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The Future of Public Service and Strategy Management-at-Scale

Abstract

Increasingly, government agencies and non-profit organisations are called on to address challenges that go well beyond any individual organisation's boundaries and direct control. Strategic management for single organisations cannot respond effectively to these cross-boundary, cross-level, and often cross-sector challenges. Instead, a new approach called strategy management-at-scale is required. This article compares strategic management with strategy management-at-scale. It responds to the question, what does strategy management-at-scale look like, and what seems to contribute to its success? The new approach helps foster – but hardly guarantees – direction, alignment and commitment among the multiple organisations and groups needed to make headway against the challenge.

Keywords strategic management, strategy management-at-scale, strategising, strategic planning, strategy mapping

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Increasingly, government agencies and non-profit organisations are called on to address challenges that go beyond any individual organisation's boundaries and direct control. In other words, a significant mismatch exists between the scale of the challenges and what any single organisation – including any government – can do to address them. Unfortunately, there is little evidence and not enough theorising about how strategy management at the scale of these cross-organisational, cross-level, cross-sector challenges can lead to better outcomes and greater public value (Ansell, Sorensen and Torfing, 2021; Taylor et al., 2021). What is it about this new context that requires adaptations or rethinking of strategic planning and management for organisations (aka strategic management), and what kinds of adaptations are necessary? How can strategic planning and management contribute to robust governance in these challenging situations wherein multiple organisations and groups are affected, involved, or have some responsibility to act? Specifically, what does strategy management-at-scale look like, and what seems to contribute to its success (Bryson et al., 2021, 2023; Bryson, Crosby and Seo, 2023)?

Strategic management is a well-established feature of public and non-profit organisations. Substantial research indicates that strategic planning and management can positively affect organisational performance. Strategic planning is an approach to helping organisations figure out what they should do, how and why. Meta-analyses show that strategic planning can result in moderate, statistically significant, positive outcomes in performance (e.g., George, Walker and Monster, 2019). Strategic management is ‘the reasonable integration of strategic planning and implementation across an organisation (or other entity) in an ongoing way to enhance the fulfillment of mission, meeting of mandates, continuous learning, and sustained creation of public value’ (Bryson, 2018, p.24). Studies of strategic management approaches also demonstrate that they tend to have a positive effect on organisational performance (e.g., Berman and Hijal-Moghrabi, 2022). At its best, strategic management fosters ongoing strategic thinking, acting and learning so that challenges – including at least some aspects of those that are beyond a single organisation’s direct control – are effectively identified, anticipated and addressed. Strategising thus becomes a continuous activity, not limited to formal strategic planning efforts.

Strategic management for single organisations basically presumes that the organisations have at least some authority and agency to pursue their missions. The organisations may not be fully ‘in charge’, but they are at least presumed capable of making some progress towards fulfilling their missions and achieving their goals. Unfortunately, many of the issues society faces cannot be addressed successfully by single organisations. Instead, actions by and contributions from multiple organisations across multiple boundaries, sectors and levels are required if significant progress is to be made. No organisation is close to being fully in charge in such a shared-power world (Crosby and Bryson, 2005; Ansell and Torfing, 2015). The scale of the challenges is simply too big for any single organisation to make much of a difference. Consider the challenges of climate change, major natural disasters, the Covid-19 pandemic and future pandemics,

an aging population with rising prevalence of dementia, uneven performance and failures of major parts of the economy, unevenly effective and adequate healthcare and education systems, family justice systems that contribute to harm for the families they serve, deepening inequality and its concomitant effects, and historic distrust in a broad range of institutions. No one is in charge, but many are affected, involved, or have some partial responsibility to act. The future of public service depends on its contributions to strategy management-at-scale (Bryson et al., 2021).

What happens to strategic planning and management when the presumption is that no one oversees the systems enmeshed in and producing major public challenges? In

will emphasise strategy mapping as an approach to helping groups figure out what to do, how and why, and how to monitor progress.

