



Addressing Complex and Cross-Boundary Challenges in Government: The Value of Strategy Mapping

*** The following 7-pages are strictly comprised of excerpts taken from the original 59-page report (title above). The original report, written by John M. Bryson and contributors, was published in January of 2023 and can be downloaded from the IBM Center for the Business of Government.*

FOREWORD

Government leaders today face serious, seemingly intractable public management issues that go to the core of effective governance and leadership. These types of challenges run the gamut from the pandemic to economic dislocation, homelessness, and natural and man-made disasters. These major crises have complex causes, and the resources needed to properly address them often transcend the capacity of any single government agency. (p.4)

Strategy mapping helps users visualize the cause-and-effect chains in a system and the actions that can be taken to introduce reforms—linking aspirations with capabilities. (p.4)

While the primary purpose of the strategy mapping efforts varies across the cases, each example illustrates that by using a few simple rules to formulate statements and creating links, causal maps help reveal relevant values, possible goals and strategies, and specific tactics and actions. (p.4)

The authors offer insights into how best to implement strategy mapping, leveraging available technology to help scale the application and use of the tool. The report culminates with recommendations and advice on how to start doing strategy management-at-scale by using strategy mapping. (p.4)

This report builds on the IBM Center's long-standing research into leveraging new tools and approaches to governance that better position government agencies to address complex challenges that cross or transcend traditional agency boundaries. The report provides practical recommendations on how governments can work with each other and with partners to leverage strategy management at scale and use strategy mapping to address complex, boundary-spanning problems. (p.5)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communities, regions, and nations increasingly face boundary crossing challenges that require the efforts of many organizations and groups to address them effectively.

Communities, regions, and nations increasingly face boundary-crossing challenges that require the efforts of many organizations and groups to address them effectively. These challenges include, for example, the global COVID-19 pandemic; homelessness; inclusive workforce development; disparity in educational achievement, income, and wealth; public safety; and many aspects of climate change. These challenges can be overcome only when multiple organizations work toward shared over-arching goals. Reasonably aligned efforts of multiple organizations can transform systems. (p.6)

Strategic management of single organizations is well understood: It involves processes and techniques for developing a mission, doing strategic planning, aligning organizational structures, deploying resources, implementing actions, evaluating outcomes, and ongoing learning and adjustment. However, new techniques and processes are needed to make sense of the challenging situations involving complex, interconnected issues in which multiple organizations must make contributions to make the changes needed to effectively confront the challenge. (p.6)

One of the most promising techniques for facilitating strategy management-at-scale is strategy mapping. Strategy mapping is a technique to help leaders across multiple levels, organizations and/or sectors understand the system in need of change and articulate the interventions needed to bring about the desired changes. Strategy mapping helps users visualize the cause-and-effect chains in a system and the actions that can be taken to change the system. In other words, it links aspirations and capabilities, the essence of strategy. (p.6)

This report contains three case examples of coalitions that used mapping for different purposes, and to different effect. Many software packages are available to facilitate strategy mapping and choosing the right one depends on what and how you are using strategy mapping. (p.7)

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- **The Minnesota SNAP-Ed project** used a largely manual mapping process to develop and coordinate a strategy for improving nutritional outcomes among Native American communities.
- **The Research Council of Norway** funded a project that used mapping to respond to the emerging COVID-19 crisis to determine the risks and opportunities relevant to managing the pandemic. They used a cloud-based software called Strategyfinder in virtual conferencing sessions.

- **A coalition involved with the Canadian family justice system** is working to reduce adverse childhood experiences. They used a strategy mapping process focused on coordinating the implementation and evaluation of a system transformation over the long term and they are relying on a software called InsightVision to help manage strategy implementation.

Leadership in strategy management-at-scale is different from strategic leadership of a single organization. Because large-scale issues can only be addressed effectively by multiple organizations together, no one leader has the oversight or control needed. Through mapping, stakeholders understand how their efforts are part of the larger strategy, and they can see how their own and other organizations working alone or together can contribute to greater success. The map is integral to managing the complexity involved in dealing with many relevant ideas, organizations, and their interconnections at different levels and often different sectors as they contribute to creating useful change. (p.7)

INTRODUCTION

In this report, we describe strategy management-at-scale, an approach increasingly necessary to address the big challenges facing governments at all levels, nonprofits, businesses, and the citizenry as a whole.

Strategy management-at-scale is very different from the strategic management of a single organization. It involves leading cross-boundary, cross-level, and/or cross-sector initiatives. Strategic leadership of a single organization often involves the development of a strategic management system to ensure direction, alignment, and commitment across the organization (Drath et al., 2008; Bryson, 2018). The system will include a focus on mission; strategic planning; alignment of organizational structures, processes, and budgets; implementation; evaluation; and ongoing learning and adjustments.

This introduction focuses on three topics: 1) Prevalence of cross-boundary, cross-level, cross-sector challenges, 2) the need for new approaches to managing strategy management-at-scale, and 3) strategy mapping. (p.8)

Prevalence of Cross-Boundary, Cross-Level, Cross-Sector Challenges

Boundary-crossing challenges are ubiquitous, which is why strategic leadership of collaborations, communities, and social movements is becoming more common and necessary. Leading multiple collaborating (or at least co-aligned) organizations to achieve a common purpose is what we call leading strategy management-at-scale, meaning the scale of the challenge to be addressed (Bryson, et al., 2021, 2023).

