

Family Planning Manager

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING FAMILY PLANNING SERVICE DELIVERY

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Case Scenario

Analyzing Strategic Issues for San Miguel Clinic

Learning to Think Strategically

Editors' Note

Strategic thinking is a powerful skill that clinic managers and supervisors can use in creating clinic or program plans designed to meet future goals and effectively use available resources. In the past, formulating strategy has been reserved for senior managers and policy makers of large organizations. However, family planning programs ultimately succeed or fail where contact with clients occurs; so strategic thinking at the clinic and community level is absolutely essential.

The clinic manager's time is usually consumed with the critical activities of daily operations: giving staff assignments, responding to requests from the central office, assuring that supplies are ordered, scheduling staff time, and handling the emergency of the day. With so much attention on immediate needs, it is easy for the manager to develop an internal focus and lose sight of the big questions: "Why are we here?" "Is my program doing the right things?" and "What other services should we be providing?"

This issue of *The Family Planning Manager* explains how clinic managers and their staff can learn to use strategic thinking skills. It discusses the strategic issues of improving quality, expanding access, and increasing demand; shows managers how to address these issues by asking pertinent questions and getting appropriate information; and explains how to use the answers to make difficult choices about what to do and how to do it to ensure program success.

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The Family Planning Manager

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Developing Strategic Thinking Skills

Strategy is used in sports, games, military campaigns, business, and even in personal endeavors like home building, and career or vacation planning. Developing strategy allows managers to design approaches that help them to successfully meet the challenges of an often unpredictable future. Throughout history ancient tribes, villages, nations, armies, and merchant groups have engaged in strategic thinking in order to improve living standards, extend political influence, conquer enemies, or increase wealth.

In order to serve their clients, family planning managers need strategies that are appropriate to the geographic, demographic, economic, social, and cultural conditions in which their programs operate. By developing strategic thinking skills, managers can more easily ensure that their programs respond to the demographic and social changes that occur in the environment in which they work.

To think strategically, family planning managers must step back from the daily activities of providing services, running their clinics, managing outreach, or information, education, and communication (IEC) programs. They start thinking about the future needs of their clients, how best to serve these clients, and how to link what they are doing today with what they need to do in the future. A good strategy can provide a road map to the future. It shows you where you want to go and helps you choose the best route(s) to take you there.

Making choices about how you will achieve your program goals is difficult because the best choices are not always obvious. Strategic thinking enables managers to identify issues that are critical to the long-term success of the family planning program and to ask questions whose answers will help to anticipate the future needs of their clients and programs.

The main strategic issues of **improving quality**, **expanding access**, and **increasing demand** for services are well understood by family planning managers. What is less well understood is how to meet the future needs and how to take appropriate actions to address them. While the people who work at the national or organizational level may develop strategies on a much broader scale than people working in a clinic, *everyone* needs to think strategically to ensure that their strategies make sense, are realistic, and produce the intended results.

This issue of *The Family Planning Manager* presents the kinds of questions that family planning managers need to ask that will help them to gather the information they need to effectively improve the quality of their services, and expand access to and increase the demand for their services. It demonstrates how managers can structure their strategic thinking and work with their staff to answer the strategic questions and formulate effective strategies for achieving program and organizational goals. ■

Creating Clinic-Level Strategic Thinkers

When you hear news about clients, donors, technology, economy, politics, or employment, and find yourself asking what this news will mean for the future of your clinic, you are thinking strategically. When you envision what your clinic could be like in three years and what it will take to get it there, or begin to anticipate the future needs of clients or the future role of donors, you are thinking strategically. When you identify groups of clients with special needs, choose a new service delivery approach, or introduce new ways to attract clients to become acceptors or to motivate them to use contraceptives effectively, you are thinking strategically.

Strategic thinkers ask questions like **“Is my program doing the right things?”** This is a strategic question and forms the basis for setting future directions for your clinic or program. The strategic thinking approach discussed in this issue will help to ensure that your future directions are compatible with the mission and goals of your organization and can be achieved by using existing resources, or resources acquired as a result of your strategic thinking efforts.

