

Public Administration **CHALLENGES:** Cases from Africa

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CASE STUDIES AS AN APPROACH TO CHALLENGES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Jacobus S Wessels and Thean Potgieter

INTRODUCTION

Why is it important to read a book reporting on case studies about challenges in public administration? Depending on the interests and perspective of the reader, there are most probably a wide variety of reasons. This book has been compiled primarily for the Public Administration scholar and practitioners in search of meaningful knowledge about, and an understanding of, the highly complex realities of public administration. It is safe to assume that the case studies included in this book are typical of many of the realities that influence the quality of life of society at large and probably also that of the reader of this book (whether a scholar trying to understand it, a public administration practitioner searching for actionable knowledge or a member of society interested in improving their quality of life). This collection of case studies constitutes a humble step towards an in-depth scholarly understanding of some typical challenges. It may enlighten scholars and practitioners who are having to deal with similar, currently unknown, or perhaps even future challenges. It is hoped that this book will be a point of departure for a sense-making process in which academics and practitioners can be the co-creators of new knowledge about the challenges in public administration and the appropriate interventions necessary to deal with them.

While this book reports on several case studies, the purpose of this chapter is to argue in support of the appropriateness of a case study approach to gaining a thorough understanding of the challenges in public administration. As the appropriateness of a using a case study approach is dependent on the nature of the phenomenon to be studied and the purpose of the study, this chapter first provides an overview of these antecedents as justification for the selection of the case study approach. Following the discussion on antecedents, the appropriateness of the case study approach is considered through an analysis of its defining attributes.

Finally, it is argued that the appropriateness of such an approach is evident from the consequences of its application, namely, its contribution to scholarly and actionable knowledge.

ANTECEDENTS JUSTIFYING THE USE OF THE CASE STUDY APPROACH

Case study research is broadly used in Public Administration and various other fields for making scholarly sense of specific empirical instances of theoretical phenomena. Yin, widely considered the scholarly doyen of case study research, defines a case study as ‘an in-depth inquiry into a specific and complex phenomenon (the “case”), set within its real-world context’ (Yin 2013: 321). While his definition does not distinguish between the broad phenomenon and the specific case, such a distinction is made by Gerring, who defines a case study as ‘an in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar’s aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena’ and also as ‘an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units’ (Gerring 2004: 341–342). The latter distinction is made in this chapter. It is argued in this section that the case study approach to a unit or a case is logically preceded by at least two antecedents: the larger class of the phenomenon and the purpose of the study (Zongozzi & Wessels 2017: 263). In the context of this chapter, the larger class of phenomena is ‘public administration’, while the purpose of a case study is specifically informed by what is referred to as ‘challenges’.

Antecedent 1: Public administration and public administration challenge as phenomena

The first antecedent to a case study is the presence of a phenomenon or an object of a study. A phenomenon such as ‘policy implementation’ constitutes an analytical and theoretical framework for explaining a specific case such as the Gauteng Mental Health Marathon Project (see chapter 2). The latter is the real case, also referred to as the subject of a case study (Thomas 2011: 511). In order to select a case for a case study, the phenomenon of which the case is an instance already needs to exist. Therefore, public administration challenges is the first antecedent for a case study in the context of Public Administration.

Public administration as a human-constructed reality is studied globally from diverse epistemological perspectives, usually in the context of a specific national state. This multifaceted reality includes many interrelated social and human phenomena, such as the state, government and society (Raadschelders 2011: 919).

Core to these relationships is public administration, as eloquently described by Pauw and Louw, which is ‘the organised, non-political, executive functions of the state’ (2014: 12). Foundational to an understanding of public administration and its contextual challenges, therefore, are the state and the relationship between state and society.

Because a standard definition of the concept ‘state’ seemingly does not exist, our understanding could be elucidated by briefly focusing on some of the many ideas that influenced an understanding of the concept ‘state’. The work of several authors from various parts of the world have through the centuries shed some light on the concept ‘state’ and the phenomenon it refers to. Although in his work, *The Leviathan*, Hobbes justifies the notion of a monarchy (in the then England), he also provides an early contribution to the concept of state by making a distinction between a ‘common-wealth’ (the state), a sovereign (communal authority vested in a single person such as the monarch) and a public office of execution (Hobbes 1651: 245–248). The idea of an office of execution also emerges in the work of Locke as ‘offices of the state’ (Locke 1690: 218), but it is even expressed more clearly and in a more visionary manner in *The Social Contract and Discourses* of Rousseau as ‘supreme administration, the legitimate exercise of the executive power’ (1762: 50) and ‘public administration, where chance has less influence than in the lot of individuals, wisdom is so nearly allied to happiness’ (1762: 271).