Based on our experience, we argue that a promising technique – though hardly a silver bullet – for facilitating strategy management-at-scale is strategy mapping. We assert that this is true whatever specific approach to strategy management-at-scale is taken – for example, collective impact or social movements (Bryson et al., 2021). Strategy mapping results in a causal map, a statement-and-arrow diagram in which statements are causally linked to one another using arrows. The map shows the interrelationships between a set of changes, reflecting the means–ends or if–then

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other words, how does strategy management-at-scale differ from strategic management of a single organisation? In this article, we move towards answering those questions based on the literature and our own considerable experience. We compare and contrast strategic management with strategy management-at-scale along several dimensions, including: (1) purpose and strategic focus; (2) governance, leadership and stakeholder involvement; (3) communication, cooperation, coordination, collaboration and co-alignment; (4) feasibility assessment, resourcing in general, funding in particular, and prioritisation; (5) implementation, action plans, performance, responsibility and accountability; and (6) evaluation and learning. We will provide brief illustrations from four cases. And we

relationships: in other words, an arrow means ‘might cause’, ‘might lead to’, ‘might result in’, or some other kind of influence relationship. In causal strategy mapping, each chain of arrows indicates the causes and consequences of an idea or action. This makes it possible to present many ideas and their interconnections in such a way that people can know what to do in an area of concern, how to do it and why (Bryson et al., 2004, p.xii; Ackermann and Eden, 2011, p.3). There are a variety of approaches to strategy mapping (Bryson et al., 2004, 2023; Bryson, Ackerman and Eden, 2014). There are also some recent reviews of different approaches (e.g., Madsen and Stenheim, 2015; MacLennan and Markides, 2021). The strategy mapping examples in this article used the InsightVision software to manage strategy implementation

(InsightInformation Inc., 2023). A recent review rated it the best software for strategy implementation (Bryson et al., 2023).

The article proceeds as follows. First, the four cases of strategy management-at-scale are presented in brief. Second, strategic planning and management for organisations and strategy management-at-scale are compared and contrasted along each of the dimensions listed above. Finally, conclusions are offered regarding what strategy management-at-scale implies for the future of public service.

The cases in brief

Four cases of strategy management-at-scale are used to illustrate selected aspects of strategy management-at-scale in practice. Two are from Canada and two are from the United States. Bill Barberg has served as a facilitator in each of the cases.

system transformation that was needed. Instead, they envisioned a multitude of interdependent changes that would transform a ‘system’ that required shared authority of multiple organisations aligning their efforts towards a shared outcome of family wellbeing. A similar collaborative formed in neighbouring British Columbia; the two collaboratives work together (Jerke and Lowe, 2023).

Dementia Network Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Dementia Network Calgary offers a second example of a broad coalition that embraces the need for system transformation. The focus is on the broad range of issues related to Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia (Dementia Network Calgary, 2023). Many experts believe that dementia will be the most costly health

Restore Hope and its 100 Families Initiative, Arkansas, USA

Restore Hope was launched as a collective impact effort to take a trauma-informed, system-thinking and strategy-aligned approach to addressing the complex challenges related to child welfare, foster care, incarceration and recidivism (Restore Hope, n.d.). A key emphasis was on strengthening families to prevent children from going into the foster care system, to improve reunification with biological families, and help individuals and families go from crisis to self-sufficiency and make progress towards thriving. In each county where participants worked, they deployed a collaborative case management platform and established an alliance called the 100 Families Initiative (InsightInformation Inc., n.d.).

Comparing and contrasting strategic management for organisations with strategy management-at-scale

In this section we compare and contrast strategic management with strategy management-at-scale along several dimensions. We provide some brief illustrations from the four cases. Note that what we pose as a dichotomous contrast between strategic management and strategy management-at-scale is in practice a continuum, with strategic management at one end and strategy management-at-scale at the other end. In addition, the dichotomy ignores differences between federal systems found in Canada and the United States and the more unitary system found in New Zealand.

Purpose and strategic focus

Strategic management is typically focused on a single organisation. Mission statements typically express an animating purpose for the organisation that articulates its reason for existence. The purpose is presumed to guide the organisation’s design and positioning in a specific niche. The strategic focus will be on doing something special for some specific group of stakeholders. In contrast, strategy management-at-scale is focused on altering the supra-organisational system level that produces challenges affecting multiple organisations and stakeholder groups. These organisations may operate in one or more fields, levels or

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Transforming the family justice system in Alberta, Canada

Leaders who had decades of experience with the problems with the family justice system in Alberta, Canada saw the need for change. The combination of compelling research reports on the harm resulting from current practices and growing appreciation of brain science and effects of childhood trauma added both urgency and knowledge to their desire to reform the system. The goal was to prevent harms arising in adversarial legal processes and support family restructuring. A broad-based collaboration formed to reimagine the family justice system. Participants recognised that incremental process fixes, an innovative programme or two, or training on being ‘trauma-informed’ would fall far short of the multi-sector

issue facing North America over the next 20 years, exceeding cancer, heart disease and diabetes (CDC, 2023).

