

Reflection - Research case studies: authentic scenarios as a way of learning

Prof Thean Potgieter and Dr Johnny Pietersen
26 October 2021



school of government

Department:
National School of Government
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Learn Serve Grow



Background Introduction

- Case study approach and case method viable research and learning tools (widely used)
- Limited influence of scholarship on public administration practice and policy development often highlighted
- Lack contextualised, local and applicable research case studies
- Need for research case studies on typical lived public administration realities
- Analysis of reality contributes to our ability to make sense, real scenarios (researched case studies) and knowledge contribution
- Can contribute to equipping public administrators to better understand complex challenges they face and function optimally when dealing with such challenges
- RSA-EU Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2014-2020 – to “*assist the state in fulfilling its developmental and transformative role...*”
- Result Area 2 of the “Public service training and capacity building programme” on “Research and curriculum development ... increased ... relevance”



Background Introduction

- Case study project aim: researched case studies, teaching and learning notes/guidelines, publish cases, case study repository
- Ten, later fifteen, cases, at least five SA HEIs, one from another country in Africa
- Framework contract (EU contracted on behalf of NSG)
- Case Study Project Steering Committee oversaw project
- Steering Committee: Service provider, EU representatives, NSG staff, provincial academies or training institutions, and HEIs
- Steering Committee and Scoping Document on project deliverables:
 - Guide the research processes
 - Development of teaching and learning cases
 - Highlight thematic areas of particular interest
 - Guidelines for completing and managing the project in line with TOR
 - Framework to the service provider



Case studies and public administration challenges

- Case studies appropriate for understanding challenges in public administration?
- Case study research – making sense of empirical instances of theoretical phenomena
- Cases on typical ‘challenges’, a humble step towards in-depth understanding
- Sense-making process: academics and practitioners co-create new knowledge
- Case study defined as an in-depth
 - ‘inquiry into a specific and complex phenomenon (the “case”), set within its real-world context’ (Yin)
 - ‘study of a single unit (relatively bounded) ... elucidate features of ... phenomena ... an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units’ (Gerring)
- Distinction between subject and object of a case study (subject the case itself, the object is the analytical framework selected, or the theory used for explicating the subject)



Conceptualization of case studies for evidence-based learning

The need to conduct case study research

Shortage of customised. Local and acceptable case studies

Develop case study repository on public administration and governance perspectives

Case studies are acceptable as viable tools for research, teaching and learning

Development of ten researched case studies

Thematic area: Complex multi-layered case studies

Thematic area: leadership, management and innovation

Thematic area: social injustice and political-administrative interface



Necessity of In-depth research for development of case studies

Case Study research design

- Single case design (study of single instance of a phenomenon) and Multiple-case design (study of two or more instances of the same phenomenon)
- A case must have a delineated boundaries
- The unit of analysis must be defined in order to focus the study appropriately
- Case studies seek to preserve the wholeness and integrity of the case by among others, a specific research problem, reliability, validity and objectivity (quantitative) and trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, triangulation (qualitative)
- *Methodology* refers to the execution choices made about cases (phenomena) to study including case selection, methods of data gathering, forms of data analysis, etc.
- *Methods* are specific research techniques



Necessity of In-depth research for development of case studies

Case Study research design

TERM	DEFINITION
Paradigm	Broad orientation to knowledge and reality. Example: interpretive and positivist
Tradition	Orientation to data and its analysis. Example. Qualitative and Quantitative
Approach	Way of designing or conducting researching. Example: Case study, experiment, survey, theory building
Method (Techniques)	Way of gathering or analysing data. Example: interview, document analysis and focus groups



Necessity of In-depth research for development of case studies

Public administration as a phenomenon

- Public administration is the first antecedent to case studies
- Public Administration is studied from diverse epistemological perspectives. It explains its multi-disciplinary nature
- Public administration reflects a multi-faceted nature in practice as evidenced by multiple stakeholders, varied contexts and complex decision-making. Ordinarily, there is an interrelatedness of phenomena such as the state, government and society
- Functions of the state, society and government evolve continuously, thus increasing the multi-layered context of public administration challenges



