

# A SWOT Analysis of the Greek Health System

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**Abstract:** This paper intends to make a SWOT analysis of the Greek health care system. SWOT analysis is a key component in the strategic planning of the Greek health system. Scope of this analysis is to evaluate the impact of internal and external factors on the Greek health care system. Internal processes and resources are considered strengths and weaknesses and external factors are considered opportunities and threats. By using this analysis we will evaluate the current status of the Greek NHS (national healthcare system) and we will identify future prospects.

**Keywords:** SWOT analysis, Greek health care system, internal processes and resources and external factors and strategic planning.

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## 1. Introduction

Human resource management (HRM, or simply HR) is the management of an organization's workforce, or human resources. HRM has a crucial role in the operation and development of an organization. Development and implementation of specific strategies in the field of human resources is an act of managerial responsibility in the health system in Greece. (Saltman RB, Ferrousier-Davis O, 2000 & Goulas A, 2007).

SWOT analysis is a technique that reveals the most important organization strengths (Strengths), weaknesses (Weaknesses), opportunities (Opportunities) and threats (Threats), in this case the specific operation of the health care system in Greece. (Goulas A, 2007)

In our case, the orientation of this analysis is mostly predicting. The SWOT analysis reviews the external and internal environment of the health system in Greece.

## 2. Research methodology

.The Greek and international bibliography has been reviewed, and in particular papers on the SWOT analysis of health systems published during the last ten years via PubMed and Science Direct. The keywords that were used are: SWOT analysis, Greek health care system, internal processes and resources and external factors and strategic planning.

## 3. SWOT Analysis

*Results obtained*

SWOT analysis of the health system in Greece highlights the following aspects of general scope:

Strengths:

1) *At the level of five functions of management:*

a) *planning:*

- The necessity of passing through the planning stage in the health system is important, even if the recognition reasons vary;
- The planning stage is very important;
- Development of predictable directions of development of health system;
- There are regular planning activities in each department;
- There are generally known forms that must occur planning activity - vision, goals, actions, responsibilities;

b) *Organization*

- clear structuring of the work processes on components, their grouping on places and sub-ordinating institutions, establishing of certain managing, economical and technical criteria;

- in general internal relations are well defined;
- instructions and procedures are well established and respected

## c) coordination

- in general planning results are correlated with results of work;
- the tasks assignment follows the hierarchic line;

## d) Training (Moilaren,R.,2005)

- own organizational culture allows considering the state as an internal factor of motivation;
- the negative motivation system is well defined by law and known by the competent persons that apply it

## e) Control

- there is requirement to reporting (periodically as events or as the case);

2) *At the subsystem level*

## a) methodological subsystem:

- a variety of methods and specific techniques are applied: a simplified form of management by objectives and the dashboard, managing the budgets, simplified methods of techniques to stimulate creativity, forms of delegation, meeting, etc..
- the need for training on the specific areas is recognized;

## b) Organizational subsystem(Moilaren,R.,2005):

- Organizational structure is fixed, being determined by law;
- Relationships and responsibilities of each hierarchical level are established by law;
- There are job descriptions for staff of the institution, their structure meet current standards;
- The structure of the informal organization is molded on the formal organization, allowing an improved communication, on vertical, as well as on horizontal;

## c) The decision making system (Pemberton, J&amp;Stonehouse,G,2000)

- decision-making procedures are well established and known;
- the criteria used in decision making are set by regulations;

## d) The information subsystem

- hospitals are equipped with computers connected to the Internet;
- hospital staff has the necessary skills to effectively use these resources;
- internal communication respects the hierarchical structure;
- relations with the external environment of the hospitals are established by legislative measures;
- communication system operates both through formal channels and the informal, the results are satisfactory.

Identified weaknesses in the health system:

## 1) At the level of five functions of management:

## a)Planning(Moilaren,R.,2005)

- time for the development of medium and long term strategies is extremely low;
- deadlines are generally very limited, activities are especially focused on the results rather than process;
- Lack of viable strategies for medium and long term de-concentration of public services programs.
- Lack of collaboration with other local authorities
- Limited financial resources and exclusive dependence on allocations from the national budget;

