

# The Future of Strategizing by Public and Nonprofit Organizations

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### INTRODUCTION

It is a great honor to receive the 2020 John Gaus Award and to give this lecture. I first encountered the work of John Gaus and his understanding of “the ecology of government” as a beginning graduate student in the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1971. Professor Gaus had been a member of the department before he moved to Harvard well before I arrived. Gaus’s expansive view of government as a multi-party and multi-layered system embedded in larger systems of complementary and competing interests has since colored much of my research, teaching, and service.

I wish to acknowledge several people and institutions for their role in my receiving this award. Thanks to the award committee for choosing me. Fred Fisher, Jerry Kaufman, Andre Delbecq, and Bob Einsweiler were wonderful mentors. Among my many co-authors, I wish to mention especially Fran Ackermann, Colin Eden, and, naturally, Barbara Crosby. I want to thank three great universities: Cornell, where I was an undergraduate; UW-Madison, where I did my graduate work; and the University of Minnesota, where I have been for the last 43 years. I thank the Humphrey School and its deans and faculty for providing such a supportive home; I’d especially like to recognize Dean Laura Bloomberg of the Humphrey School and my leadership and management colleagues there.

As many of you know, I have written about leadership; strategic management; collaboration; organizational, policy, and community change processes; and public value. A clear thread running through that wide-ranging work is the idea that effective strategizing is a necessity for things to get better—and not to get worse. This talk will cover four things: the first is the back story about how I came to focus on strategizing; the second is the idea of strategizing, at once a timeless and continually evolving idea; third, I want to talk about its applications to different levels of analysis; finally, I will share my views about how efforts to understand strategizing—in the academy and elsewhere—can bear more fruit, so that more things will get better and fewer things will get worse.

### THE BACK STORY

Several colleagues have encouraged me to share how I came to be so interested in strategizing as a major theme uniting my work on topics that are typically treated quite separately in the academy, its disciplines, conferences, journals, and professional associations. The back story is actually quite a long one—not surprisingly, given my age. I will mention three particularly formative experiences.

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First, I grew up in a very challenging family, one that I sometimes refer to as the most difficult audience I ever had to deal with. I figured out I really needed a strategy and the will to find a better life. Second, I came of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the Civil Rights movement, anti-war movement, and student activism were strong and strategizing was an elemental feature of those efforts. Spending two years as a Vista Volunteer and community organizer in Augusta, GA, after graduating from college was a truly formative experience. As a 21-year-old I learned first-hand—and in the most dramatic way—about the importance of leadership, organization, management, strategy, implementation, power, and politics.

Third, I became really good at whitewater canoe and kayak racing—to the point that my partner and I were 1968 national champions in our canoe class and, right after graduating from college, were members of the 1969 US National Whitewater Canoe and Kayak Team. We raced in the 1969 World Championships in the French Alps. What is the connection? Whitewater racing taught a great deal about the interactions of structure (riverbeds, boulders), process (water flows, hydraulics, dynamics), agency (the paddlers), tools and techniques (paddles, strokes, timing), teamwork, coaching, and the interplay of theory and practice. I’ve paid attention to all of these subjects in my subsequent research.

Then came the challenge of finding an academic home. My studies and experience involved multiple intellectual threads. I studied economics, sociology, government, and creative writing at Cornell; community planning and organizing as a Vista Volunteer; and political science, public administration, public policy, urban and regional planning, geography, more economics, and management at the University of Wisconsin. Then I landed at the Humphrey School, where public administration, planning, and management were all marginal at the time.

Fortunately, I found colleagues and coauthors at Minnesota and elsewhere and enough sympathetic editors and reviewers to get my particular brand of interdisciplinary work published in top-line journals. Then, fortuitously, I was encouraged in 1984 by Bernard Taylor, a British business management professor and the editor of *Long Range Planning*, to write the book that became *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, now in its fifth edition. Also in the mid-1980s, renowned management scholar Karl Weick strongly encouraged me to write the book that became *Leadership for the Common Good*, coauthored with Barbara Crosby. The two oft-cited books won four best book awards.

Basically, I created my own interdisciplinary academic home. My work weaves together the various intellectual threads mentioned above around decision-making, in the tradition of Chester Barnard, Harold Lasswell, Herbert Simon, and others; and power, relationships, and process in the tradition of Mary Parker Follett, Hannah

Arendt, Karl Weick, Anthony Giddens, James McGregor Burns, John Forester, Martha Feldman, Judy Innes, and others. Strategizing embraces decision-making, power, relationships, and process. Fortunately, and in part with my help, the world also moved in my direction. Leadership, management, collaboration, and change processes are now mainstream academic topics in the literature and central to the curricula of places like the Humphrey School.

### WHAT STRATEGIZING IS AND WHY IT MATTERS

Strategizing links aspirations and capabilities, issues and answers, problems and solutions (Ackermann and Eden 2011; Gaddis 2018). This includes forming, deciding on, or changing aspirations and strategies. It also includes developing or acquiring capabilities, and it includes learning-by-doing and changing your mind (Ansell 2011).