Necessity of in-depth research for development of case studies

Purpose of case study (the second antecedent to case studies)

- In consideration of public administration as a broad unit of analysis, the case study approach clarifies the purpose of the study
- Primary purpose of a case study is to analyse a phenomenon through an in-depth study of a specific case in a particular time and space. A case is studied in its context, for example, research must incorporate the nature of public administration with its complexities and multi-faceted elements
- Research of case studies must be defined by rich data, contexts and thick descriptions
- Case studies can contribute to knowledge generation through theory building, generalisation and theory testing
- Case studies provide actionable knowledge used by practitioners to implement policies. As a result, there is interconnected among researchers, practitioners and other stakeholders.



Necessity of in-depth research for development of case studies

Integrity of a case study

- The following indicate integrity and quality of a case: validity (trustworthy), reliability (credible) and generalizability (transferable) to similar contexts
- Thus, the Research & Market Intelligence unit of the NSG followed the following process and activities to ensure integrity of cases:
 - Invitation letters for contributions and subsequently, for the reviewers
 - Double Blind review of journal articles
 - Technical Editorial services
 - Editorial decisions on final documents to be published
 - Some cases were presented at AISIA conference in July 2021 under the following title: *Research case studies as an approach to public administration challenges: Cases from Africa*



Necessity of In-depth research for development of case studies

Consequences of Case studies

- Theoretical knowledge
- Deepened understanding
- Actionable knowledge



school of government

Department:
National School of Government
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Learn Serve Grow



11

Case study thematic areas

- Research case studies to be relevant to the content of NSG programmes
- Which thematic areas are relevant for case study research?

Complex, multi-layered cases on transversal issues befitting complexity of the executive management environment	Address key issues in management in the public service (for example the application of the Batho Pele principles)
Leadership	Governance
Innovation	Strategic planning
Public financial management	Supply chain management
Monitoring and evaluation	Communication
Political-administrative interface	Social justice and transformation themes (e.g., ethics, gender, disability, diversity)
Impact assessments	Programme and project management

- Executive function of the state: protection, promotion and enabling or facilitation



school of government

Department:
National School of Government
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Learn



Case studies: NSG-EU project (1)

CARING AND PROTECTING

- The management of a policy implementation project: The disastrous Gauteng Mental Health Marathon Project
- A policy instrument to relieve child poverty: The case of the child support grant in South Africa
- Implementation of a national school nutrition programme: The case of selected South African schools
- The political–administrative interface and unintended consequences of public policy: The case of the Ghana School Feeding Programme

PROMOTING QUALITY OF LIFE

- Perspectives from below on Emfuleni’s wastewater woes: In search of resolving a wicked problem
- Democratic governance and development: The case of public toilet provision in district communities in Ghana
- A rapid change in public policy: The case of access to higher education in South Africa
- Social innovation to enhance service delivery by local government: The case of the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality

Case Studies: NSGO-EU project (2)

ENABLE FOR SUCCESS

- Governance and accountability in public-sector procurement: The case of procuring a service-provider for social grant payments
- Co-operative financial governance: A case study of the distressed Mpofana Local Municipality in South Africa
- Sustained poor audit outcomes: The case of the Amathole District Municipality
- Employment equity and an improved quality of life: The case of a white woman and the South African Police Service
- Supervisor training as antecedent to employee health and wellness programmes: The case of the Provincial Administration of KwaZulu-Natal
- Sustainable risk management in the TVET sector: The case of a typical college
- Implementing monitoring and evaluation at local government level: The case of a South African district municipality



Case Studies: NSG-EU project (3)

