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TEACHER'S INSTRUCTIONS



School meals for vulnerable children: service provision in times of crisis

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How to quote this case.

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Notes.

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Introduction

Scenario.

Social inclusion and social innovation policies

Mission.

School meals for vulnerable children: service provision in times of crisis

Suggested time.

Students' playing: 20 minutes

Debriefing: 20 minutes

Learning objectives.

This case exemplifies the implementation process of alternative solutions to provide school meals to children from low-income families in the Covid-19 pandemic context that implied school closures. In particular, this case constitutes a good example of a resources manipulation strategy aiming to increase policy entrepreneur's resources and reduce the resources of those who oppose the initiative. The public figure is aiming to pressure the Conservative national government to reverse its decision and to extend free school meals over the school holidays. However, there is a majority of Conservative seats in Parliament that have the capacity to block any legislative initiative from the left-wing opposition. Hence, the public figure needs to mobilise more resources in favour of his initiative beyond the opposition parliamentary groups and, at the same time, break the unity of the national government and the right-wing parliamentary majority. To do so, the football player launches a campaign to collect signatures for a petition to Parliament that is able to garner support from a diverse range of social and political actors (including social rights associations and socially-responsible food firms). This initiative reaches over 1 million individual signatures. In addition, the campaign not only increases the resources of the public figure, but also puts pressure on and weakens his opponents: the tensions between different Ministers of the national government

increase, and the right-wing populist party and the right-wing local councils change their position from an open opposition to the initiative to a more neutral stance.

The game is modelled over the case of the English football player Markus Rashford, who pushed a campaign to demand the provision of meals and activities to low-income families during school holidays. In the debriefing, references to this actual case may help contextualise the debate and provide further elements for discussion. In the references there is more information about Rashford's case.

Common mistakes.

QUESTION: Why does the right-wing media support the campaign to collect signatures for a petition to Parliament?

ANSWER: The right-wing media is, in principle, reluctant to support extending the provision of free meals during school holidays. In fact, right-wing media opposes the initiative when it comes from the left-wing party in the form of a parliamentary motion (Strategy 1). However, the campaign for a petition to Parliament (Strategy 2) is capable of reaching an enormous and cross-cutting support among citizens, beyond the traditional social sectors linked to the left-wing party. This transversal support pushes the right-wing media to adopt more positive stances towards the campaign and petition initiative.

QUESTION: Why do right-wing local councils adopt a neutral position regarding the campaign to collect signatures for a petition to Parliament?

ANSWER: Local councils are funded by a combination of national government grants and local taxes. The food program of schools is channeled through the local councils' Schools Grants, which are financed by the national government. The decision of the Conservative government not to extend the free meal program to the following school holidays puts pressure on most local councils, including those governed by the right-wing party, which have to manage the discontent of core sectors of their electorate. Right-wing local councils, hence, adopt an ambiguous position regarding the campaign promoted by the public figure: although they do not openly support it for reasons of party loyalty, they perceive the initiative as an opportunity for a U-turn in the national government position that does not directly compromise their political sympathies.

Issues for debate

One issue for debate is the analysis of government's response in times of crisis that challenges the implementation of core social policies. In particular, we could examine actors' attitudes and strategies throughout stages of crisis response, namely, critical decision-making, coordinating responses, and management of available resources among a wide set of core actors.

Another core issue for debate is the extent to which forms of political participation beyond voting (in this case, signing a petition) can help drive changes and

innovations in public policy. Under what contexts and circumstances are these participatory mechanisms more effective in promoting policy change? For example, we can wonder to what extent the campaign promoted by the public figure is successful thanks to the context characterised by the COVID-19 pandemic and its relevant social consequences (that is, would the campaign be equally successful in a non-crisis context?). Furthermore, the effectiveness of citizen campaigns may be substantially lower when the policy innovation concerns much more politically divisive issues.

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Case studies available

- El cas Pirelli-Mar. (Ref. CL-2022-01)
- Instituto Mental de Santa Cruz. (Ref. PA-2022-01)
- School meals for vulnerable children. (Ref. PCUBE-2022-01)
- Artificial Intelligence and automated decision making in welfare policies. (Ref. PCUBE-2022-02)

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