Strategizing is a response to challenges and opportunities. If one is to address the challenges effectively and take advantage of opportunities, strategizing is certainly necessary, since there are undoubtedly more ways to fail than to succeed. Even though strategizing can never guarantee success, at least it may reduce the risk of failure, or if failure does occur, it can help increase the likelihood of drawing the right lessons from failure, so that success is more likely in the future.

In recent years strategizing as a practice or set of practices has

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received increased attention and I will claim some credit for this happening. Three developments in the conduct of the social science enterprise have been particularly helpful in this regard. First, the “practice turn” has drawn more attention to what actors actually do (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and von Savigny 2001; Latour 2005). Second, the strategy-as-practice turn in strategy research has focused on people, practices, and praxis (Whittington 1996; Golsorkhi et al. 2015). Third, the embrace of design thinking has been useful (e.g., Simon 1996; Barzelay 2019; van Buuren, Lewis, and Peters 2020). Design thinking is a kind of strategizing that looks to the past and future in order to do something in the present that can best fulfill aspirations. My own research agenda and approaches have been deeply influenced by these turns at the same time that I have contributed to them.

### What is Strategizing in More Detail?

As noted, strategy links aspirations and capabilities. Strategizing in practice necessarily involves thinking, acting, and learning (Ferlie and Ongaro 2015) in a politically astute way (Hartley et al. 2015), and is, for those reasons, a vital source of the effectiveness of public and nonprofit organizations. My colleague Bert George and I define strategizing as “consisting of the activities undertaken by public organizations or other entities to deliberately and emergently (re)align their aspirations and capabilities, thus exploring how aspirations can actually be achieved within a given context—or else need to be changed—taking into account current capabilities and

the possible need to develop new capabilities or to change the context” (Bryson and George 2020a, 1). Learning, of course, is an integral aspect of effective strategizing and is focused “pragmatically on what works, which likely includes knowing something about what doesn’t; learning of this sort doesn’t have to be by design—much of it will be tacit and epiphenomenal” (Bryson 2018, 14).

Definitions, of course, take us only so far. Over the years, and often with colleagues, I’ve written about how best to characterize effective strategizing, starting with my award-winning dissertation. My most recent—and best—thinking on the subject was reported in Bryson, Crosby, and Seo (2020), and is presented in figure 1. The figure indicates effective strategizing consists of 13 facets or elements and their interconnections.

Figure 1 consists of statements and arrows. Each statement represents an important facet of strategic thinking as a crucial feature of strategizing. The arrows indicate an influence of one thinking focus (at an arrow’s tail) on another (at the arrow’s head). In particular circumstances the arrows might indicate causal relationships; more typically, they indicate lines of argumentation, reasons, or reasonable relationships. This does not mean the relationships generally only go one way—clearly they do not (as indicated by some two-headed arrows)—or that other links are not possible.

The figure demonstrates that strategizing consists of multiple facets and their interrelationships as part of people’s thinking in

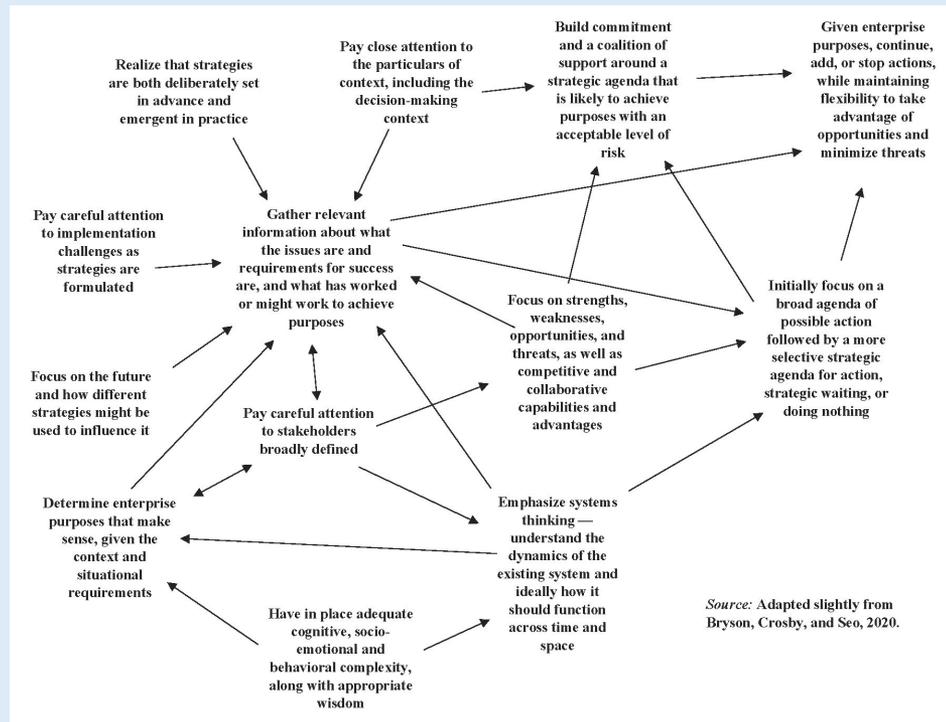
response to a moving scene. These facets jointly help the thinkers understand more clearly what, why, how, where, when, and by whom or what something might or should be done (or not done) to achieve purposes within a given context.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, strategic thinking is typically an ongoing, fluid, and often fairly intuitive process since situations, workable strategies, and purposes may, and often do, change (Kahneman 2011; Freedman 2013).

