
The State of Public Strategic Management Research: A Selective Literature Review and Set of Future Directions

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Abstract

Strategic planning and related strategic management elements have become ubiquitous practices at all levels of U.S. government and many nonprofit organizations over the past 25 years. The authors review strategic planning and management research over that time period using the premises of *practice theory* to guide the discussion. The review is organized according to 10 research directions proposed by Bryson, Freeman, and Roering (1986). Important gains have been made in a number of areas, but much more remains to be done. The authors also propose four new research directions, including the need to (1) attend more fully to the nature of strategic management practice, (2) focus on learning and knowledge management generally as part of strategic management, (3) focus specifically on how strategy knowledge develops and is used, and (4) understand how information and communication technologies can be best integrated into strategic management. The fruits of further concentrated research can be improved public strategic management practice, including enhanced organizational capacity for addressing current and future challenges and improvements in long-term performance.

Keywords

strategic planning, strategic management, strategy, budgeting, performance, practice theory, learning, information and communication technology (ICT), case study methodology

Introduction

Strategic management may be defined as “the appropriate and reasonable integration of strategic planning and implementation across an organization (or other entity) in an ongoing way to enhance the fulfillment of its mission, meeting of mandates, continuous learning, and sustained creation

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of public value” (Bryson, forthcoming in 2011). Strategic management has become common practice in the U.S. public sector over the past 25 years. (Note that when we say “public,” we are focused primarily on governments, but to an extent on nonprofit organizations as well as agents of “third party government”; see Salamon, 2002). The publication of two books offer useful markers for the start of this process: Olsen and Eadie’s (1982) *The Game Plan: Governance with Foresight* and Sorkin, Ferris, and Hudak’s (1984) *Strategies for Cities and Counties: A Strategic Planning Guide*. The first major text was Bryson’s (1988) *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (first edition; the book is now in its third edition, and the fourth is scheduled for publication in 2011).

Since the 1980s, public strategic management theory—and to an extent practice—has evolved from a framework that focused largely on strategic planning to a more comprehensive framework in which strategic planning guides, or at least strongly influences, budgeting, performance, and improvement initiatives. Strategic management theory now emphasizes the development and alignment of an organization’s mission, mandates, strategies, and operations, along with major strategic initiatives such as new policies, programs, or projects, while also paying careful attention to stakeholders seen as claimants on the organization’s attention, resources, or outputs, or as affected by that output (Bryson, 2004a; Poister & Streib, 1999). Recently, particular emphasis has been placed on performance measurement and management (de Lancer Julnes, Berry, Aristigueta, & Yang, 2007; Moynihan, 2008; Patton, 2008; Poister, 2003; Radin, 2006); the expanding array of methods and techniques for stakeholder identification, analysis, and involvement (Epstein, Coates, & Wray, 2005; Holman, Devane, & Cady, 2007); and the uses of information and communication technology (ICT) to facilitate the work of communication, stakeholder engagement, and performance management and improvement (Government Accountability Office, 2004a; Yang & Melitski, 2007).

The growth of public strategic management was prompted in part by administrative reforms in the 1990s at all levels of government and contemporaneous international reform movements (Hood, 1991; Light, 1998; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). In the United States, the reforms were strongly influenced by the “reinventing government” movement popularized by Osborne and Gaebler’s (1992 book *Reinventing Government*, which was endorsed on its cover by then-governor Bill Clinton. The 1993 Government Performance and Results Act required strategic planning to be done by all federal agencies and nudged them with mixed success toward more comprehensive strategic management (Government Accountability Office, 2004b; Radin, 2006). Brudney, Hebert, and Wright’s (1999) study of state governments provided evidence that state administrators tended to adopt a “package” or group of reinventing-government reforms. Interestingly, strategic planning was cited as the most widely implemented reform of this group, lending credence to the assertion that strategic planning is both widely used and becoming more integrated into broader management reform efforts. Other widely adopted management reforms included customer service training, quality improvement programs, outcome measurement (including benchmarking and customer satisfaction measures), and decentralized decision making. Berman and West (1997) and Poister and Streib (2005) report roughly analogous findings for municipal governments.

In this article, we do three things: First, because we are particularly interested in public strategic management practice, we discuss what is meant by practice. Second, we present a selective review of the literature on public strategic management from a practice and primarily U.S. perspective. Finally, we close with suggestions for future research.

What Is a Practice?

Practice has become a prominent research focus in the social sciences recently (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & Savigny, 2001), although its intellectual roots are deep (Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007; Latour, 2005; Nicolini, Gherardi, & Yanow, 2003; Sennett, 2008). *Practice*

theory is the term typically used to indicate important commonalities across a range of theoretical approaches to the study of practice. Schatzki (1996) and Reckwitz (2002) are the most frequently cited authors, with the latter identifying Bourdieu, Foucault, Giddens, Butler, Garfinkel, Charles Taylor, and Schatzki himself as significant contributors.

Jointly Schatzki and Reckwitz provide the outlines of a coherent approach to studying practices. As summarized by Shove, Watson, Hand, and Ingram (2007), the premises are as follows: *First*, according to Reckwitz, (2002), a practice may be defined as

a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, “things” and their use, [and] a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. (p. 249)

The definition cautions researchers not to overly reify “things” such as strategic planning or strategic management—that is, not to take strategic planning and management as standardized “things” or “objects” that can simply be adopted—mechanically installed as it were—and then be up and running on their own. Instead, strategic planning or management should be understood as partially routinized strategic thinking, acting, and learning behaviors that involve typically complex assemblies of human and nonhuman actors held together by ordering and sense-making principles that are maintained and changed over time through the way they are performed (Bryson, Crosby, & Bryson, 2009; Giddens, 1984; Latour, 2005). Thus, from a practice standpoint, strategic management is a very complex *process*.

Second, practice should be seen as a fundamental unit of social existence, because both individuality and social order result from practices (Schatzki, 1996). Reckwitz (2002) argues that theories of practice can overcome the individualist and excessively rational limits of classical theories of human action and social order that rely on presumptions of a self-interest-maximizing *homo economicus* or a norm-following *homo sociologicus*. Strategic management as practice involves behaviors and actions that are determined by both individual human agency and structural/institutional forces. Strategic choices are made by individuals and groups who are embedded in social structures that are reproduced and shaped by individual and group actions (Jarzabkowski, 2008). Reckwitz identifies practice theory as a kind of cultural theory in that it “emphasizes tacit and unconscious forms of knowledge and experience through which shared ways of understanding and being in the world are established, through which purposes emerge as desirable, and norms [are seen] as legitimate” (Shove et al., 2007, p. 12). Theories of practice differ from other cultural theories in that they see the “social” as existing in practice and not just in mental qualities, discourses, or reified interactions (as in most social network theory); in other words, the social exists in the complex assemblies of mental qualities, discourses, interactions, and so on, along with the nonhuman objects or things necessary for the practice to be maintained.

