



Association of Accredited Public Policy Advocates to the European Union

Terminology©

Key Word: ISSUES

1. **Issues:** Issues refers to any subject or topic that is being tracked and analyzed. For an issue to earn media coverage, it is usually a public issue, i.e. a problem, opportunity, question or choice faced by or greatly affecting society or some segment of society.
2. **Issues Environment:** Describes the portfolio or set of issues shared across an industry or other groups of organizations that are similar in terms of size, location, government regulations and other factors. Many issues are not organization-specific and demand the attention of multiple organizations together with publics and other stakeholders. Such issues have collective significance and are contested by organizations individually and collectively as an industry or other grouping. For example, major issues for the pharmaceutical industry include access to drugs, drug safety, and drug pricing. These issues concern and affect most pharmaceutical companies simultaneously.
3. **Issues Identification [for Agenda Setting]:** An issue or problem becomes part of the public agenda by being recognized and addressed by a governmental agency.
4. **Issues Identification and Analysis:** Identifying an issue and figuring out if and how much it's likely to matter to an organization now and in the future demands insight that can only emerge from formal and informal research. Steps in issues identification and analysis include scanning and monitoring.
5. **Issues Lifecycle:** Issues are commonly described as having a life cycle comprising five stages- Potential, Emerging, Current, Crisis and Dormant. In simple terms, as the issue moves through the first four stages, it attracts more attention and becomes less manageable from the organization's point of view. In other words, if the organization's issue management process detects an issue in the earliest stage, more response choices such as collaboration with key interest groups- are available to decision-makers. As the issue matures, the number of engaged stakeholders, publics and other influencers expands, positions on the issue become more entrenched and the strategic choices available to the organization shrink.

Stage 1: The Potential Issue: Circumstances differ but perhaps during this stage, isolated events may begin to develop into a pattern and then into a trend. A historical pattern may begin to increase in frequency and magnitude. The general public's attention has not yet been captured, but certain experts or interest groups adopt the problem as a cause.

Stage 2: The Issue is Clearly Emerging: A public crisis of some sort, an attention-getting book, or a court decision, all can be crystallizing agents that begin to generate media attention and

move the issue towards the critical mass for legislative or regulatory action. As the issue develops, the interest group that 'owns' it seeks to broaden its support base. Other groups may begin to take an interest in the issue. It may become the subject of articles, first in specialized or obscure publications, but then, in the general media, electronic as well as print. It becomes possible to begin tracking it to identify its patterns and trends in the development. This is also the strategy in which the institution, industry, or other issue target can take proactive steps to neutralize or co-opt the trend. This may well be the target's last best chance to adopt a voluntary course that preempts government action.

Stage 3: The Issue has become Current: Political figures become aware of it, perhaps because of constituency interest. Friendly interest groups may bring it to the attention of lawmakers or candidates and urge them to become involved. These politicians may see the issue as a cause consistent with their personal beliefs, or as an opportunity to 'ride' it more to more visibility and political influence. Any or all of these can be critical factors in building support for public action, be it legislative, executive or regulatory. The target is now clearly in a defensive posture.

Stage 4: The Issue is at the Crisis Stage: Various policy alternatives compete, and one will survive the process of policy consideration and be enacted or adopted. The target has no option but to comply by altering its behavior.

Stage 5: The Issue is Dormant: Now metamorphosed into law, the issue moves into the hand of the regulators where, as a government mandate or program, it will continue to evolve through regulatory and perhaps judicial case law. What was once an emerging issue is now a public norm, and even if the immediate target proclaims its support for it. Dormancy is not death, however. Action or behavior that violates the new public norm may well resurrect the issue and give rise to even more stringent public policy.

6. **Issues Management:** Issues management is an anticipatory, strategic management process that helps organizations detect and respond appropriately to emerging trends or changes in the social-political environment. These trends or changes may then crystallize into an 'issue', which is a situation that evokes the attention and concern of influential organizations publics and stakeholders. The U.S. Public Affairs Council describes issues management as 'the process of prioritizing and proactively addressing public policy and reputation issues that can affect an organization's success. Organizations engage in issues management if decision-makers are actively looking for, anticipating, and responding to shifting stakeholder expectations and perceptions likely to have important consequences for the organization. Clearly, issues management is a process that demands cross-functional teams and effective collaboration. Issues management is comprised between five and ten steps that include (1) environmental scanning, (2) issue identification, (3) issue impact assessment and prioritization (4) development of objective-driven strategy and action and (5) evaluation. Identifying an issue and figuring out if and how much it's likely to matter to an organization now and in the future demands insight that can only emerge from formal and informal research.
7. **Issues Management Evaluation/Measuring Outcomes:** The steps involved in evaluating the success of issues management initiatives will vary as much as the issues themselves. The first and most crucial step in evaluation is setting clear and measurable objectives. The challenge is to find the tools that best fit the set objectives. For example, measuring the extent and tone

of media coverage is meaningful only if one of the pursued objectives is to secure specific media attention in terms of volume, channels, tone and so on. Other objectives, such as influencing the drafting of legislation, positioning the organization effectively in relation to an industry-wide problem, or correcting allegations about a product or service all require different metrics. While the drafting of legislation can be tracked relatively easily, repositioning or correcting allegations present more complex measurements challenges and require insights into the identity, perceptions and behaviors of target stakeholders before and after the issues strategies are enacted. Tools such as surveys and interviews, as well as behavioral measures, such as purchasing decisions, may all be necessary to evaluate such a layered objective.