Communities of Hope, Detroit, Michigan, USA

Communities of Hope was founded as a non-profit organisation designed to work alongside a for-profit firm that developed and managed affordable apartment complexes that were heavily dependent on tax subsidies and housing vouchers. The vision of Communities of Hope was to break the cycle of poverty and poor health among the people living in these apartment communities, enhancing their lives while simultaneously improving the financial success of the property management firm and property owners (Communities of Hope, 2020).

Table 1 – purpose and strategic focus

Strategy element	Strategic management of organisations (SMO)	Strategy management-at-scale	Comments regarding strategy management-at-scale
Purpose	Strategic management emphasises finding a sustainable position in a specific niche. The emphasis is on agreement and alignment around an organisational mission and vision that can serve as the foundation for developing implementable and sustainable strategies that will be successful in ways that the organisation defines as success. This almost always means doing something special for some stakeholders and not trying to be all things to all people.	The emphasis in strategy management-at-scale is on understanding the dynamics of complex issues and systems that no single organisation can address effectively, and then working to clarify a set of interrelated changes that would make a significant difference in bringing about desired outcomes. The organisations involved in addressing the challenge may have different missions, visions and priorities. Nonetheless, they can still coalesce, collaborate, or at least co-align around a strategy map framework to advance all or part of a strategy that contributes to the shared purpose of minimising or overcoming the challenge.	In strategy management-at-scale, the overall effects of each organisation’s strategies can be magnified if they are aligned around overarching, co-created strategies that allow individual organisations to focus on leveraging their strengths. Organizations do not have to agree on a specific mission, vision, or SMART goals to make major headway against major challenges. Agreement on principles, high-level goals, and broad strategy outlines can offer the necessary guidance for a coalition to advance via collaboration and co-alignment toward desired outcomes.
Strategic focus	Much of the critical thinking in developing an organisation’s strategy is about prioritising what to do and what not to do. Organisations typically fail if they try to do too many things.	Much of the critical thinking when developing a coalition or community strategy centres on understanding the interdependencies and dynamics of the larger system which coalition members seek to improve. Based on that understanding, informed choices can be made about how best to intervene in the system to improve overall outcomes. No one organisation can do everything needed, but enough complementarities may be found or created to make significant headway.	The strategic focus in strategy management-at-scale shifts up a level from the organisation to the boundary-crossing challenges to be addressed. The emphasis is on systems thinking, including understanding the interactions among coalition or community members and their effects that may undermine collective achievement. Shared understandings may be developed that make more good things, and fewer bad things, happen.

sectors that comprise the system. The idea is that by aligning around shared purposes (goals, desired outcomes, high-level aspirations), these organisations can make headway against the big challenge. Each organisation draws on its own purposes and resources to do so and seeks to leverage the strengths of the other organisations. A very specific, measurable mission, vision and set of goals may be desirable, but also may not be necessary (or even possible); the good news is that simple agreement on very high-level goals, general principles or a general strategic framework may be enough for a coalition to form and make progress. (See Table 1.)

Example: Transforming the family justice system in Alberta, Canada

Participants took a broad approach to system change (Geels, 2004; Bryson et al., 2021). The group used ‘zoomable’ strategy mapping to clarify the broad, interrelated set of overarching goals, strategies, and asset- and capacity-building objectives needed to change the system. The zoom feature allowed digging into more details

in the same way Google maps does. They also used an online software platform to track changes and inform dialogue and deliberations about what to do and why. As the many parts of the strategy were discussed, coalition partners no longer saw an overwhelming set of tasks that their barely funded coalition would need to do, but rather an elegant framework around which the work of many funders and organisations could align, opening up silos, reducing fragmentation, and enhancing the efficiency of communication and collaboration. (For more on the effort, see Bryson et al., 2021, 2023.)