Such cross-boundary issues include the global COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness and the lack of affordable housing, racial gaps in educational achievement, the damage from adverse childhood experiences, and recovery from natural and human-made disasters. Such issues occur in an environment where no one is wholly in charge and power must be shared. They demand a response from multiple organizations to create a system change. (p.8)

Need for New Approaches

Strategy is what links aspirations and capabilities. It is the means to achieve desired ends. Leading strategy management-at-scale builds on organizational strategic management but differs from it in significant ways. The big challenge at scale is how to create communication, co-alignment, and collaboration across organizations in pursuit of shared objectives. (p.9)

Strategy Mapping

One of the most promising techniques for facilitating strategy management-at-scale is strategy mapping. 2 Strategy mapping results in a causal map, which is a statement-and-arrow diagram in which statements are causally linked to one another using arrows. (p.10)

Benefits of Strategy Mapping

Strategy mapping is a particularly powerful method for helping organizations figure out what to do, how to do it, and why. Group strategy mapping overcomes the two main challenges to strategic success: 1) helping the group come up with ideas that are good, worth implementing, and possible to implement; and 2) building the coalition of support necessary to implement those ideas. (p.13)

When completed, a map provides a record of agreements about what to do, how, and why, and therefore provides an external organizational memory, so that people do not have to keep it all in their heads. (p.13)

Large-scale changes necessarily involve many different efforts by multiple organizations across multiple levels (federal, state, and local) and sectors (government, nonprofit, foundations, business, and civil society). Building out an overall framework for change in the form of a strategy map can be immensely helpful in such a complex environment. The map can be refined over time as the details of the strategy emerge and as different organizations align their efforts and resources to support different parts of the larger strategy. (p.17)

Three Examples of Strategy Management-at-Scale

The three case illustrations show how useful and versatile strategy mapping can be as an element of strategy management-at-scale. The primary purpose of the strategy mapping efforts varied across the cases. In the SNAP-Ed case, the purposes included key actor involvement, relationship and commitment building, and the development of an implementable strategic plan. (p.39)

In the risk management case, the major purpose was to understand the system to be managed and to discern where the most effective interventions might be made. The TFJS case is a longer-term system change effort including key actor involvement, relationship building, understanding the system to be changed, catalyzing multiple independent implementing actions, and monitoring and managing the change effort over many years. (p.39)

The purposes varied because of the complexity of the challenges. The SNAP-Ed case involved fairly simple challenges, while the risk management and TFJS cases were very complex. The level of understanding of the challenge also varied. It was reasonably high in the SNAP-Ed case, but very low overall in the risk management and TFJS cases. (p.39)

CASE #3: Transforming the Family Justice System in Canada

By Bill Barberg

Growing Impact

Solid progress is being made on the three challenges faced by a system-level transformation of the family justice system: changing mental models, challenging complexity, and managing information. The use of strategy maps and InsightVision is allowing the coalition to plan for the first, visualize the second (even as it changes and changes again), and handle the third. (p.37)

Many recent victories are directly attributable to the coalition's approach to strategy mapping and their use of supporting techniques and software. The movement is gaining momentum as the collaborators see how strategy engagement supports action among their network of individuals and organizations. Jurisdictions across Canada are beginning to see that a well-defined cross-sector strategy for transformation is possible with this method and these tools. Furthermore, these strategy engagement techniques are spreading to adjacent work on family violence, poverty, and community resilience. (p.37)

In all three cases, the number of people directly involved in the mapping was relatively small, from 25 and two facilitators in the SNAP-Ed case, to 16 and a facilitator in the risk management case, and over 50 plus a facilitator over time in the TFJS case. The time needed to create the strategy maps beyond preparation and follow-up also varied, from two days in SNAP-Ed case, to 10 hours over four days in the risk management case, to over two years in the TFJS case. (p.39)

Neutral facilitators were involved in all three cases. Zoomable, revisable strategy maps were developed in all three cases. In short, strategy mapping can be very helpful when it comes to strategy management-at-scale, but it is important to think strategically about why, how, when, and where to use it. (p.39)

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

The zoomable strategy map is a key enabler of what Senge, Hamilton and Kania (2015) refer to as the core capabilities of “system leadership” that extends beyond the performance management of single organizations. (p.41)

The method helps individuals and groups do the following:

- Make sense of challenging, complex situations
- Catalyze creative thinking
- Manage the complexity
- Develop and refine a collective’s mission, goals, strategies, and underlying assumptions
- Develop line-of-sight relationships between ideas
- Create shared meaning
- Facilitate negotiation and commitment to agreements
- Communicate necessary actions
- Provide a framework for implementation and evaluation

In short, strategy mapping is a powerful approach consisting of a set of mapping techniques and tools to be drawn on selectively based on the overall approach to organizational or system change and the specific context of application. But the techniques and tools are just that, techniques and tools. For strategy mapping to be of use, leaders need to think in systems terms and understand how different organizations and interventions can contribute toward achieving common goals. Taking a systems view focuses attention on achieving larger goals or objectives beyond what any single organization can accomplish. (p.41)

Taking a systems view also means reconceptualizing leadership as more than just leader-follower relations. Instead, leadership should be conceived of as inspiring and mobilizing the efforts of many individuals and groups to achieve direction, alignment, and commitment toward shared high-level goals (Drath et al., 2008; Bryson et al., 2021). (p.41)

There are many software programs available that can help with strategic planning and strategy implementation in general, but fewer that directly support strategy mapping . See Table 1 in the Appendix for a sample of strategy mapping-related software programs . The Table is the result of an extensive online- review performed by Laure Vandersmissen and Bishoy Zaki at the University of Ghent and Bert George at the City University of Hong Kong, with contributions from others . (p.42)

Software programs especially helpful for strategy formulation are presented first, followed by programs that are better for strategy implementation. Strategyfinder is best for strategy formulation, while InsightVision is best for strategy implementation. (p.42)

*This summary was created by **InsightFormation, Inc.***

See **updates on the impact of strategy mapping** in transforming the family justice system.

Learn more about Strategy Mapping at <https://www.insightformation.com/ibm-report>