

# Analysis of HCA Healthcare's Strategic and Operational Decision-Making

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**Abstract:** The importance of strategic and operational decisions for business development is of increasing interest to companies. In this paper, HCA Healthcare, a private healthcare organisation in the United States, is selected to analyse its strategic decisions. Firstly, valid industry data is found and the company's external environment is analysed at the macro and micro levels using the Porter's five forces model and the PESTEL model respectively, and the two models are discussed and compared. Secondly, review market characteristics, analyse the company's strategy and business model, analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the company's strategy using the SWOT model, and propose targeted solutions. Thirdly, analyse and compare the operational strategy models and analyse the suitability of existing operational strategies for the current market. Fourthly, define HCA Healthcare's operational strategy, assess the alignment of the operational strategy with the company's strategy, and analyse the problems with the operational strategy and explore solutions.

**Keywords:** Analysis of Strategic, Operational Decision-Making, Market Assessment

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## Introduction

Today, as society evolves, strategic and operational decisions are becoming more and more important for companies, and good strategic decisions can help a company to have a good growth in the future time. This paper analyses the strategic decisions of HCA Healthcare, a private healthcare organisation in the United States, so as to identify possible problems: (1) Long time span. (2) Wide scope. (3) Difficulty in coordinating the work of various departments. Some reasonable solutions to the above problems were proposed: (1) Segmentation of the strategy. (2) Task implementation to individual employees. (3) Establish a scheduling team. And try to suggest effective solutions: (1) Provide high quality services. (2) Improve the utilisation of community hospitals. (3) Bring in talent. (4) Enhance collaboration with non-profit organisations. (5) Resolve legacy issues with the state government. (6) Assemble a team of consultants. (7) Reduce the focus on net income. (8) Develop digital services.

## 1. Market Assessment

HCA Healthcare is a private healthcare provider company founded in the USA, one of the largest providers of hospitals and health systems in the country, in the healthcare and social assistance industry in the US. The following is an analysis of the external market environment for HCA Healthcare and an assessment of the Porter's Five Forces model and the PESTEL model in analysing the external market environment.

### 1.1 HCA Healthcare External Market Environment

In order to conduct a strategic analysis of HCA Healthcare, it is first necessary to conduct an external market analysis of the industry in which the company operates. The following data will be analysed in three areas: historical financial data, future financial projections and the impact of COVID-19 on the industry.

#### 1.1.1 Healthcare and Social Assistance Industry Financial Data

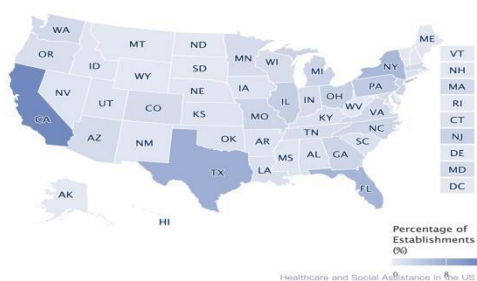
Historical aggregate financial data for the industry can be used to determine the development of the industry, the size of the market and the situation. Picture 1 below shows the financial data for the decade 2012 to 2021, with a general upward trend in revenue over the decade, with the revenue affected by COVID-19 decreasing from \$2,940,275m in 2019 to \$2,339,876m in 2020, but resuming growth in 2021 after the epidemic situation improves. Picture 2 shows how the industry business is conducted in each state in the U.S. As you can see from the picture, the industry business is conducted in all states, but not at a high density.