The power balance between the state and society gradually changed from that of a supreme monarch (government) dictating society (Hobbes 1651) to a more equal relationship between government and society (Locke 1690), and then to a relationship in which society makes the laws and public rules of conduct (Rousseau 1762). Two centuries later, it was therefore possible for Sabine to reiterate an already commonly held view that ‘the state exists for society and not society for the state’ (1972: 5). This relationship between state and society was also well established as a legal order to the benefit of society (Morgenthau 1978: 497). Rutgers draws attention to the view that the state and society are ‘two distinct spheres of legitimate social action’ with ‘public administration as something “in between” the authority to make decisions (state) and the people that are to be administered (society)’ (Rutgers 2010: 17). This in-between phenomenon is, on the face of it, similar to what Hobbes referred to as a public office of executing the executive functions of the state (Hobbes 1651: 245–248; Pauw & Louw 2014: 12). Three broad categories of executive state function can be distinguished, namely, those of protection, promotion and enabling or facilitation. For the purposes of this chapter, it is assumed that the challenges related to these categories of function articulate the phenomena preceding case study research.

Whereas the concept ‘challenge’ is an ordinary concept commonly used in various spheres of life, it is also widely used in the context of the subject field Public Administration and discourses related to research and curriculum development (Bouckaert 2013; Rosenbaum 2014; Divay 2015; Ratshitanga 2017). In the international context of public administration as defined in the previous section, the concept is widely used in policy, strategy and operational documents in combination with descriptors such as governance, development, funding, health services, service delivery and urbanisation, to mention a few (The African Union Commission 2015; Public Service Commission 2016; World Bank 2017). From the uses referred to above, one can infer that the concept ‘challenge’ refers mostly to a difficult and sometimes unspecified, trying, testing and complex public administration function, task or situation requiring special capabilities that have to be dealt with (Wessels 2020: 152). Public administration challenges labelled as three broad categories of executive state function serve as phenomena preceding case study research.

The first broad category of executive state functions is evidently that of protection. The experience of history and literature reveal that the state emerged from a period of constant war and destruction to become an institution using its power and strength to protect and defend those members who have submitted themselves to the government of the state (Hobbes 1651: 132). In this regard, Hobbes declared that the state had been instituted to protect ‘the Peace of the Subjects within themselves, and their Defence against a common Enemy’ (Hobbes 1651: 166). This narrowly defined protection function of the state has gradually been extended to include the preservation of members’ property (Locke 1690: 127), the protection of ‘the poor against the tyranny of the rich’ (Rousseau 1762: 219), and the protection against force, theft and fraud (Farrelly 2004: 53). Furthermore, Rutgers reasons that the protection function of the state may even require its intervention in the ‘free play of the forces of the market in order to guarantee a minimum standard of living for every individual’ (2010: 17). The primary and also the core category of state functions is therefore to protect society and life, liberty and property (Loxton 1993: 54).

While the protective functions of the state were originally restricted to the defence of the state against external and internal enemies, the nature, scope and complexity of these functions have gradually changed and expanded over time. As a result, this category of state functions could be understood to also include context-specific (time and space) challenges. These could consist of coordinating multi-regional transboundary disease control (Hellevik 2012: 555), protecting threatened individual and socio-economic rights (Public Service Commission 2016: 7), preserving ‘public assets for further use’ (Audette-Chapdelaine 2016: 3),

global measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus since early 2020, and protecting and caring for mentally impaired citizens (see chapter 2) and protecting children against the consequences of poverty (see chapters 3, 4 and 5). The broad phenomena studied by the case studies referred to here relate to those challenges experienced by governments in implementing the policies necessary for performing the functions aimed at protecting their respective societies.

A second category of state functions identified by Hobbes is that of promoting the quality of life (Loxton 1993: 58). Hobbes (1651: 267) argues that

whereas many men, by accident inevitable, become unable to maintain themselves by their labour; they ought not to be left to the Charity of private persons; but to be provided for.

Rousseau supports this view by emphasising the necessity to consider the subsistence of citizens (1762: 221). In this book, this is noteworthy in the case of Africa. In the first three decades after the decolonisation of Africa, heavy reliance was placed ‘upon the state as the vehicle for social and economic development’ (Raadschelders 2003: 377). The case studies in the second part of this book related to water and waste-water infrastructure challenges and also the enhancement of service delivery through social innovation, are directly preceded and informed by this antecedent. The promotive function of the state aimed at ensuring quality of life for its citizens (Loxton 1993: 98) includes constitutional development, the advancement of society, the creation of wealth, welfare and social services and the advancement of a state’s foreign interests (Loxton 1993: 58–69).

In Africa, the promotion functions of the state epitomise, in the words of the President of the Republic of South Africa, ‘a caring state’ (Ramaphosa 2019). This category of state functions consists, among other factors, of the development and advancement of society towards the self-maintenance and fulfilment of each individual (Loxton 1993: 54). Actually performing these functions in individual national states has been shown to have become increasingly difficult. The World Bank (2017: 273) attributes this trend in Africa to the fact that

the domestic policy space for tackling development challenges is significantly constrained by actions and decisions made elsewhere.

