Strategic Thinking at the Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip: Management Viewpoint

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ملخص: يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة التفكير الاستراتيجي في مؤسسات وزارة الصحة الفلسطينية في قطاع غزة. ولقد تم استخدام المنهج الوصفي التحليلي في إتمام هذه الدراسة، كما تم استخدام العينة الطبقية العشوائية من مجتمع الدراسة والمتمثل بمختلف المستويات الإدارية في وزارة الصحة. ولقد بينت الدراسة، أن التفكير الاستراتيجي موجود في وزارة الصحة بدرجة مناسبة مع وجود ارتباط قوي بين التفكير الاستراتيجي وكل من ثقافة المؤسسة والبيئة، هذا يعني أن توفر الثقافة التنظيمية والبيئة المناسبتين يشجع على تطور التفكير الاستراتيجي في الوزارة والعكس صحيح. ومن النتائج الملفتة أن البيئة الداخلية والخارجية في وزارة الصحة سلبية للغاية ولا تقدم أي دعم للتفكير الاستراتيجي. وتبين الدراسة عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في التفكير الاستراتيجي بسبب المستوى العلمي أو الموقع الوظيفي أو الخبرة السابقة أو المحافظة التي يعمل فيها الموظف. وقد خلصت الدراسة في نهاية البحث إلى مجموعة من التوصيات أهمها ضرورة أن تهتم وزارة الصحة ببناء البيئة والثقافة التنظيمية المناسبتين لدعم التفكير الاستراتيجي داخلها.

Abstract: *The purpose of this research was to investigate strategic thinking at the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) in the Gaza Strip. The research used descriptive analytical approach to pursue the study. Also stratified random sample was used. The research population was all employees in managerial positions working at the MoH. The study revealed that the MoH directors scored high in most dimensions of strategic thinking. The same applied to the correlations between strategic thinking on one side and culture and environment on the other side. This indicated that if the organization culture and*

environment were healthy strategic thinking increased and vise versa. How the MoH environment was not supportive to strategic thinking. In addition, no significant differences were found in strategic thinking attributed to qualification, job position, previous experience or the place of residence. The research came up with some recommendations including, the MoH needs to build a supportive culture and environment to enhance level of strategic thinking among its management.

1- Introduction:

The amount of strategy literature has exploded in the last thirty to forty years; in particular, there has been a growing interest in the recent years in the role of strategic thinking in the strategic process (Keelin and Arnold, 2002). The place of strategic thinking in the strategic process has now been established. Leidtka believes in the importance of strategic thinking and strategic planning to an effective strategy making process (Leidtka, 1998a). Other scholars believed that strategic thinking needs to precede strategic planning and emergent strategy is essential to make them more appropriate and effective. (Tavakoli and Lawton, 2005). Strategic thinking is not only critical to the survival of the organization but more importantly, can be effectively accommodated within a progressive strategy-making regime to support strategic planning (Tavakoli and Lawton, 2005).

Since the establishment of the Palestinian MoH in 1994, there has been a vast expansion of its structure and services. In 1994 the MoH produced its first national health plan, which presented goals, objectives and strategies for each of the various areas of health care and provided calculations of the required manpower, infrastructure and facilities for the following 10 years (MoH, 1994). Parallel to this plan, "The strategic plan for Quality of health care in Palestine" was formulated in 1994 by the Quality of Health Care Unit (QHCU) to improve the quality of health care through increasing the efficiency of the health care system by reforming the existing health system and managing quality development (QHCU, 1994). In 1999 the MoH produced the national strategic health plan (1999-2003), which was similar to the 1994 national health plan in its general outline, approach and methodology. Both plans were subject to criticism in many aspects, in particular the role of the MoH staff, at top and intermediate management levels in the implementation of this plan

was not clear, situation analysis of their capabilities was not carried out nor were their training needs addressed. Further, designing appropriate policies and incentive system were neglected (MoH, 1999).

In 2004 the World Bank (WB) and the European Union (EU) jointly carried out a "Health sector review" to assess several aspects of health care management e.g. quality of services, efficiency of the health care systems and financial management. As a result of this review, a report was formulated. This report meant to provide information and suggestions on which plans to improve the system will be based. The report spotted several areas that need reforming e.g. the health care delivery system MoH structure, numbers of medical staff, medical insurance system, treatment outside the MoH and the reporting systems and supervision mechanisms. The report particularly highlighted the importance of selecting leadership within the MoH on the basis of managerial capacity and commitment (MoH, 2005).

2- Research Objectives:

1- Investigating the level of strategic thinking of MoH managers.
2- Investigating the impact of strategic thinking on some of the managerial practices.
3- Investigating the relationship of strategic thinking with some demographic variables
4- Drawing conclusions and recommendations that may help decision makers in making decisions regarding upgrading level of strategic thinking to promote health services.

3- Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are investigated:

1- There were significant differences at level ($a = 0.05$) in "Strategic Thinking" in the MoH Attributed to some organizational elements.

This hypothesis includes the following two sub hypotheses:

a- There was a significant difference at level ($a = 0.05$) in "Strategic Thinking" attributed to "MoH Division".

b- There was a significant difference at level ($a = 0.05$) in "Strategic thinking" attributed to "Governorate".

2- There were significant differences at level ($a = 0.05$) in "Strategic Thinking" in the MoH Attributed to Qualification, Experience and Job Position.