Picture 1. 2012-2021 Performance Data

Year	Revenue (\$m)	IVA (\$m)	Establishments (Units)	Enterprises (Units)	Employment (Units)	Exports (\$m)	Imports (\$m)	Wages (\$m)	Domestic Demand (\$m)	Total health expenditure (\$ trillion)
2012	2,427,392	1,231,338	2,776,911	2,583,752	20,321,370	N/A	N/A	969,179	N/A	2.79
2013	2,438,112	1,250,406	2,803,326	2,606,496	20,558,434	N/A	N/A	972,461	N/A	2.83
2014	2,495,881	1,268,711	2,841,294	2,637,228	20,838,080	N/A	N/A	986,676	N/A	2.92
2015	2,605,686	1,320,168	2,854,922	2,636,040	21,200,714	N/A	N/A	1,028,331	N/A	3.06
2016	2,714,009	1,364,905	2,844,321	2,615,445	21,689,510	N/A	N/A	1,055,508	N/A	3.16
2017	2,785,408	1,420,218	2,838,732	2,596,166	22,182,535	N/A	N/A	1,097,111	N/A	3.24
2018	2,838,723	1,450,807	2,978,551	2,711,691	22,569,878	N/A	N/A	1,118,676	N/A	3.31
2019	2,940,275	1,504,684	3,005,384	2,735,326	22,951,761	N/A	N/A	1,151,851	N/A	3.46
2020	2,939,876	1,509,089	3,025,942	2,754,438	23,061,844	N/A	N/A	1,156,239	N/A	3.09
2021	2,976,522	1,527,679	3,061,203	2,785,544	23,364,540	N/A	N/A	1,171,259	N/A	3.67

Source: IBISWorld

Picture 2. Business Concentration in the US



Source: IBISWorld

### 1.1.2 Healthcare and Social Assistance Industry Forecast

The industry's economic growth has been driven by an ageing population, the federal government's Medicaid programme and increased investment in total healthcare spending. A robust healthcare system has led to an increase in average life expectancy, which has led to an expansion of the industry's market and a slow upward trend in overall economic conditions, despite the impact of the epidemic (Jack 2021). As shown in Picture 3, the industry is expected to be able to increase in value to 3,225,123\$m by 2027.

Picture 3. Performance Date Forecasts 2022 to 2027

Year	Revenue (\$m)	IVA (\$m)	Establishments (Units)	Enterprises (Units)	Employment (Units)	Exports (\$m)	Imports (\$m)	Wages (\$m)	Domestic Demand (\$m)	Total health expenditure (\$ trillion)
2021	2,976,522	1,527,679	3,061,203	2,785,544	23,364,540	N/A	N/A	1,171,259	N/A	3.67
2022	2,998,542	1,540,611	3,090,170	2,811,489	23,589,561	N/A	N/A	1,182,016	N/A	3.80
2023	3,043,328	1,563,934	3,129,965	2,846,711	23,934,321	N/A	N/A	1,199,367	N/A	3.92
2024	3,088,518	1,586,720	3,174,614	2,886,754	24,283,736	N/A	N/A	1,216,937	N/A	4.04
2025	3,149,136	1,616,769	3,230,385	2,936,826	24,718,268	N/A	N/A	1,239,134	N/A	4.18
2026	3,192,035	1,638,257	3,270,602	2,973,099	25,046,527	N/A	N/A	1,255,675	N/A	4.32
2027	3,225,123	1,655,853	3,308,024	3,007,278	25,322,552	N/A	N/A	1,269,349	N/A	4.47

Source: IBISWorld

### 1.1.3 The Impact of COVID-19 Outbreak on the Industry

The COVID-19 has put the health protection and social assistance sector under enormous pressure, with non-use of non-essential medical assistance and soaring unemployment stalling the sector's economy. Although demand for medical supplies soared, it did not necessarily contribute to the economic growth of the industry due to the need to purchase large quantities of medical equipment. As the impact of the COVID-19 waned worldwide, the financial situation of the health protection and social assistance sector gradually recovered and industry revenues slowly rose, industry revenue increased by 1.2% in 2021.