Third, it is simplistic to view a practice as just what people do. Schatzki (1996) helps clarify how much more is involved than “just doing” by distinguishing between practice as a coordinated entity and practice as a performance. *Practice as entity* consists of a recurrent “temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings” (p. 89). As an entity, practice has a relatively enduring existence across both actual and potential performances, although its existence depends on its recurrent enactment by practitioners. In contrast, *practice as performance* refers to the active doing through which a “practice as entity” is maintained, reproduced, and possibly changed (Schatzki, 1996). In the management literature, Feldman and Pentland (2008) have developed this idea in relation to a particular kind of practice—routines. They refer to the *ostensive* aspects of a “routine as entity” as the *abstract patterns formed out of many performances*. They refer to the *performative* aspects as *what we observe*: “real actions, by real people, in specific times and places.” Of course,

the ostensive and performative aspects are linked: The ostensive parts “are the embodied understandings of the routine that we act out in specific instances . . . [T]hey guide performances, and are used to account for and refer to performances.” The performative parts “create, maintain, and modify the ostensive aspects of the routine”; in other words, actual performances can change what we think of as the “routine in principle” (Feldman & Pentland, 2008; see also Feldman & Pentland 2003). The distinction leads to the assertion that practices cannot be reduced just to what people do. Instead, as Shove et al. (2007, p. 13) note, “doings are performances, shaped by and constitutive of the complex relations—of materials, knowledges, norms, meanings and so on—which comprise the practice-as-entity.” Strategic management thus should not be viewed simply as a “thing” people do with the help of artifacts (process diagrams, flow charts, strategy maps, plans, forms, etc.) but as a *generative system* that can produce patterns of strategic action based on context-specific, situated, and local judgment and improvisation.

Fourth, practice theory expands the central foci of dominant social theories—on minds, conversations, texts, and/or specific behaviors and interactions—as Reckwitz (2002, p. 259) notes, by “simultaneously [shifting] bodily movements, things, practical knowledge and routine to the center of the vocabulary.” Practice theories thus “contend with and seek to account for the integration and reproduction of the diverse elements of social existence” (Shove et al., 2007, p. 13). From a practice theory perspective, the literature reviewed in the next section is very one sided. Specifically, most of the literature focuses on strategic management—or more specifically, particular parts of strategic management—as *entities* or *artifacts*; the literature focuses less on strategic management as *performances*, and still less on the view of strategic management as a practice having both entity and performance aspects. We assert that an important future direction for research is to focus on public strategic management as a practice or set of interrelated practices.

A *final* point comes from Wenger (1998, pp. 4-9), who emphasizes the importance of “communities of practice.” Practices are sustained or changed in communities (which themselves may be sustained or changed). Thus, collective strategic thinking, acting, and learning occur in communities of practice that vary in permanence. Indeed, temporary cross-boundary communities such as strategic planning coordinating committees, task forces, or teams are often intentionally created to shake up people’s thinking, acting, and learning. The knowledge that is brought to bear or produced (learned) should relate to understanding and/or achieving the purposes of an enterprise or its parts (p. 4). Knowing and learning, however partial, are a matter of actively engaging in the pursuits of such enterprises and working to make the engagement meaningful (p. 4). Learning is thus an ongoing issue of sustaining the interconnected communities of practice that comprise any organization and through which it knows what it knows and thus becomes effective and valuable as an organization (p. 8). Of necessity, because communities are involved, issues of personal and collective identity are salient, which means that changes in practices and organizations also necessarily involve at least marginal changes in personal and collective identity (Fiol, 2001), or organizational culture more broadly (Schein, 2004). From a practice perspective, it is a serious error to view strategic management as any kind of technocratic, mechanistic, strictly linear process. Instead, strategic management, at least at its best, should be viewed as a much richer, fuller bodied, more fully human (physical, social, emotional, even spiritual) endeavor engaged in by communities of practice presumably intent on strategic thinking, acting, learning—and meaning making—on behalf of their enterprises, and their individual and collective identities.

That said, we also note a serious problem with most practice theory-inspired research, which is that while it does attend to processes, the typical findings do not lead easily to design principles or rules (Rommey, 2003) that might be used to guide future action, nor does it attend to the social mechanisms (Mayntz, 2004) that are the likely causal connection between elements of context, a process, and desired outcomes.¹ As a result, the studies produce little vicarious learning helpful for discerning “how outstanding performance characteristics or effects have arisen in undertakings,

Table 1. Ten 1986 Directions for Future Research for Public Sector Strategic Planning and Management, Plus Four New Ones

Research directions from Bryson, Freeman, and Roering (1986, pp. 79-81)

1. Governments need more experience and knowledge of strategic planning.
2. Most models of strategy are noncontingent in that they clearly do not specify the boundary conditions of the model or how each should be applied in specific circumstances.
3. Most process models of strategic planning do not provide much guidance on how to identify strategic issues.
4. Questions remain about how to formulate specific strategies for dealing with strategic issues once they are identified.
5. Most models of strategic planning are not formally or explicitly political, and yet the public sector typically is explicitly and legitimately a political environment.
6. Questions remain on how to deal with the plural, ambiguous, and often conflicting goals and objectives in the public sector. . . . A related question is whether or not mission statements ought to be prepared for public agencies in all cases.
7. Most models of strategic planning are not clear on how to link tools and processes. Many of the tools are actually antithetical to process.
8. The appropriate unit of analysis or application is unclear for many of the models.
9. The literature is not particularly helpful on how to engage in collaborative efforts at strategy formulation among different public organizations.
10. What is the appropriate role for the strategic planner?

Four new research directions

1. Models of public strategic management should attend more fully to the nature of practice.
 2. Increased attention should be focused on the structuring and facilitation of organizational learning and knowledge management as an integral part of strategic management.
 3. Greater attention should be devoted to how strategy knowledge develops and is made use of in practice.
 4. Information and communication technology should be better integrated into government strategies.
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either by design or epiphenomenally” (Barzelay, 2007, p. 525). Because causal mechanisms are not identified, one does not know what actually explains the outcomes of specific practices and therefore does not know what can be generalized to other situations where exact replication is not possible. For practice theory to really help improve strategic management practice, it will need to attend to what Bardach (2004) calls “the extrapolation problem” by using methodologies, such as that proposed by Barzelay (2007) to “learn from second-hand experience,” in order to discern process design and application guidance that can be applied elsewhere to produce desirable effects.

A Selective Review of the Literature

Almost 25 years ago, Bryson, Freeman, and Roering (1986) wrote a book chapter titled “Strategic Planning in the Public Sector: Approaches and Directions.” They concluded the chapter with 10 future directions “for strategic planning research and practice if strategic thinking is to become central in public management” (p. 79). The 10 directions are presented in Table 1. Our review is organized around those 10 directions but is focused more broadly on strategic management. The review focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on the U.S. experience.

First, Bryson et al. (1986) argued that governments needed more experience and knowledge of strategic planning. Clearly, this has happened. For example, Berman and West (1997) found that 52% of U.S. cities of more than 50,000 population had used community-based strategic planning in the past year. A state-level study found some 60% of state agencies had undertaken strategic planning by 1993 and 9% were planning to do so immediately (Berry & Wechsler, 1995). Most studies have presented a fairly optimistic view of strategic planning and its impacts on the agency,

although the measurement of context, content, structure, process, impacts, and outcomes has remained difficult and is typically based on perceptual measures. Several case studies (relying on differing methodologies) of strategic planning as a *performance* of real actors in a real situation show how strategic planning has produced desirable outputs and outcomes, but these studies have a sample bias in favor of successful practice (e.g., Barzelay & Campbell, 2003; Bryson et al., 2009; Hendrick, 2003; Wheeland, 2004).