Cases	CX	KI	LE	GO	IN	SP	FM	PM	ME	CO	PAI	JT	IM
Gauteng Mental Health Marathon Project	Core	Core	Supporting	Supporting				Core			Core	Supporting	
Higher education policy	Core				Supporting						Core	Core	Supporting
Mpofana Local Municipality	Supporting	Supporting		Core			Core		Supporting				
Equity - government department	Supporting	Core	Supporting						Supporting			Core	
M&E in Local Government									Core				
AG reports, Amathole District Municipality				Core			Core	Supporting	Core		Supporting		Supporting
Child Support Grant, Frances Baard District						Core							Core
Social innovation - Mangaung		Core		Supporting	Core			Supporting					Core
Procurement – Social Grant Payments	Supporting			Core			Core	Supporting	Supporting		Supporting		
Emfuleni's wastewater woes	Core	Supporting		Core				Supporting	Supporting	Core		Supporting	Supporting
National School Nutrition Programme	Core					Core							Core
Employee wellness KwaZulu-Natal		Core	Core										
Risk management TVET college		Core	Core										
Public Toilet Provision Ghana	Supporting	Supporting		Core		Core				Supporting	Supporting	Supporting	Supporting
Ghana School Feeding Programme	Supporting			Supporting				Core	Core	Supporting		Supporting	Core

	Core thematic/theoretical focus of case study
	Supporting thematic focus of case study



'Other' Case Studies (1)

Cases submitted to *Africa Journal of Public Sector Development and Governance*:

1. Pharmacies of the Future – Innovation through Appropriate Use of Technology
2. Analysis of the Influence of Road Infrastructure Implementation on Local Development: The Case of Thika Super-Highway in Kenya
3. Power of the Purse: Fiscal Oversight – SA Parliament Budget Office
4. National Government Intervention in Provincial Administration and Governance: Case of Limpopo Province
5. Ghana and Global Development Agendas: Case of the Sustainable Development Goals
6. Capacity Building through Public Institutions of Higher Learning: Case Study of Namibia
7. Namibia Institute of Public Administration and Management: Case Study on Learning Governance



'Other' Case Studies (2)

8. Impact of Independent Members of Parliament in Multi-Party Democracies: Ugandan Case'
9. Nexus between Public Administration and Disaster Management: Case of COVID-19 in SA
10. SA's National Response to COVID-19 - Reference to Sub-Level Governance in Provinces
11. Provision of Water and Sanitation during the COVID-19 Crisis: Comparative Case Study in Predominantly Urban and Predominantly Rural Provinces
12. Deployment of the SANDF for COVID-19: Case on Governance
13. Why is COVID-19 different to other Pandemics? Assessing the Gendered Impact of COVID-19 on Poor Black Women in South Africa
14. Effect of COVID-19 on Work Arrangements in the SA Public Service
15. Towards a Conceptual Framework for Organisationally Effective Female Leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa: Case of Public Enterprises in Eswatini



'Other' Case Studies (3)

Theme	Other cases														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Complex, multi-layered, transversal issues				Grey	Red				Grey	Grey		Grey			
Key issues in management (Batho Pele)	Grey										Red			Grey	
Leadership				Grey			Grey	Grey				Grey			Red
Governance			Grey	Red		Grey	Red		Red	Grey		Red		Grey	Grey
Innovation	Red						Grey								Red
Strategic planning					Grey				Grey			Grey			
Public financial management and <u>SCM</u>			Red	Red								Grey			
Project management	Red	Red										Grey			
Monitoring and evaluation						Red	Grey								
Communication														Grey	Grey
Political-administrative interface			Grey	Red			Grey	Grey	Grey	Red	Grey	Grey			
Social justice and transformation themes	Grey	Grey			Grey						Grey		Red	Grey	Red
Impact Assessments		Red						Red							

	Core thematic/theoretical focus
	Supporting thematic focus



NSG-EU project: Facilitators Manuals (1)

- Enable facilitators to guide participants to build an understanding of specific thematic learning areas
- Together with case study, identifiable scenario, evidence-based, rigorous and factual
- Researched case study forms the basis of the facilitated learning process
- Case study primary focus areas, but lessons derived also further relevance
- Learning process employ combination of participatory methodologies, presentations, text, visuals for facilitated learning and learner engagement
- Premise: tap into individual experience, learning is self-directed, community of practice, problem-solving, reflection, interactive, critical thinking and learner feedback
- Individuals in groups, learn through interaction and facilitation
- Participatory methodology, supports learning by doing and thinking collectively
- Theory integrated into experiential learning process