## **1.2 Porter's Five Forces Model to Evaluate the External Market Environment**

According to Porter's Five Forces model proposed in the 1980s, there are five competitive forces at play in the industry. Bargaining power of suppliers: the supply-side market is more solid, with products that have certain characteristics and are easily integrated by vertical integration. Bargaining power of buyers: the total number of buyers is large, the purchase of goods and services is standardised and bargaining power is weak. Threat of new entrants: There are several similar companies in the existing market, but all have a market share of one to two per cent and the threat of new entrants is low. Threat of substitutes: The introduction of technology into everyday life has led some technology companies to start a healthcare business, but the pace of development is slow and the substitutability of products and services is low, with little threat of near-term competition.

## **1.3 PESTEL Model to Evaluate the External Market Environment**

The PESTEL model is a useful tool for analysing the macro-environment, also known as macro-environmental analysis, where each letter represents an influencing factor, namely political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal. Politics: The US federal government has invested in health care protection spending to promote the industry. Economy: The size of the economy has shown an upward trend in the last five years and the outlook is good. Society: The average life expectancy has increased and spending on healthcare has increased. Technology: Medical technology is changing rapidly and companies need to keep up with investment. Environment: Both biopharmaceuticals and chemical pharmaceuticals have an impact on the environment and require attention to supplier environmental issues. Legal: The relevant laws are relatively well developed and consumer protection is more than adequate.

## **1.4 Discussion and Comparison of Two Models and Tools**

The Porter's Five Forces Analysis model analyses the external environment mainly at the micro level, by conducting a static scan of the industry's profitability and analysing the average profitability of companies in that industry. It is not very operational in practical application as it is based on three assumptions of knowing complete industry information, the existence of only competitive relationships between peers and no cooperative relationships, and the fixed size of the industry.

The PESTEL analysis model analyses the external environment mainly at a macro level and also identifies the forces that act as shocks to the company. The analysis of the situation faced by the company is relatively complete, but the analysis of the conditions for manoeuvrability is insufficient.

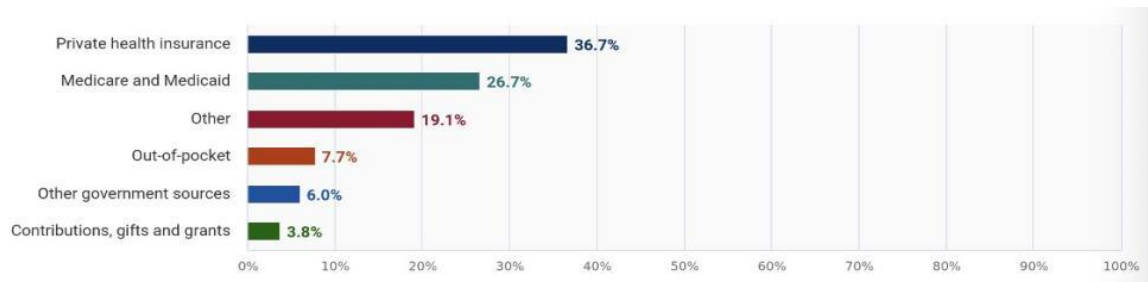
## **2. Corporate Strategy Development**

Corporate strategy is a holistic plan chosen by a company to improve its core competencies based on environmental changes, including a series of specific strategies, such as marketing strategy and talent management strategy. Corporate strategy is a holistic, long-term and fundamental choice. Corporate strategy usually consists of five areas: the company's future objectives, its market position, its competitive advantage, the means to expand its key resources and specific plans.

### **2.1 Review the Marketplace Characteristics**

The healthcare market is characterised by low capital manipulation, high profit margins and insignificant customer segmentation. As shown in Picture 6, HCA Healthcare's share of private health insurance is 36.7%, the highest of all market segments. In second place is Medicare and Medicaid with 26.7%. HCA Healthcare has the highest market share among the same type of private health care provider companies at 1.8% as shown in Picture 7. Analysis of the above data shows that HCA Healthcare has a competitive market and a large market share among companies of the same type. In terms of HCA Healthcare itself, private health insurance as well as Medicare and Medicaid has the highest share and needs to be focused on.

