

# Public Administration **CHALLENGES:** Cases from Africa

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**RESEARCHED CASES:  
AUTHENTIC SCENARIOS  
AS A WAY OF LEARNING FOR PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATORS**

*Jacobus S Wessels, Thean Potgieter and Thevan Naidoo*

## **INTRODUCTION**

While this compilation of researched case studies aims to contribute to scholarly sense-making of the challenges in public administration in South Africa and Ghana, the vexing question that remains is this: How can this process of sense-making contribute to the functioning of public administrators?

Although some of the case studies have a shared focus on a specific type of executive state function or a task, each of them has been shown to be unique regarding the context of the specific function or task analysed, the difficulties inherent in that specific function or task and the capabilities required to perform that difficult task. In this collection, a diversity of human beings – scholars, members of society, politicians and public administrators – share with one another a situatedness<sup>1</sup> in this world of challenges in public administration. Each of them has a distinct perspective on and obligation to this multifaceted reality.

In order to perform their tasks with success, public administrators need to be capable of integrating their knowledge and their behaviour with the essence of being professional public administrators (Dall’Alba 2009: 43). And in order to become capable public administrators, they must acquire the necessary habits of the mind through professional education and development.

Considering the constantly changing nature of these challenges, the professional education of public administrators has become more than the mere acquisition and use of knowledge and skills: it is a process of developing ‘professional ways of being’ (Dall’Alba 2009: 34). As a result, a paradigm shift to curriculum approaches

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1 The concept of *situatedness* means ‘the state in which one may be found’ (Heidegger 1962: 172).

that focus on capability and an ongoing rethinking of the ways in which learning is facilitated have become relevant.

With this in mind, the purpose of this chapter is, first, to explore the use of researched case studies as rich source material for facilitating the learning required by both aspiring and practising public administrators. This exploration departs from core philosophical assumptions about public administration as a reality. Second, the appropriateness of a capability approach to dealing with the challenges in public administration is considered. Third, professional enquiry is proposed as a learning strategy for instilling the required capabilities in public administrators, followed, fourth, by exposure to researched case studies as authentic environments in this learning strategy.

## PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

The philosophical assumptions that underpin this chapter relate to public administration as a reality, the relationship between public administrators, society and academics and this reality, the dissimilar forms of knowledge associated with these categories of role-player and the capabilities that public administrators must have or develop to be able to meet the many real challenges the field presents.

In line with this philosophical assumption, this chapter first departs from the assumption that public administration is not a natural phenomenon but one socially constructed through the ideas, concepts and imagination of human beings (Serres 1982: xvi; Winch 2003: 116). Drawing on the work of Heidegger (1962: 78), it assumes further that these human beings – whether scholars, public administrators, politicians or citizens – are situated in the world of public administration that is characterised by a shared language game<sup>2</sup> (Wittgenstein 1958: 5). The implication of these first two assumptions is that public administration is assumed to be a complex, multifaceted, multiconnected and diverse reality.

Third, it is assumed that the diverse categories of situated human beings have distinct ways of knowing their shared reality, and that this results in distinct forms of knowledge: scholarly, experiential, lay, tacit, action-related, presentational and inventive (Polanyi 1962: x; Kakabadse et al 2003: 368–369; Jakubik 2011: 4). This explains the need for interconnectedness among this diversity of co-inhabitants and also for comprehensive knowledge that helps such co-habitants to deal with the challenges of public administration (Jakubik 2011: 71–72; De Beer 2015: 126). A final assumption is that public administrators (who constitute an important

2 In this specific situatedness the 'language game' may be codified in, among other things, constitutional, legislative and other regulatory frameworks, and also in concepts, theories and scholarly discourses.

role-player category in public administration) require distinct capabilities to deal with complex, multifaceted, multiconnected and unpredictable challenges in public administration (Sen 1994: 334; Stephenson 1998: 3; Termeer et al 2015: 685; 2016). These capabilities are discussed below.

## **CAPABILITIES FOR DEALING WITH CHALLENGES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

When setting the scene in the first chapter on case studies as an approach to challenges in public administration, we placed emphasis on the fact that it is imperative to deal with such challenges by searching for actionable knowledge to enhance the quality of life of society at large. As a result, the focus in this collection of studies is on the requisite capabilities that public administrators should have in order to deal professionally with what are often complex and unpredictable responsibilities (Dall’Alba 2009: 39). The traditional approach for preparing public administrators for their task is competency-based: it uses ‘industry standard competencies and performance indicators drawn from experienced practitioners’ (Stephenson 1998: 3). In support of such an understanding of the global field of Public Administration, the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) adopted a single set of competency standards as the basis for the Master of Public Administration qualification (COPRA 2014: standard 5.1).

