Benefits and Challenges to Strategic Planning in Public Institutions

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Abstract

Public institutions represent a major investment for a country. Their existence is externally justified and primarily aimed at improving the lives of citizens. Much hype has been made on increasing the accountability in government and public institutions. To achieve their goals with transparency to its constituency, an institution must think and act strategically. This requires the use of strategic planning models and frameworks; however, much of the research and empirical evidence lies with corporations. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate public institution characteristics and highlight areas where changes to corporate models are required. Benefits and challenges to public institution implementation will be discussed. Finally, the paper will argue for the need to focus more on research and collection of data on strategic planning initiatives worldwide. This would create a greater basin of tools for public institutions and avoid costly mistakes.

Keywords: *Public Institutions, Strategy, Planning, Financial Institutions, Government*

1. Introduction

Public institutions and government programs reflect what society's value. Collectively, they must meet their mission and deliver value to the constituency they serve. This paper will define strategic planning and discuss why it is important for public institutions. The paper will then present the unique characteristics of corporations versus public institutions and present a framework for strategic planning that considers these characteristics. This analysis will be based on processes promulgated by public and private institutions as well as examining actual strategic plans of public institutions. Highlights of benefits realized and challenges encountered following the implementation of strategic planning will be presented before concluding with a summary and opinion on the use of strategic planning in public institutions.

Bryson (2004) describes good management "as a process that draws on resources to produce the outputs and outcomes that indicate organizational effectiveness and which triggers the resource flows into the organization needs so as to sustain itself and continue to create public value into the future''. To maximize the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of resource usage (value for money) of public institutions and ensure the intended mission justifying their existence is met, planning – defining the future as we want it – and designing strategies and tactics to get there are fundamental to good management.

2. Research Objectives

The overall objective of the paper was to examine strategies within public, rather than private, organizations. This was not limited to governments, but also included financial institutions, particularly the *Quebec Deposit and Investment Fund* (CDP). The research focused on two primary questions: Should the same strategic

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planning processes be used in public institutions as profit-oriented corporations? Are the challenges of determining strategic direction and developing a plan the same or different in a public organization?

3. Strategic Planning in Public Institutions

Strategic planning is defined "as a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does" (Bryson, 2004). It focuses on broader policy questions facing an organization, such as its basic mission and purposes and alternative courses of action or strategies to achieve those missions and purposes (Moskow, 1978). As such, strategic planning systemises an organization's direction into goals and acts as the backbone on which operational plans are built.

Public institutions are externally justified entities whose existence depends on serving public purposes and satisfying stakeholders. However, the number of stakeholders and their criteria for satisfaction can often lead an organization in a multitude of directions. The key to success lies with 'identifying and building strategic capacities to produce the greatest public value for key stakeholders at a reasonable cost' (Bryson, Ackermann and Eden, 2007). This requires the identification of stakeholders, their criteria, and a plan to meet the criteria and the externally allocated reason for existence of the institution. As the institution and its environment are not static, such an endeavor becomes complex and difficult to manage.

'In the public sector, change is the rule rather than exception' (Bryson, 2004). Not only are the same pressures felt by corporations reverberated in public institutions, but also the democratic process which institutionalizes change across government and its institutions by holding elections every four to five years, sometimes more often. As each stakeholder struggles with the costs, quality and benefits of public institutions, new structures are established and social contracts negotiated, which result in public value no longer being solely obtained from the public sectors. The boundaries between public, private and non-profit sectors have eroded and the overall complexity of all three sectors has increased as they delimit and coordinate their operations. In the same vain, policies within the public sector may impact and require input from several areas, further complicating operations and the fulfillment of stakeholder needs.

