

Children with Special Health Care Needs--Health Administration Case Study: Strategic Planning

The following discussion provides an example of what strategic planning in action looks like in the case of a Children's Health Center dedicated to serving children with special needs and their families.
(Common concepts are noted in **bold** type.)

The Children's Health Center is affiliated with a university academic health science center and is a regional center supporting and providing interventions to children with complex multiple needs as well as a leader in neurodevelopment. The Center's leadership realizes that the environment in which the Center operates is very dynamic and is constantly changing. To ensure that the Center continues to meet the needs of the changing environment and maximizes its potential, the Center's leadership has initiated a **strategic planning process**. As a first step in their strategic planning process the Center's leadership and stakeholders actively participated in a **situational analysis** of the organization's changing external and internal environments. This analysis is often referred to as **SWOT analysis**. The SWOT approach helps focus the situation analysis process on four questions: **S** – What are the Center's internal **strengths**? **W** – What are the Center's internal **weaknesses**? **O** – What external **opportunities** might move the Center forward? **T** – What external **threats** might hold the center back? The SWOT analysis found opportunities among the major environmental forces for change such as advances in genetics and biotechnology that provide the Center with exciting research potential for expanding knowledge and therapeutics. Empowered consumers who expect increased participation in care and access to new treatments and interventions will enhance the Center's opportunities to partner with families to maximize their child's potential. Also, the information technology-enabled Internet and e-health technologies provide a powerful platform for the emergence of new models of service delivery, outreach, and knowledge transfer. The analysis also uncovered increased societal and professional emphasis placed on evidence-based practice, quality, and safety in health care as well as inter-professional practice, all of which provide opportunities to improve care and better meet the needs of children and families. On the other hand, the analysis also found threats of rising health care costs and systemic changes that will move young people out of acute care settings more quickly resulting in increased pressure for earlier transition to post-acute care. These systemic changes increase the intensity of inpatient care, and furthering the trend towards ambulatory and outpatient care will stress the Center's capacity to keep pace with the changing nature of disability and the demands for new models of care and family support. Other **challenges** discovered include the growth of a more ethnically diverse client population and the corresponding need for culturally competent care as well as increasing societal pressure for accountability and a movement to pay-for-performance reimbursement.

In assessing the Center's strengths and weaknesses in light of environmental opportunities and threats the participants in the planning process found the Center's strengths to be its reputation as a leader in neurodevelopmental care and rehabilitation in their region, its affiliation with the university academic health science center and its significant accomplishments in research and education as well as extensive partnerships and network relationships in the region. At the same time, the participants found the Center's weaknesses to include stretched and limited resources (i.e. funding, staff, facilities, and equipment) and increased demands for more complex and higher acuity patients as well as the challenges of building new models of service delivery in more client-centric settings. Another challenge is the capability of cultural competency with increasingly diverse children and families.

Strategy Formulation

As a first step in their **strategic formulation process** the Center's leaders and stakeholders reviewed the Center's **vision** and **mission** directional strategies in light of their **SWOT analysis** and understanding of the changing environment. The Children's Health Center's **vision statement** is "We defy disability." The Children's Health Center's **mission statement** communicates the essence of their organization to their stakeholders and the public. "The Children's Health Center is dedicated to enabling children and youth with disabilities and special needs to achieve their personal best. The Center is a leader in child/family-centered care, rehabilitation, education, advocacy, and research. In partnership with families and communities, we create innovative programs and services to empower and enrich the independence and quality of life of children and families in our region and beyond." This review of the Center's **vision** and **mission** directional strategies in the context of the **SWOT analysis** resulted in a reaffirmation of the Center's **vision** and **mission**.

The insights derived through the **SWOT analysis** made it clear that achieving the Center's **vision** and **mission**, will require a series of other strategic imperatives. First, they determined that the Center's leadership and staff needs to enhance its analytic **capabilities to understand its market and clients** – changing demographics and discoveries about genetic disorders and new technologies that will have major impacts on the demand for programs and services for children and youth with disabilities and special needs. Second, **determine and build the capabilities to make the system work**. With the changing nature of biomedical technology and its client populations, the Center's role as a specialized resource will increase. This responsibility will increasingly involve the Center providing tertiary care to complex and technology-dependent clients and transitioning children and youth with disabilities with less complex needs to community providers. In turn, the Center will be required to provide education and skills training to these partners. This means the Center must balance responsibility as an inpatient treatment center for children and youth with disabilities with enhancing its educational and outreach role of building

communities' capabilities and working toward effective case coordination at the local and regional levels. Third, the Center recognizes it has **capacity to foster an innovative clinical, academic, and collaborative climate for clients, families, professionals, and volunteers to work together** toward the common **vision** of "defying disability. The Center, with its university affiliation, has significant research and teaching capabilities and responsibilities to garner research dollars and advance neurodevelopmental knowledge; promote the transfer of this new knowledge within its clinical, academic, and research role; and bring together partnering organizations and people from multiple sites to fulfill the Center's **mission** – "to enable children and youth with disabilities and special needs to achieve their personal best."

Strategy Implementation

To ensure the successful **implementation** of its strategy, the Center must establish implementation **goals, objectives, action steps** and short-, medium- and long-term **priorities** that link the strategy to the Center's **operating processes**. The short-term implementation priority objectives include: 1) to retain, recruit, and train staff both within the center and in communities within the region to meet the increasing demands of children and youth with disabilities and their families; 2) to increase the development of advanced assistive technology for children and youth with disabilities to improve "quality of life;" 3) to develop strategies for improving community delivery systems by mobilizing community partners to deliver integrated care and support services to children/families with complex, multiple needs; and 4) to develop an information technology platform to facilitate communication, information transfer, and exchange among the Center's multiple stakeholders – clients and families, community-based care and support organizations/staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders.

In summary, the elements of the strategic planning decision-making process (vision statement, mission statement, SWOT analysis, strategy formulation, strategy implementation) all may impact the clinical settings and services available to meet the needs of children and youth with disabilities and their families.

Questions for discussion:

1. A strategic plan is based on a set of beliefs and assumptions that leaders hold in terms of the environment. What are some of those assumptions for the organization with which your clinic is affiliated? What are the implications of these environmental assumptions for your clinic?
2. What is meant by the statement that internal strengths and weaknesses only have meaning when related to external opportunities and threats?
3. Describe the elements of a strategy formulation process. Does your organization have a strategic plan? If so, describe your organization's strategic planning process? Who participated in the strategic planning process?
4. What is your organization's vision statement? In what way is a vision statement different from other types of organizational goals?
5. What is your organization's mission statement? What component of your organization's mission statement embodies the distinctiveness of your organization?
6. Describe the elements of a strategy implementation process. What are some of the barriers to effective strategy implementation in organization and/or clinic?