The starting point in figure 1 is the need to “have in place adequate cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral complexity; as well as appropriate wisdom.” In other words, strategists need to have adequate capacity and wisdom for thinking (Maccoby 2015). (An even earlier starting point might have been strategists’ need for self-efficacy and suitable motivations, experiences, and contacts; see Mauer 2015, 126).

Cognitively complex individuals “are able to see the world through a rich array of dimensions or lenses and identify commonalities or relationships across dimensions” (Crosby 2017, 139; Hooijberg, Hunt, and Dodge 1997). They gather evidence from diverse sources, question the status quo (especially existing power relations), attend to historical influences as well as contemporary trends, and employ systems thinking and a variety of analytical tools. Socio-emotional complexity refers to the ability to understand the emotional responses of oneself and others and to regulate one’s own reactions, as well as attending to social context, especially culture and status hierarchies. Behavioral complexity is the practical ability to act appropriately in a specific situation by drawing on both cognitive and socio-emotional

Figure 1

## Elements of Strategizing and Their Interconnections



skills. Metaphorically, cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral complexity can be described as thinking with head, heart, and hands (Crosby 2017). Of course, we humans think in relation to and with other humans (Sapiksky 2017; Storberg-Walker and Haber-Curran 2017); thus, it is possible to speak about group cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral complexity.

Strategic thinking and strategies may achieve desired ends, but the ends and means may not be wise ones, which is why both ancient Greek and Chinese writers on strategy emphasized the importance of prudence (Jullien 2004). In a complementary way, Holt (2018) in his recent review of classical and contemporary sources of strategy insight emphasizes *phronesis*, or practical wisdom.

Next in figure 1 is “emphasize systems thinking—understand the dynamics of the existing system and ideally how it should function across time and space,” and “determine enterprise purposes and goals that make sense, given the context and situational requirements.” “Pay careful attention to stakeholders broadly defined” is also important for determining purposes and systems thinking. These four facets are, or should be, intimately intertwined (Senge, Hamilton, and Kania 2015; Scharmer 2018).

On both ethical and practical grounds, Bryson (2018) and Ackermann and Eden (2011) advise starting with a very inclusive list of possible stakeholders to be analyzed. Starting this way avoids leaving out important stakeholders, a basic source of unwise and needlessly harmful decisions (Nutt 2002). Paying careful attention to stakeholders, in turn, helps with two additional facets: “focus on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as well as competitive and collaborative capabilities and advantages” and (along with determining enterprise purposes) “gather relevant information about what the issues and requirements for success are, and what has worked or might work to achieve purposes within the context.”

“Use systems thinking,” “determine social enterprise purposes,” “pay careful attention to stakeholders,” and “focus on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats” are all helpful for the facet, “gather relevant information about what the issues and requirements for success are, and what has worked or might work to achieve purposes within the context.” Gathering relevant information also includes: “focus on the future and how different strategies might be used to influence it,” “pay careful attention to implementation challenges,” “realize that strategies are both deliberately set in advance and emergent in practice,” and “pay close attention to the particulars of context, including the decision-making context.” Understanding the issues and requirements (e.g., mandates, needed capabilities or resources, authorizations, etc.) and what has been done, or might be done, to achieve purposes is hardly just a technical task (Maccoby 2015). Instead, truly successful strategies probably should be technically, administratively, politically, legally, ethically, and morally defensible (Bryson 2018).

“Gather relevant information” along with “focus on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as well as competitive and collaborative capabilities and advantages” and “systems thinking” are important for pursuing the facet, “initially consider a broad agenda, followed by a later move to a more selective strategic agenda for action, strategic waiting, or doing nothing.” The social psychology and strategy literatures are clear that ill-considered action is rarely successful, though the writers recognize that chance, emotions, and heroic action can change probabilities dramatically (e.g., Janis 1989; Light 2016). When action is called for, the choice can be between pursuing “small wins” (which are less risky, can generate energy and other resources, and can add up to a big win), or “big wins,” which are riskier, but are sometimes the right way to go (Bryson 2018, 258–259). At other times, “strategic waiting” is called for (Nutt and

Hogan 2008). The wait can include time for gathering support, the weakening of the opposition, or the opening of a window of opportunity (Kingdon 2010).

At still other times, the best choice is to do nothing and let naturally occurring processes result in desirable consequences, or else eventually reveal the need to do something. As Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel (2009) note, good strategies can be both deliberate, meaning designed in advance and then imposed or partially imposed; or emergent, meaning unfolding more or less of their own accord. In short, sometimes the best thing to do is simply acknowledge what has happened, not do anything to undermine it, or better yet find ways to support it through “nudges” (Thaler and Sunstein 2008).