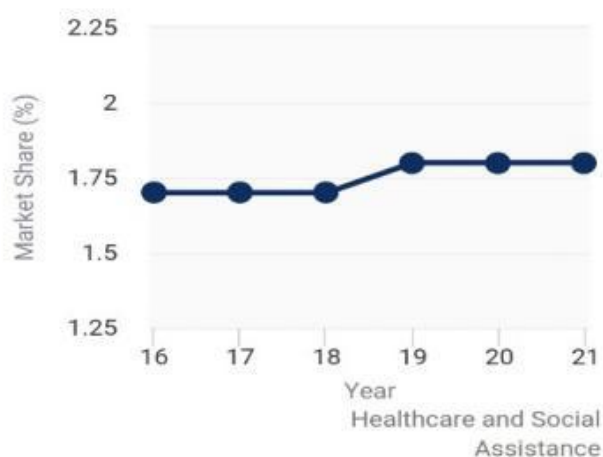
Picture 4. Major Market Segmentation



Source: IBISWorld

Picture 5. 2016-2021 HCA Healthcare Market Share

### HCA Healthcare Inc.



Source: IBISWorld

## 2.2 Evaluate the Corporate Strategy and Business Models

### 2.2.1 Evaluate the Corporate Strategy

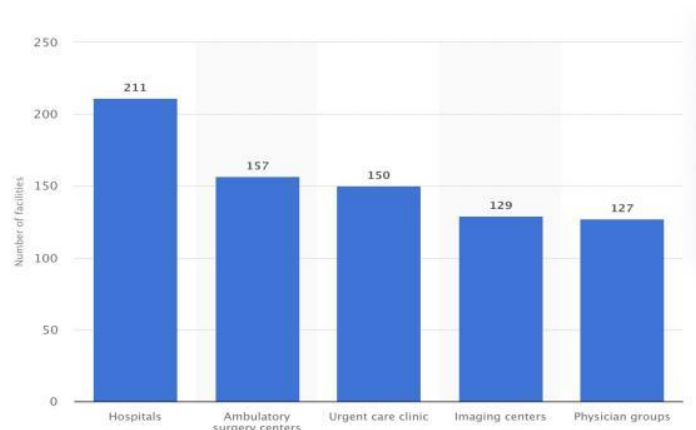
HCA Healthcare operates around 200 hospitals and healthcare facilities in the US, UK and Switzerland, providing compliant healthcare services primarily to the local population. The company's strategy for the future is to "first make sound growth decisions, with a focus on moving from limited companies to local communities." The four marketing strategies analysed according to Ansoff's strategic choice model are: market penetration strategy, product development strategy, market development strategy and diversification strategy. Market penetration of new products in existing markets, development of new markets, market development with proven products, further development and regionalisation strategies for the introduction of new services and attracting awareness. Based on the above data, it is clear that HCA Healthcare has a relatively broad market distribution and a high market share. The product development strategy enables the expansion of the depth and breadth of existing products to ensure that all hospitals can provide good services to patients beyond their expectations, thus achieving a corporate strategy of shifting the focus to local communities.

### 2.2.3 Evaluate the Business Models

A business model is the specific conditions and processes by which a business sells its products and services to satisfy the choices made by customers and other participants. Private health care provider companies sell medical services as well as health care products, and their business model needs to meet consumer demand, form products and services that consumers cannot solve for themselves and have to buy, and need to be unique in their industry and not be replicable or dominant in the market. According to Figure 6 below, HCA Healthcare has an advantage over its competitors by offering a wide range and number of medical devices under a variety of segments in the industry, and by being able to provide consumers with immediate, comprehensive and efficient services. HCA Healthcare's business model is able to meet the three basic elements of a business model, creating value, value that meets the needs of

consumers and generates the returns required by investors, and a business model that matches the characteristics of the market.