This hypothesis includes the following three sub hypotheses:

a- There was a significant difference at level ($a = 0.05$) in "Strategic thinking" attributed to "level of qualification".

b- There was a significant difference at level ($a = 0.05$) in "Strategic thinking" attributed to "Years of experience in health sector".

c- There was a significant difference at level ($a = 0.05$) in "Strategic thinking "attributed to "job Position".

3- There was a significant correlation at level ($a = 0.05$) between "Strategic Thinking" and "Building a Creative Culture" in the MoH.

4- There was a significant correlation at level ($a = 0.05$) between "Strategic Thinking" and "Internal and external environment" of the MoH.

4-Methodology

4.1 Type Of The Study

This study is a descriptive analytical one. This design was selected as it was judged to be the most appropriate method to fulfill the aim of the study which is to investigate the strategic thinking and innovation in the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza Strip.

4.2 Study Population:

The study population includes all employees in managerial positions in the three major divisions of the MoH. Senior managerial positions include general directors, directors/ deputy directors and heads of departments. The three major divisions of the MoH include: the central general directorates and departments, the primary health care and the hospitals. The study population includes 593 employees. Table 1 includes 27 general directors, 181 directors / deputy directors and 385 heads of departments as shown in table 1.

Table 1- Numbers of employees in managerial positions in the three MoH divisions in Gaza Strip

	General Director	Director/ Deputy Dir.	Head of Department	Total (%)
Central Directorates	**19** 12.1%	**74** 47.1%	**64** 40.8%	**157** (26.5%)
Hospitals	**5** 1.8%	**57** 21%	**210** 77.2%	**272** (45.9%)
Primary Health care	**3** 1.8%	**50** 30.4%	**111** 67.6%	**164** (27.6%)
Total	**27**	**181**	**385**	**593 (100%)**

Source: PHIC, Annex 3, 2005.

4.3 Research Sample:

The sample used in this research was a stratified random sample. This type of sample was selected because the study population is not homogenous. For the purpose of this study, the study population was stratified into three strata, each includes homogenous population.

- The first stratum includes general directors. This is a small stratum and therefore, all twenty seven general directors were included in the study sample.
- The second stratum includes 181 directors and deputy directors. Sixty percent of the populations in this stratum were selected randomly as this was judged to give an appropriate sample size for the given population.
- The third stratum includes 385 heads of departments. Sixty percent of the populations in this stratum were also selected randomly as this was judged to give an appropriate sample size for the given population.

Table 2-. shows the size of the research sample and its percentage as compared to the study population in each managerial level.

Table 2-.Numbers and percentages of persons with management post at the MoH in Gaza Strip in the research sample as compared to study population.

	General Director	Director/ Deputy Dir.	Head of Department	Total
Study population (No.)	27	181	385	593
Sample (No.)	27	110	229	366
Sample/population (%)	100%	60%	60%	62%

5- Data Collection:

Both primary and secondary data sources were used to collect data for this study. The main primary data source used was the "Questionnaire". A letter from the postgraduate deanship of the Islamic University was sent to the MoH director general who approved distribution of the questionnaire within the MoH institutions; to the individuals in the research sample.

5.1 The Primary Source (The Questionnaire):

A structured questionnaire including close ended questions was specially designed for this study. This type of questions was used to be able analyze it by using SPSS, and to use appropriate statistical tests, compare the results with each other and with previous studies.

5.2 The Secondary Sources:

Academic works including books, articles, thesis, internet, special studies and reports and other library housed material. Unpublished data obtained through personal communication were also used.

6- Content Validity Of The Questionnaire

Content related validity examines the extent to which the method of measurement includes all the major elements relevant to the construct being measured. Two methods were used to achieve this type of validity:

6.1 The Experts Validation:

The questionnaire was evaluated by six experts in the field, three from the Islamic University and three from the MoH. As a result of this review; six questions were modified but no questions were added or deleted.

6.2 Pilot Study:

Pilot study was conducted to assess reliability of the questionnaire. Forty individuals were chosen randomly from the study population and were asked to fill the questionnaire. Those questionnaires were not included in the research sample. Thirty nine questionnaires were returned and used for assessment for both validation and assessment of reliability.

6.3 Correlation Measurements:

Pearson correlation technique was used to confirm questionnaire's validity. The r value was 0.707 and sig. was 0.00.

6.4 Reliability Of The Questionnaire:

Two methods were used for reliability assessment which employed the Split-Half Coefficient and the Cronbach's Alpha Methods. Split-Half Coefficient was 0.881 and Cronbach's Alpha was 0.856.

The questionnaire was developed in the final format and distributed. This was done after taking in consideration all the limitations found.

7-. Data Entry And Statistical Analysis

The questionnaire was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The following statistical methods and tests were used:

1. Percentages and frequencies
2. Spearman Coefficient
3. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was calculated to define the type of data distribution. The test reveals that the data was Nonparametric.
4. Sign test to discover the difference between the average of questions (3) and the average of answers.
5. Kruskal-Wallis Test to differences between variables.

8- Research Importance:

In spite of the plethora of strategic thinking research, less attention has been paid to investigating the area in the public services and health management sectors. Moreover, strategic thinking within the Palestinian MoH have never been researched before. This research will help in filling the "literature gap" in the strategic thinking research of public institutions, particularly those within the health care sector. Indeed it is the first study of its type in Palestine. The study will also help in providing better understanding of the capabilities of MoH managers and the strengths and weaknesses of the MoH. This information is essential for appropriate and effective plans to be made.