The move to a “more selective agenda,” along with “focus on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and competitive and collaborative capabilities and advantages” and “pay close attention to the decision-making context” are likely needed for “build commitments and coalitions of support around an agenda likely to achieve purposes with an acceptable level of risk” (Mauer 2015; Jenkins-Smith et al. 2017). Both the selective agenda and the coalition will be needed for the final facet: “given the enterprise purposes, continue, add, or stop actions, while maintaining flexibility to manage and take advantage of opportunities and minimize threats.”

In sum, effective strategizing consists of an interconnected set of facets. Note we are not in any way indicating or advocating a prescriptive step-by-step process. Instead, we offer figure 1 as an orienting framework for understanding the phenomenon of strategizing without reducing it to a formula. Further research will be needed to determine the usefulness of the framework and whether specific facets or combinations or configurations of them lead to better results. For example, Bert George at the University of Ghent and I have developed a questionnaire based on the facets. A factor analysis of survey results from a recent survey of over 1,000 Flemish public servants indicates the facets combine into three factors, including attention to a strategy’s purpose and whether it can be implemented and also sustained (Bryson and George 2020b). The face validity of the framework is therefore good and its convergent and discriminant validity are also good.

Beyond that, a recent prize-winning meta-analysis of strategic planning in public, nonprofit, and business organizations indicates that strategic planning has a positive, moderate, and statistically significant effect on organizational performance in public, nonprofit, and business sectors (George, Walker, and Monster 2019). The study suggests that strategic planning should be part of the standard managerial repertoire—in marked contradiction to many of the critiques of strategic planning. Further, and again in contrast to critiques, “the formality of the strategic processes (i.e., the extent to which strategic planning includes internal and external analyses and the formulation of goals, strategies, and plans) is important to enhancing organizational performance.” Finally, strategic planning is “particularly potent in enhancing organizational effectiveness (i.e., whether organizations successfully achieve their goals), but it should not necessarily be undertaken in the hope of achieving efficiency gains” (George, Walker, and Monster 2019, 810).

The study indicates strategic planning helps, but not how it works. I would hypothesize that what matters—the mechanism, if you will—is the panoply of linkages (causal and otherwise) between a strategic planning process, on the one hand, and its constitutive activities of strategic thinking, acting, and learning—strategizing—on the other.

The meta-analysis establishes the causal link between strategic

planning and performance. The next section considers in more detail how strategic planning can be connected with implementation success (performance) through the development and use of strategic management systems by public and nonprofit organizations.

### STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC AND NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS<sup>3</sup>

Strategic management is now a conventional feature of government, nonprofit, business, and social enterprise organizations (Ferlie and Ongaro 2015; Whittington et al. 2019). Strategic management “integrates strategic planning and implementation across an organization (or other entity) in an ongoing way to enhance mission fulfillment, the meeting of mandates, and sustained creation of public value” (Bryson 2018, 24).

Strategic management applied to an organization usually requires construction of a strategic management system. Different kinds of strategic management systems are designed to perform well in different kinds of context (Bryson and George 2020b). The systems vary in: comprehensiveness, loose vs. tight coupling, advance planning, approaches to governance and organizational learning, and so on. Each system represents an organizational strategy for adapting the organization to its context in such a way that the organization’s mission and goals can be achieved or altered appropriately.

Meta-analyses of the effectiveness of strategic management systems in governments, nonprofit organizations, and businesses are in short supply, but evidence indicates that such systems can help, especially when organizations are interested in behaving proactively (e.g., Mintzberg, Lampel, and Ahlstrand 2009; Andrews et al. 2012; Whittington et al. 2019). On the other hand, when these systems—and their leaders—are out of alignment with the organization’s challenges, needed change can be stifled and public value creation reduced.

### LEADERSHIP FOR STRATEGY MANAGEMENT-AT-SCALE<sup>4</sup>

Many challenges go beyond what an organization’s strategic management system can handle by itself, including for example, the global COVID-19 pandemic, and US domestic issues like homelessness; the lack of affordable housing; racial gaps in educational achievement, income, and wealth; and the damage from adverse childhood experiences. Making headway against such challenges requires reasonable collaboration among, or at least alignment of, the efforts of multiple organizations, associations, and groups. This approach involves sharing information and power, pooling authority, and aligning resources and purposes around a shared objective. Multiple strands of reasonably aligned efforts are necessary, often across sectors and levels, for example, global, federal, state, and/or local (Drath et al. 2008). This means strategy management at the scale of the challenge to be addressed, or strategy management-at-scale for short.

Strategy management-at-scale efforts have gone on for decades—for example, efforts resulting in the virtual elimination of smallpox, polio, and other illnesses—and are likely to increase significantly in the future. Unfortunately, the results too often are disappointing, in part because collaboration is not an easy answer to hard problems—in spite of the hype surrounding it—but instead is a hard answer to hard problems. When it comes to collaboration, there are more ways to fail than to succeed (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2015). In this section, we discuss two different, yet complementary, approaches to strategy management-at-scale: collaboration, especially the popular approach called collective impact (CI); and community organizing,

coalition building, and advocacy.