On the other hand, in one of the very few large-sample quantitative studies done of public agency planning to date, Andrews, Boyne, Law, & Walker (2009a), based on a sample of 47 cases of service departments within Welsh local governments, showed a small, though not statistically significant, impact of “rational planning” (not defined specifically as strategic planning) on performance, while “logical incrementalism” or “no strategy” had significant negative effects on performance. The authors note that just prior to administration of the survey instrument, the apparently deeply unpopular Welsh planning regime moved away from emphasizing the components of rational planning; the effect of the change in context on survey responses is not clear. Nonetheless, this is an important study and an interesting finding, because the definition of rational planning bears a resemblance to strategic planning. Because the planning approaches in the study are viewed from an *entity* perspective,² it is very difficult to make sense of these findings from a performance perspective. We know that governments have adopted various components of strategic planning and management as entities, but the real effects of such entities depends on practitioners’ tacit knowledge about how strategizing should be done and the recurring behaviors that make strategizing a coherent practice. In this sense, governments still need more experience and knowledge—not about the more objective components of strategic planning of the type that can be measured easily by scales but of the more “subjective” and sometimes tacit knowledge about what strategic managers should do under certain circumstances. As Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl (2007) contend, answering the question “what do strategists do?” might require classifying specific practices such as meeting management, analytic tool use, and other management processes, but it goes beyond such classifications to “how they go about that doing, incorporating their situated and person-specific knowledge” (p. 13). The Andrews et al. (2009b) study gives some tantalizing hints about the “doing” and its aggregate effects across a large sample, but just hints.

Second, 25 years ago most models of strategic planning were noncontingent in that they clearly did not specify the boundary conditions of the model or how each should be applied in specific circumstances. Clearly, there is a great deal more work to be done in this area. Widely used models such as Nutt and Backoff (1992), Barry (1997), and Bryson (2004a) are essentially generic approaches that a naive user might assume are applicable to all situations, notwithstanding the authors’ admonitions to tailor any application to the specific situation. Said differently, these models articulate strategic planning and associated implementation activities as an ostensive *entity*. Meanwhile, the same authors and most planning theorists recognize that a contingent approach to planning is necessary; the appropriate way to organize and carry out the planning process—to *perform* it—is dependent on the situation (Forester, 1999; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Johnson et al., 2007). If strategic planning models are to become more useful to public sector organizations, they must be formulated in such a way that key contingencies and appropriate responses are articulated so that they can be applied sensibly in practice.

Third, in 1986 most process models of strategic planning did not provide much guidance on how to identify strategic issues. This was and still is a problem because strategic issues pinpoint where dialogue and discernment are most needed about the organization’s most important challenges (van der Heijden, 2005). The guidance early on was typically limited to the assertion that issues will emerge from stakeholder, SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), gap, scenario, or other analyses (e.g., Bryson, 1988; Bryson & Roering, 1987). In the past 20 years, several scholars and practitioners have developed process models that do help with strategic issue

identification. The best known (but still not widely used) may be Nutt and Backoff's (1992) "tensions approach," Schwartz's (1996, 2004) scenario planning methods, Eden and Ackermann's (1998; Ackermann, Eden, & Brown, 2005) "journey making" approach, and the balanced scorecard (BSC) questions of linkage and alignment (Niven, 2008).

All four approaches have considerable power, but from a research perspective it is not entirely clear when and how best to apply them in practice. Nutt and Backoff assert that potential issues should be tested against the challenges of tradition, innovation, equity, and productivity to gain a fuller understanding of exactly what the issue under consideration is. Schwartz's approach encourages planners to explore how various forces and trends interact and which forces and trends are amenable to organizational influence and which are not. Eden and Ackermann advocate causal mapping to highlight strategic issues defined as bundles of possible actions. A BSC attempts to link stakeholder expectations, financial and other resource measures, business process components, and learning and employee development elements. Strategic issues concern what the particular items ought to be in each major category, what the measures should be, what the causal theory might be that links changes in one measure to changes in another, and how the elements in the whole scorecard should be aligned. (Settled answers to each BSC subissue combine to create the organization's strategy; see below.) Additional process contributions include Friend and Hickling's (2005) "strategic choice" methods, Bryant's (2003) "dilemmas of collaboration" process, and group process approaches to building system dynamics models (Andersen & Richardson, 1997). What still awaits is a meta-framework or contingent framework outlining which approach works best under which circumstances and why, or possibly how to combine different approaches.

Fourth, since 1986 the question of how to formulate specific strategies for dealing with strategic issues once they are identified has been only partially answered. Several public sector strategy typologies have been developed in addition to those available approximately 25 years ago (e.g., Stevens & McGowen, 1983; Wechsler & Backoff, 1987). These newer typologies include those of Nutt and Backoff (1992; Nutt, 2004), Osborne and Plastrik (1997), the balanced scorecard (Niven, 2008), and public sector adaptations of Miles and Snow's (1978, 2003) and Porter's (1985) famous private sector-oriented typologies (Boyne & Walker, 2004). In addition, one might argue that Salamon's (2002) assembly of public sector "tools," or policy instruments, constitutes a typology of strategies. Still each of these typologies is premised on strategy as an entity, not as a practice, and none clearly specifies the social mechanisms that could provide the causal explanations for the effectiveness of different strategies. We describe these typologies briefly below.

Using two dimensions—the capacity for action and the need for responsiveness—Nutt and Backoff (1992; Nutt, 2004) distinguish four types of public organizational environments: placid, clustered placid, disturbed, and turbulent. They develop a typology using eight strategy categories; two are identified for each environment type. Preferred strategies are hypothesized in a provocative way to connect strategies with environments.³

Osborne and Plastrik (1997) posit the "5 Cs," or categories of strategy. The five are: (a) a core strategy concerned with establishing clarity of purpose, role, and direction; (b) the consequences strategy for creating incentives (consequences) for performance; (c) customer strategy focused on making public organizations accountable to their "customers" (seen as a specific category of stakeholder, of which citizens would be another); (d) control strategy involving decentralizing decision making and empowering communities; and (e) culture strategy that requires changing the habitual behaviors, thinking, and attitudes of public employees.

The BSC was originally developed for use in the private sector (Kaplan & Norton, 1996, 2004, 2006) but has been adapted by Niven (2008) for use by public and nonprofit organizations. The BSC approach specifies categories (customer, financial, internal process, and learning and growth; although there is room for adjusting these based on specific circumstances) and focuses users' attention on issues related to each category and on alignment of the way the challenges are addressed

within and across categories. The final results, as embodied in a “strategy map,” represent the organization’s strategies. One difficulty with the BSC approach is that it appears to be more suitable for strategy implementation than for strategy formulation, in part as a consequence of having predefined categories. A process approach such as Eden and Ackermann’s (1998) and Bryson and Finn’s (2004) causal mapping is typically more useful for strategic issue identification followed by strategy formulation for addressing the issues; the BSC approach can then be used to address details of strategy implementation (Bryson, 2004a).

Miles and Snow’s (1978, 2003) and Porter’s (1985) strategy typologies have had a significant effect on private sector-oriented research. Recently, Boyne and Walker (2004) have built on this approach to distinguish two major dimensions of public agency strategy “content”: “strategic stance” and “strategic actions.” Strategic stance refers to the extent to which the agency is proactive or reactive (i.e., prospector, defender, and reactor⁴), whereas strategic actions focus on substantive approaches to markets, services, revenues, external organizational relations, and internal organizational relations. A strategy thus is a combination of both stance and actions. Several subsequent studies have applied the typology with varying results (Andrews, Boyne, Law, & Walker, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). In certain circumstances, it appears that prospecting produces better performance; in other circumstances, defending does. Simply reacting almost always produces poorer performance.