Strategic thinking is fundamentally different from thinking about your daily operations, which involve multiple activities including counseling clients on the choice of contraceptives, collecting data and filling out forms, ordering supplies, making sure vehicles are working, giving staff assignments, selecting personnel for training, organizing continuing education activities, analyzing and using information on family planning services, and working with the community to promote family planning awareness and services. When managers think about day-to-day operations they usually are asking **“Is my program doing things in the right way?”** This question helps to continually examine whether activities are being carried out in the most effective and efficient way. Management techniques such as Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) are focused on addressing this type of question.

This issue focuses on the question **“Is my program doing the right things?”** Discussing and

answering this type of question will shape the future direction of your clinic or program because it leads you to think about the types of clients you serve, the kinds of services you offer, and whether your particular program will significantly contribute to improving the well-being of your clients, as well as helping to address the population and health challenges in your country. ■

Reviewers Confirm the Benefits of Thinking Strategically

The Family Planning Manager asked reviewers to provide examples of how strategic thinking made a difference to the delivery of family planning services in their programs. Following is a sample of their comments:

- “Thinking strategically about the unmet need for family planning among our clients resulted in the addition of special programs for youth.”
- “Over the past two years, we have utilized strategic thinking at both the Board and field staff level. This has resulted in changes in our program and a reallocation of program resources to emphasize 1) fundraising and resource development, 2) advocacy for inclusion of family planning services in government clinics, 3) providing family planning services, and 4) providing IEC services.”
- “When project support from donors ended without a new agreement in the pipeline, strategic thinking saved our program. By thinking strategically, we anticipated this situation and were able to make critical changes to keep our program going, including borrowing funds from other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that were still receiving support from other funding sources.”

Asking “Is my program doing the right things?” Kinds of Questions

Are we serving the right people? Managers ask this question to examine whether the clinic is attracting and serving all those who need services. A good program will tailor its services to meet the needs of many different groups including, for example, sexually active youth, men, and low parity women.

Are we offering the right mix of services? This question looks at whether you are providing the services that your clients need. To determine what services you should offer, you must know your client characteristics: age, sex, marital status, number of children, desired family size, location, as well as what services you are able to make available to them. This information will help managers to decide what types of services they should be providing in order to reach the largest number of clients.

Are we overcoming barriers to services? Asking this question helps family planning managers to look at the barriers to service delivery that often prevent programs or clinics from performing as well as they might. There are medical, cultural, management, resource, technological, political, and legal barriers that all play a part in limiting the growth of family planning programs. Managers must identify and try to eliminate such barriers to ensure future progress in their program.

Does the clinic staff set a good example for our clients? When clinic staff use reproductive health and family planning services themselves, they will become more effective advocates for the family planning program.

Are our clients satisfied with the services that we provide? Asking this question focuses your attention on fulfilling the needs of your clients. Are you doing everything that you can do to ensure that your clients’ needs are being met so that they continue to use family planning?

Are we creating support for family planning in the community that is being served? Many managers recognize that community ownership of the family planning program is critical to its long-term success and viability. Managers must develop ways in which the community can participate—individually and collectively—in promoting and providing services.

As in a jigsaw puzzle, your answers to these different questions will supply small pieces of the big picture. They will help you to understand what your program looks like today and to visualize how it may look in the years to come. This type of big picture provides multiple points of view from which you can evaluate future options. Although there is no way to guarantee that you will make the best choice, strategic thinking will help you reduce the chances of making poor choices.

Assessing Your STQ: Are You Thinking Strategically?

People who look at the big picture and see the relationship of different elements of the family planning program generally are thinking strategically and are likely to use the skills described in this issue on a regular basis. To find your strategic thinking quotient and see to what extent you are thinking strategically, take this brief quiz.

Strategic Thinking Quiz (Answer each question by circling YES or NO.)