Example: Dementia Network Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Dementia Network Calgary is a collective impact coalition with a steering committee made up of people with lived experience and individuals from private, public and non-profit organisations, with only one full-time leader, who works with a larger non-profit organisation (the ‘backbone’ organisation), the Alzheimer Society of

Calgary. Many types of organisations in this city of over 1.3 million people have a significant interest in the success of a multifaceted strategy to deal with dementia. The high stakes for so many organisations creates an opportunity to define the ‘what’s in it for me’ upside that can be used to inspire these different organisations to participate in the work of developing and implementing shared regional strategies for addressing this complex issue. People from healthcare, housing, universities, local governments and community-based organisations all had reasons to participate. Their strategy map helped them have a greater appreciation both of their role in parts of the strategy and also of the roles that others would play.

A zoomable strategy map was developed over a series of workshops and had over 25 high-level objectives. These objectives were organised into six themes: prevent and delay; understanding and influence; dementia-inclusive community; caregiver supports; care systems; and policy and funding changes. Most of the objectives were linked to a more detailed strategy map

containing more detailed sub-objectives. The robust framework allows different organisations and coalitions to find ways in which their work can be part of a larger strategy, knowing that others are working on complementary efforts.

Leadership, stakeholder involvement and governance

Leadership may take a different form in the move from strategic management to strategy management-at-scale. In a single organisation, leadership is likely to be anchored in people designated as leaders and followers, but at a system transformation level there are a multitude of leaders and followers, with different people, groups and organisations sometimes leading and sometimes following. At the strategy management-at-scale level, it makes sense to think of leadership as everything that might go into attaining direction, alignment and commitment – the DAC model proposed by Drath et al. (2008). Leadership conceived this way includes people, processes and

structures (Huxham and Vangen, 2000), and even artifacts of various kinds, including strategy maps (Latour, 2005; Stigliani and Ravasi, 2012; Franco, 2013). Collective leadership is necessary and collective leadership development may be needed (Arkedis et al., forthcoming).

In a single organisation, most of the stakeholders involved in strategy formulation and implementation are likely to be insiders, although outsiders may be involved in various ways. In contrast, in strategy management-at-scale virtually everyone will be an outsider, since the effort must engage multiple organisations that come together and work in alignment. Governance of single organisations, regardless of sector, is likely to be the responsibility of governing boards and senior managers with legal responsibility and delegated authority to act. Not so with strategy management-at-scale, where organisations are all participating voluntarily. Governance in this case is via consensus, norms, and shared aspirations, goals and principles. (See Table 2.)

Example: Transforming the family justice system

Given the ambitious aspirations for transforming the family justice system, it would seem that a large, well-funded organisation with significant authority to act would be needed. That has not been the case. The collaboration ‘leads’ were people who could have retired after impressive careers, but who instead decided to commit their time and energy to leading the transformation efforts. They built a network of people who saw the need for change. The network is co-convened by the key institutions of the justice system (courts, government, legal profession) and leaders in indigenous and family support services to champion the initiative and create a ‘license to innovate’ (Cahill and Spits, 2017), which inspires confidence and the social licence to undertake real change. They used strategy mapping to foster direction, alignment and commitment. With a more coherent and elegant strategy, they were able to get additional grant funding, and the Canadian Institute for

Table 2: Leadership, stakeholder involvement, and governance

Governance	Strategic management for organisations	Strategy management-at-scale	Comments regarding strategy management-at-scale
Leadership	Top organisational leaders have significant influence over the mission, vision, structures, systems, processes and employees. The basic leadership ontology consists of leaders and followers.	Most of the coalition’s leadership group are likely to be participating on a voluntary basis and can leave at any time. They need a solid and continually reinforced understanding of why participating in the coalition is worth their time. The basic leadership ontology is one in which many people produce direction, alignment and commitment. Collective leadership is needed.	Mutually beneficial and mutually reinforcing actions are needed to keep coalition or community members involved by demonstrating verifiable progress in addressing the challenge at hand.
Stakeholder involvement	People working on the strategy generally work for, or are hired by, the organisation that creates the strategy. Organisational members and partners are expected to do things that support the strategy	A collaborative or coalition strategy is typically created by a diverse group of stakeholders who are not specifically hired to play a role in implementing the strategy. The collaboration’s leadership needs to help attract and engage a growing group of entities that benefit by being aligned with and working towards outcomes that they value, but cannot realistically accomplish on their own.	Organizations involved in the coalition or collaboration almost always have other priorities, so ongoing encouragement and progress will be needed to keep them involved.
Governance	Government agencies, non-profit organisations and businesses all typically have a board that must authorise major decisions and budgets and to which management is responsible. These boards may delegate responsibilities and mandate broad participation in particular kinds of decisions, but typically the board ultimately bears major responsibility for decisions and their consequences.	In situations where no one is fully in charge, multiple boards and senior leaders typically are engaged to the extent that their individual organisations are participating. There may be an overarching steering committee or governance board, but typically decisions must be reasonably consensual, and implementing organisations get to decide for themselves what to implement.	Major governance roles are essentially performed by principles, norms and overarching goals decided upon by multiple, essentially autonomous boards and other kinds of decision makers.