Examples of contemporary challenges to promotive state functions are that of social and cultural development (Divay 2015: 2), the ‘settlement and introduction of newcomers’ (Myrberg 2017: 323), that is, the global trend of the migration of people from one state to another, and the provision of water and sanitation services to citizens (Audette–Chapdelaine 2016: 3; Tempelhoff et al 2019: 145). The case studies in part 2 of this book contribute to a deepened understanding of the universal phenomenon of governments’ challenges to promote the quality of life of society in the areas of water and sanitation (see chapters 6, 7 and 8) and innovative service delivery (see chapter 9).

A third category of state functions consists of those enabling and facilitative functions necessary for the state to perform its protection and promotion functions (Loxton 1993: 54, 69). Rousseau refers to this category of functions as providing ‘for the public wants’ such as the ‘management of the exchequer, ... the expenses of public administration’ and ‘the maintenance of the Magistrates and other Officials’ of the state (Rousseau 1762: 221, 223). The purpose of this category of state functions is therefore to optimise the performance of its protective and promotive functions through, among other measures, the provision of the necessary organisational systems, finance, human resources and accountability measures. Owing to what Raadschelders attributes to the redefinition of the role of the state, this category of state functions has shown expansion in especially sub-Saharan Africa since independence (Raadschelders 2003: 377).

In a similar manner to its protection and promotion functions, the challenging nature of the enabling and facilitative functions of the state has intensified in recent years (Loxton 1993: 69). This is evident from recently reported studies on, for instance, the complex nature of the relationships between the different spheres and interests of government (Myrberg 2017; see chapter 11), multi-sectoral coordination challenges (Hellevik 2012; see chapter 11), the wickedness of accounting comparability and auditing outcomes (Brusca & Martínez 2016; see chapter 12), governance and accountability challenges (see chapter 10), the management of risks (see chapter 15), human resource challenges (see chapters 13 and 14) and the monitoring, evaluation, improvement and implementation of complex policies (see chapter 16).

Public administration as a concept and a phenomenon has shown to be socially constructed through a gradual understanding of the state and its relationship with society in specific contexts. It is characterised by a form that can, at best, be described as diverse, complex and changing (Wessels 2021: 8). As an in-between phenomenon public administration refers to the organised, non-political executive functions of the state that are categorised as being protective, promotive and facilitative. It is well known that these categories of state function are, at

times, not only broad, highly complex and difficult to accomplish (Ebneyamini & Moghadam 2018: 3) but require unique capabilities to be performed (Wessels 2020: 152–153). Accordingly, the notion ‘public administration challenges’ is characterised by the uniqueness of distinct functions or tasks, the inherent difficulty of such functions and the rare capabilities required to perform them. The complex, diverse, multi-layered context of specific public administration challenges not only logically precede case study research, but also directly inform the second antecedent, namely, the purpose of the case study.

Antecedent 2: The purpose of case studies

While the first antecedent provides clarity about the unit of analysis – the phenomenon or the ‘what’ of a case study – the second antecedent clarifies the purpose of the study. This antecedent not only provides the reason for selecting a case study approach, but also informs the research decisions related to the defining attributes (the case, the case-selection strategy, the research design and the methods for collecting and analysing data) of a case study (Wessels & Thani 2014: 171–173; Zongozzi & Wessels 2017: 263, 268). This section reports on the typical purposes of, or the reasons for, selecting the case study approach.

Scholars working in this field seem to agree on the primary purpose of case study research, namely, to obtain a sound or better understanding of a larger phenomenon through the in-depth study of a specific case reflecting that phenomenon in a particular time and space (Gerring 2004: 342; Piekkari et al 2009: 571; Yin 2013: 321, 325, 327, 329). The implication of this purpose is that a case study is not an alternative or a less scientific approach to reality, but the most appropriate approach for obtaining a deepened theoretical understanding of the realities of public administration.

This understanding is informed by thick descriptions and rich data of a case in its totality and not only in its components, but also by applying theoretical lenses to making sense of a sometimes complex and context-specific reality (Kjellén 2007: 118; Piekkari et al 2009: 570; Rule, Davey & Balfour 2011: 310; Damianakis & Woodford 2012: 709; Yin 2013: 325, 329). In this regard, Yin (2013: 321) cautions that to

arrive at a sound understanding of the case, a case study should not be limited to the case in isolation but should examine the likely interaction between the case and its context.

A survey of South African Master's dissertations in Public Administration reporting on case study research in the period 2005–2012 revealed that at least 52% of these case studies were preceded by a descriptive purpose (Zongozzi 2015: 59). In addition to the purpose of understanding by means of thick descriptions, some case studies are preceded by exploratory and explanatory purposes (Rule et al 2011: 314), while nearly all the case studies are motivated by the purpose to develop, refine or confront 'theory with the empirical world' (Piekkari, Welch & Paavillainen 2009: 569, 578).