NSG-EU project: Facilitators Manuals (2)

- Supplementary reading support facilitator to guide discussions and support learning
- Activity with instructions for facilitation – not intended to limit responses
- Important to discuss contradictions and diverse opinions
- Facilitator be subject matter experts – correct misinformation, aid understanding
- Manuals require facilitators to do additional reading, knowledge on subject
- Designed for number of days, or modified activities for shorter programmes
- Content of modules sequentially linked, but exercises also independently used
- Sessions designed to build knowledge and skills
- Groups recommended, participation by all group members in exercises, supported by facilitator to avoid a few participants dominating discussion
- Prescribed time limits could vary due to topic, group size and character



NSG-EU project: Facilitators Manuals (3)

- Cases exploratory, similar cases or examples could be incorporated based on facilitators assessment
- As subject matter may be sensitive or controversial, create safe space for effective learning
- Conduct exercises in mixed gender groups, specifically if gender differences are exacerbated by power differentials, also optimise diversity to enhance learning
- Facilitators firm (not domineering) in managing group dynamics,
- Manuals are structured as follows:
 - Outline of the overall learning plan
 - Abstract of the researched case study
 - Focussed learning on specific thematic areas: overall learning objectives, tasks and activities, handouts/materials



Researched cases: authentic scenarios as a way of learning (1)

- Aim researched case studies contribute to scholarly sense-making of challenges in public administration
- Vexing question: How can sense-making process contribute to the functioning of public administrators?
- Despite shared focus on executive state function, each case unique in context, difficulties inherent and capabilities required
- To perform successfully, public administrators capable of integrating knowledge and behaviour go with being professional officials
- Being capable, acquire habits of mind through professional education and development
- Changing nature challenges, professional development more than acquisition and use of knowledge and skills: process of developing 'professional ways of being'
- Paradigm shift to curriculum approaches that focus on capability and an ongoing rethinking of the ways in which learning is facilitated have become relevant



Researched cases: authentic scenarios as a way of learning (2)

- Philosophical assumptions: public administration as reality; relationship administrators, society, academics, dissimilar forms of knowledge and capabilities public administrators require to meet real challenges
- Professional enquiry a learning strategy for instilling required capabilities
- Researched case studies rich source material and authentic environments
- Authentic learning environment: contexts reflecting reality, authentic activities, multiple roles and perspectives, collaborative construction of knowledge, reflection and articulation, coaching and scaffolding, authentic assessments
- Learning value of case studies: is simplified task-oriented cases, summarised scenarios or short stories preferable to rich researched case studies?
- Tendency to simplify complex cases/situations, particularly in initial instruction, can serve to impede later acquisition of more complex understanding
- Researched case study not technical toolkit for learning appropriate professional capabilities, but authentic scenarios in learning process with diverse thematic foci



Furthering practice: case studies and learning (1)

- Limited influence of scholarship on public administration practice and policy development, research be made more meaningful
- Scholarly analysis of reality contribute to sense making and knowledge (rich real-life descriptions)
- Whole events in complex context, not watered down to single incidents
- Narrative appeals – valuable pedagogical tools involving a dilemma
- Case method common learning approach:
 - ‘Socratic approach’ - pedagogical value in analysing actual situations
 - Not academic writing, focus to develop an empirically supported thesis, with deductions emanating from cases (e.g., background, chronology, problem)
 - Protagonists and antagonists, participants debate solutions and actions
 - Value: active, engaging, practical and peer learning
 - Dialectic process, propose solutions by interrogating opposing views
 - Case teaching/facilitating demanding, participants ‘guided, not told’



Furthering practice: case studies and learning (2)

- Two pedagogical objectives linked to facilitating case studies:
 - Highlight topical issues/dilemmas, participants grapple to find solutions
 - Refine analytical skills and cognitive response mechanisms, could add to shaping behaviour patterns.
- Contribute to teaching about ethics – consider complex ethical dilemmas and apply ethical norms and principles
- Pursue knowledge for the sake of action: higher form of knowledge practical and theoretical, “practical wisdom”, be familiar with the particular as “wisdom” is about action, which is constituted by particulars (Aristotle)
- Closely associated with ethics (“virtuous human conduct”)
- Difficulties in determining correct actions at a specific time, for right reasons
- “Practical wisdom” contribute to understanding and judgement, about what to do and how to do depending on the circumstance – in essence make good choices



