

Learning & Knowledge Management Unit

The Public Service focus of the Unit's responsibilities

The Learning and Knowledge Management Unit was established in 2001 within the SDI Branch to establish and coordinate a learning programme for the public service. The Unit was recently expanded to also drive the internal (DPSA) learning and knowledge management programme. To achieve the 'public service' objective, the Unit has established and runs various learning platforms and products.

- Learning Networks serve as platforms for colleagues to learn from one another by sharing experiences, best practices, failures and methodologies with the aim to enhance and accelerate service delivery.
- The Service Delivery Review: a Learning Journal for Public Service Managers is a platform for learning and sharing of information and knowledge amongst public servants. Three editions are published per year.
- The web page (www.dpsa.gov.za) serves as an electronic library where all case studies and articles from learning sessions, as well as other sources of information developed within the DPSA, are all posted.
- The Machinery of Government Manual is a simple guide/manual on how Government is structured and functions.
- The Manual for Learning Networks and Sessions guides public servants on how to establish learning networks and organise various learning events.
- Annual Service Delivery Learning Academy is a 3-day Conference for public servants at the coalface of service delivery. The platform provides an environment addressing service delivery challenges in an integrated environment by bringing together colleagues from different sectors.
- Annual Public Management Conversation is a 3-day conference of select public servants, civic society, private sector, academics and internationals to interrogate identified urgent challenges in the public service and collaborate on solutions.



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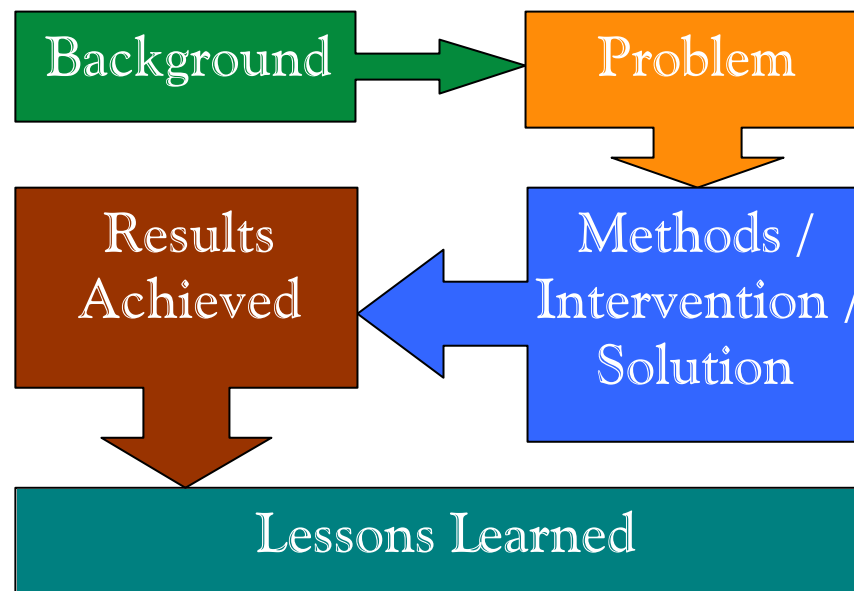
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CASE STUDY TEMPLATE

Prepared by the Learning & Knowledge
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Introduction

Case studies have historically been used as interactive teaching methods by mostly and exclusively those in the academic world. Their use in the academic world has been useful to demonstrate real-life examples of what happens in the actual life of public servicing. Useful as they are for relevant and contextually based teaching, the limitation of teaching/classroom based case studies has been their limited inside knowledge and contextual understanding of what happens in the real world of public servicing. As the process of public service transformation begins to unravel some experiences and lessons, and the need to inculcate a learning culture in the public service, the use of case studies relevant and derived from that experience is becoming increasingly important.

The case for case studies

In order to find practical solutions to the challenges public servants face, and to avoid to re-invent the wheel as has happened many times in the public service since transformation began, there is a great need to share real practical good and best practices and nurture a culture of learning from each other's experiences. Case studies are important tools to facilitate that process. Numerous projects are being implemented and methods tried and tested. The results coming out of these trials and projects contain lots of valuable lessons and solutions (obviously adapting in line with specific dynamics becomes necessary in some situation). Of extreme importance is to identify cases worth capturing and sharing with clear lessons. Through visits and other numerous projects that we get exposed to in the public service, we draw in and develop best practice case studies.