Pressures to improve governance, deregulation and freedom of information legislation, challenges the status quo and the role of government. Managers are forced to an active management mentality, to act with more autonomy and to focus on government objectives, managing risks and being responsive to the requirements of the recipients of their services. There is a 'realization that effective public governance requires the capacity to design and execute long-term solutions to complex problems' (Matheson et al., 1995) and the need for government to focus on its core competencies of 'making quality long-term decisions, creating and distributing knowledge, implementing decisions effectively, and mediating against competing interests' (Matheson et al., 1995). Public institution accountability expectations have dramatically risen in the last decade. The corporate and government scandals of the early 2000's have eroded the public's trust, severely impacted North American economies and increased the public's scrutiny. Effective leadership and good governance have increased the importance for all sectors (public, private and non profit) to address acceptable behaviour and practices and, in some instances has been legislated. To obtain the public's trust, these institutions must demonstrate and communicate with transparency as to how they will achieve their mission and goals, thereby requiring a strategic planning process.

4. Corporate Strategic Planning Environment

There is no one framework or approach that dictates the corporate strategic planning process, a corporation must adopt. Strategic planning depends on the unique characteristics of each corporation, its size and structure, and the needs and requirements of its senior management. In a given industry, there may be widespread differences in approaches and application, the process being intuitive and evolutional for each company.

'The management style of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and senior management is the most important determinant of planning activities' (Moskow, 1978). As 'it is likely that most of the key decision makers will be insiders even though considerable relevant information may be gathered from outsiders' (Bryson, 2004), strategic planning activities tend to be 'subject to a fair amount of discretion by the CEO and senior management' (Moskow, 1978) and can be self-contained to a limited number of people or groups within the company. As the information is of a competitive nature, most planning activities and the strategic plan remain confidential.

5. Public Institution Strategic Planning Environment

As was the case for corporations, public institution strategic planning processes are as diverse as the institutions and intimately linked to the management style of the institution or ministry chief. The chief's style will dictate the organizational structure, the functions within the department and the priorities for the entity. However, the chief's influence will be limited and constrained by the needs and requirements imposed by the ministry's or institution's mission. The mission may be inscribed in legislation or program definitions that are not within the chief's power to alter. The institution must adapt its structure, priorities and resources to accomplish the mission while assuming any interpretation leeway left in the legislation or programme definition. These are the primary similarities to corporations.

Fundamental to public institutions is that all-important decisions, especially those of strategic nature, are made 'within a political context and are characterised by bargaining and incremental decision making' (Moskow, 1978). There are several reasons that contribute to the increase in bargaining and incremental decision making environment. First, 'policy making, the process of deciding on a course of government action, is essentially a bargaining process (Moskow, 1978). As the creation of public institutions, government programmes and legislation stems from this process, bargaining permeates the structure and processes. Second, the missions of public institutions often cross the institution's boundaries to other organisations, governments or communities. As their purpose relates to public value, 'almost all key decision makers will be outsiders' (Bryson, 2004) to the institution and may involve many groups with diverging interests. Each of these groups will freely use the media to make its views known and, combined with freedom of information legislation, brings the strategic planning process open to the public. Each group and respective elected official views 'proposals from the point of view of their local constituents, which may not always be optimal for the nation as a whole' (Moskow, 1978).

The third reason relates to society's reluctance to grant absolute power to government and its institutions by instilling a separation of powers between various government institutions. For example, the cheques and balances between the branches of the US government 'reflect the unwillingness to give complete authority for government policy to one person or group or single institution. The result is blurring of responsibility and ambiguity of power, which is the antithesis of a basic principle of management–to establish a centre of authority with provision for accountability' (Moskow, 1978). In contrast, corporations rarely face such division of responsibility and accountability. Companies subject to specific legislation and regulatory oversight still retain control of their entity's strategic destiny and obtain interference from regulatory bodies only if there is potential harm for society at large.

