

## 2. The Strategic Management Cycle

### 2.1. An Overview

Like any other systems, education has inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes:

- f Inputs to the education system include resources such as teachers, instructional materials, equipment, buildings, etc.
- f These inputs go through a process (throughput) whereby they are mixed (input mix), combined and/or moved along to achieve results.
- f Educational outputs are tangible results produced by processes in the system, such as enrolments, graduates and learning achievements.
- f Another kind of result, which can be called outcome, is the benefits for the students, their families and/or the society as well.

As a way of strategic management, education systems should be analyzed and thought out from the perspective of the input, process and output, as well as in terms of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability: for example, one will wonder whether the inputs to the education system are relevant for addressing the needs, to what extent the processes (utilization of resources) are efficiently driven and how well the anticipated outputs are effectively produced. Outcomes should be weighed in terms of their impact and sustainability.

### 2.2. The Strategic Management Cycle

There are a variety of terminologies used in strategic management and a variety of approaches to carry it out. One cannot say that there is a “single perfect way” to conduct strategic planning. Each institution has its own particular interpretation of the approaches and activities in strategic management. However, what is generic to strategic management are certain typical stages involving similar activities carried out in a similar sequence. Any management involves **four basic stages**: analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation.

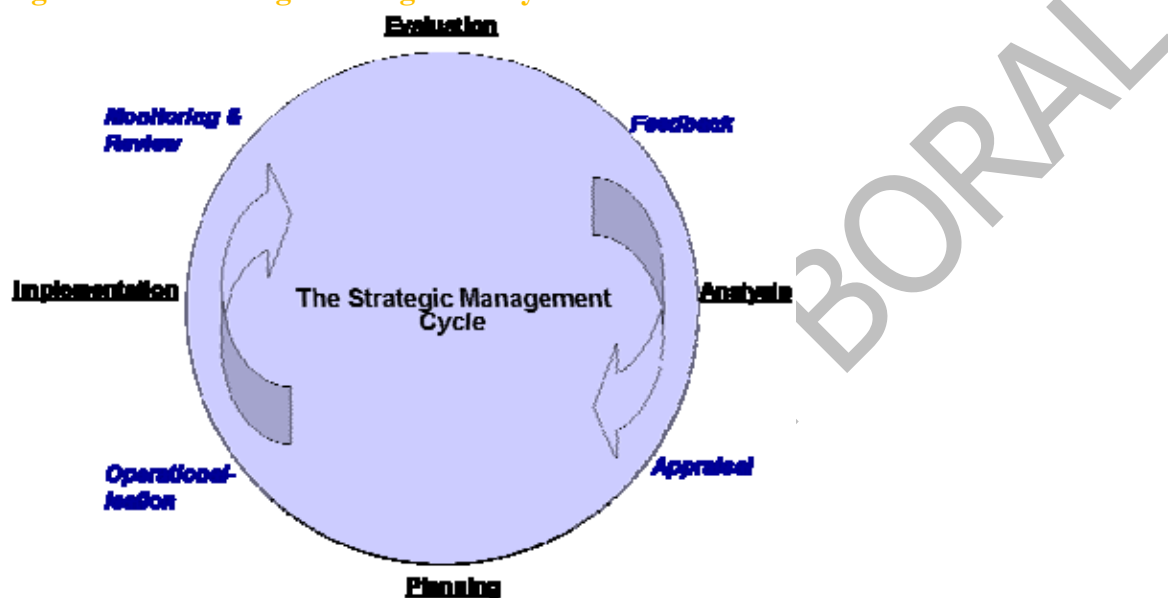
More precisely, we can say that strategic management is a continuum of successive stages such as: critical analysis of a system, policy formulation and appraisal, action planning, management and monitoring, review and evaluation. Experience and lessons learnt from implementation, monitoring and evaluation provide feedback for adjusting the current programme or for the next cycle of policy formulation and action planning.

Figure 1 outlines this cyclical pattern of strategic management:

- f Any management cycle begins with analysis, whereby the current situation of a system and the critical issues pertaining to its status and functioning are first analysed.
- f Findings and remedial options are then formulated and appraised, thus providing policy orientations.
- f When the system is analysed and the future directions are traced, one can proceed with planning the necessary actions to correct or improve the situation. A plan can be long range (6 to 10 years), medium term (3 to 5 years) or short term (1 to 2 years).

- f Operationalization consists of taking the necessary reform and institutional measures that are conducive to the smooth implementation of plans or programmes and before the actual execution starts, including:
  - f Designing specific development projects or programmes and/or mobilizing resources required to implement the planned actions and activities.
  - f Planning and management are subject to feedback-providing operations, i.e. monitoring, review and evaluation.

**Figure 1: The strategic management cycle**



In the education sector, the management operations related to “upstream”, planning work consist of: (i) system analysis; (ii) policy formulation; (iii) action planning.

In the past, planners usually referred to the term “long-range planning”. More recently, they use the term “strategic planning”. Although many still use these terms interchangeably, strategic planning and long-range planning differ. Long-range planning is generally considered to mean the development of a plan aimed at achieving a policy or set of policies over a period of several years, with the assumption that the projection of (or extrapolation from) the past and current situation is sufficient to ensure the implementation of the future activities. In other words, long-range planning assumes that the environment is stable, while strategic planning assumes that a system must be responsive to a dynamic and changing environment. The term “strategic planning” is meant to capture strategic (comprehensive, holistic, thoughtful or fundamental) nature of this type of planning.

With regard to operational and strategic planning, a narrow definition would be that strategic planning is done with involvement of high levels of management, while operational planning is done at lower levels. A wider, more holistic definition can be illustrated as in the following table.

	<i>Operational planning</i>	<i>Strategic planning</i>
Focus	Routine activities	Achieving goals
Purpose	Achieving the best use of available	Planning the best courses of action

	resources	
Rewards	Efficiency, stability	Effectiveness, impact
Information	Present situation	Future opportunities
Problem solving	Relies on past experience	Finds new ways and alternatives

A strategic plan in the education sector is the physical product of the strategic planning process and embodies the guiding orientations on how to manage an education system within a larger national development perspective, which is evolving by nature and often involves constraints.

DR. MOUSUMI BORAL