The case studies included in this collection are no exception to this reported observation. They all set out to explore, describe and interpret the respective cases with the purpose of making sense of them, learning lessons from them, and enriching the existing theories in order to understand the phenomena these cases are instances of. Therefore, the primary purpose of research case studies is to contribute to scholarly knowledge about the larger phenomenon which the respective case is an instance of. It is inevitable that this in-depth knowledge of specific cases and the consequent enhanced understanding of the phenomenon may contribute to both theoretical and actionable knowledge.

The implication of the antecedent of purpose is that researched case studies are distinct from teaching cases and popular case studies. While teaching cases are frequently informed by researched case studies (Kjellén 2007: 199) teaching cases are preceded by different teaching- and professional training-inspired purposes such as stimulating argumentation, illustration, application, decision-making, evaluation and discussion and instilling critical thinking (Kjellén 2007: 119; Guess 2014: 115–117; Yin 2018: 18–19). It is important, though, that these two types of case study should not be mutually exclusive but linked through the adaptation of researched case studies to teaching purposes (Kjellén 2007: 120).

While this section has shown that researched case studies are preceded mainly by two antecedents – namely, a specific category of phenomena (eg public administration challenges) and a purpose of scholarly understanding – the next section provides an overview of the defining attributes of a case study as implied by these antecedents.

Defining attributes of the case studies approach to reality

Despite the popularity of the case study approach among Public Administration researchers, its appropriateness for making a scientific contribution to Public Administration has been shown to be a disputed issue (Zongozzi & Wessels 2017: 260). As Flyvbjerg (2006: 221) indicates, issues of dispute concern the

reliability and validity of case studies and their contribution to the theory of case studies. However, Yin (2013: 325) refutes the supposed inability of case studies to contribute to theory and emphasises the scientific value of the analytical and conceptual contributions case studies can make. The appropriateness of case studies relating to purpose and phenomena (as discussed above) is demonstrated by the defining attributes of case studies, namely,

a case as a single instance of a phenomenon; a purposeful case selection strategy; an appropriate case study design; appropriate data collection methods and techniques; and appropriate methods and techniques for data analysis (Zongozzi & Wessels 2017: 264).

These defining attributes are each informed by the preceding antecedents of phenomenon and purpose.

The case as instance of a phenomenon

A core attribute of any case study is evidently the case itself. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the case as instance of a phenomenon is also referred to by some scholars as the subject of a case study (Thomas 2011: 511; Thomas & Mayers 2015: 53–54). The scientific status of case studies is frequently questioned on this attribute: the case. Although several scholars question the possibility of generalising from one case to the phenomenon (Mariotto et al 2014: 360; Schoch 2016: 249), Yin responds (2018: 20) by arguing that case studies are generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes.

What are the characteristics of typical cases explored in Public Administration case studies? Bearing in mind that the first antecedent to case studies entails a specific phenomenon, and that public administration as the organised, non-political executive functions of the state constitutes such a phenomenon, it makes sense that typical cases will be instances of that phenomenon and its constituting phenomena. While concepts such as ‘challenge’, ‘function’, ‘executive function’, ‘task’, ‘organised’, ‘state’ and ‘policy’ are examples of typical theoretical constructs public administration that refer to collections of empirical phenomena with more or less similar characteristics, the case on which a case study reports is an instance of a specific phenomenon. While a case may have a familial resemblance to the phenomenon, it does not necessarily have the same characteristics as all the other cases in that class (Yeung, Chan & Chan 2012: 226–227).

The case studies included in the first part of this book, report on typical challenges experienced by government in implementing the policies necessary

for performing their function to protect their respective societies. While the phenomena preceding these case studies are policy implementation, policy instruments and the unintended consequences of public policy, the specific cases are the Gauteng Mental Health Marathon Project (see chapter 2) and the National School Nutrition Programme (see chapter 4) as instances of policy implementation, the child support grant (see chapter 3) as an instance of a policy instrument and the Ghana School Feeding Programme (see chapter 5) as an instance of a public policy with unintended consequences. All the cases selected have the characteristics of interventions.

The case studies in the next part of the book (Part 2) contribute to a deepened understanding of the universal phenomenon of governments' challenges to promote the quality of life of society with respect to water and sanitation (see chapters 6, 7 and 8) and innovative service delivery (see chapter 9). In this regard, Emfuleni's wastewater case (see chapter 6) serves to deepen our understanding of wicked implementation problems; the case of providing public toilets in Ghana (see chapter 7) serves to enhance our understanding of democratic governance and development challenges; the case of access to higher education in South Africa (see chapter 8), serves to deepen our understanding of rapid policy changes; and the case of social innovation in the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality (see chapter 9) aims at deepening our understanding of the challenges associated with enhancing municipal service delivery.

