Public Policy and Strategy

Module Introduction and Overview

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1 Introduction to the Module

Welcome to this module on public policy and strategy. Strategy is a term that has become very common in both business and government, and it is likely that you have your own understanding of what it may mean. This module sets out to explore the meaning of strategy generally, and more specifically as a feature of the work of governments and public authorities.

It is written for people who are engaged in the processes of strategy development, policymaking, implementation and evaluation, whether as professionals, politicians, advisors or citizens.

The module is designed to be useful for you, working in a variety of public policy contexts – our students live and work in countries that range from democracies to dictatorships, from stable and peaceful to post-conflict reconstructions, from places where the state takes up more than half of national resources to places where the state's writ runs very small.

While the module is designed to apply to a wide variety of situations, certain assumptions underpin the material:

- that there is a functioning government, or elements of government
- that policies are made and the institutional arrangements are in place for policy to be implemented
- that the governments in place have responsibility for, at least to some extent, the interests of the people
- that there are processes of policymaking and strategic implementation that go beyond the naked Public Policy and Strategy
- pursuit of power and self-interest by the ruling elites.

The core of the module is a 'rational' approach to policymaking and strategic implementation, an approach that includes problem analysis, stakeholder analysis, an evaluation of options, the choice of policy instruments, the allocation of resources and construction of programmes, and their methods of monitoring and evaluation. That is not to say that the strategic process always occurs in this linear, rational and logical way, and you will be asked to think critically about how policy is made in the real world in different social, economic, cultural and political contexts. We use the 'rational' model as a heuristic device, since it sets out the possible elements of a policy process.

The module begins with a review of the meaning of strategy itself, and of what it means to describe a phenomenon as strategic. The origins of the term are traced far back into history, and we encounter Sun Tzu, a strategist from ancient China, for the first time in Unit 1 – his ideas have been influential for more than two thousand years, and he will crop up a number of times during the rest of the module. Unit 1 also draws important distinctions between strategy in the public and private contexts, and explores the similarities and, more importantly differences, between them.

Unit 2 broadens the discussion to highlight the importance of a number of contextual factors. Governments and public authorities operate in situations which vary in many different ways, and we explore how context influences the sorts of issues which arise, the shape they might take, and the constraints and opportunities which they impose.

In Unit 3, we look in more depth at how Governments come to identify problems which demand a strategic response, learning how this may come from their importance, but also from coincidences of influence, circumstance and chance. Ways in which strategic issues can be better understood are discussed, along with the roles that different distinct groups in society – stakeholders – may play.

Unit 4 pauses to consider the relevance of theories of complexity to the understanding of public policy, and how strategy can play a role in coping with apparently intractable situations. It then moves on to consider how strategies themselves can come into being, a theme followed through to Unit 5, which looks at ways to choose the policy instruments best suited to delivering your strategic goals.

Unit 6 considers in depth the critical stage of moving from a strategy on paper to concrete actions on the ground, emphasising the importance of making sure the entire system is mobilised, from the politicians right through to the 'street level bureaucrats'. Unit 7 looks at how the success or shortcomings of strategy can be understood and evaluated, and how information can be used to manage performance to make final success more likely.

Unit 8 deals with three main issues. Firstly, it offers practical advice on getting started on an actual strategic planning exercise, and the relevance of the idea of the strategic state. It then takes a cross-national perspective, and considers how policy ideas move between different places and situations, before concluding with some thoughts on how the world is changing during the second decade of the twenty-first century, and the implications for strategy into the future.

2   The Module Author

John Bell

John Bell is Senior Partner with the CurvedThinking partnership, a UK policy and evaluation consultancy working with clients around the world to help make the link between intention and delivery. John has been a CeFiMS tutor since 2009. He has particular experience in social policy in Britain and Europe, and is specialist advisor on youth unemployment and the European Social Fund to the House of Lords European Union Committee. He has worked on numerous research, evaluation and policy consultancy assignments from cross national programmes to the smallest local projects, and is an experienced trainer and writer, including authoring CeFiMS modules on

evaluation and perspective on public policy. You can find out more about his work and interests at www.curvedthinking.com

3 Study Resources

This study guide comprises eight sequential units. Each unit provides a discussion of different aspects of strategy in a public policy context, beginning with first principles and concluding with perspectives on strategic issues for the future. The narrative is supplemented with exercises and questions for you to consider, and in a number of places you are encouraged to share your ideas and responses on the virtual learning environment (VLE) with your fellow students.

At the start of your module you will also be made aware of which members of CeFiMS will be tutoring during this session. Your tutors are there to help you, in addition to comments and questions they may post to the group, and you should also not hesitate to contact them directly for help, advice and guidance at any time.