### Collective Impact

Strategy management-at-scale initiatives gained added stimulus with the publication of a practitioner-oriented article by John Kania and Mark Kramer in 2011. The authors asserted that achieving CI “required a disciplined cross-organizational and cross-sector approach on a scale that matches the challenge.” They argued that “five conditions” were necessary to achieve collective impact (Kania and Kramer 2011, 39–40): a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, frequent and structured communications, and a “backbone organization” to provide support.

The CI framework found a ready audience among foundations, government agencies, health systems, and other actors who were looking for a conceptually simple way to talk about and create large-scale change through single- or multi-sector collaboration. The CI approach fit the bill and, from a scholarly standpoint, was in reasonable accord with more sophisticated, nuanced, and research-based frameworks (Ansell and Gash 2008; Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2015; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015). Partly in response to criticisms, CI advocates have modified and elaborated the approach since 2011 (Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer 2012; Kania and Kramer 2013; Kania et al. 2014). The most serious criticisms assert that CI initiatives have great difficulty achieving fundamental system change, equity, and justice (e.g., Christens and Inzeo 2015; Wolff et al. 2016). Nonetheless, a strong community of practice has built up around the approach and we can expect to see many more CI-related initiatives in the future, and ideally much more research on successful and unsuccessful strategizing in collaborations.

### Community Organizing, Coalition Building, and Advocacy

Really addressing issues of equity, social justice, and system change requires community organizing, coalition building, and advocacy (Wolff et al. 2016). A revision of the CI framework called “Collective Impact 3.0” acknowledges this, but doesn’t go far enough (Cabaj and Weaver 2016). As originally formulated, CI is a fairly top-down, “grass tops” approach that does not engage the most affected communities as equal partners, nor does it get at the deep political, economic, and racial causes of serious social problems.

The shift is to create a social movement that alters power relations so that major system changes can happen. The shift also involves: recognizing that powerful opposition is to be expected; a power analysis is necessary; effective engagement, mobilization, and advocacy efforts are required; and entrenched power must often be confronted and neutralized or overcome. The required leadership tasks are similar to those for CI, but with more emphasis on: grass-roots organizing, systems thinking, political astuteness (Hartley et al. 2015), coalition building, and advocacy (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2017), and a willingness to engage in conflict (Christens and Inzeo 2015). Strategy mapping (Bryson, Ackermann, and Eden 2014; Barberg 2017), power mapping (Ackermann and Eden 2011), and system dynamics modeling (Stroh 2015; Richardson 2020) can be particularly helpful.

Community organizing, coalition building, and advocacy also have their limits. The focus on bottom-up organizing and overcoming entrenched power means that—as with CI efforts—there are more ways to fail than to succeed. The focus on “the community” also generally limits the reach of the approach to more local concerns, although grass-roots mobilizing initiatives have also helped change many specific policies at state and federal levels, including smok-

ing limits, gun safety legislation, easing or strengthening abortion rights, changes to suffrage, and civil rights legislation.

Actually, CI initiatives and community organizing, coalition building, and advocacy efforts can be complementary. System changes that require better alignment and inter-organizational service coordination may be achieved relatively quickly using a CI-style approach. On the other hand, when “changes require concessions from entrenched interests, or reorganization and reorientation of existing institutions,” community organizing, coalition building, and advocacy are “likely the more effective approach” (Christens and Inzeo 2015, 431.)

### Strategy Mapping

One specific emerging technology that can make both kinds of efforts more effective is interactive, “zoom-able” strategy mapping. These co-created, software-based maps operate much like Google maps in that it is possible for all collaborators to zoom in and out from high-level strategic objectives down to more detailed strategy and action elements (Ackermann and Eden 2011; Bryson, Ackermann, and Eden 2014; Barberg 2017). The maps help manage the complexity of the changes needed at this scale. They also act help track and monitor progress and can easily be changed as circumstances shift.

Change at this scale is unlikely to be led by a single backbone organization. Instead, the need is for leadership (broadly conceived) and guidance about how all parties can work in a collaborative or co-aligned and committed way toward shared purposes (Drath et al. 2008). Shared strategy maps help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the collaboration or movement by capturing and representing graphically a generally agreed upon, broad strategic framework (common agenda) and, to the extent practical, shared measures, mutually reinforcing activities and continuous communication. The use of strategy maps makes the rest of the conditions of CI or social movements more practical for large scale transformation. I predict that their use will be ubiquitous in five or ten years for single organizations, collaborations, and social movements.