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Can you identify the primary target group(s) in your program (ie. adolescents, low parity women, rural couples, men, etc.)? | Yes | No |
| 2. Do you know the special characteristics of these clients (income level, marital status, parity, catchment area)? | Yes | No |
| 3. Do you know the contraceptive preferences of your clinic's target group(s)? | Yes | No |
| 4. Do you know which characteristics of your target group(s) most influence their choice of contraceptive? | Yes | No |
| 5. Do you know if the contraceptive needs of the client groups have changed over the past three to five years? | Yes | No |
| 6. Do you know what changes are likely to occur over the next three to five years in terms of client groups, contraceptive preferences, and service delivery approaches? | Yes | No |
| 7. Do you know if the national family planning program has identified new priority target groups? | Yes | No |
| 8. Do you know if your clients are seeking other sources of supply in order to find a better selection of contraceptives? | Yes | No |
| 9. Do you know, on the average, how long clients must wait before being seen by a provider in your clinic? | Yes | No |
| 10. Do you know which ways of delivering contraceptives are the least costly? | Yes | No |
| 11. Do you know to what extent unmet demand exists in the area that your clinic serves? | Yes | No |
| 12. Do you know what complaints your clients have about your services? | Yes | No |
| 13. Do you know if your staff have any prejudices against certain contraceptives and are not offering them to clients? | Yes | No |
| 14. Do you know if nurses or doctors in the nearby hospital or health center give priority to the clients you send for long-term methods? | Yes | No |
| 15. Do medical and reproductive health problems such as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) prevent your program from increasing the number of users of long-term methods? | Yes | No |
| 16. Do you know which segments of your target groups are likely to be able to pay for services? | Yes | No |
| 17. Do you know how much clients would be able to pay? | Yes | No |
| 18. Do you know how much income you need in order to cover all the costs of your family planning services? | Yes | No |
| 19. If there are other family planning providers in your area, do you know why your clients choose to come to your clinic and not to the others? | Yes | No |
| 20. Do you know what barriers clients experience in obtaining contraceptives? | Yes | No |

Scoring: For each question that you answered YES, give yourself five points. Total your points to find your score. If you have a score of 75 points or higher you are already thinking strategically and you can use this issue to help other people think strategically. If you score between 50 and 75 points, you are on your way to becoming an strategic thinker and you can use the skills explained in this issue to improve your strategic thinking ability. If you score below 50, read this issue carefully and try to incorporate the strategic thinking process into your daily activities.

QED for Strategy

Strategic issues are those that directly affect the ability of the family planning program to attract and retain clients. Addressing these issues helps to guide the program so that it can expand services to reach specific client groups and work with those groups to change behaviors that are critical to improving maternal and child health (MCH), as well as to achieving family planning program goals.

Over the years family planning managers have identified many strategic issues that fit these criteria. These can be summarized as QED for strategy:

- **Q - improve the quality** of services;
- **E - expand access** to family planning services;
- **D - increase demand** for services among key groups in the population.

Q: Improving the Quality of Services

The quality of family planning services is an important strategic issue because it deals with client satisfaction and service effectiveness. Attracting new contraceptive users, reducing discontinuers, ensuring that contraceptives are effectively used to prevent pregnancies as planned, and reducing or preventing contraceptive side-effects or other complications all depend on offering quality services. Providers who do not continuously seek to improve quality may have a difficult time making their program grow, or may experience high numbers of discontinuers.

To think strategically about improving the quality of services, consider how you can:

- Make sure that a wide range of contraceptive methods is available, so that clients can choose methods that are appropriate to their reproductive needs and health status;
- Develop a system for continuous quality improvement (CQI) within your programs;
- Integrate counseling and IEC programs to help clients make informed choices in selecting contraceptives and to ensure that they use contraceptives effectively;

- Develop an effective follow-up system to identify potential discontinuers and to ensure that clients continue to use and be satisfied with your services;
- Reduce barriers to services within the family planning service delivery system by: setting more convenient clinic hours, managing client flow to reduce waiting time, treating clients respectfully so that they keep coming back to your program, and eliminating provider prejudices for and against certain types of contraceptives.

Examples of Barriers to Acceptance of Vasectomy in Kenya

This example illustrates the kind of information that providers need in order to effectively address and reduce the barriers to acceptance of surgical contraception for men.