## b) Organization

- Resources are inadequate related to current needs;
- Procedures and standards are mostly bureaucratic type, characterized by an extended circuit information,

which affects the time required for decision making;

c) Coordination

- in many cases recruitment and selection process is only formal, more jobs are filled before launching the necessary formalities;
- in terms of staff training there is no concrete training plan based on actual training needs;
- excessive fragmentation of activities leads to inability to establish a unique widely accepted final result;

d) Training

- low importance given to this function of management;
- lack of a monitoring system of the degree of motivation which permits identification of grievances and improvement of the existing situation by integrating the positive and reducing negative ones (Pemberton, J&Stonehouse,G,2000);

e) Control-evaluation

- the share of control activities is much higher than the evaluation;
- lack of monitoring activity in the evaluation process;
- There are no performance evaluation criteria;

1) *At the subsystem level*

a) Methodological subsystem (Moilaren R,2005)

- the need for training in specific areas is constrained by lack of resources that allows only a little coverage of training needs;
- The legislative is complex, complicated, poorly harmonized and creates problems in consistent application and interpretation;

b) The organizational subsystem (Moilaren R, 2005&Bourandas, D and Papadakis,V.,1996)

- definition of blurred objects affects the whole decisional system;
- Excessive use of informal communication channels generates obvious failure;
- lack of adequate space and facilities for the smooth running of the activities of services of the health system;
- Administrative capacity is different from administrative-territorial units with a negative impact on quality of services provided to citizens;
- slow rate in the implementation of quality management;

c) The decision making system

- failure to establish responsibilities and criteria for assessing the performance of the healthcare system;
- bureaucratic procedures increase the cost of health system management;
- the transmission of information is affected by a lack of a coherent information System;
- creation of an ethical decision making system that would eliminate inequities between different types of decisions

d) Informational system

- equipment with computers and Internet access are not commensurate with the needs (qualitative and quantitative);
- lack of strategies in the acquisition of IT technologies;
- information flows and circuits are affected by external systems;
- management of public funds is centralized and rigid.

In this current analysis we carried on, looking in more detail at human resources, we evaluated in detail the main activities of human resource management in the health system in Greece, as follows ( Bourandas ,D and Papadakis,V.,1996):

- human resource planning;
- job analysis;

- recruitment and selection;
- individual performance appraisal;
- initial and continuing education;
- assessment of the costs of human resources management activities;
- computerized data management of staff;
- motivation;

Also reviewed, with a lower level of detail however, and other matters of interest, such as:

- Job evaluation;
- Labor relations;
- Status management and disciplinary practices;
- Promotion of personnel;
- Organization structures;

By the integration of all conclusions obtained for the above mentioned activities from the performed analysis, resulted the picture of the most important elements, with generalizing values, as follows:

### **Opportunities**

- significant growth of importance in the field of the human resources management in the health system in Greece, by placing the personnel in the position of essential value of the organization;
- the presence of the normative frame of high level, which permit the development of the carriers of the personnel of different categories, in the health system of Greece;
- maintaining in society a high level of attractiveness for the professions in the health system of Greece;
- participation on international co-operation programs aimed to the sanitary field development;
- higher expectations of the society regarding the tasks fulfillment in the field of the public health services, by growing the quality of the personnel professional performance .

### **Threats**

- budget restrictions and limitations;
- provisions of some normative laws which enforce the system development on some co-ordinates, sometimes a-typical and which, also, contain heterogenic procedures;
- higher salary or earning conditions on the labor market, compared to those ensured in the health system in Greece, for certain specialties, generally, in deficit.

### **Strong points**

- possibility of initiation by the institution of normative acts favorable to the development of the human resources;
- the existence, already, of internal regulations, well structured, which allow the significant growth, in quantity and quality, of the activities of human resources management;
- the existence of coherent conceptions for the development of the main fields of the human resources management;
- the professional training, generally adequate, of the institution personnel;
- the existence of a well structured system of the institutions for initial and continuous training of the personnel, which can be improved and modernized by well directed interventions;
- the operation of the Department specialized in Human Resources Management;
- the system for social protection, relatively developed, compared to the one other budget categories have access;
- the well established provisions regarding the disciplinary regime of the personnel.