As noted, each of the above typologies assumes strategy is an entity not a practice. On the other hand, Nutt and Backoff (1992), Eden and Ackermann (1998), Barzelay and Campbell (2003), Bryant (2003), Bryson (2004a), and Friend and Hickling (2005) all do emphasize the importance of influencing strategy making as a practice and performance. That is, they view strategy making as a reasonably coherent assembly in which actors, tools, techniques, and various process design features and procedures are incorporated into a process of situated learning and in which strategy is seen as some combination of what is intended, emergent, and ultimately realized (Mintzberg, Alhlstrand, & Lampel, 1998).

Fifth, 25 years ago most models of strategic planning were not formally or explicitly political, and yet the public sector typically is explicitly and legitimately a politicized environment. Beyond recognizing and incorporating formal mandates into the planning process (e.g., Bryson, 2004a), strategic planning researchers have made several advances in this regard. These include, in particular, development of a wide variety of stakeholder analysis methods meant to clarify exactly who the stakeholders are, especially the “key” stakeholders (e.g., Bryson, 2004b; Bryson, Cunningham, & Lokkesmoe, 2002; Eden & Ackermann, 1998; Nutt & Backoff, 1992). Other useful methods include a variety of situational analysis methods (e.g., see Bryson, 2004a; Friend & Hickling, 2005; Nutt & Backoff, 1992) and scenario development methods (e.g., Eden & Ackermann, 1998). Also developed are a wide array of stakeholder engagement methods that clearly recognize the political and politicized nature of much strategic planning (e.g., Bryant, 2003; Holman et al., 2007). The extent to which these analyses and engagement methods are actually used in practice is not clear, nor is the extent to which they are used to address major policy issues in contrast to more narrowly focused issues, such as those related to service delivery. On the other hand, almost all these methods have been developed through deep engagement with practice.

Fully incorporating politics into strategic planning and management is consistent with a practice perspective, because the strategy-as-practice approach emphasizes the contextualization of micro-actions by strategy practitioners (Whittington, 2003). Whereas public administration scholars have long recognized that strategic decision making in government is political, incremental, and sometimes garbage-can like (Cyert & March, 1963; Lindblom, 1959), little systematic knowledge has accumulated about exactly how public managers do or should deal with political pressures in strategic management (Hill & Lynn, 2009, and Moore, 1995, are exceptions). Various and frequently competing expectations, partisan politics, political coalitions, political appointees, term limits, and

so on, all may influence how strategic management is being performed and what strategic management patterns are sustained. Whereas some authors (e.g., Mintzberg, 1994; Radin, 2006) have argued that strategic planning cannot be done well because of politics and the time constraints of government planning (notably single year budgets and short-term horizons of elected officials), studies cited above under the first research direction are at odds with the claim that strategic planning cannot be done well in political environments. On the other hand, few studies have examined systematically the impacts of temporal (including timing) considerations on strategic management practice.

Sixth, Bryson, Freeman, and Roering noted the need for public sector agencies to deal with plural, ambiguous, and often conflicting goals. Although research by Rainey and his colleagues indicates that vague goals are often not characteristic of public agencies (Chun & Rainey, 2005; Rainey, 1983; Rainey, Pandey, & Bozeman, 1995), nonetheless, public agencies often face difficulties in dealing with plural or competing goals (Kettl, 2009; Kettl & Fesler, 2008). Most strategic planning models then as now do not emphasize such situations; instead, they tend to argue for the formulation of clear goals, objectives, and performance indicators. Whether doing so is a good idea in all circumstances remains an important subject for research. For example, we know that in conflict-ridden circumstances planners may be better off starting with clearly understanding stakeholders and their interests before proceeding to goal setting (e.g., Thompson, 2001). The same advice emerges from the literature on consensus building (e.g., Innes, 1996; Susskind, McKearnan, & Thomas-Larmer (1999)), collaboration (e.g., Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Innes & Booher, 2010), and deliberative democracy (e.g., Gastil & Levine, 2005). From the practice perspective, strategies and their implementation, including often implicit strategic goals and objectives, are produced and reproduced through the actions and interactions of the practitioners who do not always have clearly stated goals. So once again, some meta-framework or contingency framework and additional research are needed to know what works best when and why.

A related question was whether or not mission statements ought to be created for agencies in all cases. The question is still quite pertinent. In practice, the answer would often appear to be yes, as having a mission statement is often mandated by higher level governments or required by external funders. In addition, there is some evidence that an actively worded mission that includes measurable goals can be a source of inspiration and guidance to employees that leads to demonstrably better organizational performance (Patton, 2008; Weiss & Poderit, 1999). On the other hand, mission statements, if not incorporated into a coherent practice or set of practices—along with strategic activities, mental activities, tacit knowledge, and emotions—are “things” or “artifacts” that do not necessarily produce positive results. Light (1998, p. 187) points out: “One of the great mysteries of organizational life is how agencies survive year after year without a clue as to their mission.” There is also a question about whether agreement on mission is always possible, especially in highly conflict-ridden situations. The best that might be expected is agreement on the means, or actions, that might be taken by the agency (Cleveland, 2002; Huxham & Vangen, 2005). Alternatively, developing different missions for different stakeholders might be a possibility. Again, understanding exactly when mission statements are useful, under what circumstances, and why is an important subject for future research.

The *seventh* concern raised by Bryson, Freeman, and Roering was that most models of strategic planning did not clearly link tools and processes; and indeed, that many of the tools were actually antithetical to process. Considerable progress has been made since 1986 in this regard. For example, Nutt and Backoff (1992), Eden and Ackermann (1998, 2010), Bryant (2003), and Bryson (2004a) all show how various tools and techniques might be linked to strategic planning and management processes. On the other hand, the extent to which these tools are used in practice is unclear. Beyond that, particular methods, such as portfolio analyses and competitive analyses (Porter, 1985), fit with difficulty into processes in the sense that they typically ignore politics—which can hardly be ignored in practice—which then leads to improper or useless applications of the tool or distortions of its results.

The *eighth* concern was lack of clarity about the appropriate organizational level for using most models of strategic planning. Should the models be applied to units within departments, or agencies within cities or other levels of government, or to an entire level of government, such as a city, county, or state? We know from the way that practice has developed, the first two levels (within units of a department and by departments within a level of government) are probably the most frequent applications, but cities, counties, and states are also known to apply strategic planning and management to the entire government (Berry, 1994; Government Performance Project, 1999; Kissler, Fore, Jacobson, Kittredge, and Stewart, 1998; Poister and Streib, 2005), and indeed the European Commission has made significant use of strategic planning (Barzelay & Jacobsen, 2009). In addition, some award-winning examples of strategic planning and management by cities, such as Charlotte's (North Carolina) and Coral Gables' (Florida), involve applying strategic planning jurisdiction-wide and government-wide, as well as to individual departments (see also Healey, 2003). We are aware of no research that carefully compares the success of undertaking strategic planning at one level versus another, and thus little is available in the literature about the best level for strategic management, or more specifically, how models might need to be adapted at different levels in order to be of most use. Beyond that is the emerging research question of where to focus analyses of strategic planning. In general, practice theory typically asserts the practice itself should be the research focus and not just what any individual does. But one strand of the emerging "practice-based school" of strategic management research argues that the appropriate level of analysis is at the fine-grained, micro-level of what managers actually do on a daily basis (Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003). Alternatively, Jarzabkowski (2005, 2008) believes that analysis should be focused on the practice of "strategizing," which is often or even typically a multi-level phenomenon.