- Men have limited knowledge about the vasectomy procedure.
- Men have fears about the health and side effects, especially loss of sexuality. They often equate vasectomy with castration.
- Men fear that their children may die and they will be unable to have more.
- Many men believe it is the women's responsibility to use family planning.
- Men want to talk to other men who have had vasectomies, but since the pool of acceptors is so small this is difficult.
- Many service providers are misinformed or don't have complete information.
- Men want to obtain information from male health workers, but most family planning service providers are women.
- Men want to talk to doctors about the procedure, but many doctors have little knowledge of vasectomy.

[Source: AVSC Working Paper No. 4, 1993]

E: Expanding Access to Services

Expanding access to family planning services is important for meeting clients' needs as well as for achieving lower fertility levels. There are many factors that can affect a clinic's ability to bring services to a larger population. These include: the socio-economic status of the client, the special needs of the client (for example, young adults will probably not want to attend the same clinics as their parents), rural or urban geography, the ability of providers to provide follow up to clients, the supply systems for contraceptives and other pharmaceuticals and equipment, the capacity of the referral systems, the scheduling of services, the charges for services, and the skills and attitudes of service providers. Expanding access may be further limited by medical, technological, administrative, political, and legal barriers that are deliberately or unintentionally imposed.

Expanding access becomes increasingly important as family planning providers start to address unmet demand in the population or divide the population into different client groups in order to serve the specific needs of those groups. Can your current service delivery system meet all needs in a highly diverse client environment? What changes should be introduced?

To think strategically about expanding access, consider how you can:

- Coordinate work and provide support to other providers in your area (including private physicians, nurses, and midwives in both the public and private sectors);
- Develop ways to expand your family planning services and maintain or lower their cost (*for example, expanding or changing hours of operation, or having separate entrances and waiting areas for adolescents*);
- Enlarge the community's role in the service delivery system (*for example training community-based volunteer workers to provide family planning services*);
- Identify groups where there is a high degree of unmet demand and determine how you

can increase access to your services to meet the demand (*for example employing mobile teams in areas where there are no fixed clinics*);

- Integrate family planning services with MCH services, primary health care activities, and hospital/clinic maternity services where feasible;
- Create or strengthen referral systems to improve access to more effective long-term clinical methods.

D: Increasing the Demand for Services

Even if a program offers high-quality services and provides good access to those services, it will not be sustainable without stimulating strong demand for services. If demand is weak, instituting even a small fee for services in an attempt to recover costs could cause clients to stop coming to your clinic, or worse, to discontinue contraception altogether.

Family planning managers realize that many people do not seek, want, or think that they need family planning services. Managers must actively work to increase demand for services by reaching out to these people and by providing opportunities to discuss their concerns, provide information and education, and encourage them to seek and accept family planning services. Family planning managers also know that they must provide regular and accurate information and advice about reproductive health concerns and family planning services if they want to attract new clients and retain current clients. Only by continually motivating and educating clients can a program expect to realize long-term changes in attitudes and behaviors that will induce clients to continue to practice family planning effectively.

To think strategically about increasing demand for services, consider how you can:

- Identify and use satisfied customers to inform, educate, and motivate their neighbors to use family planning;
- Identify ways to educate and motivate specific groups of people whose use of services is low or inconsistent;

- Provide information and services geared to the needs of specific groups (*for example, having youth or women work with their peers to educate and motivate them about reproductive health*);
- Anticipate changes in the social and demographic patterns that will affect demand over the next few years;
- Integrate family planning programs with other development activities in your area in order to increase knowledge of family planning, encourage positive changes in attitudes and practices, and secure local financial support. ■

Working Solutions—Kenya

The Kenya Seventh Day Adventist/Rural Health Services (SDA/RHS) program recently held a series of meetings to discuss strategic issues and formulate strategic directions for their program. The purpose of the exercise was to explore ways to improve their services, strengthen management systems, utilize resources better, and improve the prospects of future sustainability. During a four-day workshop the SDA/RHS team addressed the following five strategic issues.