Table 3: Communication, cooperation, coordination, collaboration and co-alignment

Strategy element	Strategic management for organisations	Strategic management for organisations	Comments regarding strategy management-at-scale
Communication, cooperation, coordination, collaboration and co-alignment	Internal communication, cooperation, coordination and co-alignment are crucial for achieving organisational success. For organisations dependent on grants, much communication attends to funder requirements for information and compliance. Collaboration and external co-alignment are typically far less important.	Cross-boundary, cross-level and cross-sector communication, cooperation, collaboration and co-alignment are necessary for coalition success in addressing the major system-level challenges. Early communication focuses on synthesising collective wisdom regarding the system to be changed and desirable interventions. Later communication is on how to improve alignment around strategy and better leverage the strengths of each organisation.	Organisations that historically have competed with one another for funding will need an intentional process to build trust, see the value of investing in working together, discern each other’s comparative advantages, and become team players. Skilled facilitation is almost certainly necessary.

the Administration of Justice agreed to be a financial sponsor. This gave them further reach and credibility, and people in other provinces began to explore engaging in similar strategies.

Example: Dementia Network Calgary

As the sole staff person dedicated to Dementia Network Calgary, the employee of Alzheimer Calgary focuses on being a coordinator and facilitator of a 12-person, cross-sector leadership team, the strategic council. People from healthcare, housing, universities, local governments and community-based organisations all had reasons to want to see more progress on a regional strategy for this complex issue. With the support of the strategic council, the network was able to engage dozens of additional participants in the development of a strategy map that encompassed a much more ambitious aspiration than any organisation could realistically pursue on its own. The network worked with a consultant who facilitated a series of five online workshops to develop the strategy map, which has helped the members of the network have a greater appreciation both of their role in parts of the strategy and of the roles that others would play. Many organisations feel an ownership of and buy into the strategy map framework.

Communication, cooperation, coordination, collaboration and co-alignment

In strategic management, communication, cooperation and coordination are very important, but occur primarily within a framework of hierarchy and authority that helps guide communication and

other organisational efforts. In strategy management-at-scale, communication, cooperation and coordination are also very important, but so are collaboration and co-alignment, since no one person, group or organisation is in charge. It is almost impossible to underestimate the amount of communication, mutual understanding and mutual support that are necessary to achieve strategy management-at-scale success (Vangen and Huxham, 2003). (See Table 3.)

Feasibility assessment, resourcing in general, funding in particular, and prioritisation

In strategic management, organisational strategies must be directly linked to the organisation’s purpose, capabilities and resource constraints. The mission and funding will be more narrowly focused than the overarching challenge prompting strategy management-at-scale. Anything outside the organisation’s mission and foreseeable capabilities, resources and funding is simply a non-starter. In strategy management-at-scale the approach is different. The aspirations will almost certainly go beyond any one organisation’s mission, capabilities and resources. Strategy management-at-scale strategy maps will invite organisations to pool capabilities and resources with those of other organisations and activate underutilised capabilities and resources in pursuit of system changes. Capabilities and resources are thus leveraged and magnified in pursuit of the overarching purpose. Strategy management-at-scale can also promote creative thinking about how pooled capabilities and resources might be

used and stimulate innovative approaches to resource development. Funders should focus their own strategies on addressing cross-organisational, and often cross-sector, challenges; building coalition capacity to address the challenges; and staying in the game long enough to make a significant difference at the system level. (See Table 4.)