9- Theoretical Framework:

9.1- strategic thinking Definition:

Strategic thinking has been defined in many ways. Stumpf defined strategic thinking as "identifying different ways for people to attain their chosen objectives and determining what actions are needed to get them into the position they want to be in" (1989, p 31). Strategic

thinking has also been defined as a "method of gathering competitive intelligence or information that may has strategic value" (Drobis, 1991, p 9). It has been described as the ability to effectively integrate and utilize the information that exists (Reagan-Cicincione *et al.*, 1991). Wilson (1998) suggested that strategic thinking is merely thinking about strategy. Keelin and Arnold (2002, p 39) say that "the critical ability in being a strategic thinker is to have strategic perspective and the ability to create clarity out of complex and disconnected details". Mintzberg (1994, p 110) by contrast, emphasizes that strategic thinking is not merely "alternative nomenclature for everything falling under the umbrella of strategic management". Strategic planning proponents encompasses synthesis; that in the best practice, strategic planning, strategic thinking, and strategy making are synonymous (Mintzberg, 1994). Mintzberg, however, argues that strategic planning is about analysis i.e. breaking down a goal into steps, designing how the steps may be implemented, and estimating the anticipated consequences of each step. Strategic thinking is about synthesis, using intuition and creativity to formulate an integrated perspective and a vision of where the organization should be headed (Mintzberg, 1994). Strategic thinking involves "arraying options through a process of opening up institutional thinking to a range of alternatives and decisions that identify the best fit between the institution, its resources, and the environment" (Rowley *et al.*, 1997, p. 15). Ohmae (1978) in one of the earliest modern works on strategic thinking, defined it as a combination of analytical method and mental elasticity used to gain a competitive advantage.

In order to measure strategic thinking in the MoH Liedtka model with some modifications will be used. Six variables were used and analyzed to measure the level of strategic thinking at the MoH. These are the as follows:

1- MoH internal and external environment
2- Systems Perspective
3- Intent Focus
4- Thinking in Time
5- Hypothesis / Assumption Driven
6- Intelligent Opportunity

9.2- Health Services In The Gaza Strip

Health services in Gaza Strip are provided by various organizations and institutions, namely:

- The Ministry of Health (MoH).
- The Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS).
- The military medical services.
- The Non Governmental Organizations (NGO's).
- The International organizations; mainly the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA).
- The private sector.

The moh is the main health services provider in palestine. It was established in 1995, assuming responsibility for a diverse range of existing facilities. This constituted a major challenge for the newly born palestinian national authority to create a modern healthcare system capable of providing the essential needs to all palestinians in the palestinian territories (moh, 1999).

Palestinian health services are divided into primary, secondary and tertiary provisions (Palestinian Health Information Centre PHIC, 2004).

Primary services are those provided by the general practitioner (GP) and the primary care team. It includes preventive, curative and rehabilitative services.

Secondary services are those provided by the General hospital. They include diagnostic and curative services in general medical, general surgical, pediatric and obstetrical and gynecological services as well as special medical and surgical subspecialties.

Tertiary services are highly specialized services provided at specialized centers serving more than one local health authority (governorate). These services include both diagnostic and curative services; to the highest available levels, covering all medical specialties and areas.

The MoH medical and paramedical services cover primary, secondary and tertiary levels in the five governorates of Gaza Strip namely the north, Gaza, mid Zone, Khan Younis and Rafah governorates (PHIC, 2004). The military health services provide health services to military staff and their families mainly at primary health care level with some limited secondary health care services. The PRCS concentrates mainly on ambulance emergency services. The UNRWA has traditionally

been concerned with primary health care services. Private sector health service providers are particularly active in the secondary and tertiary service sectors (Wheeler and Grice, 2000).

10- Strategic thinking at Palestinian MoH:

To identify the level of strategic thinking six variables were used. These are: 1) internal and external environment, 2) systems perspective, 3) Strategic Intent Focus, 4) Thinking in Time, 5) Hypothesis / Assumption Driven, and 6) Intelligent Opportunism. These variables will be tested in details as follows:

10-1. MoH internal and external environment.

Table 3 revealed that the MoH environment is not supportive to strategic thinking. The total mean was 2.55, the Weighted mean was 51.0% and the sig. was 0.000.

In order to improve level of strategic thinking among MoH management, we should improve employees' level of income. Local custom and traditions of the Palestinian society must be considered in the process of strategic thinking and planning. Table 3 indicated that the MoH data base is not usually used in determining the best ways of dealing with work problems and there are no adequate numbers of competent employees with long experiences at each level in different departments. Development plans for different MoH departments are not made within these departments. Work is not regularly analyzed, and the findings of analysis do not usually used in making future plans.

This variable (MoH internal and external environment) has the lowest score (mean score 2.55) compared with the other variables related to strategic thinking. The impact of environment on strategic thinking is well documented. Ayyoub (2000) found a strongly positive effect for appropriate environment on management behavior. El-Farra (2004) revealed that environmental complexity correlate with strategic planning. Bonn (2001) believes that organizations must create an environment in which all employees are encouraged to participate in the development of innovative ideas and strategies. Collins and Porras' (1998) research showed that visionary companies who consider environment dynamic had a stronger organizational orientation than other companies.

Table 3- The percentages of different responses, its mean and weight mean values and sign test, related MoH environment.