Feedback Case Study Workshop (1)

Case Study 1:

- Water crisis in Emfuleni (Vaal region Gauteng Province, South Africa)
 - Value transdisciplinary skills in research and understanding complex realities
 - However, ‘wicked’ problem remains and not yet sufficiently addressed
 - Integrated character impacts on many spheres of life in the area

Case Study 2:

- Governance and accountability: lessons from social grant payments in South Africa
 - Question legacy of NPM
 - Governance only succeed when government takes action
 - Crucial aspect often “from strategy to action”



Feedback Case Study Workshop (2)

Case Study 3:

- Social innovation to enhance local government service delivery (Mangaung)
 - Relevance of learning from successes in other countries
 - Need for active citizen participation in “co-production” of service delivery (SI)

Case Study 4:

- Unintended Consequence of Public Policy: Ghana School Feeding Programme
 - Appropriate governance arrangements crucial for projects and programme management
 - Implementing public policies require a holistic approach
 - Effectiveness of public policy in addressing social justice expectations re the transformational agenda of the state



Reflection and Response (1)

- Selected examples (Ireland and France)
- Researched case studies require proper theoretical base enhanced with practical application
- The best learning occurs where there is an integration of practical experience and theory
- Many pertinent aspects (from case studies), but some cross-cutting lessons include:
 - Political will
 - Interrelatedness of local, provincial and national spheres, and the value of cooperative and participatory governance for resolving challenges
 - Consistent message: improve governance and fight corruption
 - Consequence management
 - Address problems when they surface – if not crisis will exacerbate



Reflection and Response (2)

- Lessons (continue):
 - Relevance of specific case studies to wider public service administration challenges across the continent
 - Engagement with citizens crucial – improved two-way communication between government structures, residents, other stakeholders
 - Symbiosis (national sense of purpose around values and ethos of the state)
- Of relevance idea of a social contract – various philosophical perspectives
- However, implicit to social contract is checks and balances:
 - it is not borne from the conscience of rulers, or
 - the free will of citizens, but
 - based on prescriptive legal structure with systemic mechanisms



Concluding remarks (1)

- Need to constantly make undertakings of this nature, to contribute towards creating a public service that is more attuned to the needs of citizens and which espouses to the higher aim of enabling efficient and effective service delivery
- From the scholarly analysis of reality (researched case studies) and knowledge contribution thus made, a number relevant ‘lessons’ could be derived
- Of relevance is the Platonic notion: we need to understand government as not just a piece of “machinery”, but that its quality and essence is determined by the individuals who constitutes it
- What is therefore required is to consistently develop their understanding and capacity



Concluding remarks (2)

- Use of rich information for teaching and learning:
 - **Active learning** processes enable participants to recognise, analyse, debate, and conclude on important issues and their implications
 - Easier to **identify with narrative case studies** based on remarkable real-life events, and grapple with complex issues confronting decision makers
 - **Connection** between **theory, problems and solutions** is evident and that a comprehensive **multi-disciplinary approach** involving many role-players are often required
 - Case studies stimulates the development of **cognitive** skills, further deep **reflection** and **sensemaking**, create opportunities to recognise **patterns** and shape appropriate **responses**
- Inter-connected situatedness of researchers, practitioners and other stakeholders
- Theory – practice – action (Clausewitz)



Thank you

Ke a leboha
Ke a leboga
Ngiyabonga
Ndzi khense ngopfu

Ngiyathokoza
Ngiyabonga
Baie dankie
Ndi a livhuwa

The NSG:

Learn: expanding learning opportunities for public servants to master state craft

Serve: building the capacity (and culture) of public servants to serve society effectively

Grow: helping public servants to combine learning and service (experience) to grow professionally