Ninth, in 1986 Bryson, Freeman, and Roering asserted that the literature was not particularly helpful on how to engage in collaborative strategy formulation and implementation among different public organizations. Since then collaboration among government agencies and their public, private, and nonprofit partners has greatly increased, and more programs and services are delivered via either collaborative arrangements or through competitive markets and contracts. Collaborative public management has thus become a major practice and research focus (Bardach, 1998; Bingham & O'Leary, 2008; O'Leary & Bingham, 2009). The resulting literature has paid substantial attention to management generally, but surprisingly little to collaborative strategic management specifically as an integrated approach, with partial exceptions including Huxham and Vangen (2005), Healey (2003), Agranoff (2007), Bryson et al. (2009), and Innes and Booher (2010). Practitioner-oriented guidance on how to engage in collaborative strategic planning and management is also surprisingly thin, with a few significant exceptions (e.g., Straus, 2002; Winer & Ray, 1994).

Finally, Bryson, Freeman, and Roering ask, "What is the appropriate role for the planner in strategic planning?" Should the person be an expert, a technician, a line manager, or what? In a widely cited discussion, Mintzberg (1994) argues that planners need to facilitate the process, conduct useful analyses, and help line managers identify issues, strategies, and decide on the plan's content. He emphasizes that strategic thinking, acting, and learning do not normally emerge from a standard, formalized strategic planning process, and even argues that a rigid strategic plan may hinder strategic thinking and needed changes in strategy and operations. Few studies since then have addressed this topic of the role of planners in public strategic management, although Eden and Ackermann (1998), Bryson (2004a), and Friend and Hickling (2007), among others, note a variety of functions or roles that probably need to be effectively fulfilled if strategic planning and strategic management are to succeed. These include the roles of process sponsors, champions, and facilitators; strategic planning or management coordinating groups; strategic planning teams; line managers; and various consultation groups. A practice perspective also requires consideration of "strategists" far beyond the organizational upper-echelons, so that all actors contributing to the social accomplishment of

strategy are considered, including how their personal identities and experiences and the social dynamics in which they engage shape strategy (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007).

To summarize, considerable progress has been made in pursuing the 10 directions for future research outlined almost 25 years ago. In brief:

- Strategic planning and many elements of a more comprehensive strategic management approach have become fairly ubiquitous in practice, although the actual impacts remain unclear.
- Formal models of strategic planning and management remain generic and noncontingent, but presumably they have been applied contingently in practice, as their academic advocates advise and as is almost certainly necessary (Wenger, 1998).
- Although now many more tools and techniques exist for helping identify strategic issues, knowing exactly how and when each is most beneficial is unclear. Guidance is therefore still needed on how to identify strategic issues in practice.
- Many public sector strategy typologies are available, although tests of the different strategy categories in practice are limited primarily to work inspired by Boyne and Walker (2004). In addition, the typologies view strategy as an entity—as something an organization has—and not as a practice that actors and nonhuman actors perform (Johnson et al., 2007; Latour, 2005); nor do they focus explicitly on social mechanisms as the causal links between strategy and performance. The applicability of the typologies to practice therefore remains unclear.
- There are also now many new tools for understanding and addressing the political aspects of strategic management, including especially the development of stakeholder identification, analysis, and engagement tools and methods, but the extent and effectiveness of these tools in practice remains unclear.
- There is still a need for more clarity about how to deal with the plural, ambiguous, and often conflicting goals and missions that public organizations face.
- Considerable progress has been made in understanding how to integrate strategic planning and management tools with strategic management processes, but the extent and effectiveness of doing so in practice has been little studied.
- Still unclear is what the appropriate organizational level of application and analysis is for strategic planning and management concepts both in terms of practice and research. In other words, little is available in the literature about the best level(s) for applying strategic management models or how models might need to be adapted at different levels in order to be of most use in practice.
- Although a great deal of work has been done in the area of collaborative public management, not much has been done on collaborative public *strategic* management.
- Finally, there are in fact many different roles for people who might be called strategic planners, but a full explication of these roles is still needed, along with research into how best they might be played as an ensemble in practice and taught to others.

In short, although a great deal of progress has been made since Bryson, Freeman, and Roering's 1986 survey, the progress has been far from even. Most of the research appears to have focused on strategic management as an entity, whereas far less has focused on strategic management as a practice. Nonetheless, in the past 25 years public strategic management has evolved in theory, research, and seemingly in practice from a framework that focused largely on strategic planning to a more comprehensive, integrated, and interactive framework in which strategic planning significantly affects, while also being affected by, budgeting and related performance management efforts within a context of institutional, organizational, processual, and stakeholder opportunities and constraints.

In the next section, we turn to four additional future directions for research on strategic management practice. In part, the directions take the above observations further, and in part they tap new developments, such as the recent growth of practice theory, scholarly attention to social mechanisms, and the advent of newer and now widespread information and communication technologies.

Future Directions

In this section, we assert that strategic public management research and practice will advance if the following occurs:

- Models of public strategic management are further developed so that they attend more fully to the nature of practice
- Increased attention is focused on the structuring and facilitation of organizational learning and knowledge management as an integral part of strategic management
- Greater attention is devoted to how strategy knowledge develops and is used in practice
- More attention is focused on integrating information and communication technologies into public strategic management models and practice

Certainly we could add other potential research directions to this list, but will not due to space limitations.

Models of Public Strategic Management Should Attend More Fully to the Nature of Practice

As noted earlier, a rather astonishing array of models of, or approaches to, strategic management, broadly conceived, has emerged in the past 25 years. What is striking about all of them is how seldom they have been subject to careful tests of their applicability and usefulness—or even careful documentation of their use in practice. Most discussions of models include case illustrations of applicability and usefulness, but that is obviously not the same as careful descriptions and tests. Many of the problems that plagued research on strategic planning 25 years ago still exist, including questions of specifying context, level of application and analysis, and so on. Beyond that is also the challenge of understanding clearly what it means to study processes. Recent methodological advances in process research will help (e.g., Latour, 2005; Poole, Van de Ven, & Dooley, 2000; Van de Ven, 2007), as will exemplary studies in which features of context, content, structure, process, and outcomes are carefully delineated, connections noted, and tentative causal inferences drawn (e.g., Barzelay & Campbell, 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Wheeland, 2004), but obviously much more needs to be done. In addition, careful attention should be devoted to the social mechanisms that can account for the causal connections between strategic management elements and outcomes (Barzelay, 2007; Barzelay & Jacobsen, 2009). The role of leadership as well needs to be studied carefully, because the advocates of strategic management and numerous studies point to its importance. Denhardt and Denhardt (2006) argue that leadership is a practice-based art, not a science, and requires knowledge of how to apply the practice in context to be successful. They also underscore important practice elements, such as the role of timing, intuition, and passion, in leading effectively.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges is taking seriously the assertion of most model builders that every model needs to be applied sensitively in practice, which means that there are no pure forms in practice, only hybrids, which in all likelihood circumscribes whatever generalizations might be drawn (Shove et al., 2007; Wenger, 1998). Careful studies explicitly informed by practice theory would thus appear to be particularly needed. As noted earlier, however, for these studies to provide useful lessons applicable in other situations, they must attend carefully to what Bardach

(2004) calls “the extrapolation problem.” In particular, the connections between context, process design features, actions, social mechanisms that are triggered or suppressed, and outcomes must be spelled out, or the studies will do little to improve strategic management practice because causation will not be understood (Barzelay, 2007).