No.	Question	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Mean (5)	Weight Mean	Sig. Level
1	Political and security instability in Gaza Strip has no impact on the morale of the employees in your department	4.1	2.6	3.6	57.0	32.7	1.88	37.7	**0.00**
2	Raising living standard has no effects on the morale of the employees in your department	0.5	4.6	9.0	61.1	24.7	1.95	39.0	**0.00**
3	Local traditions of the Palestinian society has no impact on the way work is carried out in your department	3.7	10.8	12.9	58.2	14.5	2.31	46.2	**0.00**
4	The database of the MoH is usually used in determining the best ways of dealing with work problems	2.9	19.2	41.6	30.0	6.2	2.82	56.5	**0.00**
5	There are adequate numbers of competent employees with long experiences at each level in your department	2.3	25.8	17.4	48.2	6.3	2.7	54.0	**0.00**
6	In your department, you have the modern equipment and technology needed for efficient performance	4.2	56.8	13.8	22.7	2.6	3.37	67.4	**0.00**
7	Development plans of different departments within the MoH are made peripherally within these departments	0.3	11.9	36.5	36.8	14.6	2.47	49.3	**0.00**
8	Work in your department is regularly analyzed and the results are usually used in making future plans	4.0	29.9	28.3	32.0	5.8	2.94	58.8	**0.00**
TOTAL							**2.55**	**51.0**	**0.00**

10.2 MoH systems perspective.

Table 4 indicated weak MoH systems perspective. The average mean was 3.07, the Weighted mean 61.5% and the sig. value 0.509. These indicate that the MoH managers, when making plans, they concentrate on the general objectives and the outline. MoH managers do not have adequate knowledge of the MoH strategic plan. The role of their departments within this plan is limited. The employees are not clear about the direction of work in the ministry within the next few years. This indicates poor involvement of MoH managers in the planning process of the ministry. This finding is in agreement with the findings of El Farra (2004), that Gaza managers leave little time to focus on planning and strategic issues and El Farra (2003) that

Palestinian managers allocate little time to the strategic planning process which is mostly carried out by the top management team with very limited involvement of the subordinates. The importance of the systems perspective as a whole to the strategic thinker was highlighted by Liedtka (1998a) who believes that systems perspective enables individuals to clarify their role within the larger system and the impact of their behavior on other parts of the system, as well as on the final outcome. Senge (1990) suggests that systems perspective is arguably the most critical of the five disciplines of the learning organization. Bonn (2001) concludes that for an organization to be able to develop strategic thinking as a core competency, individual members, particularly senior managers should have a holistic understanding of the organization and its environment.

Table 4- (MoH Systems Perspective). The percentages of different responses to each question, its mean and weight mean values and sign test

No.	Question	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Mean (5)	Weight Mean	Sign test
9	You have adequate knowledge of the MoH's strategic plan and the role of your department within this plan	3.4	31.6	23.8	32.9	8.3	2.89	57.8	0.00
10	When asked to make a plan, you concentrate on the general objectives and out line and not on the fine details	3.7	39.2	26.2	28.0	2.0	3.13	62.5	0.00
11	You have interest to understand the links between different MoH departments and the way these departments interact	8.3	64.0	8.8	14.8	4.1	3.58	71.5	0.00
12	Employees in the MoH are clear about the direction of work in the ministry within the next few years	0.5	16.1	29.5	42.5	11.4	2.52	50.4	0.00
13	Each of the employees in your department knows his exact role within the general plans of the department and the MoH	4.4	47.7	22.7	21.1	4.1	3.27	65.4	0.446
TOTAL							3.07	61.5	0.509

10.3 Strategic Intent Focus.

Table 5 manifested that the thinking of the MoH managers is driven by the strategic intent of the MoH; with a mean score of 3.69, weighted mean 73.9% and sig. value 0.00. There are clear written policies and procedures in the MoH departments. They enjoy

exploring new areas looking for new ideas and extraordinary opportunities. They give priority to completing their work according to plans and do not allow work problems to interfere with this priority. They love their work and are faithfully loyal to their organization. They, however, do not have clear vision as where they want their work to be in five years time. These results are not in agreement with the results obtained by Stonehouse and Pemberton (2002), that large service organizations were more likely to plan over a longer time horizon. The strategic intent of an organization provides the focus that allows individuals within an organization to marshal and leverage their energy, to focus attention, to resist distraction and to concentrate on achieving a goal (Liedtka, 1998a). Lawrence (1999) on the other hand concludes that strategic thinking is fundamentally concerned with, and driven by the continuous shaping and reshaping of intent.

Table 5- (MoH Strategic Intent Focus). The percentages of different responses to each question, its mean and weight mean values and sign test

No.	Question	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Mean (5)	Weight Mean	Sig. Level
14	You have in your department, clear written policies and procedures	6.4	48.7	16.8	25.5	2.6	3.31	66.2	0.049
15	You have clear vision as where you want your work to be in five years time	5.4	33.9	23.5	32.7	4.6	3.03	60.6	0.059
16	You enjoy exploring new areas looking for new ideas and extraordinary opportunities	14.6	59.7	17.9	6.2	1.5	3.8	75.9	0.00
17	You give priority to completing your work according to plans and do not allow work problems to interfere with this priority	17.2	63.6	15.9	1.8	1.5	3.93	78.6	0.00
18	You love your work and you are faithfully loyal to your organisation	49.7	45.0	4.2	1.0	0.0	4.43	88.7	0.00
TOTAL							3.69	73.9	0.00

10.4 Thinking in Time:

This variable (Table 6) shows that the MoH managers strongly "think in time" with a mean score of 4.02, and sig. value 0.00. They make use of previous studies in formulating their plans. They make sure that their interim and action plans are integral parts of their department's and the ministry strategic plans. They make sure that

their action plans include time frames for different phases and tasks. They make use of previous experiences in formulating their plans and they are prepared to make changes in their plans if unforeseen changes in circumstances take place. These findings are from management point of view. But in an interview with the Palestinian minister of health, he stated that, the plans usually set up but never transferred into action plans. MoH strategic plan contains hopes and wishes rather than real strategic plan based on a comprehensive understanding to the MoH environment (Naaem, Interview, 2006). Prahalad (1994), concludes that strategy is not solely driven by the future, but by the gap between the current reality and the intent for the future.