Example: Communities of Hope

In spite of its bold aspirations, Communities of Hope didn’t have any money for grants or projects. They had to show how improved alignment and coordination, working with the property management firm, and engaging residents as partners would reduce waste and headaches while leading to better outcomes for each organisation and for the collective whole. By inviting different organisations that had money and responsibilities for impact to consider how they would better work with the apartment properties and residents, Communities of Hope was able to help many organisations get better results with less effort. Furthermore, Communities of Hope helped harness the time and talent of the apartment residents to improve their own lives and those of their neighbours. It created wins for these organisations and residents by helping them take advantage of the facilities and relationships that the apartment’s property management company could provide. For example, many programmes and services were brought on-site using space donated by the apartment buildings, dramatically reducing the transportation challenges that often were barriers to participation.

Table 4: Feasibility assessment, resourcing in general, resourcing in particular, and prioritisation

Strategy Element	Strategic management for organisations	Strategy management-at scale	Comments regarding strategy management-at-scale
Feasibility Assessment	Given the constraints that any one organisation has, there are often major questions about the feasibility of strategies that will strongly affect whether they should be adopted or not.	A large-scale coalition or collaborative strategy map will likely include aspirations that are not obviously feasible; that said, the idea is that the framework will help advance the thinking, creativity, problem-solving and other work to find new ways to do things.	Working with a collaborative strategy map over an extended time prompts (re)consideration of the strength of the ‘if-then’ hypotheses that are built into the strategy map and also stimulates remapping when necessary.
Resourcing in General	An organisational strategy answers the question: What are we going to do, and what resources do we have or need to do it? When a strategy is for one organisation, the objectives on a strategy map are things that the organisation intends to do, and they should realistically draw on resources available to do it. Otherwise, it is an unrealistic fantasy. An organisation creating its own strategy cannot reasonably expect other organisations to contribute their resources to do the organisation’s work.	A coalition or community strategy answers the question: What will it take to achieve the desired outcomes, and what resources might we obtain? When a strategy map is being created by a coalition, the desired outcomes are those valued by many organisations – including many outcomes that might not initially have been part of many individual organisations’ strategies. Having a strategy framework that embodies systems thinking prompts looking for partners, innovations and creative ways to make progress on achieving the main strategy objectives.	The coalition almost never knows where the resources will come from, or how much will be required. The better the strategy map, the more successful the coalition will be in attracting others to contribute resources to accomplish various parts of the overall strategy.
Funding in Particular	Funding is typically predicated on, and specific to, the organisation’s mission, and does not encompass addressing issues beyond the organisation’s competence. In addition, organisations addressing social issues are often required by their funders to focus on an evidence-based intervention. This often limits their strategy choices in unfortunate ways, because most research done to build the evidence base is focused on isolated interventions, not system-thinking strategies that weave together many mutually reinforcing activities over several years.	Instead of trying to pick the ‘correct’, evidence-based, isolated intervention, strategy management-at-scale often works backwards from the outcome objectives using a system-thinking approach that considers innovative and interconnected possibilities in addition to more narrow evidence-based interventions. This is where a strategy map becomes powerful because it visually depicts this system thinking. Then, different organisations can collaborate or co-align their efforts to use their respective strengths to achieve the objectives and learn as they go along.	Funders should support the process of multi-organisationally and collaboratively developing and refining a strategy map; engage the leaders, staff and boards of collaborating organisations in how they can support the strategy; and support the many efforts that align with the strategy.
Prioritisation	Organisations typically have limited resources and funding and thus need to make often very difficult decisions about how to prioritise the use of their limited resources. A scarcity, zero-sum mentality can prevail.	Coalitions often have very different dynamics regarding resources. Improving alignment and having many different organisations better using their strengths can generate huge value without requiring more resources. The more that organisations align and share things (information, processes, or other types of easily shared resources), the more they all have to work with. Rather than be captured by a scarcity mentality of only doing a few things, the process encourages positive-sum thinking that engages more stakeholders and envisions strategies that generate all-gain value..	A collective strategy that emphasises tapping into underutilised resources can greatly increase the available resources for accomplishing change. These might include resources that can provide behind-the-scenes assistance to other organisations.