Beyond that, a particular challenge these days is the need to develop models and methods that are inclusive in terms of information and various stakeholders, involve reasonable analysis and synthesis, and are quick. The challenge is that it is fairly easy to get any two of those features (inclusive, and reasonably analytic and synthetic; inclusive and quick; reasonably analytic and synthetic, and quick), but extraordinarily hard to get all three (Eden et al., 2009).

Increased Attention Should Be Focused on the Structuring and Facilitation of Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management as an Integral Part of Strategic Management

We have already noted the general move to a more comprehensive system of strategic management in public organizations that includes strategic planning, budgeting, personnel, and performance measurement and management. An important next phase should include increased attention to strategic planning and management as a way of knowing (e.g., Bryson et al., 2009) and to incorporating into public strategic management ideas and practices for fostering organizational learning and knowledge management (e.g., Moynihan & Landuyp, 2009). This move would take seriously from a research standpoint the assertion by many strategic planning researchers and advocates that a major benefit from strategic planning is the learning and communication that occurs during the planning and implementation process (e.g., Barzelay & Campbell, 2003; Bryson, 2004a). Learning occurs, for example, about the outside environment and concomitant opportunities and threats; the way things are currently done inside the organization and their attendant strengths and weaknesses; the major strategic issues; alternative strategies for program development and service delivery; likely implementation challenges; and quite significantly, the politics surrounding any change effort. Furthermore, this emphasis on learning underscores the importance of who is involved in the planning and implementation process and how the design and evolution of planning and implementation processes can promote iterations of dialogue, deliberation, and change. The emphasis also involves incorporating into strategic management research insights and approaches used for organizational development (e.g., Cummings & Worley, 2008).

In discussing reflective practice, Yanow (2009) notes the importance of understanding not only what managers claim to know but also how they know what they claim to know. This would help scholars better understand the community of practice that contributes to managers’ construction of problems and solutions. Hummel (1990, 1991) makes the point that objective analysis of a problem out-of-context may not meet managers’ needs as much as a common understanding by those “involved in a problem who must be brought along to constitute a solution” (Hummel, 1991, p. 33); thus learning by and among the community of practitioners is key for developing strategies that can be accepted and implemented. Both authors’ work challenges the current performance management movement that emphasizes objective and quantified data, to the exclusion of other ways of knowing and learning. Hummel (1991) argues that storytelling is a primary way that managers reconstruct their experience and learn from other managers about solutions and their workability in the specific context a manager works within, whereas Yanow (1992) notes that metaphor plays a cognitive role in addition to its literary role and thus can influence common understanding and action in organizational settings. Metaphors can also be used to substitute for explicit goals and language about which there may be disagreement or political conflict—what Yanow (1992, p. 103) calls “verboten goals”—because metaphors allow for ambiguous interpretations.

Recent work on some elements of strategic management helps point the way. For example, Moynihan (2008) develops important insights into how performance measurement information is used by organizations to promote learning. He develops what he calls an “interactive dialogue model” to explain how and why organizations use performance information internally and externally. In a complementary vein, Forrester and Adams (1997) argue for more attention to human behavioral dynamics and organizational cultures to assist budget reform integration in organizations.

Another useful contribution is Crossan, Lane, and White’s (1999) model of strategic renewal for the business sector that also has direct applicability to the public sector. Their model builds on Argyris and Schon’s (1996) distinction between single-loop and double-loop (i.e., assumption-accepting vs. assumption-challenging) learning and is multilevel, moving from individual to group to institutional levels and back again. They note the tension in organizational learning between switching from new learning based on feedback that is used to make incremental adjustments to existing strategies, on the one hand, to “feed-forward” thinking that may result in changed theories-in-use, assumptions, values, and strategies, on the other hand. The feed-forward process of interpreting and integrating information requires a shift from individual learning and insight to creating new jointly shared strategies or patterns and then infusing those insights and related changes into the established routines of the organizations. Thus, they argue that the feed-forward and feedback processes likely require different incentives and different types of communication and leadership support. The model clearly challenges researchers to understand the three levels of learning (individual, group, and organizational) better than we currently do.

In a related manner, because strategic management is in large measure about creating and sustaining a mission and goal-related alignment across organizational levels and functions, and between inside and outside, an explicit practice-based research perspective would pay particular attention to the role of bridging activities, roles, processes, and structures. Relevant research includes work on boundary spanning roles and activities (Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004), the creation of boundary experiences and boundary groups and organizations (Feldman, Khademian, Ingram, & Schneider, 2006), boundary object creation and use (e.g., Carlile, 2002, 2004; Kellogg, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2006), and the development of nascent or proto-institutions (Lawrence, Hardy, & Phillips, 2002).

Cross-boundary groups (boundary groups for short) are “collections of actors who are drawn together from different ways of knowing or bases of experience for the purpose of coproducing [cross-] boundary actions” (Feldman et al., 2006, p. 95). Typical examples would include strategic coordinating committees or task forces and strategic planning teams, as well as representative decision-making bodies. As some boundary groups become formalized, structured, and institutionalized, they become cross-boundary organizations or proto-institutions (Lawrence et al., 2002).

Adeptly designed discussion forums (Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Moynihan & Landuyp, 2009) allow boundary groups to have boundary experiences, defined as “shared or joint activities that create a sense of community and an ability to transcend boundaries among participants” (Feldman et al., 2006, p. 94; see also Feldman & Khademian, 2007). Boundary experiences are important for helping participants develop a shared perspective that they then can act on (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995). Many strategic planning activities, such as stakeholder analyses undertaken by a team, or strategy discussions by coordinating committees would be boundary experiences.

Boundary objects are typically important in helping people create shared meaning (Star & Griesemer, 1989). Boundary objects are “physical objects that enable people to understand other perspectives” (Feldman et al., 2006, p. 95). Beyond that, boundary objects can facilitate the transformation of diverse views into shared knowledge and understanding that can affect action (Carlile, 2002, 2004). Of particular importance in strategic planning are discussion documents of various kinds and draft and final strategy maps and strategic plans. A strategy map or strategic plan thus is not a free-standing repository of value by itself, but is instead a nonhuman actor potentially

important for the creation of shared meaning in concert with human actors such that associations and connections of various sorts are altered that lead to better performance (Latour, 2005; Shove et al., 2007). Said differently, from a practice perspective, one would never expect any sort of direct, causal connection between the existence of a strategic plan and performance; practice does not work that way.

Greater Attention Should Be Devoted to How Strategy Knowledge Develops and Is Used in Practice

Definitions of strategy and observations about it in practice help reveal its multidimensional nature. Johanson (2009, p. 873), for example, asserts that “strategy is about purpose, direction and goals.” Meier, O’Toole, Boyne, and Walker (2006) argue,

Strategy content can be defined broadly as the way an organization seeks to align itself with the environment. . . . Strategy can be characterized as senior managers’ response to the constraints and opportunities that they face. The better the fit that an organization achieves with external circumstances, the more likely it is to win financial and political support and thereby improve its performance. (p. 358)

In contrast to the presumed intentionality in the previous two statements, Bryson (2004a), drawing on observations by Mintzberg (1987; Mintzberg et al., 1998), emphasizes that realized strategy is a blend of what was intended with what emerges in practice. Research on public sector strategies should take this multidimensionality into account.