Table 6- (MoH Thinking in Time). The percentages of different responses to each question, its mean and weight mean values and sign test

No.	Question	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Mean (5)	Weight Mean	Sig. Level
19	You make use of previous studies in formulating your plans	28.2	62.4	7.3	2.1	0.0	4.17	83.4	**0.00**
20	You make sure that your interim and action plans are integral parts of your department's and the ministry's strategic plans	22.0	61.9	10.9	5.2	0.0	4.01	80.2	**0.00**
21	You make sure that your action plans include time frames for different phases and tasks	18.6	57.2	17.5	6.7	0.0	3.88	77.5	**0.00**
22	You make use of previous experiences in formulating your plans	23.8	63.7	10.4	2.1	0.0	4.09	81.9	**0.00**
23	You are prepared to make changes in your plans if unforeseen changes in circumstances take place	20.4	64.7	10.3	3.1	1.5	3.99	79.8	**0.00**
TOTAL							**4.02**	**80.5**	**0.00**

10.5 Hypothesis / Assumption Driven and testing.

This variable as stated in Table 7 shows that thinking of the MoH managers is hypothesis driven i.e. they have hypothesis generation and testing as core activities with a mean score of 3.45 and sign test 0.00. The findings confirm that MoH managers can accurately predict the expected outcome and results of their plans. Their planning depends on information obtained as a result of hypothesis testing; which they believe is more valuable in the

planning process than those obtained as a result of analysis and prediction. They encourage their subordinates to validate their new ideas through experimentation. MoH managers, however, do not believe that planning in the MoH is based on environmental analysis, contrary to what Bonn (2001) concludes that senior managers should have a holistic understanding of the organization and its environment. This sector also shows that the MoH top management does not encourage managers to audit their work and draw conclusions, for future planning. According to Lietka (1998a) this element embraces hypothesis generation and testing as core activities. Lawrence (1999) concludes that this process allows an organization to pose a variety of hypotheses without sacrificing the ability to explore novel ideas and approaches.

Table 7- (MoH Hypothesis / Assumption Driven). The percentages of different responses to each question, its mean and weight mean values and sign test

No.	Question	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Mean (5)	Weight Mean	Sig. Level
24	Planning in the MoH is based on environmental analysis	4.4	20.3	43.5	26.6	5.2	2.92	58.4	**0.00**
25	You can accurately predict the expected outcome and results of your plans	9.7	65.4	17.5	6.3	1.0	3.76	75.3	**0.00**
26	Your planning depends on information obtained as a result of hypothesis testing	11.2	53.1	27.3	7.3	1.0	3.66	73.2	**0.00**
27	Information obtained as a result of hypothesis testing are more valuable in the planning process than those obtained as a result of analysis and prediction	13.7	55.7	19.7	10.9	0.0	3.72	74.5	**0.00**
28	You encourage your subordinates to validate their new ideas through experimentation	12.1	68.8	12.9	5.2	1.0	3.86	77.2	**0.00**
29	The MoH's top management encourages managers to audit their work and draw conclusions, for future planning	3.9	23.3	30.1	33.4	9.3	2.79	55.8	**0.00**
TOTAL							**3.45**	**69.1**	**0.00**

10.6 Intelligent Opportunism.

This variable shows that the MoH managers deal with available opportunities efficiently and intelligently with a mean score of 3.94, and sig. value 0.00 (Table 8). MoH managers always involve employees in their departments in the planning process. They try

different sources for new ideas. They are prepared to change their strategies if unforeseen changes in circumstances take place. They can formulate applicable plans, within the available resources in their departments and they keep alternative plans, ready for implementation, in case changes in circumstances take place. Mintzberg and Lampel (1999) see this element as underscoring the difference between emergent strategy and deliberate strategy. They believe that, a healthy strategy system requires a tremendous amount of communication and interactions around ideas and possibilities from all levels of management. Hamel (1998) advocates that creating a meaningful strategy means giving the opportunity to the young, newcomers and to those at the periphery of the company.

