



SUBREGIONAL MEETING ON HEALTH
FOR ALL BY THE YEAR 2000

EM/SUB-REG.MTG.HFA.2000/6

Kuwait, 14 to 17 April 1980

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DISCUSSION GUIDE ON STRATEGY

➔ PURPOSE OF TODAY'S SESSION

We have two main tasks to accomplish today.

Firstly, we have to agree on a definition of strategy, and distinguish it from policies and plans of action.

And secondly, we have to discuss what individual countries need to do about strategy in the context of planning for HFA 2000.

I intend to make some brief introductory remarks, and then invite you to make comments or ask questions. Afterwards, we will divide into groups and start the more detailed discussions.

➔ A DEFINITION OF STRATEGY

The word strategy comes from the Greek language. The Greek word "stratos" means army, and "strategia" means management of the army. Over the centuries, strategy has usually meant the art of controlling armed forces in order to win wars. This is quite appropriate for us. We have a war to win over illness and death, and their allies which include ignorance and waste of resources.

Nowadays, the term strategy is used everywhere, not only by the military. In the business world, we talk about a company's long term market or production strategies. The term is even used in sport, and there are books on chess and bridge strategy.

I want to try to combine popular understanding of the meaning of strategy with its scientific meaning. The main elements of both are as follows:

- it is more concerned with general ideas on what to do, than with details.
- it is more concerned with what we will do over a long period, than with what we might do today or tomorrow:
- it is concerned with methods of doing things, rather than just specifying where we want to go.
- it is concerned with listing alternatives, and then analysing them to determine which is best.

On the basis of the above, I suggest the following definition. I hope it is clear and precise.

A STRATEGY IS A STATEMENT OF WHERE WE WANT TO GO, AND HOW WE CAN BEST ENSURE WE GET THERE. IT EXPLAINS THE GENERAL DIRECTION IN WHICH WE SHOULD PROCEED, IN ORDER TO REACH OUR OBJECTIVES.

➔ STRATEGY COMPARED WITH POLICY

We agreed yesterday that policy is concerned with stating our commitments to attaining objectives. But we noted that a policy statement doesn't describe in detail how we intend to attain those objectives.

Strategy follows on logically from policy setting. Having stated our objective, we must now decide how to get there.

AN ANALOGY. TAKING A HOLIDAY TRIP

As an illustration, suppose we wish to plan a holiday journey with our family

Then, some policy statements might include the following.

1. Decisions on the locations of holidays will always be based on a consensus, all family members being given an equal say.
2. Holiday expenses should never be so high as to result in a deficit in the bank account.
3. Sites selected for vacations should never be more than 50 km from the sea.

Thus, policy statements define our objectives -- to satisfy all the family, to avoid excessive expenditure, to be near the seaside, and so on. And they give us continual guidance, as a set of rules which should be consistently followed. But they are not concerned with details as to how we might attain our objectives.

Here are some strategies, to illustrate the difference.

1. Travel by air, using special reduced rate advance booking tickets.
2. All-inclusive package tours, with special rates for families
3. Selection of a large holiday site, because it would offer a wider range of activities.

So, strategies concern methods of attaining our objectives. Note that they describe resource use, such as air travel and package tours. We must specify resources when we talk about how to do something.

Finally, note that a set of policies works together -- each policy always applies, and all of the policies should be followed. But strategies are often alternatives -- we can attain our objectives either by using strategy X or by using strategy Y. We can never forget any policy, but we can sometimes choose not to use strategy X and use strategy Y instead

➔ STRATEGY COMPARED WITH PLANS OF ACTION

It was mentioned yesterday that plans of action give specific details of what is to be done, and who will do it, when, and with what resources. A strategy does not contain such details. Particularly, a strategy does not state a precise timetable, or a precise target as to how much will be achieved by a certain date

Just as strategies follow on logically from policies, so plans of action follow on logically from strategy selection. We move from the general to the detailed. Plans of action must contain the detail, after we have selected the best strategies.

AN ANALOGY. TAKING A HOLIDAY TRIP

We can continue with the illustration started on the previous page.

We have seen that policies give a clear indication of the objectives of holiday travel in general. They express commitments to principles which are relevant to many holidays, not only the current one being planned.

The strategies indicate actions we might take in order to apply those principles. They give alternative ways of ensuring we attain our objectives.