1. How can RHS attract, motivate, and retain appropriately skilled and trained staff who understand and share its philosophy? (Quality)
2. How can RHS improve its management systems and effectively utilize its governing Board as a resource? (Quality)
3. How does RHS strengthen its weak financial base while ensuring future sustainability and consistency with its mission? (Access)
4. How does RHS improve its service delivery network and capability? (Access)
5. How can RHS maximize its linkages with government agencies, donors, other development organizations, and the local community? (Quality, Access, and Demand)

Thinking Strategically in Family Planning

Thinking strategically requires that you exercise certain skills so that you can more easily choose the best course of action. Many managers are natural strategic thinkers and almost unconsciously follow a logical process in moving from thought to action. The process outlined here—made up of five steps—can help all managers structure their strategic thinking.

- Create a guiding framework
- Identify your strategic options
- Evaluate your options
- Select your options
- Transform your strategies into actions

Step 1: Creating a Guiding Framework

Charting your future directions requires that you have a clear idea of where you want to go. Developing or clarifying your organizational mission and program goals is the first step to thinking strategically.

If your clinic or organization has a mission statement, start by reviewing it with your staff. If you do not have a mission statement, work with your staff to develop one. At the end of this step you should have a shared understanding of your program's purpose and values. This understanding will be the foundation on which you will build your future goals, strategies, and activities.

How to . . .

Define Your Mission and Strategic Goals

The mission statement is a broad, general statement that explains the type of organization, its main purpose, and its values. The mission statement helps to unify the vision of the organization's purpose. It should answer the questions, "Why does our organization exist?" and "Who are our beneficiaries?"

Sample Mission Statement

Parsante Health Services believes that access to reproductive health services is a fundamental human right and strives to provide high quality, low-cost reproductive health information and services to men and women of reproductive age.

Goals are directly related to the organizational mission and describe, in general terms, the benefits to the specific populations that will result from your activities.

Sample Goals

To serve the needs of the rural poor and underserved populations.

To ensure that women have a choice of a wide range of contraceptive methods.

Step 2: Identify your Strategic Options

Once you have developed your guiding framework, you need to identify specific strategic issues that are important to your program. To facilitate this process, it is important to examine your clinic's capabilities and identify any opportunities or constraints that exist in your setting for improving

quality, expanding access, and increasing demand. This type of analysis is called a QED analysis.

A QED analysis will help you and your staff to collect and analyze basic data that you can use to develop strategic options for your clinic that both build upon the clinic's strengths and take advantage of any potential opportunities.

How to . . .

Conduct a QED Analysis

A QED analysis can be done quickly and inexpensively and should be done with other clinic staff. Form a team of clinic staff to work on the QED analysis and conduct a series of meetings and discussions within and outside the clinic. Be as open as possible about the weaknesses and do not pass over significant problems that exist, as future plans will be based on this assessment. To facilitate the analysis process, you can formulate a list of questions for your group to address.

Sample Questions for the QED Analysis

The following questions are some that you should consider in your planning sessions. Review these questions and add any that may be more relevant to your particular program. As you discuss and formulate answers to each of these questions, decide whether they represent your program strengths or represent opportunities for future program development.

Continued on next page

When considering these questions, think about your program from a marketing perspective, and how you can attract, serve, and retain clients by keeping in mind:

- the *client* (how to satisfy client needs);
- your *organization* (how best to use your organization's strengths);
- other *providers* (how to coordinate your services with those of other providers to reach the largest numbers of clients, while keeping program differentiation in mind).

Concerning Quality:

- Are staff trained and motivated adequately so that they can do their jobs properly?
- What are the main areas where training is needed to upgrade staff capacities?
- Do staff have the necessary materials and equipment to provide quality services?
- Are family planning services offered to clients who come to your clinic for other types of health care?
- Do staff have positive attitudes toward family planning and service delivery?
- Are your counseling and IEC messages consistent so that your clients can make informed choices about contraceptive use?
- Is the clinic staff attentive to the clients' needs, questions, and concerns?
- Is your program appropriate to the socio-economic and health status of families in your area?
- Are your clients offered a wide range of contraceptive methods?
- Are all the contraceptives you offer always available to your clients or do you have supply problems?
- Are clients going to other clinics to receive services? If so, why?
- Do other clinics offer contraceptives or other services that your clinic does not offer?
- What types of outreach and follow-up services do you provide to your clients?
- Is your facility in good condition?