Example: Restore Hope, Arkansas
Restore Hope in Arkansas had built a robust strategy for addressing an extraordinarily difficult mix of challenges facing families dealing with incarceration, poverty, substance abuse, trauma, and housing insecurity or homelessness. They knew that dramatic improvements could be achieved if they had a way to better coordinate the existing services and the underutilised

time and talents of people who wanted to help those in need. Restore Hope struggled with winning competitive grants, and they wanted to avoid the frustrating process that often twists the mission of the organisation into ‘apply for grants and then do whatever the grants you win require you to do’. Two unconventional resources have been especially helpful in enabling them to make impressive progress in recent years: in-kind,

non-cash donations, and a compelling case to allocate underused federal funding. As the Restore Hope community-based system change approach demonstrated results, decision makers in the state of Arkansas have realised that allocating more money to these efforts actually enables them to reduce spending in other areas.

Implementation, action plans, performance, responsibility and accountability

Strategy implementation in a strategic management context often involves making changes to organisational systems, including operational systems, to improve mission accomplishment and stakeholder expectations. In a strategy management-at-scale context, the approach is very different, since coalition members do not control other members' operational systems. The focus instead is on fostering the kinds of communication, cooperation, coordination, collaboration and co-alignment needed to change the overarching system. The focus will be enabling different stakeholders to work in mutually reinforcing ways to bring about

the change. The details of what is going to be done, who is going to do it and when tend to emerge after the strategy map is initially created.

In strategic management, organisational units and personnel are given responsibility and are expected to be accountable for the achievement of narrowly defined strategic objectives. In strategy management-at-scale the focus of performance and accountability shifts to the system level. Individual organisations still have their own accountabilities, but what is added is heightened attention to improvements at the system level. Accountability is mainly enforced via cross-organisational norms regarding transparency and taking responsibility for aspects of the strategy map. (See Table 5.)

Example: Transforming the family justice system

The clarity provided by the strategy maps inspired people and organisations to deepen their commitment to the movement. Justice Rod Jerke, co-convenor of the Court of King's Bench in Alberta, was approved for a nine-month study leave during which he focused on ways that the courts could align their practices to support key objectives in the overall strategy.

The city of Grande Prairie (population 63,000 plus), the county of Grande Prairie (population 22,000 plus), and a number of indigenous communities in the region (population 50,000 plus) had the combination of needs, willing participants, and a size that was appropriate for piloting

Table 5: Implementation, action plans, responsibility, performance and accountability

Strategy element	Strategic management for organisations	Strategy management-at-scale	Comments regarding strategy management-at-scale
Implementation	Strategy implementation often involves making changes to organisational systems, including operational systems, typically in order to better satisfy mission accomplishment and stakeholder expectations.	Coalitions do not control their members' operational systems. Beyond that, the larger supra-organisational systems are rarely intentionally defined or managed. The strategy focus, therefore, is on encouraging collaboration, or at least co-alignment, of efforts and in moving from unplanned systems to ones that are more intentionally planned. There is also a focus on breaking complex social issues down into smaller parts that might be a fit for different organisations to work on.	The strategy management-at-scale approach is very different from changing the operations of single organisations. The focus is on what is needed to create a new system, or transform a poorly functioning one. The new system is often quite informal, but typically makes use of new technology.
Action plans	Since the organisation creating the strategy is the one that will generally do the things that are included in the strategy, the strategy is usually accompanied in fairly short order by a detailed action plan.	A collaborative strategy map is often an exploration of the options for accomplishing a specific change and involving different stakeholders working in mutually reinforcing ways to bring about the change. The details of what is going to be done, who is going to do it and when tend to emerge after the strategy map is created.	While a strategy map should be aspirational, there is also a danger the coalition's or collaboration's objectives will be too pie-in-the-sky. Participants should focus on objectives that have a realistic chance, given promising innovations, improved alignment of effort, and more engagement of people who have a stake in seeing the outcomes accomplished.
Responsibility	Organisational members often 'own' objectives and are responsible for getting them accomplished.	Too much emphasis on accountability can keep people from being willing to take on a volunteer role for the coalition or collaboration. It is better for people in a coalition to be 'lead advocates' for an objective that depends on many others to move the objective forward.	Responsibility is more diffuse in a strategy management-at-scale collaboration and fostering a strong sense of collective responsibility usually requires a significant investment of time and effort to build.
Performance and Accountability	Organisations are expected to demonstrate that they are responsible for producing positive outcomes. Each organisation strives to not depend on the actions of others. This can pit organisations against each other, with each organisation wanting to take credit for any success and blame others for any failures. Strategies may be designed to undermine the success of other organisations.	Coalition members can look at what is working or not working in the overall system and collectively join in understanding and overcoming obstacles to success. Rather than fighting for getting credit or avoiding blame, this approach leads to clarifying issues by exploring who in the coalition can best address the issues that are hindering success so that the collective overall can win.	The focus of performance and accountability shifts to the system level. Individual organisations still have their own accountabilities, but what is added is heightened attention to improvements at the system level. It is important for funders to reward organisations for being team contributors rather than driving them to fight over who gets credit for outcomes.