Important lessons can be learnt by looking to other departments and public organisations for benchmarks and best practices. Private sector, whether in industrial, commercial, or service sectors, do that through experimentation, massive investment in cutting edge research and development, and instilling best practices from a range of industries other than their own. Non-governmental organisations are well renowned for their best practices derived from their own experiences with working with communities on the ground. The public sector has to follow these trends. Case studies are a knowledge and learning tool which contributes to improved service delivery, and often in the public service their potential is not always fully understood and appreciated. It is also important to bear in mind that case studies are not just past or completed projects, but they are also current projects and work in progress which contain some important lessons to learn.

Through this journal, we are keeping a repository of best practices through cases. We have published and disseminated case studies on best practices on road and public works service delivery improvement, mobile community policing, putting people first through multi-purpose community centres, restructuring of state assets, social development and poverty alleviation, to name but a few.

Exploring a Case Study methodology relevant for the public service

As a powerful knowledge and learning tool, it is important to explore what are the important ingredients of a practically relevant and replicable case study and/or what it should aim to achieve. It could be said that a good case study should provide the reader with sufficient background to the project, the processes involved and methods used, the nature and uniqueness of the intervention, the results achieved, and lessons learnt through that experience. What follows is a guide on what to incorporate in writing a good case study that has practical relevance to public service delivery. Although it is not exhaustive, we encourage practitioners to use this guide as a basis in developing their cases and write-ups:

➤ Background

This first part of a good case study provides a background and introduction of the project and gives the audience/reader an understanding of the circumstances and the context that led to its initiation. For an example, on a social development project case study, a background could be the geographical location of the area and extent of socio-economic backlogs, demographic profile of the targeted community/beneficiaries, factors that precipitated the initiation of the project, etc. On a successful crime prevention case study, background could be the crime profile before the intervention, historical and present law and order and policing and trends in the area, etc.

➤ Problem

Building from the background, this section highlights the specific problem/s that justified the case for initiation of the project and intervention. This is a very important part of the case because the nature of the problem explains what the project initiator was out to achieve, and naturally informs the method of intervention used and the result achieved thereof.

➤ Method / Intervention / Solution Used

Perhaps the most central ingredient of a good case study project is the description and explanation of the intervention/solution used in addressing the problem, and how it was/is. This part has to inform and the reader of questions like: 'What did you aim to achieve and how was it done? How unique and innovative was it, and in what way. Who were the stakeholders involved and what was/is their manner of involvement? What kind of resources were or are being utilized in implementation and fulfillment of the project goals, and how were/are those resources acquired?

➤ Results achieved

Results are very important as they reflect and demonstrate the outcome of the intervention and methods used in the execution of the project. In a very practical way/s, what did the intervention/project do to the beneficiary community/client? How did it address and change the previous situation and the problems? For an example, to what extent did a successful crime prevention programme reduce the crime rate or if it a programme in progress how is it progressing/what are the tangible demonstrated results thus far? What were the other unintended results achieved. What were the major obstacles and if they were overcome, what method was used to do that?

➤ Lessons learned

A case study is a learning tool. It must be replicable – one of its important ingredient is that it must provide the reader, be it an official or member of the public, with lessons to learn and to adapt the learning's to their own situations. In the public service delivery sphere this is important because it provides others with ideas in implementing similar projects in their own domains, what to anticipate and expect and/or not expect, how to deal with challenges, and avoiding mistakes. What can the reader and the general public learn from the project. What should they do and not do. What were the problems and challenges, and how best to deal with them. Highlight how did the project deal with issues of integration, co-ordination, etc, and what the results were.

Conclusions

A good case identifies the issues, explains what happened, reflects on the processes, methods employed and the associated dynamics, and raises key emerging conclusions. There exists a greater need to use case studies as knowledge and learning tools that practitioners in various fields in the public sector can use to improve service delivery.