Table 8- (MoH Intelligent Opportunism). The percentages of different responses to each question, its mean and weight mean values and sign test

No.	Question	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Mean (5)	Weight Mean	Sig. Level
30	You always involve employees in your department in the planning process	12.1	67.2	12.1	6.2	2.6	3.8	76.0	**0.00**
31	You try different sources for new ideas	17.2	72.1	5.6	4.1	1.0	4.0	80.1	**0.00**
32	You are prepared to change your strategies if unforeseen changes in circumstances take place	15.7	71.4	8.3	3.1	1.5	3.97	79.3	**0.00**
33	You can formulate applicable plans, within the available resources in your department	18.2	73.3	5.9	2.1	0.5	4.07	81.3	**0.00**
34	You keep alternative plans, ready for implementation, in case changes in circumstances take place	11.1	72.9	11.3	2.6	2.1	3.88	77.7	**0.00**
TOTAL							**3.94**	**78.9**	**0.00**

Level of Strategic Thinking at the MoH

Table 9- shows that the total mean 3,45, weighted mean %69.15 and sig. level 0.00. This reveals a reasonable level of "Strategic thinking" at the MoH from management viewpoint. However, the MoH needs to analyze its internal and external environment in the process of strategic thinking. This is essential to produce suitable strategy to the MoH environment. In addition, the MoH has a weak systems perspective which, do not give them full details about MoH

work and the system is unable to clarify employees roles within the larger system in the process of strategic thinking.

Table 9- Mean, weight mean and sig. level for each of the "Strategic thinking" variable and the total mean, weighted mean and sign test for the overall "Strategic thinking" variables

No.	Variables	Mean (5)	Weight Mean	Sig. Level
1	MoH Internal and External Environment	2.55	51.0	0.00
2	MoH Systems Perspective	3.07	61.5	0.509
3	MoH Strategic Intent Focus	3.69	73.9	0.00
4	MoH Thinking in Time	4.02	80.5	0.00
5	MoH Hypothesis / Assumption Driven	3.45	69.1	0.00
6	MoH Intelligent Opportunism	3.94	78.9	0.00
	Total	**3.45**	**69.15**	**0.000**

11- HYPOTHESES TESTING

11.1-There are Significant Differences at level ($a = 0.05$) in "Strategic Thinking" Attributed to Some Organizational Elements.

a- There is a significant difference at level ($a = 0.05$) in "Strategic Thinking" attributed to " MoH Division "

The results (see Table 10) show that there is no significant difference (sig. 0.114) in "Strategic thinking" attributed to "MoH division". Significant differences between managers in the Primary Health Care and Hospitals were not expected; as both groups work to the same level and have similar mixes of General Director, Directors and Heads of Departments. On the other hand, the central directorates and departments represent the highest decision making authority within the MoH and have higher proportions of top management employees i.e. General directors and Directors as compared to hospitals and primary health care. Therefore, significant differences were, expected between managers in these Directorates and Departments and those in Hospitals and Primary Health Care. Lack of such differences in this study may be attributed to the fact shown in Table 11 that general managers, managers and heads of departments are almost similar in the level education as they hold at least bachelor degree.

Table 10- Kruskal-Wallis Test for differences in strategic thinking variables attributed to "MoH Division"

Sector	Grouping Variable	General Directorate	Hospitals	Primary Health Care	Other
Systems perspective	Mean	3.0669	3.0232	3.1592	3.083
	Chi-Square	3.194			
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.363**			
Intent focus	Mean	3.6560	3.6515	3.7483	3.894
	Chi-Square	3.835			
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.280**			
Thinking in time	Mean	3.9616	4.0207	4.0453	4.2105
	Chi-Square	2.991			
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.393**			
Hypothesis Driven	Mean	3.4185	3.4224	3.5126	3.526
	Chi-Square	2.325			
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.508**			
Intelligent Opportunism	Mean	3.7927	3.9888	3.9975	3.873
	Chi-Square	6.485			
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.090**			
Total	Mean	3.576	3.622	3.690	3.730
	Chi-Square	5.951			
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.114**			

Table 11- Distribution of sample according to "The highest professional qualification obtained" and "Job position"

			Job Position		
			General Director	**Director/ Deputy**	**Head of Department**
Qualification	**Basic University Degree**	**Frequency**	10	32	71
		% of total in job position	**43.4%**	**30.0%**	**49.3%**
	High Diploma / Master	**Frequency**	9	55	50
		% of total in job position	**39.2%**	**51.4%**	**34.8%**
	Ph.D or equivalent	**Frequency**	2	9	11
		% of total in job position	**8.7%**	**8.4%**	**7.6%**
	Other	**Frequency**	0	11	10
		% of total in job position	**0.0%**	**10.2%**	**6.9%**
	None	**Frequency**	2	0	2
		% of total in job position	**8.7%**	**0.0%**	**1.4%**
	Total	**Frequency**	23	107	144
		% of total in job position	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

b- There is a significant difference at level ($a = 0.05$) in "Strategic Thinking" attributed to "governorate".

Kruskal-Wallis Test was used to test this hypothesis. Table 12- shows that the sig. value was 0.213. This shows no significant difference in strategic thinking attributed to "Governorate". Differences were not expected as Gaza Strip is a small geographical place with homogenous society where all governorates share the same external environment and culture.

Table 12- Kruskal-Wallis Test for differences in strategic thinking variables attributed to "Governorate"

Sector	Grouping Variable	North	Gaza	Middle	Khan Younis	Rafah
Systems perspective	Mean	3.1065	3.0359	3.2154	3.1440	3.175
	Chi-Square	3.011				
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.556**				
Intent focus	Mean	3.5387	3.6833	3.8308	3.7362	3.791
	Chi-Square	4.679				
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.320**				
Thinking in time	Mean	3.810	4.0365	4.1692	4.0270	4.091
	Chi-Square	3.92				
	.Asymp. Sig	**0417**				
Hypothesis Driven	Mean	3.4301	3.4347	3.6538	3.4583	3.562
	Chi-Square	0.2914				
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.5712**				
Intelligent Opportunism	Mean	3.8733	3.9291	4.0154	3.9539	4.125
	Chi-Square	4.722				
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.317**				
Total	Mean	3.544	3.623	3.776	3.666	3.749
	Chi-Square	5.819				
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.213**				

11.2- There are significant differences at level ($a = 0.05$) in "Strategic Thinking" attributed to qualification, experience and job position.

a- There is a significant difference at level ($a = 0.05$) in "Strategic Thinking" attributed to "The Level of Qualification".