Concerning Access:

- Is your facility being fully utilized?
- Is there room for expansion at your facility?
- Does your information system give you the information that you need to plan for and assess the performance of the clinic?
- What kinds of specialized services are you providing for special groups, for example men, sexually active unmarried adolescents, newly marrieds, and others?
- What is the greatest unmet need for family planning in your catchment area?

Continued on next page

- Does your program provide long-term methods or facilitate referral to programs that do provide these methods?
- Does your program offer community-based services that operate in conjunction with your clinic?
- Is family planning available from other sources in your area? What are these sources? (Include private physicians, social marketing outlets, government clinics, non-governmental clinics, etc.)
- What coordination mechanisms exist or could exist with other providers?
- What are your clinic's current and projected sources of funding for the next 3 to 5 years?
- What can be done to increase your financial resources?

Concerning Demand:

- In what ways has your program been effective in creating demand for your services?
- What are the characteristics of your clients and how might these be changing? (Consider ages, percent female/male, marital status, types of methods used, number of children desired, etc.)
- Have you identified specific groups of potential clients where demand is low or the use of services is inconsistent?
- Do you provide services geared to the special needs of these groups?
- Do you offer services at hours that are convenient to your clients?
- What activities has your program initiated that change the attitudes and behaviors of clients and potential clients?
- Have you integrated family planning with socio-economic development activities, such as income-generating initiatives or school programs?
- What are the community and religious attitudes towards family planning in general and in your clinic in particular?
- What is the status of women and how does this affect their ability to seek quality family planning services?
- What are the anticipated changes in the social and demographic patterns that will affect demand over the next few years?
- Does it make sense to open a branch clinic in a growing neighborhood?
- How can the media be used to help increase demand?

The QED analysis will help you to identify opportunities for improving quality, expanding access, and increasing demand within the context of your management capabilities and constraints that exist in your setting. Use the information in the QED

analysis to identify potential future strategies that you can employ in your program. Concentrate on how your services can be refocused to better serve your current clients, attract new clients, and increase the demand for family planning.

Step 3: Evaluate Your Options

Identify options that are compatible with your mission and goals. Once you have identified some strategic options, you need to evaluate each option to see the extent to which it furthers your organizational mission and brings you closer to achieving your long-term goals. Discard those that do not seem to be compatible with your organizational mission and goals.

Weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Prepare a simple table to compare the advantages and disadvantages of each option. The table should include the potential benefits and risks of implementing each option in terms of both your clients and your organization. Often this kind of analysis reveals that it is better to develop a combination of service delivery systems where one system can support another, rather than investing exclusively in one type of delivery system. ■

Sample Table for Weighing Advantages and Disadvantages

In this example, the QED analysis had indicated an opportunity to expand services to clients by developing additional delivery systems. In this step, the manager and clinic staff had identified several strategic options for expanding services, including mobile clinics, community-based distribution (CBD), and a variation on CBD, depot holders. They then created a table to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each option and began with the CBD option. Part of this table is shown below.

Advantages of CBD Delivery Systems

- 1) Will provide more regular and frequent contact between service provider and client.
- 2) Will minimize burden on clients in traveling and waiting time—may improve client satisfaction.
- 3) Would reduce risk of discontinuation or interruption in contraceptive use, since contraceptives will be brought regularly and on schedule to the client.
- 4) Is more economical—we can mobilize a large cadre of CBD workers for the same cost as a smaller group of nurses, midwives, or doctors.

Disadvantages of CBD Delivery Systems

- 1) Will require high degree of supervision as CBD workers are often nonprofessionals or volunteers.
- 2) Promotes temporary methods—may make program dependent on temporary methods—causing problems in use effectiveness.
- 3) May be difficult to link with clinic services—will need to develop effective referral system.
- 4) May not be a good fit with our organizational goal of increasing use of more effective long-term methods.