In this regard, Johanson (2009) has developed three modes of strategy formation in public sector agencies—strategic design, internal strategic scanning, and strategic governance. The strategic design mode relies on predetermined strategy and working within an environment that is relatively stable, whereas the internal scanning mode emphasizes a resource-based view of the agency as well as a temporal view of growth and evolution. In the strategic governance mode, strategy helps develop principles for identifying partners and interaction patterns within the environment and allows for radical change when necessary. These models are differentiated by varying emphases on rational planning, how internal capabilities and resources can be deployed, and the formation of external networks. Johanson expects each strategic orientation to have a distinctive approach to the primary role of management, the way professional groups work in organizations, and the role of social capital in agency operations. Although his framework usefully distinguishes between various processes used to formulate strategy, and the process’s interaction with other key organizational features, it has not been tested through either detailed case studies or large-*N* studies to establish its validity.

The O’Toole and Meier (1999) and Andrews et al. (2009b, p. 1) frameworks for studying public management’s impacts on organizational performance assert that “organizations are autoregressive systems.” More research on strategy needs to explicitly develop theories on how outcomes are affected by organizational antecedents, including factors beyond the prior year’s budget. Scholars should consider strategic positioning in the past, the organization’s environment, and other factors that may help predict the likelihood of strategic stability or reorientation. Business studies of firm strategy show that path dependency can affect both the strategic content and the strategic processes used (e.g., Burgelman, 2002). Work on organizational culture and path dependency strongly suggests that organizations develop routines, core technologies, and logics about how to handle their work which will influence the strategies adopted over time. Whereas Zajac and Shortell (1989) argue that organizational-level strategies are long term and not subject to short-term change, little research has considered whether this is true for public organizations, although some studies indicate

that major change is possible (e.g., Barzelay & Campbell, 2003). Analysts have much to learn about the rigidity (or changeability) of organizational strategy and its contents and how strategy thrust and its contents mesh together over time.

Research on strategy in the public sector has thus far been largely limited to one level of analysis. However, public organizations likely formulate strategy at multiple levels and are statutorily obligated to carry out strategy developed by oversight or legislative bodies that control policy and agency budgets. Researchers should develop ways to understand the interaction of different strategies at different levels. Also needed are longitudinal studies that assess the stability and changeability of organizational strategy by program type and environment.

Finally, a number of other topics require research and detailed thinking. First, how much control do managers have over their agency's strategy versus how much of strategy is imposed on the agency? Johanson (2009, p. 876) says that "both ex ante and ex post political control bind public managers. There is little room for strategy formation at the top management level within agencies, the choices being carefully restricted in advance and the outcome scrutinized in detail." Meier et al. (2006) find that school districts embracing a defender strategy (i.e., in this case focusing on meeting prescribed mandates) did better in achieving higher student performance than those using a prospector strategy (i.e., experimenting with entrepreneurial approaches). Andrews et al. (2006) found that English local authorities that pursued a prospector strategy outperformed defenders and reactors. Andrews et al. (2009b) found in a study of Welsh local authorities that centralized decision making worked best when defending, whereas decentralized decision making worked best when prospecting. These studies point to the importance of contingency analysis that takes account of organizational context and multiple indicators of organizational goals.

Finally, we need a broader understanding of the goals for organizational strategy in the public sector. In the private sector, strategy is usually geared toward increasing profit, market share, and growth through competition or alliances. In the public sector, strategy may be geared toward increasing organizational performance, maximizing citizen well-being, ensuring the organization's survival, or other goals that are not yet clearly understood, captured by existing performance measures, or vary widely. Until we know exactly what purposes managers and their masters prioritize for their specific organizations in specific circumstances, we may be inferring strategy based on typologies or indicators that may not fit, or alternatively, we would not know what to make of any misfits.

Information and Communication Technology Should Be Better Integrated Into Government Strategies

Many of the challenges public service faces grow out of globalization and increasingly networked societies and are partly rooted in information and communication technology (ICT) advancement. ICTs, particularly the Internet, are transforming the nature and patterns of public service; therefore, strategic management must reflect this reality, as ICTs will affect strategic management in terms of its focus, content, visioning, and implementation.

First, in terms of strategic focus, ICTs have added electronic government to the purview of government strategy. ICTs may be used to achieve greater government efficiency, better service quality, and more democratic participation. Nearly all state governments and many local governments have formulated e-government strategic plans or included e-government in their information technology strategic plans. However, many of these plans focus on internal efficiency concerns, paying less attention to transparency, citizen participation, and responsiveness (Yang & Melitski, 2007). In addition, it remains debatable whether the Internet will strengthen or hamper democracy (Barber, 2001). Additionally, many e-government projects fail (Sommer, 2002), most of the current local e-government projects are relatively unsophisticated and nontransactional, and few governments report any changes that are attributable to e-government (Coursey & Norris, 2008).

As Gronlund (2002) observes, “strategies are badly needed in order to get some kind of return on the investment” (p. 1), but “the strategic perspective on eGov is still to be researched” (p. 5). What is clear is that effective e-government is facilitated by top management support (Northrop, 2002). In addition, intergovernmental relations and high-level strategic coordination are critical to e-government, given interdepartmental or intergovernmental obstacles to information sharing (Fountain, 2001).

Second, in terms of strategy content, government strategies increasingly include attention to ICTs, but because of a variety of factors—such as politics, term limits, goal ambiguities, interest conflicts, resistance to change, measurement problems, and legal concerns—comprehensive and effective strategic information system planning is rare (Bozeman & Bretschneider, 1986; Bretschneider, 1990). ICT plans in state governments are often operational, not strategic (Holley, Dufner, & Reed, 2004). At the federal level, the Government Accountability Office (2004a, p. 3) observes, “[A]lthough agencies generally have goals associated with IT, these goals are not always linked to specific performance measures . . . many agencies do not monitor actual-versus-expected performance against enterprise-wide IT performance measures in their IRM [information resource management] plans.” Clearly more research is needed to understand how best to incorporate ICTs into strategic management in practice.

In addition, as Yang and Melitski (2007) argue, public managers should recognize that the value of ICTs is not only about efficiency and economy but also about engaging citizens in policy discourse, managing knowledge in public organizations, and integrating organizational cultures. They argue that ICT strategy should be part of overall agency strategy and its contribution to the overall strategic performance should be clarified, measured, and evaluated. Researchers should help create a framework that enables managers to assess how their ICT strategy can match their political environments, organizational contingencies, and agency missions and goals.

Third, as for strategic visioning, new ICT-based tools are emerging to help improve strategic visioning in government, by which we mean the ability to develop visual representations of desired outcomes, alternative strategies, geographic or social impacts, and implementation approaches. For example, geographic information systems are being used with increasing frequency to understand spatial implications of policies and strategies, including as part of real-time decision-making exercises (e.g., Bryson et al., 2009; Behn, 2008). ICT-based tools are also being developed to help public managers develop and use strategy maps (e.g., Bryson et al., 2004; <http://www.banxia.com/dexplore/index.html>), including strategy maps based on the BSC approach (e.g., <http://www.balancedscorecard.org>; <http://www.insightformation.com>). New ICT-based tools are also being developed that can help managers do scenario planning. For example, the Decision Theater at Arizona State University uses an interactive three-dimensional immersive environment built with cutting edge graphics technologies to enable up to 25 decision makers to better “see” and understand the past and present, as well as predict the future of an issue (http://www.decisiontheater.org/page/about_us/facility).

