

ICPS newsletter

Strategic planning improves government effectiveness

Last week, in the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers experts of RAND Corporation John E. Tedstrom and Stephen M. Massey held a seminar "Strategic Planning for Effective Government Operations". The aim of this meeting was to acquaint Ukrainian officials with practices of US government in the area of strategic planning and to discuss this subject. The seminar was organised in the framework of the international project "Policy Management for Positive Change", which designed to assist the improvement of public administration system in Ukraine. The International Centre for Policy Studies is the Ukrainian partner of the project

Every democratic government operates in very competitive environment

Throughout the world, government officials constantly find themselves "fighting fires" as they react to the demands presented by developments at home and abroad. In the democratic society the opposition can benefit from this situation, because in contrast to the government it is not burdened by day-to-day responsibilities and has the luxury of time, which it can use to advance its agenda. The opposition organise information campaigns to expose weak spots and blunders in government activities.

In 1994, when administration of Bill Clinton failed to implement health care reform, and his party lost their majority in the Congress, the US president initiated fundamental changes in the decision-making process. With due regard for constant political competition, highly structured policymaking system was introduced. According to new procedures, every public decision is examined as it were the part of election campaign. Strategic planning and communication strategies became the most effective elements of new policy process.

Benefits of strategic planning

In democratic society, where legitimate opposition exists, public policy is associated with continuous struggle for every public decision. Simply put, strategic planning provides direction for the government and guides the system to follow that direction to achieve strategic national goals. Experience has shown that strategic planning is an effective tool that governments can use to gain control of the policy agenda and political debate, and advance a program designed to realise the national vision articulated by the president.

Strategic planning serves a variety of purposes, including to: (a) defining the vision of the government and establishing realistic goals and objectives consistent with that vision; (b) communicating those goals and objectives directly to bureaucracy and general public; (c) developing a sense of ownership among leadership; (d) ensuring the most effective use of the government's resources by focusing on key objectives and priorities; (e) providing tool for ensuring implementation and measuring success.

Stages of planning process

In the USA, as soon as the president is elected and the government is formed, all ministries develop strategic plans for implementation of the presidential programme where the national vision is articulated. The US budget is a consolidated reflection of the government strategic plan; the budget is developed for one-, two- and four-year periods. Budgeting is the process of strategic plan adjusting. In the US policy process, adjustment is a continuous procedure; it includes the following stages:

1. Vision articulation. Government leaders must have in mind some overall purpose or result that the strategic plan is intended to achieve. Normally, this would be to realise key elements of the national vision articulated by the President.

2. Analysing the policy environment. During strategic planning, leaders must consider the government's strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats faced both inside and outside the government. This analysis must consider various factors that might affect government operations, including economic and political realities, resources, external factors, etc.

3. Identifying strategic goals. Based on

the national vision and mission of the government and against the background of their analysis of the policy environment, senior officials should identify the strategic goals the government should achieve within a certain time period. Goals should be as concrete as possible, measurable, acceptable to those working to implement the goals, realistic, and timely.

4. Establish an action plan to achieve goals. The action plan is a key element of the strategic plan. Action planning carefully lays out how the strategic goals will be accomplished. Action plan should detail: (a) strategic goal to be accomplished; (b) objectives; (c) responsible implementers; and (d) timeline.

5. Write and communicate a plan document. The above information is organised and written in a document, which is distributed among relevant government offices. Once finalized and approved by the Prime Minister and President, the plan should be made available to the public, in order to ensure transparency and to promote accountability of the system.

6. Acknowledge completion and celebrate success. This critical step is often ignored-which can eventually undermine the success of many of your future planning efforts. The purpose of a plan is to address a current problem or pursue a development goal. It seems simplistic to assert that you should acknowledge if the problem was solved or the goal met. However, this step in the planning process is often ignored in lieu of moving on the next problem to solve or goal to pursue. Skipping this step can cultivate apathy and scepticism-even cynicism-within government.

The way of how American scheme could be adopted in Ukraine is presented on next page.

Guidelines for effective planning

A common failure of strategic planning is that good plans are never actually implemented. Instead, all focus is on writing a plan document. Once written, the plan sits collecting dust on a shelf. RAND experts proposed the following guidelines, which could help to ensure that the

planning process is carried out completely and is implemented effectively:

- **Involve the right people in the planning process.** It is critical that all relevant parts of the government take part in the planning process in order to function effectively. When planning, get input from everyone who will be responsible to implement parts of the plan. It is critical to consult with key groups that will be affected by the plan. Use a cross-functional team, including representatives from each of the major Ministries and branches of government to ensure that the plan is realistic and collaborative.