The clinic staff then developed a similar table for the other service delivery approaches and went on to compare the advantages and disadvantages among the three systems.

Step 4: Select Your Options

Evaluate each option in terms of your available resources. Consider the availability of technology and the existence of expertise to design and plan programs, as well as the funds and personnel for implementing programs and services.

Make a list of human and financial resources that you estimate would be required to implement this option. Make an assessment of your ability to acquire the resources that you have identified and select the strategies that have the most likelihood of success.

Step 5: Transform Your Strategies into Actions

Managers who *think* strategically do not *act* strategically unless they can transform their ideas into action. The final step in this process is to communicate the mission, goals, and the strategies

that you have decided to pursue to all interested parties, including your clients, your staff and superiors, government officials, and the community at large. The following example illustrates how you can communicate your strategic directions and show how you intend to achieve your goals. ■

Communicating your Mission, Goals, and Strategies for Effective Action

Mission Statement

Parsante Health Services believes that access to reproductive health services is a fundamental human right and strives to provide high quality, low-cost reproductive health information and services to men and women of reproductive age.

Long-Term Goals

- To provide high-quality family planning and IEC services delivered with care and respect to meet the needs of the individual client.
- To assure that women, men, and youth have access to the family planning services they seek.
- To assure that women, men, and youth know where they can obtain family planning services.

Strategies for Improving Quality

1. Establish a referral system between the clinic and the local hospital to provide clients with sterilization and Norplant services.
2. Assess training needs of staff and develop a plan to ensure that staff skills are adequate to meet the needs of clients.
3. Establish a client advisory committee to assist in assessing client satisfaction with clinic services and to recommend service delivery improvements.

Strategies for Increasing Access

1. Assess the needs of youth and create a program to specifically address their needs.
2. Work with the hospital to provide postpartum women with family planning services.
3. Develop an outreach program that provides a forum for men to discuss family planning and prevention of STDs.

Strategies for Increasing Demand

1. Create enthusiasm and support for family planning among religious and community leaders.
2. Organize discussion groups in rural villages to encourage family planning acceptance.

Strategic Thinking in Action: Addressing Missed Opportunities

Strategic thinkers constantly scan the environment for information that they can use to identify potential strategies for improving quality, expanding access, and increasing demand. In this Working Solution, family planning managers used the results from a hospital-based study to increase demand and expand access to family planning services.

In Kenya, a study of 1,000 Kenyan women who gave birth at two hospitals revealed that very few of the women had previously used contraception, but 90 percent of them expressed a desire to use contraception and most said their last pregnancy was unwanted or mistimed. The study found that very few women were comfortable raising the subject of family planning while they were in the hospital, citing that the nurses were often too busy, they were afraid to approach the nurses, or there was not adequate privacy.

Clinic managers used information from this study to consider how they could transform this missed opportunity into strategies for increasing demand and expanding access. Subsequently they developed the following strategies for addressing these issues:

- Use CBD workers to visit women in maternity wards to provide them with information about your clinic's services, education about contraceptives, and some temporary methods for them to use.
- Train maternity ward personnel to provide family planning services and to inform women about the services available at the clinic.

[Source: AVSC News]

Using the Results of Your Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking is a natural process of anticipating future client and program needs. It requires asking the right questions and effectively using the answers to these questions in a structured way. There are many different ways to use the information. Some managers may choose to embark on a formal process of strategic planning; others may incorporate the information they obtain from strategic thinking directly into their operational plans.

Once strategic issues have been identified and a plan has been developed to respond to these issues, strategic management begins. The resulting plan should be a dynamic tool to guide managers and staff. It should be referred to frequently for guidance and used to assess progress and clinic or program performance. At three- or six-month intervals it is helpful to ask questions such as:

- Are we meeting our goals?
- Are our assumptions and strategies still appropriate?
- Do we need to make changes or adjustments, and if so, what are they and how will the changes be implemented?