Fourth, the planning of major policy issues requires the involvement of various agencies and institutions, who must cooperate and coordinate their planning efforts and resources. The coordination of planning with other agencies and obtaining their support is sometimes difficult because of natural bureaucratic tendencies to be concerned primarily about areas for which they are directly accountable (Moskow, 1978). The number of agencies and exchanges can hold down the planning processes for months. For example, the US budget process is initiated in the spring of every year. However, in the last five years, the budget has rarely been completed and adopted by year-end! The bargaining occurs at all levels and goes through further revisions once in Congress.

Until recently, corporate leadership at the senior management level tended to have a medium to long-term life. This perspective is required for companies to deliver their mission. However, public institutions undergo regular upheaval at leadership turnover where a change at the head of government level trickles down to the institutional and ministry level. Every four years, the head of government can change, sometimes more often, while periodic cabinet shuffles during those four years continue to focus government on the short term and 'discourages long term planning' (Moskow, 1978). The 'periodic elections and frequent turnover provide an environment that accentuates political skill and visibility rather than administrative skills. The political process places a high premium on the ability to handle a wide variety of short term crises with little incentive for good management and policy officials frequently place a low priority on managing well the programs already enacted' (Moskow, 1978).

Public institution missions do not have an overriding, single-purpose goal such as profit orientation like that of corporations. The mission may contain contradictory messages or may conflict with the goals of other institutions and require the implication of senior government to balance the conflicting interests. Depending on the nomination rules or legislation, the head of institutions may not be able to freely hire or fire key employees, may themselves be imposed on the institution without an appropriate background or may not be able to terminate a non performing program which impacts part of the government in power's constituency. For example, nominations to the Canadian senate are made by the government in power and are valid for the life of the senator, many public institutions have their president or board member nominations imposed by the government in power, or prisons built in remote areas which constitute regional employment but whose operations are costly.

6. Public Institution Example

The *Quebec Deposit and Investment Fund* (CDP) will be used as an example to highlight some of the characteristics listed in the above section. The CDP was created via Bill 51 in 1965, named its first president and board, received its first deposit, and performed its first investment transaction in 1966. The first depositor was the Régie des rentes du Québec (RRQ) and, since 1966, 23 pension plans, insurance plans and other plans joined the RRQ as CDP depositors. The enabling law was reformed in December 2004 with a goal to bring the institution in line with corporate governance best practices.

Government names the chairman of the board and the board members. Two-thirds of the board members and the chairman must be independent from senior management yet three-quarters must reside in Quebec. As of 31 December 2006, the board comprised of 12 members. Two members represent depositing institutions, two represent Quebec unions and one was the institution president. The mandates of the board and the president run for five years, slightly over the regular election period, and can be renewed for a maximum of 10 years. The board names the president of the institution with approval by the government and his expertise, profile and experience should consider the requirements of CDP. However, these requirements are not publicly known, need only be considered and can be altered by the president in office. The board is responsible for the approval strategic plan and business plan, budgets, financial statements and annual report, typical of board responsibilities in corporations.

Recently reformed, the enabling law still contains particularities. For example, permanent employees hired before 22 December 1977 cannot be fired and must be transferred elsewhere in the public sector, the president, board members, chairman and CDP employees cannot be sued if they acted in good faith, and CDP can only receive monies from government institutions whose constituting law requires deposit at CDP and who are qualified (defined as government, municipal, education or health and social services institutions). This provides a guaranteed source of deposits for CDP and prohibits the depositor from withdrawing the funds to another institution unless the National Assembly alters their enabling law.

The CDP's mission statement is:

"The mission of the fund is to receive moneys on deposit as provided by law and manage them with a view to achieving optimal return on capital within the framework of depositors' investment policies *while at the same time contributing to Quebec's economic development*."

The CDP mission presents two possibly conflicting goals of maximizing returns while contributing to Quebec's economic development. The BCIM mission extends a social responsibility message but does not define whether this is for its investments or in corporate activities, while Calpers will be creating an environment of responsiveness. Although all three plans fundamentally perform the same service, the enabling act of each plan provides goals beyond the maximisation of returns.