Similarly to its protection and promotion functions, the challenging nature of the enabling and facilitative functions of the state (Loxton 1993: 69) have intensified and expanded in recent years. This is evident from recent reported studies on, for instance, the complex nature of the relationships between the different spheres and interests of government (Myrberg 2017; also see chapter 11), multi-sectoral coordination challenges (Hellevik 2012), the wickedness of accounting comparability and auditing outcomes (Brusca & Martínez 2016; see chapter 12), governance and accountability challenges (see chapter 10), the management of risks (see chapter 15), human resource challenges (see chapters 13 and 14) and the monitoring, evaluation, improvement and implementation of complex policies (Divay 2015; see chapter 16).

The cases in this part of the book include:

- the procurement of a social grant payment service-provider as an instance of governance and accountability challenges (see chapter 10);
- the Mporofana local municipality as a case of cooperative financial governance (see chapter 11);
- the Amathole District Municipality as an instance of sustained poor audit outcomes (see chapter 12);

- the case of a white woman in the South African Police Service as an instance of the application of employment equity (see chapter 13);
- the case of the Provincial Administration of KwaZulu-Natal as an instance of employee health and wellness programmes (see chapter 14);
- a selected technical and vocational education and training (TVET) college as an instance of sustainable risk management (see chapter 15); and
- a selected district municipality as an instance of implementing monitoring and evaluation frameworks in local government (see chapter 16).

Although only one of these cases is concerned with a specific human being (see chapter 13), all the others are social constructs such as instances of policy programmes, policy implementation interventions and institutions or organisations. As is highlighted below, these cases were purposefully selected.

Case selection strategy

A case subject is usually selected because of its uniqueness and the fact that it is an interesting example pertaining to a specific object. Researchers might select a subject because they are familiar with it, owing to its relevance to practitioners, because it could be a key example, or it might elucidate an object clearly owing to ‘its difference, its *outlier* status’ (Thomas 2011: 514). Researchers use different case selection strategies. Cases of phenomena are selected because they are perceived as common, typical, diverse, extreme, critical, deviant, influential, revelatory or longitudinal (Seawright & Gerring 2008: 297; Zongozzi & Wessels 2017: 266). Case selection strategies, as Honig (2019: 299) indicates, could be reduced to two categories: the most similar (typical or common) and the most different (extreme, critical or revelatory).

Typical cases fall within the most-similar category referred to above. These cases are selected because they are perceived to be representative of or similar to the circumstances and conditions of the phenomenon in an ‘every day or commonplace situation’ (Yin 2009: 48). This strategy, for example, was used in the bulk the of case studies selected for the purpose of Public Administration Master’s dissertations during the period 2005–2012 (Zongozzi & Wessels 2017: 267). This selection strategy was also applied in nearly all the case studies in this collection.

As the Gauteng Mental Health Marathon Project (see chapter 2) is a most-different, or extreme, case of policy implementation, it is in essence at the other end of the spectrum. Such rare cases of a common phenomenon are worth documenting and analysing for the purposes of retrospective sense-making. The revelatory case-selection strategy is especially appropriate to studying a situation

of which the phenomenon, and therefore the theoretical significance, is not evident at the time of selection. However, as Yin (2018: 50) argues, the rich descriptive information emanating from a systematic study may be revelatory for theory and practice.

A third selection strategy – the longitudinal case-selection strategy involving studying a case over time – could be added to those above. This approach is specifically informed and implied by the incremental or becoming nature of public administration phenomena. It is consistent with a social ontology, analysing interaction and developing public administration challenges from an across-time perspective (Yin 2009: 49; Yin 2018: 51; Raadschelders 2019: 90; Wessels 2021: 4). The longitudinal case selection strategy has shown itself to be highly appropriate for the studying an evolving public policy (such as access to higher education in chapter 8) over more than two decades until it rapidly changed.

Although researchers could choose from various case-selection strategies, the typical strategy is seemingly the most popular, whereas the extreme strategy is particularly appropriate for studying an unusual instance of a phenomenon (such a revelatory strategy is to be recommended for studying new and complex phenomena). Whereas the longitudinal strategy is especially appropriate for studying a case as it evolves over a period of time, a prime consideration when selecting a specific case is the research design of the study.

Case study research design

In the case study literature, emphasis is placed on two classical research design-types, namely single-case and multiple-case design (Yin 2013: 321–332; Marriotto, Zanni & De Moraes 2014: 359; Yin 2018: 47–54). The case-selection strategy decision will inevitably determine the data-collection methodology of a specific case study. Furthermore, Yin (2018: 49) draws attention to the implied relationship between the case-selection strategy and the design type by arguing that the single-case design type is especially appropriate to use with various case-selection strategies, including the typical, extreme, revelatory and longitudinal discussed earlier.