Kruskal-Wallis Test was used to test this hypothesis. Table 13- shows that the sig. value was 0.371. This shows no significant difference in strategic thinking attributed to "level of education".

This lack of significant difference may be the result of the fact that MoH managers lack the knowledge of the MoH strategic plan and their exact roles in this plan. MoH employees are not clear about the direction of the MoH in the next few years and they do not know their exact roles within their departments (Table 4). This means that MoH

managers; have similar abilities to think strategically regardless of their qualifications. El-Farra (2003), however found a positive correlation between strategic management practices of Palestinian managers in the plastic industry and qualification of the manager.

Table 13- Kruskal-Wallis Test for differences in strategic thinking sectors attributed to "level of qualification"

Sector	Grouping Variable	BA	High Diploma /Master degree	Ph.D	Non	Others
Systems perspective	Mean	3.085	3.1461	2.818	3.012	2.885
	Chi-Square	7.331				
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.119**				
Intent focus	Mean	3.673	3.6600	3.800	3.821	3.742
	Chi-Square	1.893				
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.755**				
Thinking in time	Mean	4.00	3.9875	4.181	4.172	3.971
	Chi-Square	4.149				
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.386**				
Hypothesis Driven	Mean	4.431	3.4871	3.411	3.477	3.319
	Chi-Square	3.233				
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.520**				
Intelligent Opportunism	Mean	3.899	3.9629	4.137	3.629	3.771
	Chi-Square	11.190				
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.025**				
Total	Mean	3.614	3.650	3.669	3.682	3.538
	Chi-Square	4.265				
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.371**				

b- There is a significant difference at level ($a = 0.05$) in "Strategic Thinking" attributed to the "Years of Experience in Health Sector" .

Kruskal-Wallis Test was used to test this hypothesis. Table 14- shows that the sig. value was 0.254. This shows no significant difference in strategic thinking attributed to "years of experience".

One possible explanation for this lack of difference is that the MoH is not keen on keeping its employees professionally updated which makes the length of experience counterproductive i.e. the longer the experience of the employee is; the older and more out dated his knowledge becomes. This means that MoH managers; regardless of the lengths of their experiences have similar capabilities of thinking strategically. This is consistent with the findings of Garratt, (1995) that 90% of the directors and vice presidents from the Institute of Directors in London had no induction, inclusion or training to become a competent direction giver of their companies and that this percentage seems to hold good in Europe, East Asia, Australia, Newzealand and the United States. Similarly Bonn (2001) showed

that the majority of senior executives in 35 of the 100 largest manufacturers in Australia identified lack of strategic thinking as the main problem in their organization. El-Farra (2003), however found a positive correlation between strategic management practices of Palestinian managers in the plastic industry and length of experience of the manager.

Table 14- Kruskal-Wallis Test for differences in strategic thinking sectors attributed to "Years of experience in health sector"

Sector	Grouping Variable	Less than 10 years	10-20 years	More than 20 years
Systems perspective	Mean	3.1468	3.1059	3.024
	Chi-Square	2.710		
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.258**		
Intent focus	Mean	3.7759	3.710	3.644
	Chi-Square	2.286		
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.319**		
Thinking in time	Mean	4.0260	4.0691	3.980
	Chi-Square	1.914		
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.384**		
Hypothesis Driven	Mean	3.5295	3.500	3.390
	Chi-Square	5.611		
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.060**		
Intelligent Opportunism	Mean	3.9760	3.9234	3.960
	Chi-Square	0.855		
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.652**		
Total	Mean	3.688	3.660	3.601
	Chi-Square	2.743		
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.254**		

c- There is a significant difference at level ($a = 0.05$) in 'Strategic Thinking Attributed to "Job Position"

The results (see Table 15) show that there is no significant difference (sig. 0.475) in "Strategic thinking" attributed to "Job Position".

Lack of such significant difference may be attributed to the finding that promotion of MoH employees does not rely upon their performances and abilities to develop work, which means that differences in strategic thinking between managers in relation to the size of department or job position should not be expected (Zanoon, 2006). Another possible explanation is the finding that development plans are made centrally with limited sharing of the concerned departments (Table 3.) which deprives all managers from showing their abilities to think strategically, and abolishes differences between them in this respect.

Participation by lower level managers in the strategy development process has been linked to improved decision making by senior managers (Wooldridge and Floyd, 1900). Liedtka believes that involving middle managers in the strategy process enriches the repertoire of ideas and frameworks that senior managers have to work with. Bonn (2005) found that involvement of middle managers in the strategic decision making process fosters strategic thinking within an organization and increases an individual's diversity representational systems.