However, has the time not arrived to question a competency-based approach which assumes the validity of a universal set of competency standards that prepares public administrators to deal with unpredictable challenges? Such a question is especially relevant when we consider the complex nature of public administration and the intricate challenges that administrators must often manage.

Whereas the *competency-based approach* is described by Stephenson as ‘essentially a top-down control model which aims to secure the effective delivery of current services based on standards determined by past performance’ (1998: 3), the *capability approach* has been shown to be a more comprehensive and humane approach, one informed by the notion of integrating ‘knowledge, skills, personal qualities and understanding ... in familiar and highly focused specialist contexts but [also] in response to new and changing circumstances’ (Stephenson 1998: 2).

The capability approach is founded on the deep-seated value of inherent respect for human beings (Alkire 2005). This is especially relevant to the situatedness of human beings in the world of public administration. In fact, the work by Sen has set the tone by framing the capability approach as one whose point of departure is valuing the well-being and freedom of human beings so as ‘to achieve functionings that we have reason to value’ (Sen 1994: 334). Other

scholars, such as Nussbaum (2000, 2002; 2016), Alkire (2005) and Osmani (2017), have also contributed significantly to the vibrant scholarly discourse on the relevance and value of this approach.

Stephenson's work regarding the capability approach is highly relevant to the vision of public administrators as free and optimally functional human beings. For him, the concept of 'capability' refers to a person's justified confidence in their ability to:

- take effective and appropriate action;
- explain what their actions are about;
- live and work effectively with others; and
- continue to learn from their experiences as individuals and in association with others, in a diverse and changing society (Stephenson 1998: 2).

In support of Stephenson's interpretation of human capabilities, Termeer et al propose an integrated approach to dealing with the challenges in public administration (2015: 681). They introduce the concept 'governance capabilities' when referring to what public administrators need to be equipped with in order to perform their functions – of which they have identified four (2015: 685):

- Reflexivity: The capability to appreciate and deal with unstructured problems and multiple realities.
- Resilience: The capability to adapt flexibly one's course in response to frequent and uncertain changes without losing identity.
- Responsiveness: The capability to respond legitimately to unlimited demands and concerns.
- Revitalising: The capability to unblock stagnations and reanimate policy processes.

Notwithstanding some concerns having been raised about the overemphasis on individual choice and freedom in the capability approach (Osmani 2017: 9), this approach seems to be highly appropriate to dealing with the unstructured and unpredictable nature of challenges in public administration. Assuming that public administrators are not intuitively equipped with these capabilities, an appropriate learning strategy is necessary to instil them in both current and aspiring administrators. In the next section we therefore propose professional enquiry as an appropriate learning strategy for acquiring these governance capabilities.

## PROFESSIONAL ENQUIRY AS A PROPOSED LEARNING STRATEGY

The line of reasoning above refuted the validity of the competency-based model as a standardised approach to learning. It also maintained that the capability approach to challenges in public administration is appropriate. As a result, this section proposes professional enquiry as a suitable strategy for instilling the necessary capabilities in public administrators.

To this end, a survey of the scholarly literature on education and training as interventions aimed at enhancing practitioner performance was carried out mainly by education scholars. Professional enquiry as a learning strategy emerged from a dissatisfaction with existing professional development strategies aimed at improving educators' performance (Timperley et al 2009: 228, 229). The theoretical foundations of enquiry learning evolved from this dissatisfaction.