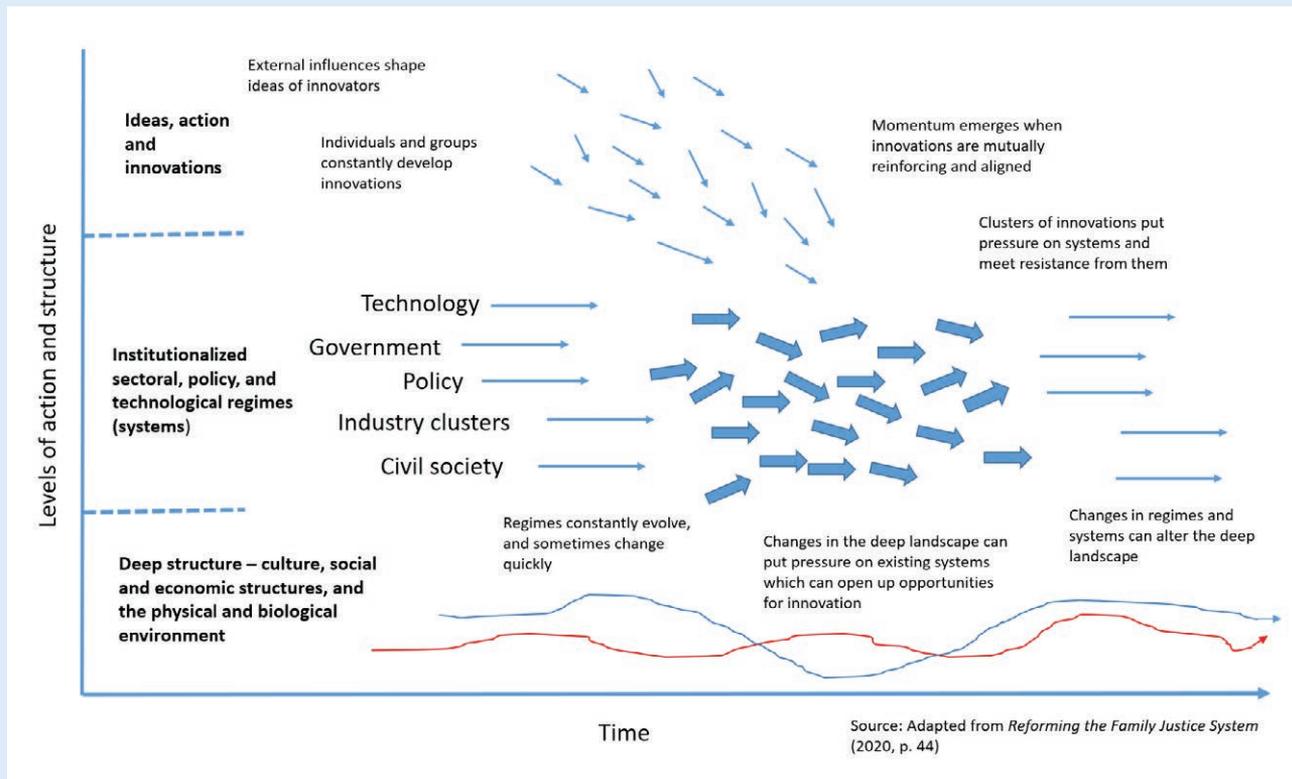
### LEADERSHIP OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Social transformation takes the magnitude of changes imagined by CI and community organizing a dramatic step further—out, down and up. Out means changes well beyond the boundaries of any collaboration; down means deep-seated systemic changes; and up means up to higher more encompassing levels, such as state, national, or global levels. Transformation involves major changes to systems and explicitly addresses power relations. Patton (2020, 157) points to the following transformations as offering lessons for leading and managing change: the end of colonialism, the end of apartheid, the fall of the Berlin Wall and communism, turning back the AIDS epidemic, creation of the Internet, and the rise of social media. None of these transformations occurred due to a centrally conceptualized, controlled, and implemented strategic plan or massive coordinated initiative. They occurred when multiple and diverse initiatives—that typically included various social, political, and technological innovations—intersected and synergized to create momentum, critical mass, and ultimately, tipping points. We can assume that far-reaching social transformations will continue and that savvy strategizing by public and nonprofit organizations will recognize them and, ideally, nudge them in public value-enhancing ways.

Figure 2 illustrates how transformation happens. The x-axis shows

Figure 2

## How Transformations Happen



changes through time. The y-axis shows changes at three levels: (1) the deep level of culture, social and economic structure, and the physical and biological environment—that is, the broad, fairly stable landscape; (2) institutionalized sectoral, policy, and technological regimes (systems); and (3) ideas, action and innovations. Changes in the broad landscape support, but also put pressure on, existing regimes, and open windows of opportunity for system-changing actions and innovations. Subsequent changes in systems can change the landscape. Regimes are generally stable responses to persistent challenges, but regimes can also evolve and can change rapidly (Baumgartner and Jones 2009)—and even collapse (e.g., the Soviet Union)—in response to actions and innovations and pressures from the landscape. Regimes vary greatly in their ability to guide and control their environments, but none is ever in complete control. Ideas, action, and innovations are influenced by the functioning of regimes and the broader landscape. In turn, the actions of individuals and groups can produce innovations that can be tested and, if workable, scaled to address deficiencies or inadequacies of regimes. System change accelerates when innovations are mutually reinforcing and aligned and powerful supportive coalitions emerge. If the system or systems change enough, societal transformation occurs. System change slows in the face of resistance from opposing coalitions and inadequacies of the innovations on technological, social, political, or economic grounds.

