Scenario Planning in Australian Government

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ABSTRACT

Is scenario planning a process that can be used by agencies of the Australian Public Service to generate and develop information that is relevant to the future, and thereby make possible improved strategic planning? This is the core question of this dissertation. The first part of the thesis is devoted to the case for investigating the benefits of scenario planning. Literature defining and describing the benefits of scenario planning for both private and public sector organisations is examined, and factors that appear to be critical to effective implementation of the process are discussed.

Against this theoretical background the empirical evidence of seven cases of the application of scenario planning in six agencies of the Australian Public Service is considered. Several conclusions are drawn on the basis of the data obtained from the seven cases studied. Scenario planning is more likely to make possible improved strategic planning of public sector agencies such as those that comprise the Australian Public Service (irrespective of their function or size) if it has the active involvement of senior management during the developmental phase of the process, and their ongoing support for any follow-up activity. In addition, a well resourced and in-depth research phase is integral to the success of the process. Even if these elements are not present to a high degree, a well managed scenario planning exercise will improve to some degree the ability of an agency’s senior executive to think more openly and proactively about its future business context. In addition, well resourced and properly supported scenario planning can also help a public sector agency to improve the quality of its information gathering, test the viability of its strategy options and develop appropriate contingency plans.
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