7. The Strategic Planning Process

Strategic planning processes tend to be customised to the organisation's management style. Literature highlights five key steps on which a sixth phase is added for public institutions. The sixth phase is required as corporations and public institutions start from different vantage points. Corporations initiate their strategic planning process from within then extend externally whereas public institutions start from the outside, as their reason for existing is external to the organisation and then move internally to its structure, mission and processes.

The starting phase of any strategic planning process is to "assess the organisation's readiness to plan" (Smith-James, 2005) from which the project charter and objectives will be established. Although a continuous process, strategic planning must be identified and managed as a project. It is vital to name a project sponsor that will give credibility to the process and ensure the cooperation of departments throughout the organisation. The choice of project sponsor may differ in corporate and public institutions and should be carefully analysed for organisational fit. The purpose and steps anticipated should be well defined in the project document as well as the form and timing of reports to emanate from the project. Although corporations may designate a team planning responsibilities, public institutions may require input and participation from various groups and committees in addition to the planning department and require the regular review of the team's composition. This adds a level of complexity and non-continuity to the planning team. Commitment of the necessary resources (individuals, groups, or committees) should be obtained. Team composition, resource commitment and "agreement on the process" (Gantz McKay, 2001) should be finalised before the project is initiated.

Once initiated, the second phase entails a review of the organisation's mission, vision and values to ensure they are still relevant as well as "identifying the strategic issues facing the organisation" (Bryson, 2004). There are diverging views on where in the process the identification of issues should take place. Bryson and Gantz McKay place this analysis after the environmental scan where more data is available. For public institutions, a sixth phase regarding stakeholder assessment is suggested immediately after phase one as its results can feed the review of the organisation's mission, vision and values and the identification of strategic issues. For example, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario performed an extensive stakeholder assessment, then prioritised five of its stakeholders and analysed the impact of each on four dimensions of success. CARI CAD and the Centre for Public Skills Training performed the stakeholder assessment before initiating the project plan. As public institutions may place equal priority on more than one goal affecting several stakeholders, an assessment of the stakeholders is required early in strategic planning and needs to be reviewed regularly for changes in the political environment.

The following phase is the same for all processes examined and entails an environmental scan where an analysis of internal strengths and weaknesses and of external opportunities and threats is performed. In corporations, a competitor or competitive position analysis is performed. This element is not present in public institutions as there are no direct competitors. For example, CDP is an institution enacted by provincial legislation and does not have competitors for investment management services. However, it would be beneficial for public institutions to identify private sector competitors and to initiate comparisons of its structure, costs and processes in order to optimise its performance and public value. Currently, CDP performs an indirect competitor analysis by comparing itself to other government pension plan asset managers. However, the number and types of depositors and the lack of responsibility over the actuarial liability and pension payments make the comparison difficult and imprecise. Comparison with mutual funds and similar asset type managers may yield a better fit and would enable CDP to better evaluate its efficiency beyond absolute returns.

The information gathered in the preceding phases enables the planning team to refine its strategic issues list and turn its attention to elaborating strategies and goals for the future. Table 1 illustrates that most strategic plans are designed in the three to six year range.

In determining the optimal period for the strategic plan, the sponsor must consider the time to deploy and implement the plan. A short time frame may not enable full realisation of goals and may be discouraging for subsequent strategic planning efforts. Longer durations may no longer be in line with stakeholder expectations and the organisation's environment once realised, resulting in mismatches between strategies and stakeholders and a loss of momentum and commitment for future plans. The strategic goals should be prioritised and an implementation plan prepared, communicated and monitored. This last phase seals the strategic process and is crucial to the success of the strategic plan. It is important that the project retain the same level of energy and focus at this phase as the implementation of the plan depends on the clear definitions of who will be responsible for which portions of the plan, the measurement mechanisms to assess progress and successful attainment, the frequency of monitoring as well as the level of detail and to whom reporting should be made, how the plan will be communicated, the resource requirements and their source, how accountability will be determined, and corrective actions that can be taken throughout the plan.

