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Strategy as a social practice: How methodologies from different disciplines inform strategic decision-making?

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Abstract

In today's world, there is a wealth of information available through the internet, which brings with it the contemporary problem of discerning which information is reliable, defensible and useful. Added to this complexity is the question of how to make policy decisions that are strategic and informed by evidence. At the Department of Social Services, the Policy Evaluation Section leads evaluative thinking and practice through different types of evaluation including developmental, process, impact and performance monitoring. More recently, the Policy Evaluation Section has moved forwards to the design-end of the policy cycle through the delivery of the Evaluation Readiness Service. Introduced in 2017, this service facilitates the development of theories of change, program logics and performance measure frameworks for new policy programs and tests whether the original program design and purpose are prepared for future evaluation. What we find are policies that emerge from a range of processes and varying levels of strategic intent. While this appears to be a logical and appropriate service, where does strategy come into the policy cycle? What is the strategic intent of a policy? How does the intended plans deliver the policy intent? This presentation will offer participants an opportunity to engage in a simulation where a range of stakeholders will demonstrate one element of a Strategic Environmental Assessment of a social service problem. Each participant is allocated a position to discuss and defend through a stakeholder collaboration activity leading to recommendations to inform a national response. Participants will be able to understand where 'strategy' sits within the policy design cycle and recognise that different stakeholders offer an important difference of perspective that enhances the design of social program solutions.

Objectives/aims

The objectives of this paper are to:

- introduce strategy as a social practice,
- demonstrate how adopting established methodologies from other disciplines can be useful,
- allow participants to engage in a simulation of stakeholder engagement applying Strategic Environmental Assessment as a methodology,
- establish the value that strategy, through informed decision-making, can bring to policy and program design.

Methods

All participants in this session are invited to participate in (or observe) a simulation. They will be allocated roles in the policy cycle including: decision-makers; politicians; designers; evaluators; community stakeholders; clients or observers. Groups of 8-10 participants are invited to participate in a Strategic Environmental Review of a set topic. Each participants is allocated a position to discuss and defend through a stakeholder collaboration activity leading to recommendations to inform a national response.

Main findings

Participants will be able to understand where 'strategy' sits within the policy design cycle and recognise that different stakeholders offer an important difference of perspective that enhances the design of social program solutions.