The single-case design focuses on single instances of a phenomenon, which may be an individual (such as in the Employment Equity case in chapter 13), an institution (the municipalities in chapters 11, 12 and 15), a provincial administration (see chapter 14), an intervention (the specific instances of policy implementation in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5), an event (the rapid decision to change policy chapter 8) or procurement (see chapter 10). Case studies frequently illustrate a ‘complex chain of occurrences or events over an extended period of time’ (Yin 2014:

155). In order to obtain a deepened understanding of the dynamics present in single settings, Yin recommends the use of embedded single-case designs for a multiple-level study of a single case (2018: 51–54). A single-case design seems to be justifiable if such a case is congruent with, and appropriate for, the respective case-selection strategy and the preceding purpose of the study.

Apart from the single-case design, a researcher can also choose a multiple-case design. Although this collection of case studies does not contain a study that followed this design, a multiple-case design implies the identical or replicative study of two or more instances of the same phenomenon (Yin 2018: 59). In a study on the use of multiple cases for theory-building, Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007: 27) identify several advantages of the multiple-case design such as the provision of a stronger foundation for theory-building, the possibility of comparisons, more robust theory construction, construct delineation and a broader exploration of research questions. With these advantages in mind, a comparative, multi-case study focusing on the Mpofana Local Municipality (see chapter 11) and the Amathole District Municipality (see chapter 12) could provide an even deeper understanding of the financial governance challenges at municipalities. Similar opportunities for a multiple-case study on the child support and school-feeding programmes exist (see chapters 3, 4 and 5), as well as on basic service-delivery issues (see chapters 6 and 7). The selection of a specific case study design, however, will inevitably be informed by the nature of the phenomenon, the study purpose preceding a study and the attributes (such as the case itself) and the selection in line with the strategy. Whether a single-case or a multiple-case design is preferred, a core attribute of a case study is the data-collection methods and techniques.

Data-collection methods and techniques

The appropriate data-collection methods and techniques of a case study are determined by its purpose and the specific phenomenon of which the case is an instance. As the selection of appropriate data-collection methods and techniques is one of the defining attributes of a case study, a case study is not a distinct research method but an approach that makes use of a variety of qualitative and quantitative data-collection methods in addition to existing data sources. In Public Administration this could include mixed-method designs, qualitative research with techniques such as document interpretation (textual data), participant interviews, focus-group discussions and quantitative data from surveys (Zongozzi & Wessels 2017: 267). These methods and techniques could show relationships between the concepts and categories: they are all congruent with the ontological nature of public administration, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

A variety of data-collection methods were used to study the cases that are included in this book. True to the nature of public administration as a phenomenon, the bulk of the case studies used hermeneutical or content analysis methods to interpret texts (such as legislation, policy documents, reports, court judgments and hearing transcriptions). These methods were complemented by obtaining quantitative and qualitative data from human participants through surveys, individual interviews and focus-group sessions. A transdisciplinary approach was applied in the case study on the Emfuleni wastewater challenges (see chapter 6) which resulted in also using data-collection methods and techniques associated with Chemistry, Zoology, Botany, Earth Sciences, Political Science, History and Development Studies. The case-study approach therefore provides for using the most appropriate data-collection method or technique, which is informed both by the preceding nature of the phenomenon and the purpose and attributes of the case study. The final attribute of a case study is the analysis of the data in order to meet the preceding purpose of the study.

Data-analysis methods and techniques

The data-analysis methods and techniques should be appropriate to the material available and collected about a particular case. Although various methods and techniques are available, the record indicates that the so-called pattern-matching technique is most frequently used. This technique compares patterns identified from empirical results with predicted, usually theory-informed patterns. This results in the possible strengthening of the internal validity of a case study. Other methods and techniques also applied include explanation-building, time-series analysis, logic models and cross-case synthesis (Gerring 2004: 349; Zongozzi & Wessels 2017: 269–269; Yin 2018: 175–195). However, the principles for sound data analysis and interpretation are of much relevance as they pertain to considering all the evidence, examining all plausible rival interpretations, concentrating on the most substantial aspects of a case study, and understanding the prevalent discourses about a topic (Yin 2018: 199).

The defining attributes of a case study – the case as an instance of a phenomenon, the case selection strategy, the research design, the methods and techniques for data collection and the methods and techniques for data analysis and interpretation – serve as indicators that distinguish case-study research from other research approaches. Furthermore, it may also inform an assessment of the appropriateness of a case study to its preceding phenomenon and purpose. Nevertheless, the extent to which a case study meets its purpose is evident from the consequences of such a study.

CONSEQUENCE: CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

It is argued that the consequences of a case study stem directly from the nature of the case study as influenced by its antecedents. This implies that it is reasonable to expect that researched case studies whose purpose is to understand complex, diverse, multi-layered and context-specific public administration challenges will contribute to enlightening knowledge about the case and its phenomenon. If this expectation is not fulfilled, it may imply that the defining attributes of the case study were not sufficiently aligned to the antecedents (as discussed in previous sections). At least three consequences can be expected from researched case studies of complex and context-specific public administration phenomena:

- a contribution to theoretical knowledge about the particular phenomenon and the specific case;
- a deepened understanding of the complexity of the case in its context; and
- the possibility of actionable knowledge for public administration practitioners.

