# Strategic Planning in a Health Leadership Sector: A Report from UNESCO Chair in Health Education, Iran

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## Abstract
Strategic planning defines the formal decision of a company for its future. Like all organizations, health care sectors need to prepare their strategic planning and act according to it. UNESCO chair in health education as a leader health sector, describes the course and steps for preparing its strategic planning based on SWOT analysis technique.

**Keywords:** *Strategic planning, Health education, Health leader sector, Iran*

## Introduction

Strategic planning has become a widely used term in recent years. It is often seen to be a response to the need for explicit leadership for the health sector at a time of considerable challenges including very constrained resources and complex and increasing health needs (1). Considering the increasing need for health sectors to act according to their strategic planning, they are all working to prepare their own planning system; however, there is little guidance on the approach.

UNESCO Chair in Health Education (2, 3) as part of UNITWIN Networks and UNESCO Chairs Program (4), with a role of leadership in health education plans in national and regional levels, reports its planning approach. This paper will discuss the issues that should be considered in preparing a planning system at the national level in a leader health sector.

### Team of Experts

For the first step, a team is to be formed, consisting of experts in strategic planning process and responsible persons in the organization and there should be an agreement on the definition of the strategic planning and its components. A typical definition could be as "a process of setting agreed priorities and direction for the health sector in the light of given resource constraints" (1). Although these constraints (such as limited available resources and political environment) are restraining, strategic planning is a means to overcome them.

### Values

The next step would be to define the values at the beginning and during the process. The team should recognize conflicting values and avoids them when possible. The values should be made real and brought into planning. In organizations such as UNESCO chairs, the values of the organizing body and national hosting institution should be considered as well. To have an effective plan, relevant policy statements and plans should be reviewed.

Then the contextual factors that influence the organization and their impact should be taken into account. We shall remember that these factors have a changing nature and are not fixed and stable.

### Rolling Plans

For a leader health sector, the plan is better to be clear, can reduce flexibility and includes controversial elements (e.g. Expanding quantity OR quality of services). Instead of general statements with no set time period, or 'finished' products with defined periods for implementation, it would be better to consider plans with inbuilt processes to up-

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date with changing surrounding environment. These plans called 'rolling', cover a defined period (e.g. 3 or 5 yr), and are rolled on every year to work out the new conditions and annual budget. These kinds of plans enable us to have a balance between long and short-term plans, while long-term plans could be outdated and short-term plans do not allow long-term strategy.

### Vision, Mission and Goals

When an agreement is reached on general issues stated above, the 'vision' of the organization should be stated. This is our desirable view from outside of the organization. Then our 'mission' would be described considering our role and in a way to reach our final goal. This would be a general and brief statement which defines the existential philosophy of this organization and will be discussed in detail in 'mission statement'. In this part we respond to these questions: a) What service? b) To whom? c) In what level (national, regional or international)? d) With what technology? e) Philosophy? f) Special characteristics? g) What's the view to society? h) What's the view to employees? i) The view to beneficiary and development?

### Strategies and Methods

'Long-term goals' help us to move in direction of our mission (Fig.1). They totally specify our aims. Then, 'strategies' show the way to approach our goals and 'lines' determine the boundaries for strategies. 'Short-term goals' are extracted from long-term goals and explain them. 'Methods' are a way of clearing the strategies. In order to follow with 'activities', the practical part which brings the strategies to action, we need to 'SWOT' before. SWOT stands for 'strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats'. In this stage, first we try to prepare a list of organization's own weaknesses and strengths and then the outside conditions influencing as opportunities and threats. After preparing a detailed list, now is the time to use this SWOT. We come to conclude with strategies to use strengths in order to best benefit from opportunities, strategies to eliminate weaknesses so as to utilize opportunities, strategies to profit from

strengths for reducing the threats, and finally strategies to remove weaknesses to reduce the ruining effects of threats. This stage will effectively help us to come to the 'projects and activities'. When all parts are ready, the timeframe for revisions and the responsible persons should be specified.
Now the plan is to be approved by the organizing bodies that could be ministry of health or other governing organizations. The dissemination process is the next step which is better to be considered in development of the planning. Direct links between strategic plan and operational activities and budgets help the plan to be efficiently implemented.

**Fig. 1:** Strategic planning process model (5)

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