Table 1. Strategic Plan Duration Comparison

Institution Name	Duration of Strategic Plan
Québec Deposit and Investment Fund	Rolling 3 years
SITQ (Ivanhoe Division)	Rolling 3 years
Ivanhoe-Cambridge	Rolling 3 years
British Virgin Islands	Rolling 5 years
New South Wales	3 to 5 years
Hydro Québec	5 years
OMERS (Ontario Retirement Fund)	3 years
Rhode Island Geographic System	5 years
Immigration Canada	5 years
Action Mines Canada	5 years
ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names)	4 years
US Environmental Protection Agency	6 years
Vital Statistics Council of Canada	6 years
Knowledge Council: SSHRC	6 years
South Australia	4 years
NASA	5 years
NRC-CISTI (National Research Council)	5 years
PEI Department of Education	5 years
Queen's University Library	4 years
7 Island College	4 years
Public Library Quebec	5 years
NOAA National Weather Service	5 years
Canada Council	5 years

Once the plan has been approved, "budget submissions and future policy proposals should indicate a correlation with and reflect strategic priorities" (Smith-James, 2005). The "structures to support systematic data gathering and analysis, operational planning, performance reporting and an enhanced management accountability framework should be reviewed, adjusted or built where required" (Smith-James, 2005).

8. Benefits Realised

While "strategic management approaches are shaped by the organisation's specific context" (Proeller, 2007), "strategic planning can improve the performance of government agencies" (Moskow, 1978). Public institutions that have initiated a formal strategic planning process are reaping several benefits, sometimes unexpected. For example, strategic planning processes in public institutions require the contribution of various departments and agencies. CARICAD witnessed "improved communication between departments and an increase in the level of understanding of individual roles and interdependence" (Smith-James, 2005) through the dialogue and communication channels enabled by strategic planning. This resulted in "the strengthening of inter-departmental linkages and achieved a high level of consensus on ministerial priorities and goals" (Smith-James, 2005). "Cooperation between Ministries also increased as key institutional supports, often housed within other Ministries, were identified and recognised as essential for the success of their individual strategies" (Smith-James, 2005).

Direct benefits were noted regarding accountability where "plans helped to translate promises into action and afforded a wide range of stakeholders the opportunity to become better educated about public services and to participate in policy and programme formulation and evaluation" (Smith-James, 2005). The publication of strategic plans and annual performance reports provides transparency of government's operations to the public and to the organisation's stakeholders. The transparency led to increased quality of decisions and promoted the leadership capacities of institution management. The added clarity provided "an objective basis upon which to assess organisational performance and allocate resources" (Smith-James, 2005) that not only permitted external evaluation of performance but also cascaded to all levels of the organisation, orienting performance metrics and individual goals.

The strategic planning process also increased the alignment between the core strategy, the external environment and the internal organisational design creating more coherent objectives and operational plans which reinforced adherence by the institution's management and employees. Extensive interviews with key stakeholders and stakeholder assessments allowed the "development and communication of goals, objectives and prioritised strategic initiatives" (Smith-James, 2005) ensuring that the needs of principal stakeholders were met. The exercise of strategic planning provided significant organisational learning experience and initiated peer support, which promotes sustainability of the process and of the institution while providing new competencies for departments and chief executives whose strategic abilities (development of strategies and coordinating their implementation) improved. Senior managers also saw their role become more important as politicians distanced themselves from the administration of institutions and programmes. This allowed administrators to "plan for long term development with greater confidence and a greater orientation towards results" (Proeller, 2007).

New Zealand felt the process had clarified the interests of government as owner that reoriented the role of many agencies to ensure alignment with collective interests and government's overall strategy. This led to the enhancement of organisational effectiveness and the effectiveness of broader societal systems.