Picture 6. Number of health care facilities operated by HCA healthcare in the U.S. as of May 2019, by type



Source: Statista

## 2.4 Analysis of Corporate Strategies Through the SWOT Model

In the process of developing a business strategy, it is necessary to analyse the company's strengths and weaknesses and to analyse the external environmental factors and internal capability factors of the company. External environmental factors are objective factors, including opportunity and threat factors. In a relevant analysis of HCA Healthcare it can be concluded that the opportunity factors affecting the Group's development are as follows: (1) High income growth. (2) High performance driver. (3) Funding from Medicare and Medicaid. Threat factors include: (1) Low abnormal growth. (2) Number of people with private health insurance. Internal capability factors are subjective factors, including strengths and weaknesses, and in the investigation and analysis not only historical data but also future developments should be taken into account. Strengths factors include: (1) High profitability. (2) Low customer class concentration. (3) Low capital requirements. Weakness factors include: (1) High concentration of products and services. (2) Low income per employee.

Based on the main elements of the SWOT model analysis, it was possible to identify a number of weaknesses that need to be taken into account when developing the company's strategy and strengths that can be fully exploited. The company is in the context of a low capital invasion industry with high profits and strong financial support from the federal government. Although the existing healthcare market is mainly dominated by state-owned enterprises, the market is in a state of expansion and there is an opportunity to gain greater market share by building on its strengths through sound corporate and business strategies. The focus on strengths and weaknesses needs to be complemented by a concentration of products and services and a low level of customer income, which affects the realisation of corporate strategies and the development of business strategies. As a result of COVID-19, unemployment has risen and incomes have fallen, companies need to find the right balance between the quality of their products and services and their prices to ensure that their business strategy moves forward.

## 2.5 Implications and Solutions

HCA Healthcare's corporate strategy focuses on moving from the company to the local community, a value that lies in each subsidiary and community, roommate to the overall market boom created by penetrating from large to small, and not a predatory strategy. The specific measures are: (1) To ensure that all subsidiaries provide a high quality service that exceeds customer expectations. (2) Improving the utilisation of the subsidiaries and community hospitals. (3) Introduce new services to attract talent and new customers. (4) Strengthen partnerships with non-profit organisations. (5) Cooperate fully with interstate governments to resolve legacy issues. (6) Create a team of highly qualified consultants to negotiate contracts. (7) Reject contracts that do not benefit the public and eliminate the focus on net income. (8) Trial a media-based service organisation and move towards digital services.

## 3. Operations Strategy Analysis

Operational strategy is an important part of a company's overall strategy, which is accomplished by setting and implementing

operational strategies to achieve specific objectives and plans. Operational strategies are designed to give a company a competitive advantage and are generally divided into two main categories: structural strategies, which generally require long-term implementation, and fundamental strategies, which include decision-making issues with a relatively short time horizon.

### **3.1 Discuss Operations Strategy Models and Tools**

#### **3.1.1 Hayes and Wheelwright's Volume-Variety Matrix**

Volume-variety matrix represents the relationship between process structure and throughput requirements, where dedicated equipment and standard logistics become economically viable as throughput increases and the product mix becomes narrower (Hayes and Wheelwright). Depending on market needs it can be clear that the production method on the diagonal gives the greatest economic return and that a bias towards the four corners can make the plan unviable. When market demand changes, product saving and production methods need to be adjusted simultaneously.

#### **3.1.2 Hoekstra and Romme's Decoupling Point Models**

To resolve the contradiction between mass production and customisation, Hoekstra and Romme have developed the concept of coupling points in mass customisation production. There is a point in the supply chain where mass production and customisation can be separated. Mass production is carried out in the part of the supply chain before the coupling point to increase speed and reduce costs, and customisation is carried out in the part of the supply chain after the coupling point to increase customer satisfaction and the price of goods or services. The more upstream the coupling point is in the supply chain, the greater the customisation, and vice versa.