Leading social transformation involves thinking differently from strategic management and strategy management-at-scale. The following premises are useful guides (Patton 2020, 154):

- Systems transformation is the focus for both design, action and

evaluation.

- Complexity theory and systems thinking inform and permeate transformation theory.
- Transformation frames the nature, scope, and magnitude of change desired and needed, but values, stakes, and perspectives inform judgments about the desirability of the direction of transformation.
- Systems and transformation transcend project and program-level changes while building on and integrating them for greater momentum and cumulative impact.
- No person, organization, entity, nor network is in charge of, controls, or manages transformation, but synergistic interactions can propel and accelerate transformation.
- Transformational engagement and momentum will generate opposition and resistance from those who benefit from the status quo.

Transformation also involves changing mental models, at least ultimately if not initially, in a deeper way than in strategy management-at-scale initiatives (Senge 2006; Kania, Kramer and Senge 2018; Scharmer 2018). Mental models are typically implicit, because unconsciously held, yet they provide the powerful underpinnings of relationships and power dynamics. In turn, relationships and power dynamics underpin explicit policies, practices, and resource flows. That means that changes to policies, practices, and resources flows are limited by relationships and power dynamics, which in turn are limited by mental models. Fundamental social changes largely begin, perhaps ironically, with micro-level changes in the mental models held by change advocates.

An example of how this happens is provided by the recent unrest

in the US unleashed by a series of brutal murders of African American men and women at the hands of police that catalyzed a growing realization among white people that, indeed, as the movement's slogan says, Black Lives Matter. As those lives must matter—if equality, justice, and freedom from oppression are to mean anything in a country that since its founding has espoused, but not fully realized, those values in practice. In other words, changing mental models for social transformation involves changing or reprioritizing values (Joy 2011). As another example, the adoption of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals emerged from changing mental models about human and economic development in the context of a need for global resilience and stability (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>).

#### KEY FOCI FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

As noted previously, strategizing by public and nonprofit organizations takes place increasingly not just at the organizational level, but also at the strategy-at-scale and social transformation levels. This section highlights several themes that will be part of these efforts and merit significant research attention. These are: approaches to strategizing, leadership, public value, evaluation, and theories of change and transformation.

#### Approaches to Strategizing

My colleagues and I have argued that the elements of effective strategizing are relatively constant. That said, there is great variety in the approaches to how they might be instantiated. Take for example strategic planning, which I define as “a disciplined, deliberative approach to producing fundamental decisions and actions

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that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it” (Bryson 2018, 8). As an approach, its practitioners draw selectively on a set of concepts, practices, procedures, platforms, tools, and techniques to influence change in desirable ways. Any strategizing approach involves its own set of contingent choices (Bryson and George 2020a).

While we know that strategic planning in general has positive benefits, we know less about which specific approaches (including specific practices, procedures, platforms, tools and techniques) work best in which specific circumstances, and why. What is true about strategic planning is also true about other complementary approaches to strategizing, such as the increasingly popular design approaches (Dorst 2015; Bason 2016; Barzelay 2019). Furthermore, strategies can be set deliberately, emerge in practice (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel 2009), or be the result of bricolage (Innes and Booher 1999; MacMaster, Archer, and Hirth, 2015), so fitting these approaches into ongoing streams of events adds further contingencies. One area where I therefore expect to see considerable progress is in matching strategizing approaches to different kinds of issues or problems, for what purposes, in what kinds of contexts (including decision-making contexts), and with what kinds of specific technologies, techniques, and tools. Such knowledge will help practitioners be more strategic about their choices.

#### Leadership

Strategizing is a feature of leadership, but how? Strikingly little attention is paid to the actual strategizing efforts of leaders of various kinds in the public and nonprofit literature; what attention exists is seldom informed by a theoretical understanding of strategy and strategizing. Similarly, the leadership literature itself contains little attention to the content and practice of strategizing, especially when that literature employs quantitative, variance-based approaches to study leadership (Quick 2015; Crosby and Bryson 2018). That said, pockets of literature do attend to strategizing; for example, research on street-level bureaucrats (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003), detailed case histories (e.g., Lewis 1980; Barzelay and Campbell 2003), and of course, the actual case studies many of us use in our teaching. I expect that professional development programs for public and nonprofit leaders, and the core curricula of public affairs, public policy, public administration, and planning schools will increasingly focus on both leadership and strategizing and how best to go about both (t Hart and Tummers 2019).

#### Public Value

I also predict that far great attention will be paid to public values beyond efficiency and effectiveness in the strategizing efforts of public and nonprofit organizations in the future (Bryson, Crosby and Bloomberg 2015). Social justice and equity concerns, for example, have risen to prominence. Beyond that, there is increased recognition in the United States and elsewhere that a broad range of public values are really important and that governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and collaborations, often across

sectors, are crucial to realizing those values in practice (Ferlie and Ongaro 2015; Roberts 2019; Torfing et al. 2020). Given the number and scale of the challenges facing the world, the increased attention to a broad range of public values is most welcome.