### **Weak points**

- the planning process of human resources has a low friability, especially on medium or long term;
- some procedures of human resources does not ensure publicity, transparency and non-discrimination, necessary as regards the management of the personnel carriers;

- the system of the occupational standards are in an incipient phase, as regards their elaboration, as well as their implementation in the training process;
- the corresponding specialization of the personnel which administrate the activities of the human resources management has not been achieved;
- it has not been elaborated, in complete volume, the system of performance indicators for human resources management and it has not performed the cost analysis of the activities in this field;
- does not exists an own structure of the health system, for ensuring the psycho-pedagogical training of the personnel;
- in the initial training, the role of the practical training stage is not fully defined;
- the continuous training does not respond fully, to a rigorously determined need;
- the system of managerial training of the personnel is not adequately developed;
- the IT system, for the administration of the data of the personnel is insufficiently developed

Based on this SWOT analysis, a reformation of human resource management is needed. The Change of the management (managerial change) is recommended by following some steps. Necessary steps that we should follow are:

1. The development of a new management system that would make a positive change in the health care system. At this step are outlined new goals and objectives in which the health care system must respond in the near future.
2. Implementation of the new management system which ensures sustainability of the health system. This step is important because the old system should harmonize with the changes that are required to perform. In this sense the current system must be prepared to allow implementation of changes. Interim measures are implemented to switch from the old system to new system. Next move to the effective implementation of the proposed measures can be done in stages or in a direct, sudden manner.
3. Assessment of the changes has the role of comparing the original estimates at the planning stage and the results of effective implementation of change; this step has the role of highlighting the deviations that occur between estimated and realized causes and trends. As a result of going through this step will establish a number of conclusions and recommendations for necessary actions that should be taken in the future. Future changes will have to remove irregularities and eventually causes that generate them.

Synthetic steps and mode of action on the implementation of change management to ensure the sustainability of the health system is represented in Figure no 1

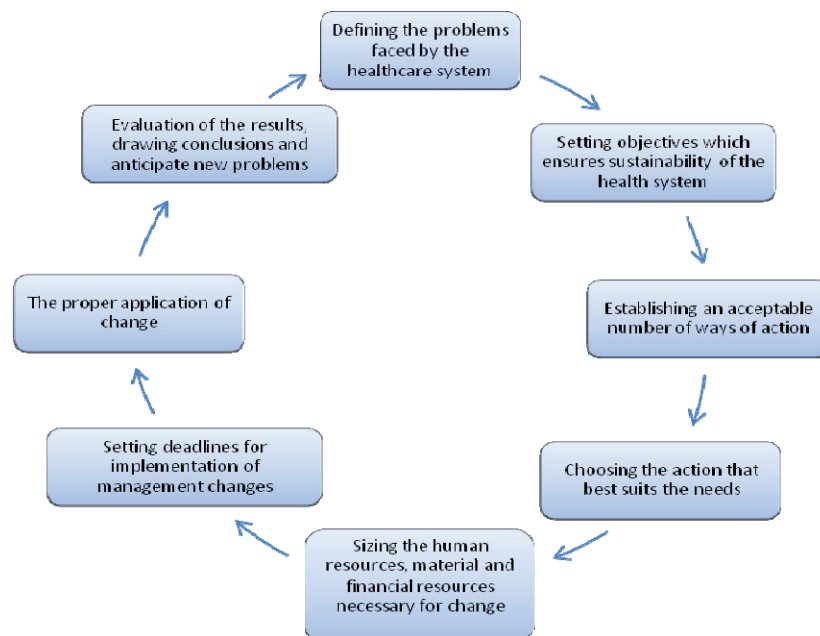


Figure no. 1 - Stages on the implementation of management changes.(Robinson R,1993)

As shown in figure no. 1, to ensure sustainability of the health system, managerial changes are permanent, and this is influenced by how rapidly the environment is involved. This environment influences the adoption of significant changes in a very short time by the following factors:

- Evolution in population growth, which entails the need for a developed and robust health care system ;
- Evolution of the lifestyle in a direction that requires extensive research on the present and especially future health of the population served by the healthcare system;
- Dynamic economic environment with direct impact on the financial resources of central systems and thus on the health care system;
- The impact of technology and resource consumption on the environment by destroying the natural balance which entails a negative response to public health and thus will require new health system costs;
- The evolution of medical techniques, medical research and disease control that have direct impact on decisions for future action in the health system and which require attention and impose a state of continuous alert

#### 4. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, we can say that changes in management in the Greek Health System are a necessity, a fact that guarantees the sustainability of the system. Adopting a conservative management and avoiding application of changes that forces the system to turn quickly to the needs of society does nothing more than to seriously affect long-term sustainability of the system.

In this sense management has the role of monitoring the environmental trends on the health care system and preparing adaptation measures and permanent change to the new system requirements.

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