Consequence 1: Theoretical knowledge

As a case study is regarded as a research approach, it is expected to contribute to scholarly knowledge through, for instance, theory-building, the generalisation of theories and theory-testing (Piekkari et al 2009: 569, 571; Yin 2018: 21). *Theory-building* could be described as the development of inductive theories linking rich qualitative data (collected as part of a case study) to mainstream deductive research (Piekkari et al 2009: 571). As theory-building has been shown to be rooted deeply in rich qualitative data, it is with good reason that case studies are expected to be a source of accurate, interesting and testable theories. However, theory-building occurs mostly through multiple-case studies and not necessarily single-case studies (Mariotto et al 2014: 361). Because all the cases recorded in this book are single-case studies, their contribution is not so much to theory-building as to knowledge-creation through generalising theories.

Regarding the *generalising of theories*, it is of note that Yin (2018: 21) does not refer to the building of theories or extrapolating probabilities in the sense of statistical generalisations, but rather argues that analytical and conceptual generalisations can be derived from single-case studies. As it is possible to interpret these generalisations meaningfully, he argues, they can serve to expand and generalise on cumulative theoretical knowledge – an undeniable consequence of case studies (Yin 2013: 327).

Theory-testing and falsifying are both commonly associated with the so-called ‘black swan’ approach Popper (2005) refers to. Theory-testing is a key consequence of cases selected according the critical or extreme case-selection strategy and the unique in-depth nature of such case studies is particularly well

suiting to harsh theory-testing, including the falsifying of theories (Piekkari et al 2009: 571; Mariotto et al 2014: 362). Although the case studies in this collection are not aimed at harsh theory-testing, the use of theoretical lenses may foster insight into and understanding of theory and the challenges reported on.

Consequence 2: Deepened understanding

Deepened understanding as a second consequence of case studies is logically preceded by a meaningful interpretation of the theoretical generalisations, as discussed above. Theory therefore stimulates understanding as it presents a plausible explanation for the outcomes of a specific intervention, either through emerging theory from a specific case study or through theory as reported in the scholarly literature (Yin 2013: 327).

Whereas existing theories are characterised by their generalised nature, they do not always provide for context-specific (time and space) deviations from phenomena. Case studies, especially single-case studies, provide for 'a more precise understanding of the circumstances in which the phenomena occurred' (Mariotto et al 2014: 363). A key attribute of these circumstances is the historical context with its subsequent 'patterns of patterns of continuity and change' (Rule et al 2011: 316).

Deepened understanding as a consequence of case studies is especially applicable to case studies on the life history of individuals, the history of institutions or government departments, and the evaluation of policy implementation (see chapters 2 to 5, 7, 8, 13 and 16). Although a deep understanding of a complex case 'can contribute to a fine-tuned and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon in all its complexity' (Rule et al 2011: 319), it is not restricted to the theoretical and cognitive sphere; it can nevertheless contribute through enabling practitioners to manage situated challenges.

Through scholarly sense-making, a deepened understanding serves as a bridge between scholars and practitioners co-situated in the world of public administration, and therefore between scholarly knowledge and actionable knowledge. Bridging the unique types of knowing in these two worlds may stimulate innovative interventions when both existing and new public administration challenges have to be managed. Scholarly sense-making also has direct knowledge implications for public officials and members of society situated in the reality of a specific case. Creating actionable knowledge is therefore a crucial consequence of undertaking case studies in the realm of public administration.

Consequence 3: Actionable knowledge

As challenges in public administration are the first antecedent discussed, theoretical insight and a deepened understanding resulting from case studies of public administration must be translated into actionable knowledge for meeting these challenges. The concept of ‘actionable knowledge’ in the context of this chapter refers to knowledge used by practitioners to enable action or intervention while performing their tasks or functions (Bartels 2012: 435; Davis 2017: 213). Related to this concept are others such as ‘scholarship of application’ coined by Schön (1995: 31) in 1995 and ‘actionable researcher’ (Bartels 2012: 435). The latter concept specifically refers to a researcher situated in an ongoing process of interweaving and enquiry with practitioners with the aim of generating actionable knowledge (Bartels 2012: 435).

The implication for case study research is that actionable knowledge as a consequence of case studies depends on the inclusion of a third antecedent to case studies, namely, that of an inter-connected situatedness of researchers, practitioners and other stakeholders. This will inevitably enrich case study research with experiences of practice, tacit knowledge and practical wisdom (a concept introduced by Aristotle), resulting in comprehensive actionable knowledge for dealing with the challenges in public administration (Wren & Wren 2009: 258). Comprehensive knowledge resulting from case study research by interconnected research teams could provide the knowledge impact on practice envisaged by Aristotle, that is, knowledge with a view to ‘matters of action and acquisition’ (Aristotle 2014: 1096b). He concluded by stating that ‘if there is an end for all that we do, this will be the good in matters of action’ (Aristotle 2014: 1097a).