9. Challenges Encountered

The addition of extensive stakeholder assessment and their impact on public institution strategy in the strategic planning process is a first step to integrate the corporate model to public institutions. Characteristics such as bargaining, lack of autonomy of agencies, electoral period focus and no overriding single-purpose goal similar to profits requires additional tools. "The level of implementation and development within individual countries varies considerably" (Proeller, 2007) and additional research and experience are required to bring the process for public institutions to a more mature state.

A major challenge faced when establishing a strategic planning process was the time and cost required to deliver a quality strategic plan. Many European countries took several years to introduce the process and were only in the implementation phase in 2007. CARICAD noted complaints on the time and effort involved with many participants apprehensive and resistant to involving themselves in a process that may not realise its long-term benefits. Girishankar added that cultural characteristics of public institutions such as special and vested interests, informal internal institutions or cross-institutional, and path dependencies of information processing needed to be considered in the process and required more time for plan delivery. The existence of these characteristics, depending on how prevalent, may require a less ambitious initial strategic planning project.

Despite the cost and coordination required of involving several groups and stakeholders, a key concern and success factor was the need to ensure no one was left outside the process. Not only did leaving out a key group have an impact on the project's reputation and credibility, it also had an adverse impact on the quality of the overall strategic plan.

Another challenge involved the "coordination with other management processes, especially the budget process, which was often difficult and inadequately clarified" (Proeller, 2007). This led to several difficulties of determining who is responsible for implementing and pursuing a given strategy, establishing performance measurements, evaluating the outcomes, and accountability for the outcome.

10. Implications

Complexity and change have entered the realm of private, public and non-profit institutions. To sustain themselves and continue to create public value into the future, organisations must develop goals and strategies to meet their mandate. The use of a strategic planning process provides a systematic approach to formulating strategies while allowing the customisation of the process to the organisation's needs. Public institutions are not excluded from strategic planning and face increased pressure for accountability of their mandate to its constituency. With this pressure comes a re-evaluation of government's role and the divide between elected office and institutional management. Such an environment has prompted the implementation of strategic planning processes worldwide.

Public institutions' use of strategic planning processes requires the integration of their unique characteristics. Traits such as bargaining, separation of powers, lack of autonomy, and lack of an overriding goal necessitate the participation of all stakeholders, which can significantly impact the time required and cost associated with planning. The size of public institutions can further complicate the initiation of a planning project. Despite the setbacks encountered, participants in strategic planning report positive results for the institution, its senior management, its stakeholders and its employees. Participants developed strategy abilities and improved their decision making abilities while organisations improved their learning abilities, saw the realisation of their goals and obtained greater alignment between strategy and operation.

As strategic planning processes are adaptive to their institution, the various processes presented–whether for corporations or for public institutions–tend to be similar. Differences occur at the initial decision to plan (is the organisation ready) and the assessment and prioritisation of stakeholders needs. Public institutions live in a political environment. As "politics is the method we use to find answers to analytically irresolvable questions of what should be for collective purposes, how it should be done, and why it should be done" (Bryson, 2004), the strategic planning process must accommodate and deal with the conflicts and contradicts that arise from trying to resolve irresolvable questions. Overall, strategic planning in public institutions is in its infancy. It will take more time and experience with strategic planning processes and models across countries, ministries and institutions in order to refine the models and optimise its use for public institutions.

Government and public institutions serve the purpose of improving the lives of its citizens and arise to help organise the community. To perform these tasks, public institutions must define the goals they seek to accomplish, allocate its resources accordingly and create a roadmap to achieving the goals set. To accomplish its mission, public institutions must use a structured approach and the use of a strategic planning process in public institutions is logical when we think of the goals it must achieve.

