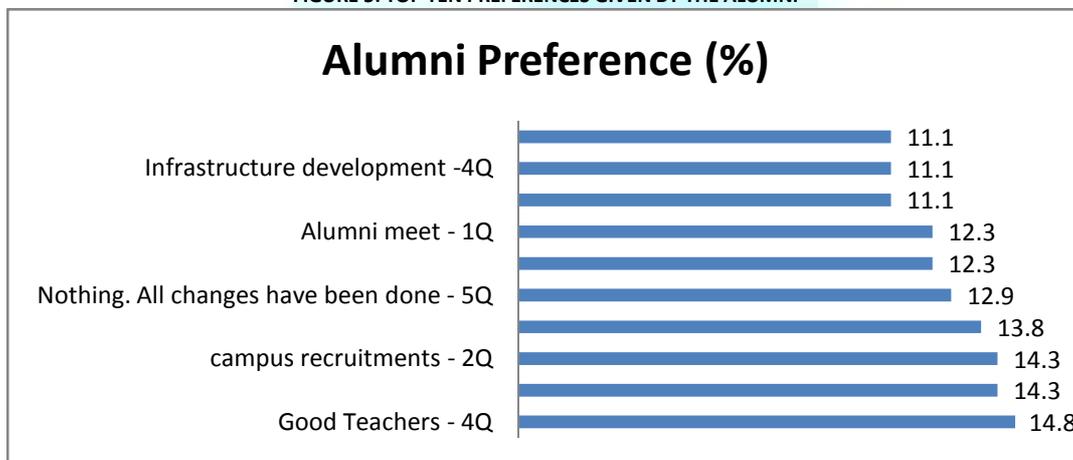


FIGURE 6: SWOT MATRIX FOR BCE

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S1. Calm and quite environment, good for studies</li> <li>S2. Good and care taking faculty and staff</li> <li>S3. Small class size</li> <li>S4. Cost of education is less (Economical)</li> <li>S5. Good teaching</li> <li>S6. Transparent administration</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>W1. Lack of competitive strength</li> <li>W2. Low financial status (Fundraising)</li> <li>W3. No accreditations</li> <li>W4. Less marketing and advertising</li> <li>W5. Low academic standards of students</li> <li>W6. Limited campus life</li> <li>W7. Limited student services</li> <li>W8. Less exposure due to rural place</li> <li>W9. Very less placements</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>O1. Discipline among staff and students</li> <li>O2. Build infrastructure</li> <li>O3. Take advantage of location for programming</li> <li>O4. Local community relations - fundraising opportunities</li> <li>O5. Partner with business, industry and government</li> <li>O6. Multi-campus structure</li> <li>O7. Adding new courses/Enhance intake</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T1. Loss of key staff</li> <li>T2. Competitor intentions are complex</li> <li>T3. Sustaining internal capabilities</li> <li>T4. Sustainable financial backing</li> <li>T5. Increased competition from other</li> <li>T6. Lack of Professional Approach</li> </ul>

**5. FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The major findings and recommendations of this study are as follows:

1. College location, surrounding and environment is liked by most of the Students (20.2%), Faculty (17%), Parents (20%) and expressed that it is calm, quite, cool, homely, peaceful and good for study.
2. Teachers and staff of the college are cooperative and having helping nature. The Students (11.6%) have mentioned that teachers are easily available and encourage for their progress.
3. Teaching staff are the strength of the college. They interact freely with the students and teach & guide nicely as told by Students (11.9%), Faculty (24.5%) and Parents (18%). Alumni (14.8%) say BCE should preserve good teachers at any cost.
4. College is good in everything (staff, teaching & training, discipline, facilities etc) is mentioned by the Parents (20%).
5. Academic and teaching works are done well as mentioned by the Faculty (11.1%), Parents (23%) and Alumni (11.1%).
6. Functions and events are organized well in the college as mentioned by Faculty (12.7%), Parents (19.5%) and Alumni (12.3%).
7. Alumni (12.3%) say Hospitality and traditions are done well by BCE.
8. The students' unity and their team work is the strength of BCE as said by the Students (15.8%).
9. Teaching and academic activities are better than competitors as mentioned by Faculty (14.3%) and Parents (12.5%).
10. The students are given opportunities for their overall development. BCE does it better than its competitors as told by the Parents (10%).
11. The infrastructure / building appearance is not liked by the Students (11.3%) and they (16.4%) say it is the weakness of BCE. The Faculty (57.4%) agree infrastructure & building appearance is the weakness of BCE. Faculty (9.5%) and Alumni (14.3%) say BCE should address it immediately.
12. A separate Canteen building should be constructed immediately as expressed by the Students (11.1%) and Parents (19.2%).
13. A good internet Facility (Wi-Fi) should be provided to the students and staff immediately as said by the Students (8.9%) and the Faculty (9.5%).
14. Campus placements are less/not good. No good companies are visiting the college as told by the Students (11.7%) and it is the weakness of BCE said by the Parents (24.1%).
15. Being in rural area, the students are lagging and have less scope for exposure as told by the Parents (6.9%).
16. Discipline among the staff and students is very poor as expressed by the Faculty (21.1%) and they (16.7%) say BCE should address it immediately.
17. BCE should address immediately to guide failed / academically poor students as said by the Parents (6.8%).
18. Alumni (6.9%) say BCE is poor in retaining senior staff and they (14.8%) say BCE should retain them at any cost.