Another powerful simulation modeling technique under development is agent-based modeling, which is increasingly used in demography and social, economic, and environmental sciences (Ball, 2005). Agent-based modeling assumes actors are adaptive rather than fully rational and uses bottom-up microsimulation, in which multiple actors act according to rules, and complex social patterns emerge from the interactions among actors. As a result, agent-based modeling can show how collective emergent phenomena occur because of the interaction of the actors, capturing emergence from the bottom up. The approach is thus useful in studying flows and their management (e.g., evacuation, traffic, and customer flows), organizations (e.g., operational risk and organizational design), and diffusion (e.g., of innovations and adoption dynamics; see Ball, 2005; Bonabear, 2001). Agent-based modeling offers a useful approach to scenario development and situation analysis (Druckenmiller, Acar, & Troutt, 2004). Said differently, each of the uses of ICT mentioned above help provide new kinds of boundary experiences and boundary objects to boundary groups as they seek understanding, shared meaning, and coherent sets of responses to strategic issues within a community of practice.

The fourth challenge involving ICTs and strategic management concerns strategy implementation. New forms of governance structure are emerging because of ICTs. Certainly, ICTs can connect government programs and units more closely than ever before. More important, ICTs have important implications concerning how networks outside the government can and should be run. As government service is increasingly delivered by networks of governments, businesses, and nonprofits, a key strategic question is how to develop and maintain such networks and how to enhance their performance, including via regular or even real-time performance monitoring. The use of ICTs is necessarily part of the answer.

Finally, the four issues raised above should be addressed from the strategy-as-practice perspective (see Button, 1993; DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Orlikowski, 2000; Orr, 1996). ICTs should not be viewed as “things” or “artifacts”; rather, they are part of strategy practice, of strategy as performance. Along with organizational arrangements and practices that support their use, ICTs are changing the fabric of organizations and leading to new organizational forms and functions (Zammuto, Griffith, Majchrzak, Dougherty, & Faraj, 2007). A practice-oriented understanding of the recursive interaction among people, technologies, and social action focuses on “how people, as they interact with a technology in their ongoing practices, enact structures which shape their emergent and situated use of that technology” (Orlikowski, 2000, p. 404). A key theme in this perspective is that technologies are not objective “things” that are simply to be bought or installed but are both a product and a medium of human actions that are enabled and constrained by institutional conditions (Orlikowski, 1992). The “technology-enactment” framework Fountain (2001) used in analyzing the evolution of e-government in U.S. federal government echoes this practice perspective. She points out dominant organizational interests are often reflected in the form and functioning of technologies being used, a process that is also referred to as “inscription” (Latour, 1992). Orlikowski (1992) writes: “human agents build into technology certain interpretive schemes (rules reflecting knowledge of the work being automated), certain facilities (resources to accomplish that work), and certain norms (rules that define the organizationally sanctioned way of executing that work)” (p. 410). In other words, the main question lying ahead is not how technology as an object determines the focus, content, visioning, and implementation of strategic management but how the evolution of technology occurs as part of the change of strategic management as practice.

Conclusions

Strategic planning and related strategic management elements have become ubiquitous practices at all levels of U.S. government and many nonprofit organizations over the past 25 years. Simultaneously, the body of descriptive and theoretical public strategic management literature has grown enormously. This article has summarized key issues and progress made over that time span in knowledge about how public strategic management works. At the same time, there is still a great deal more to be learned, particularly if practice is to be improved and the promise of strategic management realized. That promise includes enhanced organizational capacity for addressing current and future challenges and improvements in long-term performance, adaptability, and resilience. At a time when governments and nonprofits are called on to address major challenges in the face of serious fiscal constraints, enhanced capacity and long-term performance improvements are surely important to the health of the nation.

We have highlighted the importance of adding and emphasizing practice-oriented approaches to public strategic management. This means that public strategic management research should embrace both the *entity* and *performance* aspects of strategic management. We also emphasize that for practice theory approaches to be really useful, they will need to focus on revealing research-based design principles or rules (Rommles, 2003; Simon, 1996) that might be used to guide future action and also must explore the social mechanisms (Mayntz, 2004) that are the likely

causal connection between elements of at least partially designed processes and desired outcomes. This means that more research studies need to focus on producing knowledge that helps us understand “how outstanding performance characteristics or effects have arisen in undertakings, either by design or epiphenomenally” (Barzelay, 2007, p. 525). Doing so will require using methodologies that allows us more effectively to “learn from second-hand experience” (Barzelay, 2007) so that more successful public strategic management processes can be designed and enacted in the future. We also assert that more attention is needed to the four areas highlighted in the last section of this article. If these things happen, we believe everyone may benefit from more effective strategic management of governments and nonprofit organizations.

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Notes

1. Note that “a social mechanism is a fairly general, but only sometimes true, partial theorization of complex temporal phenomena in the social world” (Barzelay, 2007, p. 527). Or in the words of Mayntz (2004), in a widely cited article,

Mechanisms . . . “are” sequences that occur repeatedly in the real world if certain conditions are given . . . Mechanisms state *how*, by what intermediate steps, a certain outcome follows from a set of initial conditions . . . The specification of causal chains is what distinguishes propositions about mechanisms from propositions about correlations. (p. 241)

Processes then may be viewed as “combinations and sequences of mechanisms that produce some specified outcome” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 203). Well-known mechanisms include competition, cooptation, the creation of us-them distinctions, diffusion processes, escalation of commitment, and groupthink. See, for example, Barzelay and Campbell (2003) and Tilly and Tarrow (2007).

2. Rational planning was operationalized as responses to five survey questions related to the existence of a formal procedure, formal analysis, assessment of alternatives, following procedures to achieve targets, and matching targets to citizen needs. Logical incrementalism was operationalized by asking whether strategy is made on an ongoing basis and develops through negotiation with external stakeholders. Note that the way logical incrementalism is operationalized differs from that of the person who coined

- the term, James B. Quinn (1980). He emphasized making use of incrementalism within a clear guiding framework of goals, a point not picked up by the survey questions, but perhaps assumed to be implicit in the planning regime. Responses to all questions were on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Independent variables were aggregate scores from respondents within a given service. Factor analysis confirmed high loadings on one factor for each type of planning. It appears that factor scores were used in the regression analyses.
3. Specifically, the bureaucrat strategy is preferred over the drifter strategy in a placid environment, the accommodator strategy is preferred over the posturer strategy in a clustered placid environment, the director strategy is preferred over the dominator strategy in a disturbed environment, and the mutualist strategy is preferred over the compromiser strategy in a turbulent environment. The mutualist strategy, for example, is the most proactive strategy among the eight: it responds to a diverse and ever-changing set of needs through proactive strategy development and collaboration. The amount of change that is desirable increases as need and responsiveness increase, first calling for bureaucratic, then for compromiser, and finally for mutualist types strategy.
 4. Note that the authors leave out Miles and Snow's category of analyzer, which combines elements of the prospector and defender categories.

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