Since strategic thinking is based on making assumptions about trends, there will always be surprises. New trends will emerge and unforeseen events will require that portions of the plan be modified. Remember, strategy is like a road map that will guide you towards your destination and the occasional detour will be inevitable, but by thinking strategically, you can anticipate the need for change and turn it into an opportunity for making program improvements. ■

Reviewer's Corner

A forum for discussing additional applications of FPM concepts and techniques

On the differences between strategic thinking and operational thinking...*One reviewer points out, "It is true that strategic thinking helps to ensure that future program directions are compatible with the mission and goals of the organization. But sometimes, strategic thinking may actually change the direction, mission, or goals of an organization. I think this brings out a major difference between strategic thinking and operational thinking—that flexibility and change is an essential part of strategic thinking."*

On the importance of training to improve the quality of services...*One reviewer stresses, "When it comes to thinking strategically about upgrading the quality of services, it is important to be sure to include training for those who are the first to encounter clients, such as promoters, vehicle drivers, receptionists, cleaning staff, and others. Initial staff hospitality and information-giving, based upon a sympathetic understanding of client concerns and knowledge of available services, go a long way in building trust and positive attitudes. These people may figure as importantly in a client's decision to return for services as product reliability or the delivery of medical and health care services."*

On the importance of thinking strategically...*One reviewer writes, "Strategic thinking and the development of new strategies is key to making our program more client-centered." Another reviewer writes, "A very important reason for thinking strategically has to do with the limited and sometimes decreasing funding for family planning programs. Thinking strategically can help us meet our clients' needs while making the best use of limited resources."*

On stimulating the strategic thinking process...*One reviewer suggests, "Clinic managers could be refreshed or reminded to think strategically at semi-annual clinic management meetings. Issues to be discussed during these meetings could be similar to those explained in this issue."*

On the issue of decentralization...*One reviewer points out, "Our program is very dependent on foreign donor support; and program performance changes according to the availability of funding. Currently our program is undergoing a restructuring process that gives administrative control of the program to local providers. In this situation, clinic managers and supervisors need to think strategically to ensure that they provide services according to the plans and standards developed at the national level."*

On achieving QED results...*One reviewer suggests, "One technique that works well in achieving the kinds of things under QED—reaching new clients and understanding barriers and client attitudes—is the *promotora* program widely used in Mexico and other countries. In these programs, volunteer promoters are trained as peer counselors, information providers and, in some cases, providers of contraceptives. Promoters can be found among any population group. Sometimes they are paid a stipend, but mostly the acquired self-esteem and status among peers is adequate compensation."*

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Checklist for Learning to Think Strategically

For Clinic Managers

- Introduce the concept of strategic thinking to your staff by explaining the difference between “doing *the right things*,” and “doing things in *the right way*.”
- Formulate critical questions that concern your clinic that deal with the question, “Is my program doing the right things?”
- Initiate a strategic thinking process to help structure your discussions with your staff about ways to improve quality, expand access, and increase demand.
- Work with your staff to clarify, or redefine, your organizational mission.
- Develop two or three organizational goals that relate directly to your mission.
- Conduct a QED analysis that focuses on answering specific questions that pertain to quality, access, and demand in your program.
- Determine which areas represent organizational or program strengths or opportunities for future program development.
- Evaluate your strategic options, taking into consideration your mission and goals, and the advantages and disadvantages of each option.
- Select your strategic option(s) and communicate your decisions to your staff and supervisors.
- Make concrete plans for putting your strategies into action.

For Mid- and Senior-Level Managers

- Help clinic managers to think about the kinds of broad program changes that would influence quality, access, and demand.
- Assist clinic managers in conducting a QED analysis by looking at successes from other organizations and programs and how you can learn from their experience.
- Support strategic decisions and goals that result from the strategic thinking process at the clinic level.
- Use the strategic thinking process to focus your program so that you can use your existing resources and strengths to achieve your goals.

The Family Planning Manager is designed to help managers develop and support the delivery of high-quality family planning services. The editors welcome any comments, queries, or requests for free subscriptions. Please send to:



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