📖 Key texts

In addition to the study guide, you will be assigned chapters in the following key texts.

Michael Barber (2015) *How to Run A Government: So that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers Don't Go Crazy*. London: Penguin Books.

This relatively short book was written by a senior public official in the UK's Labour governments which held power between 1997 and 2010, and offers an insider's perspective on the exercise of power from the centre. This period saw attempts to make significant changes to the way government operated, in particular a search for ways to obtain better outcomes, and to overcome departmental barriers and rivalries. It also includes examples from many other countries.

John M Bryson (2018) *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*. 5th Edition. Hoboken NJ: John Wiley & Son.

John Bryson's book was first published in 1993, and has been regularly updated and expanded over the years to become one of the standard practical guides for those embarking on strategic planning exercises. It includes valuable tools and guidance on putting into effect the theoretical lessons from this module, and in addition to the set chapters you may well find it of practical use in your professional life.

Paul Joyce (2015) *Strategic Management in the Public Sector*. Oxford UK: Routledge.

Where Barber takes a populist stance, and Bryson offers practical tools, Paul Joyce is unashamedly academic in his approach. One of the leading writers on strategic issues and the public sector globally, this is his latest book, and

includes a wide variety of perspectives on different aspects of strategic management, including cross-country comparisons and examples from different types of country and political systems.

Module readings

In addition to readings from the key texts, each unit also includes specific supplementary readings relevant to the unit topics. These include articles from academic journals; chapters from books of different kinds; and a variety of public policy documents, reports and papers related to strategic issues. One particular feature is a linked set of material from the Australian State of Tasmania, tracing the development and implementation of its strategy for population growth from 2016 onwards.

4 Learning Outcomes

When you have completed your study of this module, you will be able to:

- define the meaning of strategy, and what makes an issue strategic, in a public policy context, including how this differs from private sector strategy
- identify the ways in which key contextual factors shape and constrain how public sector strategy is made, including the physical and socio-economic environment, and political and administrative systems
- explain how strategic issues come onto the political agenda of governments, how they are understood, and the roles of different types of stakeholder
- describe how to begin the process of strategic planning, taking into account the complexity of public policy and the business of government
- assess the potential use of different types of policy instrument and how strategy helps in making choices over which actions to adopt
- explain how to move from strategic planning as a conceptual exercise to the practical issues involved in putting your plan into effect and mobilising the system for its delivery
- define the differences between performance management, monitoring and evaluation, and explain the importance of the principal–agent problem, and different ways of evaluating the results of strategic plans
- describe what is meant by the Strategic State, and its relationship to the 'science of delivery', and explain how policy ideas and innovations travel from one place to another.

5 Module Overview

Unit 1 Strategy and the Policy Process
1.1 The Meaning of Strategy
1.2 Public Policy and Strategy
1.3 Public/Private Differences
1.4 Strategic Issues
1.5 Conclusion

Unit 2 The Contexts for Strategy
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Political and Institutional Context
2.3 Economic and Market Context
2.4 Geographical and Environmental Context
2.5 Technological Context
2.6 Social and Demographic Context
2.7 Conclusion

Unit 3 Strategic Issues, Stakeholders and Evidence
3.1 Strategic Policymaking
3.2 The Emergence of Strategic Issues
3.3 Stakeholders
3.4 Issue Definition and the Use of Evidence
3.5 Tasmania's Population Issue: Stakeholders and Data
3.6 Conclusion

Unit 4 Complexity, and How to Produce a Strategic Plan
4.1 Complexity
4.2 The Formation of Strategy
4.3 Case Study: Tasmania's Population Growth Strategy
4.4 Conclusion

Unit 5 Strategy into Practice: Approaches and Instruments
5.1 What Are We Going to Do?
5.2 Choosing Instruments
5.3 Strategic Approaches to Choice of Action
5.4 Case Study: China's Policies for Elderly Care
5.5 Conclusion

Unit 6 Implementation
6.1 Engaging the System
6.2 Institutions for Implementation
6.3 Case Study 1: Network Implementation
6.4 Case Study 2: Population Policy in Ghana
6.5 Conclusion

Unit 7 Reviewing Strategy: Performance Management, Monitoring and Evaluation

7.1 Introduction
7.2 The Context for Monitoring, Evaluation and Performance Management
7.3 Reviewing Strategy
7.4 Performance Management and The Principal–Agent Problem
7.5 Monitoring Strategy
7.6 Aspects of Evaluation
7.7 Strategy and Policy Evaluation

Unit 8 Strategic Futures, and the Future of Strategy

8.1 Introduction
8.2 Getting Started on Strategic Planning
8.3 The Strategic State and Science of Delivery
8.4 Policy Networks and Policy Transfer
8.5 Shared Imagining