#### **3.1.3 Lampel and Mintzberg's Customer Order Penetration Point Concept**

Customer order penetration point assesses the factors that influence customer satisfaction, such as price, service quality, cost, etc., from the perspective of both the company and the customer, enabling the company to achieve a good balance between satisfying customer needs and corporate profits. A certain reserve of basic components is made before receiving the customer order, and after receiving the order they are reworked according to the customer's needs to meet the customer's private customisation needs. In HCA Healthcare's operational strategy, because it is primarily a service provider, it is possible to fix the basic simple services and then define the details according to the customer's specific requirements to meet the customer's private health care needs. In this production method, the point of separation of the customer's order is in the upper part of a complete transaction process and the private customisation carried out by the customer is in the lower part.

### **3.2 Compare Operations Strategy Models and Tools**

All three models and tools can optimize supply chain capacity when improving operational strategies. Volume-Variety Matrix can determine whether the production plan is reasonable, the closer to the line of symmetry the more reasonable the production strategy, if the production plan is at the edge of the matrix, it proves that there is an unreasonable hidden risk in it, and it is difficult to achieve positive results. Decoupling point model was created to solve the contradiction between mass production and customised production, and can balance the customer's customisation needs with the company's production. Customer order penetration point concept is chosen from the perspective of both the firm and the customer, in terms of customer satisfaction and firm profitability. While carrying out supply chain capacity optimisation, it can achieve the effect of enhancing customer value.  $\text{Value} = \text{Quality} * \text{Service} / \text{Cost} * \text{Lead Time}$ . A high quality and high satisfaction product combined with low costs from an optimised supply chain can effectively increase customer value and thus become an order winner.

### **3.3 Analyse the Appropriateness of Operations Strategy to the Current Market**

Operational strategy includes the overall strategy of the production operation, the selection of products or services, the involvement and development, the design of the production operation, the competitive strategy and the way the production operation is organized (Alex 2012). HCA Healthcare's operational strategy includes the overall strategy of production operations, the selection of products or services, design and development, the design of production operations, competitive strategy and the way production operations are organized. The strategic objectives are derived from the overall corporate strategy and the target market, and are adapted to the changing needs of the customer, taking into account the positioning of products and services, the supply chain and the allocation

of resources. The operational strategy can be adapted to the market environment and implemented smoothly, and the enterprise can develop and expand at a good pace.

## **4. Operations Strategy Implementation**

### **4.1 The Operations Strategy of HCA Healthcare**

According to Michael Porter's view of competitive strategy, there are three basic types of operational strategy: total cost leadership strategy, differentiation strategy and target aggregation strategy. Firstly, the total cost leadership strategy requires a company's operating system to have certain scale and technological advantages that enable it to achieve leadership by keeping its costs lower than those of competing companies. This strategy requires the company to strengthen its own control of promotion, service, research and development expenses and other expenses, a high degree of cost control, throughout the operation strategy is focused on making costs lower than competitors. Low costs mean that when competitors reach a standard of losing profits in the competitive process, this company can still profit from low costs. Secondly, a differentiation strategy requires attention to cost factors while at the same time developing a distinctive competitive advantage which, through cooperation between different divisions, allows the company to have a special attraction in one or several products and services. Although the process of achieving specialisation may entail an increase in costs, customers are often willing to pay for it. Thirdly, a target aggregation strategy is actually a market segmentation strategy that focuses a company on a specific customer group or a specific market. This strategy is often implemented in conjunction with a total cost leadership strategy and a differentiation strategy to reduce costs or increase specialisation in the company's chosen market.