Much of the literature and research on strategic management and planning is addressed to corporations. This creates two roadblocks for government and its institutions. The first relates to the interpretation and translation of frameworks and models used in a profit-oriented manner to a multi-goal mandate. As both worlds are viewed as culturally different, there is a bias against using these frameworks. The second roadblock relates to the need of a creative, project sponsor. This roadblock emanates from the fact that any corporate model must be creatively adjusted to the institution and the public sector element, which necessitates leadership and comprises much risk for the sponsor. The project sponsor must be responsible for the planning process that is difficult and scary in a culture where responsibility and accountability lines are blurred. Public institutions are now willing to go beyond these roadblocks and adapt corporate models. What has changed in the last decade? The corporate and public scandals of abuse that have cost citizens millions of dollars and had a worldwide impact have brought public accountability to the forefront. Citizens want value for their money and are seeking clear accountability of government and its institutions' decisions.

Accountability being demanded at every level, a public institution must question how will it realise its mandate and ensure that the results are transparent to the public. It must also question whether the culture of its organisation is ready and competent enough to lead implementation of quality plans to the successful realisation of its goals. The strategic planning process enables the institutions to contemplate the future and how to get there. The public must be accountable to understand the government process and what goals should be prioritise. The section on the public institution strategic planning environment illustrates the constraints under which government institutions operate and these characteristics reflect how as a society we must make choices. The public must also realise that the accomplishment of goals may only be resolved incrementally or partially at best.

The internal decisions, although reflective of private asset managers, weigh the impact on public image, ensuring value for money and contributing to Quebec's economy. Considerable time and effort are spent analysing how returns to depositors can be maximised while contributing to Quebec's economy. As the enabling law was reformed by parties external to the institution, special teams were set up to analyse, interpret and act on the new articles. Further, the division of asset manager and actuarial liability management seemed nonsensical. Fundamentally, public institutions operate in the public eye and must always be answerable to someone. The problem is that the "someone" is several people whose needs widely differ. The public eye also does not allow management any room for error. A negative sway in public opinion and the entire institution may not recover. Coming from a corporate world, these realisations about public institutions make it easier to understand its challenges and the time needed to act.

Understanding the characteristics of public institutions is the first step; the second is adapting the strategic planning process overcome barriers and use the characteristics to benefit. For example, stakeholders participated in setting up the institutions' mandate. Their involvement in strategic planning not only ensures that their vision is well interpreted; it enables stakeholders to view the challenges of meeting those goals and allows for creatively flow by sharing the ideas of persons vested in goal accomplishment. The strategic planning process also enables the alignment of institutional goals with their external environment, whose lives they seek to improve, while allocating resources and an internal structure that can deliver the goals. The process' transparency allows institutional members the autonomy and assurance that they are acting in the right manner.

11. Conclusion

Government and public institutions are usually very large, composed of thousands of employees. Such structures are difficult to manage without some directives and autonomy at each level. Missions, visions and values are ideas that create an image of where the entity wants to go. The strategic planning process and plan provide the path on how to get that image. Agreeing that the complexity and size of public institutions require a structure on which to deliver goals may not be as easy to implement successfully primarily because of the size. Although many governments have initiated projects government-wide, this may complicate the implementation and de-motivate future strategic planning usage. As the theory and experience regarding strategic planning for public institutions is still evolving, starting at a manageable unit size is crucial to develop the expertise but also ensure concrete results are realised. As noted in several jurisdictions in Europe, several years have been spent setting up planning initiatives and many are only at the plan implementation phase. It is difficult to ensure momentum consistency if it takes 10 years to complete a cycle.

Despite short term political cycles and increased rotation at senior government, public institutions must strive to extricate the benefits of these cycles by matching their planning process to the political term yet distance themselves sufficiently to make long term plans. The models and frameworks of corporations represent the majority of research and experience in strategic planning but can be moulded to meet the needs and cultures of public institutions. It is unfortunate that insufficient funding and research are available to follow the implementation of various initiatives worldwide so that lessons learned could be shared and costly mistakes avoided.

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