Now we must prepare a plan of action, giving precise details of what has to be done. Our plan would include details of the following types.

- dates of the trip
- prices of tickets
- who is to travel
- flight numbers
- sources of funds
- responsibilities of individuals
- and many more details concerning who, what, why, when, how, and involving what resources.

➔ A CONFUSING ISSUE: POLICIES IN ONE PLAN CAN BE STRATEGY ISSUES OF A LARGER PLAN

We have seen that policies deal with

- commitment to attaining objectives
- guiding principles
- consistent decisions
- creation of the right attitudes
- and so on.

We have seen that strategies concern

- ways of attaining the agreed objectives
- how to get where we want to go
- general methods, specifying resources
- and so on.

We have seen that plans of action

- give details on how, who, when, etc , so the strategies will be implemented.

The above principles always apply.

But confusion sometimes arises because a particular topic (say, free health services) can sometimes appear in a policy statement, or in a strategy description, or in details of a plan of action!

We must remember this: that it is not the subject which determines whether it is policy or strategy or plan of action, but the way it is written -- the context of the subject item.

AN EXAMPLE OF A SUBJECT WHICH CAN BE IN BOTH POLICY AND STRATEGY STATEMENTS

Look at the following diagram.

POLICY STATEMENT	STRATEGIES	PLAN OF ACTION
The government is committed to free health services	1 Raise money to finance HS from direct taxation. 2. Cut health expenditure by reducing high cost services.	1.1 Draft legislation by November: heads of departments to meet in early October, and make

The statement about commitment to free health care is clearly a matter of policy. And raising money from direct taxation to finance free health care is clearly a strategy aimed at attainment of the policy's objectives.

But suppose we were responsible for a national development plan, concerning all sectors and not just health. Then, we might have the following.

POLICY STATEMENT	STRATEGIES	PLAN OF ACTION
The government is committed to equal rights and opportunities for all citizens	1. Setting of a national minimum wage.
	2. Provision of health services free of charge.	2.1 Draft legislation on raising money from direct taxation and submit it by May to

So, a subject which is a policy matter in a small plan can be a strategy in a larger plan. Note that there is no doubt that free health care is a strategy in this second example. We are not committed to free health care. It is merely one of the possible alternatives we will consider, one of the ways which might be used to attain the policy objective of equal rights and opportunities

For this reason, policies are more likely to be set at higher levels of government and organisation, because higher levels deal with larger plans. Remember, no subject is obviously a policy or obviously a strategy matter. It depends on the context; and whether we are committing ourselves to it, or merely considering it as one possible way of attaining a specified objective.

➔ SOME DIFFERENT TYPES OF STRATEGIES

It will be helpful to consider some of the different types of strategies. In order to do this, let us think about a particular policy, and the various ways in which it might be implemented.

THE POLICY. the Ministry of Health is committed to reduction of morbidity and mortality rates of cholera.

Many strategies might be considered. Here are a few examples.

- STRATEGY 1 spend all available resources on a nationwide immunisation campaign
- STRATEGY 2 spend all available resources on improving treatment facilities at all hospitals and clinics
- STRATEGY 3 upgrade treatment facilities to an acceptable level, and spend the remainder of the resources on immunisations in areas where cholera is most common
- STRATEGY 4 spend all available resources on improving the sources of domestic water
- STRATEGY 5 spend all available resources on a health education campaign, aimed at informing the community of the epidemiology of cholera and how to avoid the risk of infection

The above strategies can be classified into types, using the following dimensions.

A: SIMPLE → COMPOUND

If a strategy only comprises one main type of activity, it is called a simple strategy. If there are two or more types of activities involved, then it can be called a compound strategy. Strategies 1, 2, 4, and 5 above are simple strategies. But number 3 is a compound strategy.

The parts of a compound strategy are themselves each a simple strategy. The compound strategy involving some upgrading of treatment facilities and some immunisations is a combination of the two simple strategies -- treatment and immunisation.

B. SINGLE-PURPOSE → MULTIPURPOSE

If a strategy is relevant to only one policy or objective, it is called a single-purpose strategy. But if it will help attainment of two or more policies or objectives, it can be called a multipurpose strategy.

Strategy number 4 is clearly a multipurpose strategy, because improvement of domestic water sources will help attain many more objectives than merely reduction of cholera incidence rates.