### Enquiry learning: a theoretical foundation

An important contribution to the theoretical foundation for an enquiry learning strategy emerges from a study commissioned by the United States National Research Foundation on human learning. A published report on *How People Learn: Bridging Research and Practice* (NRC 1999) provides insightful findings directly applicable to a learning strategy for public administrators. The three most relevant findings contained in this report are:

- First, facilitating the learning of new concepts and information has to begin with engaging with learners' prior knowledge and their preconceptions about their practice. The reason for this is that their prior knowledge helps students to understand the relevance of the new knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful problem-solving (NRC 1999: 10, 20).
- The second finding suggests that capable professionals need a deep base of foundational and factual knowledge, organised within a conceptual framework that encourages the easy retrieval of that knowledge (Timperley et al 2009: 230). Such conceptual frameworks have deepened learners' understanding of the connection between their prior knowledge and experience to new knowledge informed by research. This understanding allows learners to evaluate, learn and apply the acquired knowledge in new situations in their functional contexts (NRC 1999: 12, 13, 22, 28).
- Third, the report proposes a 'meta-cognitive' approach to facilitating learning in order to instil self-regulated learning and practice in individuals (NRC 1999: 13). This approach entails, among other practices, internal conversations, self-reflection, self-awareness and an ability to reflect on one's expected functioning and required capabilities. A study by Butler and Schnellert (2012: 1209) supports this presumption by placing emphasis on a possible association

between successfully acquiring these forms of self- and co-regulated learning and practice and observing important changes in these learners' world of work.

Professional enquiry as a learning strategy is therefore founded on the principles of prior knowledge and conceptions, knowledge embedded in an appropriate conceptual framework, and self- and co-regulated learning. One implication of the self- and co-regulated nature of professional enquiry is the emergence of professional learning communities (Woodland 2016: 505). Their ultimate purpose is improved performance and practices (Timperley et al 2009: 229).

### **Defining attributes of professional enquiry as a learning strategy**

The literature reveals that the notion and phenomenon referred to as 'professional enquiry' can be identified by several attributes: an act of questioning, the situatedness in a specific practice, self- and co-regulation, collaboration, and practice-improving knowledge.

#### *An act of questioning*

In the context of acquiring the capability to deal with challenges in public administration, the notion of 'enquiry' refers to an act of questioning, reflection, critique, investigating and exploring. Its purpose is to uncover myths and fabrications and probably change or discard existing conceptual frameworks (Rice 2001: 29; Smith & Goldblatt 2009: 135). Such questioning is not only an act of learning, but also 'indispensable [to] arriving at truth' (Goldman et al 2010: 279).

#### *Situatedness*

The word 'professional' in the expression 'professional enquiry' refers to the situatedness of the enquiry process in the specific world of work with its unique regulatory framework. The enquirers are therefore part of a situated community of practice (Butler & Schnellert 2012: 1206) who reflect on, and enquire into, their situated professional practices (Smith & Goldblatt 2009: 135). Professional enquiry, grounded as it is in an extended epistemology of practice, is therefore characterised by the situatedness of the meaning and existence of knowledge in ordinary experiences of practice (Cook & Wagenaar 2012: 8).

#### *Self- and co-regulation*

Such learning relates directly to the meta-cognitive approach to self- and co-regulated learning and practice (NRC 1999: 13). This approach entails, among other factors, learners' – and, by implication, future public administrators' – taking control of their own learning and practice (Timperley et al 2009: 231). A study



by Butler and Schnellert suggests that self- and co-regulation may result not only in improved learning and practice, but also in the generation of new knowledge about the learners' own practice (2012: 1209).

### *Collaboration*

Related to the characteristics of situatedness and those of self- and co-regulation as methods of professional enquiry is the collaborative nature of enquiry. As Butler and Schnellert have shown, collaboration in the enquiry process is important to systematic change in an organisation (2012: 1206). The collaborative nature of the enquiry process is also enhanced by having professional learning communities (PLCs) in place that take care of the improved education and training essential to enhanced practice (Woodland 2016: 505). Workplace learning provided by public officials for public officials is a typical example of PLCs, which serves to highlight the relevance of the related concepts, 'networked learning' and 'connectivity' (DeLuca et al 2017: 68). Collaboration is also grounded in the third philosophical assumption identified earlier in this chapter: the necessity of interconnectedness between co-inhabitants of the world of work so that one and all gain and share comprehensive knowledge with which to resolve challenges in practice (Jakubik 2011: 71–72; De Beer 2015: 126).

### *Comprehensive knowledge construction*

Constructing comprehensive knowledge about a specific practice in which the collaborators are situated is another attribute of professional enquiry. Comprehensive knowledge construction draws on the first finding of the study: the necessity of including learners' prior knowledge and preconceptions about their practice in a common conceptual framework for enquiring, understanding and learning (NRC 1999: 10, 20). In this regard, Smith and Goldblatt (2009: 6) refer to enquiry frameworks as knowledge structures and lenses for making sense of and constructing new knowledge about multi-layered challenges.