Table 6: Evaluation and learning

Strategy Element	Strategic management for organisations	Strategy management-at-scale	Comments regarding strategy management-at-scale
Evaluation and learning	Evaluations by a funder are typically formative or summative and look at how the organisation can get credit, or not, for attaining the outcomes it is funded to accomplish.	Evaluations of a coalition’s or collaboration’s strategies are more likely to be principles-focused or developmental. Evaluations of individual entities should be focused on how well they play their role in implementing specific parts of the coalition’s strategy.	Consider the following analogy: in American or Canadian football, offensive linemen are not evaluated on how many points they scored, but rather on how well they blocked their opponent and protected the quarterback or other ball carrier. Winning is a team-level objective analogous to a strategy management-at-scale objective; blocking well is a lineman’s objective, analogous to a strategic management objective.

some of the key elements of the strategy related to helping families to build skills and deploying ways to support families, rather than focusing on a legal, adversarial battle that actually causes more harm for families. The collaboration then worked with the courts and with community organisations in Grande Prairie to apply for grants and create pilots aligned with the larger strategy.

Example: Dementia Network Calgary

Since the coalition’s work is done by people who are not paid by Dementia Network Calgary, it is important to show how their work aligns with the goals and interests of the organisation that is paying them. Given the high cost (and for other stakeholders, high revenue) of dementia, many organisations are motivated to be involved. For example, the city of Calgary has a person dedicated as an issue strategist for Age-Friendly Calgary. Alberta Health Services, a province-wide integrated health system with over 100,000 direct employees, has an executive director for seniors, palliative and continuing care. Numerous academic centres focus on some aspects of aging and dementia, including the Caregiver Centered Care initiative that involves multiple universities and healthcare providers. Each of these have leaders involved with Dementia Network Calgary. The strategy map, co-created through a process that involved dozens of organisations like these, provides a structure for action teams that focus on

the important things that need to be done next to make progress in accomplishing each objective.

Evaluation and learning

In strategic management, evaluation is mainly tied to performance of the overall organisation or to a specific strategy, programme or project. Typically, formative and summative evaluations predominate (Patton and Campbell-Patton, 2021). Learning is focused mainly on the work of a specific organisation and its more immediate environment (Munteanu and Newcomer, 2020; Newcomer, Olejniczak and Hart, 2021). In strategy management-at-scale, evaluation and learning will be at the coalition or collaboration level and is far more likely to be principles-focused or developmental in nature, since no pre-existing model exists (Patton, 2010, 2017; Bryson et al., 2021). Systematic use of system-wide learning forums will allow participants to assess results of evaluation efforts and decide what to do differently in order to change the overarching system. Software for tracking progress, such as InsightVision, is especially valuable for informing the work of learning forums. (See Table 6.)

Conclusions: implications for the future of public service

We conclude with five implications for public service. First, an important part of the future of public services depends on becoming good at strategy management-

at-scale. Second, strategy management-at-scale is very different from strategic management. This means that strategic management approaches should not be imposed on situations for which they are not designed. Third, when it comes to strategy management-at-scale, there is simply no substitute for collective leadership involving a host of leaders and managers intent on developing reasonable direction, alignment and commitment across multiple organisations, programmes, projects and initiatives in pursuit of jointly shared aspirations (Crosby and Bryson, 2005). Fourth, strategy mapping is a particularly helpful approach to developing direction, alignment and commitment in situations where no one is in charge, and many are involved, affected or have some partial responsibility to act (Bryson et al., 2023). Finally, the coalition or collaboration may not know where the resources will come from, or how much will be required. The better the strategy map, the more successful the group is likely to be in attracting others to contribute resources. Beyond that, strategy management-at-scale can change the incentive structures facing single organisations who participate, whereby they can join with others in leveraging and mobilising untapped or underused resources to advance the common good and help them better achieve their own organisational missions.

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