HCA Healthcare's corporate strategy calls for shifting the company's focus to community hospitals, enhancing detailed services and comprehensive coverage, and shifting the focus on net revenue to increasing consumer recognition. Based on its corporate strategy, it can be judged that HCA Healthcare is better suited to a differentiation strategy, which is more suited to improving customer satisfaction and thus achieving the company's overall strategy. There are some detailed operational implementation plans here. (1) Hospital product items are themed to optimise product items according to consumer buying psychology (e.g. myopic people's need for vision enhancement, etc.). (2) Community hospital decoration and optimisation, to standardise all community hospitals with uniform specifications and decorate in a style consistent with pricing. (3) Attracting professional doctors and talents, developing a detailed talent promotion and development system to attract outstanding talents with generous conditions. (4) Service staff management and training. Professional, patient and meticulous service is very important to patients and requires professional training.

### **4.2 Assessing Alignment of Operations Strategy with Corporate Strategies**

Corporate strategy is a holistic approach to business chosen by the company according to its actual needs, environmental changes and its own resources. It has the ability to guide the future development of the company, to co-ordinate the overall situation of the company as a whole, to implement long-term, to be competitive with certain advantages, to have a complete system of upper and lower structures and to face the risks of uncertainty. After confirming the company's objectives, a sound analysis of the external environment is carried out, including an analysis of the macro-environment and micro-environment, as well as an analysis of the internal conditions, to understand the real demands of the company's stakeholders and the position of the company itself, etc. Then, based on the results of the analysis, a strategic plan is formulated, in which the different levels of management of the enterprise are involved, and the strategy made is evaluated and alternatives are identified. HCA Healthcare's corporate strategy is to shift the focus from limited companies to community hospitals and to provide customers with a service that exceeds their expectations. HCA Healthcare's differentiated operational strategy is aligned with the overall corporate strategic objectives and is customer-focused and differentiated.

The differentiation of responsibilities and rights for the alignment of people in the implementation of the strategy according to the Responsible-Accountable- Consult- Inform analysis. The strategy itself must rely on people to act on it in order to facilitate the process of change. It needs to have those who approve it, those who are responsible, those who are consulted and many who are informed, and to divide the existing responsibilities and rights to ensure the implementation of the operational strategy. Use the Responsible-Accountable-Consult- Inform analysis tool to analyse what adjustments people should make, whether they have a single

identified approver, those responsible for actually completing each task activity, those who are consulted before decisions are made, and those who are informed of decisions. Reduce personnel uncertainty and ensure that the organisation completes change successfully.

### 4.3 Realign and Improve the Operations Strategy

HCA Healthcare's operational strategy has a number of features, the first of which is that it is part of the business strategy and therefore considers specific issues, ranging from product development to retailing. Secondly, operational strategy is closely linked to marketing strategy and financial strategy and is subject to the constraints of both. Thirdly, operational strategy has a long time span and a wide range of subordination. As a result, there are potential problems in operational strategy that need to be avoided through advance preparation. (1) The long time span makes it easy to encounter unexpected situations. (2) It involves all aspects of the company, from production and development to after-sales service, and is not easy to grasp. (3) It requires the cooperation of personnel from all departments of the company, but coordination between departments is difficult.

In order to try to solve the above problems, the following are some feasible solutions. (1) Shorten the time span when establishing the operational strategy and try to make a breakdown. For long-term operational strategies that have already been developed, set up a risk management team to avoid possible risks in advance. (2) Establish a detailed division of responsibilities and assign each staff member to a specific event to ensure that all plans are implemented in detail. (3) Establish a dedicated control group linking the various departments, subsidiaries and community hospitals to coordinate strategies that require collaboration between departments.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of a company's strategic decisions enables it to identify its problems and future trends, and to improve the problems and make reasonable pre-determined actions in response to future development changes. The analysis of a company's strategic decisions can be accompanied by a consideration of the financial aspects of the company, so that a holistic analysis can be made more critical. Due to limitations, this paper may suffer from insufficient data collection and low feasibility of solutions. For future research, the problem can be analysed as comprehensively as possible and practical solutions can be proposed based on the integration of financial data and operational methods.

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