Do you think that strategy 5 is multipurpose ?

C. DIRECT → INDIRECT

Strategies can also be classified according to whether they directly help attainment of the objective, or whether they only affect the objective via an intervening activity or process.

Immunisation directly affects attainment of the objective. Once people are immunised, nothing else has to happen -- the objective will definitely be attained, at least in part

But the health education campaign is an indirect strategy. By itself, it will have no effect on cholera. There are intermediate processes, such as attitude and behaviour changes on the part of the community which was given the education.

Do you think any of the other strategies are indirect ?

➔ DEALING WITH STRATEGIES

When the time comes to deal with strategies, the planner has several important tasks to perform. Dealing with strategies is, in fact, the part of planning which is most often done badly. We will see why this is so in a moment.

The main tasks associated with strategies are as follows.

STRATEGY IDENTIFICATION

We want to implement a policy, to attain an objective. Our first task is to think of as many ways as possible of attaining the objective. Too often, we only think of ways (strategies) which we have used before. We are not sufficiently imaginative. Techniques like "brainstorming" can help us. In this first phase, we must try to think up wild ideas one of them might be

feasible and effective, and just one new idea is worth the effort. This is the only stage in planning where there are opportunities to think up innovations, and we must not waste the chance.

STRATEGY FORMULATION

In the first phase, we think up many ideas. In this second phase, we have to describe these strategies in some detail -- to describe what the ideas mean in practical terms. We write descriptions of each strategy: at least a page or two on why we think it is a good strategy, how it would be likely to help attainment of the objective, a general description of how the strategy might be carried out, and so on.

STRATEGY ANALYSIS

We must now decide which of the strategies are best, from among the alternatives we have formulated.

There are several kinds of analytical procedures.

Study of existing data from our health information system -- mostly, routine data.

Literature searches, to find out what other people know about the merits of alternative strategies.

Field or laboratory experiments, where we test out each alternative strategy and see how it works.

Mathematical modelling and scientific analyses on paper (as opposed to physical modelling).

Developmental research, which means introducing the strategy on a small scale, but permanently (rather than in an experiment where the strategy is usually withdrawn at the end of the trial).

DECISION MAKING

On the basis of the analytical reports, decisions must be taken. We must decide which strategies will be used. We will usually select not just one strategy, but a combination of several -- often called the strategy mix.

The decisions on strategies are of great importance, so the analytical reports must be understandable to decision makers, as well as being scientifically sound.

I said above that we would look at the reasons why strategies are often dealt with badly. I suggest the following reasons. You may want to add others.

We need data: but there are few reliable data, and they are hard to collect.

We must be scientific. but we are short of skilled and experienced management scientists, operations research specialists, and health services research specialists.

Decision makers don't always trust science sometimes they prefer to use their own judgments and experience.

Sometimes there are vested interests: people want to strengthen their own programmes, and their own fields of expertise.

➔ GROUP DISCUSSION TOPICS

As was the case yesterday, we propose to split into two groups for the purpose of discussing our themes in more detail. Again, we are suggesting two topics, one for each group, as follows.

GROUP + A +

What strategies should be considered by most countries, because they are likely to be particularly useful in the HFA 2000 context ?

You should use the list of policies from yesterday's discussion as a base. What strategies might be expected to be particularly useful in the light of those policies ?

For example, you might have listed this policy on the first day: governments should be committed to involvement of the whole community in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of health care.

If you think this policy is important, you should then consider ways of implementing it. You might consider strategies like these:

- publicity campaigns to inform the community about health, and the roles it can and should play in health care.
- health workers to be recruited from, and be assigned to work in their own communities
- national health advisory council set up, to represent whole community, and advise the Ministry of Health on needs, inefficiencies, and problems.
- and so on.

GROUP + B +

What changes need to be considered in the way strategies are identified, formulated, analysed, and selected ? In other words, what are the current weaknesses in methodology for dealing with strategies, in the context of HFA 2000 and how might these weaknesses be overcome ?

The purpose of discussing this topic is to generate ideas on how the process of producing strategies for HFA 2000 might be improved.

You might think there are weaknesses and opportunities for improvement in respect of.

- selection of staff to be involved in strategy production.
- the quantity or quality of research and analysis of alternatives
- methods of generation of new ideas:
- information consulted in respect of field experience in effectiveness of particular strategies.
- and so on