#### Evaluation

Strategizing and evaluation are likely to become increasingly intertwined. Like views of strategy and strategizing, views of evaluation have changed over the years. Evaluations, whether formative or summative, originally focused on projects and programs and whether implementation involved fidelity to the designs. Later moves have added evaluands and approaches. Evaluands now include strategies, missions, organizations, collaborations, principles, developments, and indeed the earth as a living system. Approaches have moved beyond questions of fidelity and accountability to usefulness, assistance with learning, and designing interventions in partnership with planners, stakeholders, and decision makers (Patton 2010; 2017; 2020). Especially when it comes to the most complex challenges—in which learning is essential to progress—I see thinking strategically and thinking evaluatively as two sides of the same coin. Adept evaluators should be involved at or near the start of change efforts.

## Logic Models, Theories of Change, and Theories of Transformation

Philanthropic funders now typically require proposals to include a logic model, if a program or project is to be funded, or theory of change if the effort involves multiple organizations or multiple projects (Funnel and Rodgers 2011; Van Tulder and Keen 2018). Another word for a logic model or a theory of change is a strategy. Earlier I highlighted strategy mapping as a valuable way to lay out in a plausible causal sequence how capabilities might be drawn on to achieve aspirations (I am using the word causal loosely). Strategy mapping is the most powerful strategizing tool I know, and is especially helpful when it comes to collaboration and the need to coordinate and align different organizations' efforts (Ackermann and Eden 2011; Bryson, Ackermann, and Eden 2016; Barberg 2017). I predict that strategizers and evaluators will make increasing use of strategy mapping as a way of better articulating theories of change and determining whether hypothesized relationships are realized in practice or whether re-mapping is necessary. In other words, can what starts out as fiction be made non-fiction in practice (Bryson, Ackermann and Eden 2014)?

I also foresee considerable effort put into developing theories of transformation (Patton 2020). These will involve the blending and aligning of multiple theories of change in order ultimately to change systems. The Global Alliance for the Future of Food, an international collaboration of 27 foundations, became one of the first organizations to adopt a theory of transformation (Global Alliance 2020).

### What this Means for Research

I would like to see more research designed to foster the development of public and nonprofit management as what Michael Barzelay calls a design-oriented professional discipline (Barzelay 2019). Among other kinds of knowledge and capabilities, the discipline should provide knowledge about, and the ability to, engage effectively in strategizing. Figure 1 presents a plausible summary in graphic form of what strategizing is for (to determine, given enterprise purposes, what actions to add, continue, or stop, while maintaining flexibility to take advantage of opportunities and minimize threats), what it consists of (the other facets), and how it works (the arrows linking facets). More research obviously is needed to determine if, and to what extent, this is a useful way of thinking about strategizing. Experiments can help (George 2020), as can reverse-engineering of both successful and unsuccessful efforts at strategizing (Barzelay et al. 2020). I particularly would like to see comparative, longitudinal case studies of strategizing in practice. Such studies take a long time and are very hard work, which is why there are so few (Abdallah, Basque, and Rouleau 2018). That said, such case studies can afford the kind of rich depictions of context, strategizing processes, and outcomes—along with relevant comparisons and contrasts—that can really contribute to learning.

### CONCLUSIONS

Let me close with a number of observations. First, if you aspire to make the world or some part of it a better place, then understanding what strategizing is, what it consists of, and how it works becomes important. A next step is gaining clarity about what capabilities are needed to achieve your aspirations and how best to acquire and use them. Also helpful is appreciation that strategizing is a practice that improves with experience—when coupled with a disciplined approach to learning about what works, for what purposes, how,

and why; including learning from the kind of second-hand experience that a design-oriented professional discipline can acquire, curate, and transmit (Barzelay 2019).

A second observation is that effective strategizing is important in order to develop the stable and improvable institutions needed for the world to become a better place. These institutions must themselves be sites or platforms to make continuous improvements that human societies require if they are to thrive; ensure security, liberty, justice, democracy and other important public values; and be sustainable (Ansell and Miura 2019).

Finally, strategizing is a phenomenon that cuts across levels. I've highlighted strategic management, strategy management-at-scale, and social transformation as sites for this cut-across phenomenon. There are obviously many more sites, starting with each of us as a human being. Indeed, the phenomenon is so ubiquitous that, rather ironically, it hasn't received the kind of attention it deserves. Let me conclude with three famous quotes: The late, great baseball player and manager, Yogi Berra, said, "You can observe an awful lot just by watching." African American author and icon James Baldwin, said "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." Finally, award-winning author Wallace Stegner observed, "Science and Reason have always been on the side of Utopia; only the cussedness of the human race has not." The short version of these quotes is: pay attention; clarify your aspirations, strategy, and needed capabilities; and make the best possible use of science and reason to address and overcome the cussedness you are likely to encounter.

Thank you. ■

### NOTES

1. The text in this section is drawn from Bryson, Crosby and Seo, 2020.
2. In the urban and regional planning literature, this probably would be called planning, not strategizing.
3. This section draws heavily on Bryson and George, 2020a.
4. This section and the next draw heavily on Bryson, Barberg, and Patton, 2020.

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