Table 15- Kruskal-Wallis Test for differences in strategic thinking attributed to "the Job position"

Sector	Grouping Variable	General Director	Manager	Director / Deputy	Head of Department
Systems perspective	Mean	3.1944	3.1138	2.967	3.0741
	Chi-Square	4.737			
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.315**			
Intent focus	Mean	3.8074	3.7004	3.6182	3.9638
	Chi-Square	2.695			
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.610**			
Thinking in time	Mean	4.111	4.0528	3.9656	4.0241
	Chi-Square	1.693			
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.792**			
Hypothesis Driven	Mean	3.6049	3.4274	3.3374	3.4775
	Chi-Square	2.042			
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.728**			
Intelligent Opportunism	Mean	3.9926	3.9722	4.0167	3.9346
	Chi-Square	6.770			
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.149**			
total	Mean	3.742	3.654	3.582	3.636
	Chi-Square	2.52			
	.Asymp. Sig	**0.475**			

11.3- There is a significant correlation at level ($a = 0.05$) between "Strategic Thinking" and "Building a Creative Culture".

Table 16 shows the significant correlation between strategic thinking and "Building a creative culture" at 0.01 significance level. Spearman correlation coefficient was 0.586 and the sig. value was 0.000.

Liedtka (1998b) argues that senior managers must develop guidelines and facilitate the strategic thinking skills of organizational members. Communication is an essential medium for a creative culture. Bonn (2001) suggests that senior managers need to design programs for training and development that raise the general level of

creative ability. Bonn, however, explains that simply selecting individuals with high strategic thinking abilities or providing training in this area is not enough to ensure that strategic thinking manifests itself in the organization. Bonn adds that this requires corporate willingness to involve people throughout the organization in the strategy development process. Bonn concludes that establishing an organizational culture that values the initiative and creativity of its people will result in employees taking more initiative and having a greater sense of responsibility in their work.

Table 16- Nonparametric Correlations (Spearman's rho) between Strategic thinking, and "Building a creative culture"

SECTOR	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	(Sig. 2-tailed)
STRATEGIC THINKING		
Systems perspective	**.452****	**0.000**
Intent focus	**.426****	**0.000**
Thinking in time	**.410****	**0.000**
Hypothesis Driven	**.572****	**0.000**
Intelligent Opportunism	**.338****	**0.000**
Total	**.586****	**0.000**

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

11.4- There is a significant correlation at level ($a = 0.05$) between "Strategic Thinking" and "Environment".

Table 16- shows a significant correlation between "Strategic Thinking" and "MoH Environment". Spearman correlation coefficient was 0.630 and the sig. value was 0.000.

The relationship between strategic thinking and the environment is well established. Bonn (2001) believes that in addition to fostering strategic dialogue among the top team, organizations must create an environment in which all employees are encouraged to participate in the development of innovative ideas and strategies. Collins and Porras' (1998) showed that visionary companies had a stronger organizational orientation than other companies. In visionary companies a greater emphasis is placed on designing organizational structures, processes and mechanisms that stimulate improvement and change.

Table 17- Nonparametric Correlations(Spearman's rho) between Strategic thinking and "Environment"

SECTOR	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	(Sig. 2-tailed)
STRATEGIC THINKING		
Systems perspective	**.478****	**0.000**
Intent focus	**.284****	**0.000**
Thinking in time	**.145****	**0.000**
Hypothesis Driven	**.336****	**0.000**
Intelligent Opportunism	**.١٧1****	**0.000**
Total	**.630****	**0.000**

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed

14-Conclusions and Recommendations

first: Conclusions

The research came up with the following conclusions:

1- The great majority of MoH managerial staff are highly qualified; the majority hold either Bachelor degree or higher. The Palestinian MoH enjoys a reasonable level of strategic thinking from management point of view. Further, there is no significant difference in strategic thinking attributed to MoH division, governorate, qualification, years of experience in health sector or job position.

2- There was reasonable level of "Strategic thinking" at the MoH from management viewpoint. However, the MoH needs to analyze its internal and external environment in the process of strategic thinking. The MoH environment is non supportive to strategic thinking. Political and security instability and raising living standards in Gaza Strip have strong impacts on the morale of the employees. Local traditions of the Palestinian society have a strong impact on the way work is carried out. The MoH database is not usually used in determining the best ways of dealing with work problems. Development plans for different MoH departments are not made within these departments. Work is not regularly analyzed, and when analyzed the results are not used in planning process.

3- MoH lacks system perspective that enables the managers to have a holistic view of the organization and to clarify their roles within the larger system. Managers are poorly involved in the planning process. Their thinking is driven by the strategic intent of the MoH but they do not have clear vision. They "think in time". Their thinking is hypothesis driven but they do not encourage managers to audit their

work and draw conclusions for future planning. MoH managers deal with available opportunities efficiently and intelligently. There is a correlation between "strategic thinking" and "Building a creative culture" and between "strategic thinking" and "Environment".

Second: Recommendations

The following recommendations may be concluded:

1- Although the MoH culture has positive elements, many of its elements do not support strategic thinking. It is, therefore recommended that the MoH encourages new ideas and the development of the employees' potential capabilities. The rules and regulations must not be allowed to hinder work. Directors need to encourage direct communication with their subordinates and listen to them.

2- Establishing a strategic thinking forum is one of the useful ways, to enhance strategic thinking within an organization. This might be a worth investigating proposition. The MoH needs to involve its managers in the central planning process.

3- The strategic thinking abilities of the MoH managers are generally satisfactory. However this can be further improved if the MoH develops a system perspective that enables the managers to have a holistic view of the organization and to clarify their roles within the larger system. Managers need to have a clear vision as where they want their institutes and departments to be in the coming years. The MoH needs to encourage its managers to analyze their work and draw conclusions, for future planning.

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