The three consequences identified for case studies of the challenges in public administration (theoretical knowledge, deepened understanding and actionable knowledge) are a point of reference for assessing the appropriateness of this approach. The contribution to and refinement of theoretical knowledge are indispensable to gaining a deepened understanding of cases and challenges, while actionable knowledge will also enhance the understanding necessary for dealing with such challenges.

CONCLUSION

The chapter commenced with a question about the worth of a book on researched case studies on the challenges in public administration. In support of such a publication, this chapter embarked on a process to justify the appropriateness of the case study approach to understanding these challenges. It is argued that because a case study is undertaken for distinct reasons, or antecedents, and because

the defining attributes of a case study are designed according to those reasons, its results are expected to be aligned to those reasons.

This chapter analysed two antecedents which justify the use of the case study approach to studying the challenges in public administration: the phenomenon challenges of public administration and the purpose of the study. In providing support for the appropriateness of using the case study approach to obtain a thorough understanding of the challenges, this chapter has shown that public administration as a human constructed reality has emerged in conjunction with the idea of the state to become that in-between mediator between state and society. The concept of 'public administration' has been shown to refer to the organised, non-political executive, protective, promotive and facilitative functions of a state. These categories of state function have been shown to be difficult to perform at times, with a concomitant need for unique performance capabilities. Accordingly, the notion 'challenges of public administration' refers to phenomena in diverse contexts that are influenced by a complexity of antecedents with sometimes unexpected consequences. The wicked, complex and evolving nature of this phenomenon inevitably leads to distinct knowledge needs and purposes, which constitute the second antecedent to a case study. This antecedent entails a having a specific purpose for case studies: to contribute to scholarly knowledge of the phenomenon 'challenge of public administration' and the selected instances of that phenomenon.

Informed by these two antecedents, the chapter proceeds to report on an analysis of the defining attributes of a case study approach relevant to the antecedents. Five attributes have been identified: the case as an instance of a phenomenon, the case selection strategy, the research design, the methods and techniques for data-collection, and the methods and techniques for data analysis. It is shown that these attributes have to be aligned to the antecedents. Therefore, typical, extreme, critical or revelatory instances of the challenges of public administration must be selected purposefully so that they can be studied as either single or multiple cases. Together with this, the most appropriate methods and techniques for collecting and analysing data and material on these cases must be selected. It is argued that these defining attributes not only sufficiently distinguish the case study approach from other research approaches but are purposefully aligned to the two antecedents. This supports the appropriateness of the case study approach to contributing to scholarly knowledge of the challenges of public administration.

The chapter also highlights the consequences of a case study as induced by both the antecedents and its constituting attributes. Three interrelated consequences have been identified, namely, theoretical knowledge, deepened understanding and actionable knowledge. These consequences serve as justification for

the appropriateness of the case study research into the challenges of public administration. It is for this reason that the case study approach is proposed for obtaining a thorough practical and theoretical understanding of these challenges in order to deal with them in an informed and sensible way. While wicked problems are rarely solved, the case study approach is a vehicle for gaining enhanced insight into problems requiring future research. The case studies shared in this book are related to the specific broad categories of executive state functions identified earlier in this chapter.

The first part of this book is devoted to the caring and protecting executive functions of the state. The selection of the case studies for this part has been guided by the principle for this category of function as set by Rousseau in 1762, namely, the principle of 'rigid integrity in doing strict justice to all, and above all in protecting the poor against the tyranny of the rich' (Rousseau, 1762: 266). Therefore, the four case studies in this part focus on the Gauteng Mental Health Marathon Project, child support and school feeding as cases of state intervention to do justice to all. The second part of the book consists of case studies related to the state's executive function to promote the good life for its citizens. The four case studies in this part focus on a wastewater challenge, the provision of public toilets, public service-delivery and access to higher education. Part three consists of seven case studies related to the third category of executive state functions – the enabling and facilitating functions. Three of these cases explore public finance and accountability challenges; another two focus on typical public human resource management challenges, while one case centres on risk management and another on the monitoring and evaluation of state performance. Part four deals with the value of these researched case studies to an epistemology of practice that informs the practice of public administration.

Reading a book reporting on case studies concerning public administration challenges is indeed considered to be a worthy pursuit. While this worthiness may be articulated in a different way by scholars, practitioners and members of society, this collection contributes to scholarly knowledge about, a deepened understanding of and actionable knowledge for dealing with these challenges. This book therefore aims to prepare public officials academically and professionally for dealing with their work-related challenges and to enhance the scholarly practice of case study research in South Africa and the rest of Africa.

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