8. **Issues Monitoring:** While often paired with scanning and used interchangeably, monitoring is conceptually and practically a step separate from scanning. While scanning systems reveal a situation or problem with the earmarks of an emerging organizational issue, the decision to monitor should be taken. Monitoring should occur only after the issue meets three criteria: 1) The issue is gaining increased legitimacy as signaled by journalists and other opinion leaders; (2) The issue offers a quantifiable threat or opportunity in terms of the organization's markets or operations; (3) The issue is championed by a group or institution with actual or potential influence.
9. **Issues Prioritization:** Determining which issues demand organizational response, and therefore the allocation of resources demands detailed analysis. Although there are many ways to analyze issues using open access and proprietary models, the two most critical dimensions of issues are probability of occurrence and organizational impact. In other words, (1) How likely is the issue to affect the organization? And (2) How much impact will the issue have? No two issues are equal and should not be treated as such. Issues can be moved up on the agenda for action, or back to continued monitoring, depending on prioritization. Managers assigned by organizations to monitor issues should define and prioritize their publics based on the opinions, people hold and their degree of involvement with the issues. Issues that spread rapidly through the internet- issue contagion-present a relatively new and volatile challenge that is particularly important at the prioritization stage. In other words, assessing the likelihood of an issue gaining momentum via the internet must be considered.
10. **Issues Research:** Researching issues involves three basic elements:
 - (1) Formulating the question to get the necessary information;
 - (2) Knowing how and where to get the answers;
 - (3) Analyzing and interpreting the results in light of the organization's needs.

Sample Questions are:

- What is this issue all about? What are the key regulatory proposals? What are their provisions? What is their significance?
- How precisely will it affect us?
- Who are its government sponsors? What interest groups and allies, both actual and potential, are behind this issue?
- What is the rationale underlying the proposal and what are the motivations of the supporters?
- Who are the issue's opponents both real and potential?
- What are the rationales and motivations of opponents?

- Are there relevant government reports, academic studies, and other pertinent documentation on this issue?
- What are the issue's prospects? Is it going anywhere?
- What are the potential implications of this issue? Is it part of some larger effort or movement? Does it relate to the fortunes of important interest groups, political leaders or candidates?
- Is the likely timetable for action immediate, near future, or down the road? What is the issue probable life span if action does not occur in the near term?
- Will hearings be held? When? Who will testify? What are they likely to say?
- As the issue moves along, what is its status at any given time? Are amendments being offered? What is their significance?
- What are the long-term and strategic implications of this issue for our company or organization?
- Are there likely steps that can be taken either to promote or forestall action on this issue?

11. Issues Strategic Decision-Making and Action: At the strategic decision-making stage, an appointed issue Action Team analyzes the issues and priorities in more detail. This team should include people who are closest to the issue and best equipped to direct and implement the organization's response. At this stage, the team allocates resources to an emerging or current issue and initiates the investigation of various strategic options- including issue communication.

12. Issues Understanding: If a group is to influence policy outcomes, then it is extremely important for it to have a solid and clear understanding of the issue of concern. The group should not only be familiar with its own particular interests, but it should also understand and be able to comment on and provide information about alternative or conflicting positions on the issue as well. By providing information to government policy makers to use in formulating policy, groups can gain indirect influence on policy and the policy agenda setting process. A group should strive to develop expertise in the issue areas of concern. The development of the more technical aspects of the issue, will serve to increase credibility and at the same time create a resource that policy makers can easily call upon. Such expertise can then be put to work by offering the policy maker assistance in preparing speeches on the issue or in developing legislation.

Expertise can be developed in-house or obtained on a contract basis. In-house capacity can be developed in several ways: The organization might assess its own members for issue expertise and then encourage the development of that expertise. Groups might be encouraged to develop Issue Specialists that can be called upon when needed. An In-House Policy Unit could be created whose principal tasks is research on issues and the development of alternative positions for the group on key issues. Task Groups might be created charged with the examination of and definition of issues in critical policy areas. Such groups can be temporary ad hoc arrangements or more permanent with the aim of developing a continuing expertise. While it is clearly important that groups providing expertise highlight their own point of view, this should not be at the cost of distorting the information or threatening their credibility.

The group should be open for contracting for expertise when needed and develop outside sources of information, including local and international experts on certain issues, government

officials responsible for policy planning and implementation, and published information on the issues, such as journals, newsletters, or government documents. The group might investigate other low cost sources of information, such as working with universities or coalitions with other groups with relevant expertise. The group might also develop mechanisms to reinforce its experts with stakeholders. This can be done through publication of studies, opinion-editorials, forums, workshops, position papers, issue-analysis reports, political impact reports and the like. The important thing is to make the group's expertise visible.

AALEP:

Website: www.aalep.eu

E-mail: aalep@proximus.be