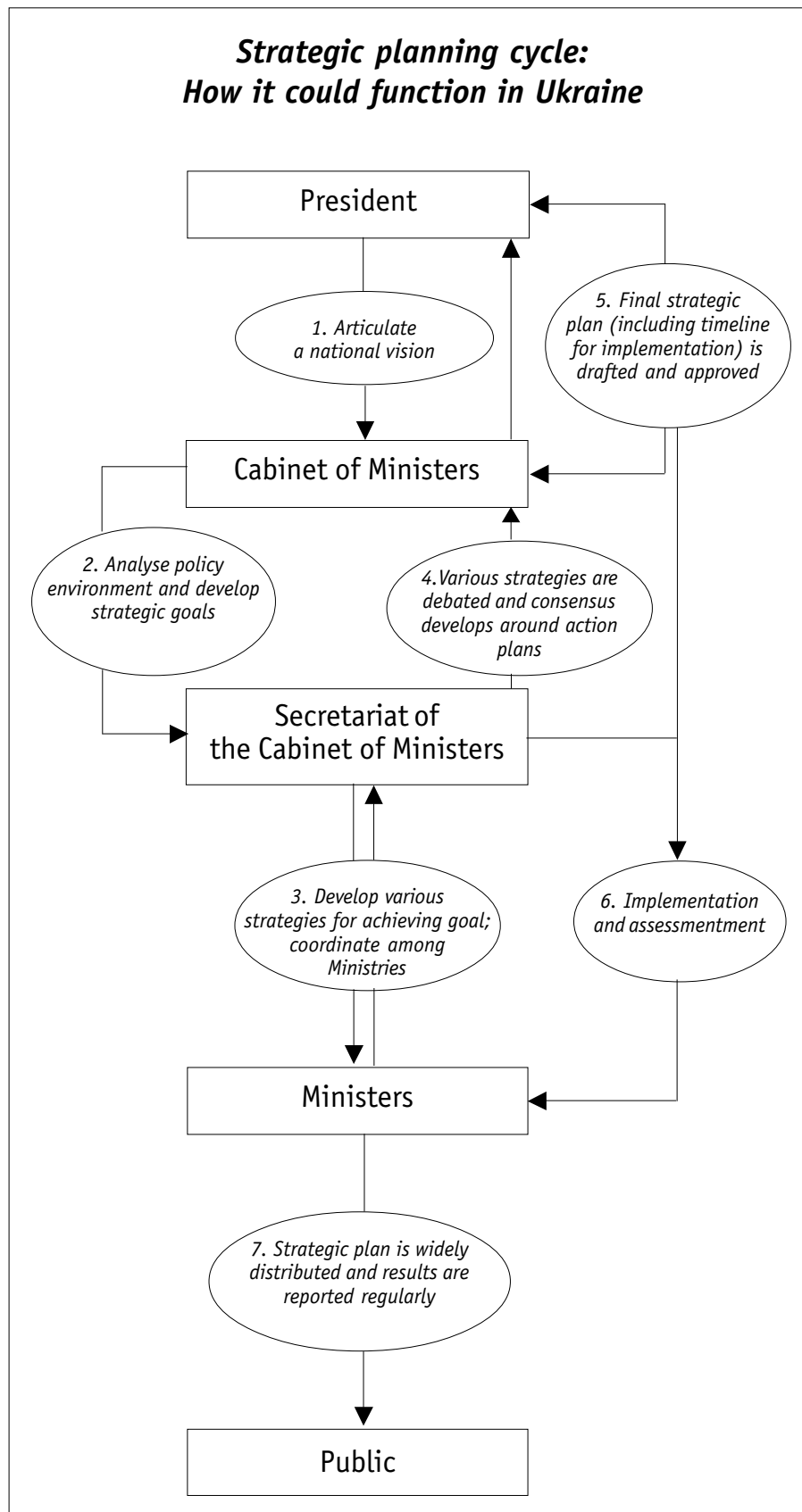
- **Organise the plan effectively.** The strategic plan should be organized into smaller action plans that are developed within the Ministries. In the planning document, make sure to include a timeline for implementation, clearly specifying which individual or Ministry is responsible for performing an action by a certain date. Also, make one person ultimately responsible for ensuring that the plan is actually implemented. Translate the strategic plan's actions into job descriptions and personnel performance reviews. Be sure to detail the first 90 days of the implementation of the plan, and build in regular reviews of the implementation process.

- **Write down the planning information and communicate it widely.** If officials communicate their intentions and plans verbally, chances are great that others won't completely hear or understand what the official wants done. Also, as plans change, it's extremely difficult to remember who is supposed to be doing what and according to which version of the plan. Therefore, it's critical to write plans down and communicate them widely, both within and outside the government.

- **Note deviations from the plan and replan accordingly.** It's acceptable to deviate from the plan. As work toward objectives progresses, new opportunities will arise and new challenges will emerge. The plan is not a set of rules; it is an overall guideline. While following a plan, it is important to notice deviations and adjust the plan accordingly. Also, include the next formal planning cycle in the original plan.

- **Evaluate planning process and the plan.** During the planning process, regularly collect feedback from participants. Do they agree with the planning process? If not, what don't they like and how could it be done better? During regular reviews of implementation of the plan, assess if goals are being achieved or not. If not, were goals realistic? Do responsible parties have the resources necessary to achieve the goals and objectives? Should goals be changed? Should more priority be placed on achieving the goals? What needs to be done?

- **Planning process is more important than the plan document.** Far too often, primary emphasis is placed on the plan document. This is extremely unfortunate because the real value of planning is the planning process itself. During planning, officials learn a great deal from ongoing analysis, reflection, discussion, debates and dialogue around issues and goals in the government. ■



If you wish to receive the workshop notes (Ukrainian or English), please contact Oleksiy Blinov, ICPS marketing office, tel. (380-44) 463-3737, e-mail: marketing@icps.kiev.ua.

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 ICPS Newsletter editor Yevhenia Yehorova (ee@icps.kiev.ua)
 English text editor D. (Ksenia) Ovcharenko.
 Articles may be reprinted with ICPS consent.
 Address: 8/5 Voloska Street, Kyiv 04070, Ukraine
 Phone (380-44) 462-4937/38/58 Fax (380-44) 463-5970
 Web-site: <http://www.icps.kiev.ua>