The above mentioned few important findings pinpointed certain Strengths and Weaknesses of BCE. There are certain needs and expectations expressed by the stakeholders that management has to take actions to meet them immediately. Apart from these there are certain problematic areas where stakeholders have shown their dissatisfaction. The stake holders also have suggested certain areas of opportunities for improvement of BCE. Some of the problems are such that these can lead to making situation further worse if not tackled by taking timely decisions.

**6. ACTIONS PLANS**

Setting of objective should be done after performing the SWOT analysis. This would allow achievable goal(s) or objective(s) to be set for the organization. Based on the information collected from various stakeholders of BCE through SWOT Analysis, Sixteen action plans covering important thrust areas have been suggested and are shown in the Table 6. All the action plans are expressed with respect to the SWOT factors, the person(s) responsible to carry out the actions with the time line for each action.

**TABLE 6: PROPOSED ACTION PLANS FOR BCE**

Sl. No.	Proposed Action Plans	Related SWOT Codes	Timeline	Responsibility
1	Improving Infrastructure by adding separate buildings for Civil, Mechanical departments.	S1, O2, O4,O7, W2,W6,	July 2015	Management
2	Additional Hostel buildings to be constructed to meet additional requirements.	S1, O2,O4, W2,W6,	Dec 2014	Management
3	A separate building for Canteen and recreation centre for both staff and students is being constructed.	S1, O2, O6, W6	Dec 2013	Management
4	Reducing failure rate of students by taking extra care and counseling to academically poor students.	S2,S3,W5,W8, T5	Ongoing	Dean-Academic /HODs
5	Incorporating overall personality development and entrepreneurship development programmes as major components of teaching learning process.	O5,W1,W5,W7, W8, W9, T2,T6	Ongoing	Principal/Dean /HODs
6	Improving industrial orientation, training and placement services.	O5,W1,W4,W5, W7, W8, T2,T6	Ongoing	HODs/TPO
7	Developing suitable performance evaluation, feedback reporting and recording system, standard academic templates.	S6, O1,W1, W3, T3	Ongoing	Dean-Academic /HODs
8	Developing suitable HRD policies.	S6,T1,T2,T3,T6	Dec 2013	Management
9	Providing Wi-Fi facility to all department blocks including hostel blocks with security system.	O2,O6, W6,W7	Dec 2013	Principal /Head-ICTC
10	Encourage both staff and students for participation in workshops, conferences with leave and monetary benefits.	S6, W5,W6,W8, T3,T5	Ongoing	Dean-academic /HODs
11	Training of faculty and staff every semester under Faculty development programme.	W1,T3	Ongoing	Dean-Academic
12	Enhancing facilities of sports, library, transportation, malty gym centre, internet and intranet etc.	O2,O6,W6,W7	July 2014	Management
13	Strengthening with adequate qualified and experiences faculty and staff.	S2,T1	Ongoing	Management /Dean-Academic/HODs
14	Updating library and teaching learning resources.	W7,T6	Ongoing	Principal/Dean-Academic/HODs
15	Improving Hostel and Mess facilities.	O2,W7	Dec 2013	Management /Principal /Warden
16	Improving discipline among both staff students with proper code of conducts and guidelines.	S5, O1	Ongoing	Principal/HODs

After careful study of the data it is concluded that a systematic approach with technical vision and management strategies these issues could be tackled. It is hoped that administrators, members of management, head of the institution/department will take strategic measures for the overall growth and development of BCE.

The SWOT analysis through feedback on questionnaire is proved to be an instrument for developing strategic plans for the growth and development of an engineering college. It is expected that the integrated efforts of all the stake holders shall bring significant improvement in the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of BCE.

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