Professional enquiry as a process of constructing a comprehensive body of knowledge about the world of practice is also grounded in an extended epistemology of practice which regards 'practice as having an epistemological dimension, rather than seeing knowledge as giving rise to practice' (Cook & Wagenaar 2012: 26). Cook and Wagenaar argue that the public administrators' consequent comprehensive and actionable understanding of a situation at hand enables them to perform their functions effectively and responsibly (2012: 18).

*Improved performance or practice*

The literature also indicates that professional enquiry is characterised by its purpose, that is, to improve performance or practice so as ultimately to ‘achieve functionings that we have reason to value’ (Sen 1994: 334). In this regard, Woodland refers to the notion of ‘improvement science’, which refers to

a type of evidenced-based collective inquiry that aims to bridge the research–practice divide and increase organizational capacity to solve pressing problems of practice (Woodland 2016: 505).

The presence of this purposive attribute, however, inevitably depends on the presence of all the attributes.

In the context of public administration, professional enquiry therefore refers to a collaborative act of enquiry into the practice of public administration by the situated, self- and co-regulated inhabitants of this practice with the purpose of constructing comprehensive knowledge for improving this practice. In order to instil professional enquiry as a way in which public administrators think and act, the next section proposes the use of a researched case study as an authentic environment through which to acquire professional capabilities.

## **RESEARCHED CASE STUDY: AUTHENTIC SCENARIO AS A MEANS OF LEARNING PROFESSIONAL CAPABILITIES**

The philosophical assumptions discussed earlier in this chapter impose certain requirements on designing and facilitating learning. These requirements entail, first, learning being aimed at acquiring the capability to perform professional or workplace functions in the multifaceted and socially constructed reality of public administration. This implies that learning must prepare public administrators to deal capably with complex, multifaceted, multiconnected and unpredictable challenges. Second, while learning should be situated in authentic scenarios of workplace realities, this implies that it is also a collaborative experience, one that includes all the knowledges required to function capably.

Considering these assertions, it can therefore be expected that an appropriate learning strategy will instil some fundamental and also some specific governance capabilities in public administrators. The fundamental capabilities as identified by Stephenson entail a justified confidence and an ability to act appropriately, to understand and explain a situation, to live and work effectively with others and to learn continuously from practice (Stephenson 1998: 2). The four governance capabilities identified by Termeer et al (2015: 685) – reflexivity, resilience,

responsiveness and revitalising –are therefore also of considerable relevance and warrant inclusion for consideration in this chapter. For the purposes of this chapter, it is assumed that it can be expected of public administrators to have the capabilities to perform both the fundamental and the governance responsibilities in their respective situated contexts. This section therefore proposes the use of researched case studies as authentic scenarios relevant to the contexts in which public administrators are situated to enable them to acquire the requisite capabilities that empower them to function capably.

The research and publications of Herrington and other scholars (including Ron Oliver, Anthony Herrington, Jenni Parker, Dorit Maor, Thomas Reeves and Younghee Woo) are held in high regard so far as the notion of an ‘authentic scenario’ is concerned. They have identified the following elements of an authentic learning environment (Herrington & Oliver 2000; Herrington et al 2003, 2004; Herrington & Herrington 2005, 2007; Herrington et al 2010; Boase-Jelinek et al 2013; Parker et al 2013):

- authentic contexts that reflect the way the knowledge will be used in real life;
- authentic activities;
- access to expert performances and the modelling of processes;
- multiple roles and perspectives;
- collaborative construction of knowledge;
- opportunities for reflection;
- opportunities for articulation;
- coaching and scaffolding; and
- authentic assessment.

These elements have been refined and categorised as learning tasks, learning resources, learning supports, task supports, task resources and resource supports (Herrington et al 2010: 127–132; Parker et al 2013: 228–230).

Considering their evidence-supported statement that for ‘authentic learning to occur, learners must be engaged in an inventive and realistic task that provides opportunities for complex collaborative activities’ (Herrington et al 2010: 1), this chapter makes a strong argument for rich researched case studies being highly appropriate to our purpose.

A common question that is often asked when considering the learning value of case studies is whether simplified task-oriented cases, summarised scenarios or stories are not preferable to rich researched case studies. In response, Herrington et al (2010: 20) argue that

the tendency to simplify complex cases and situations, particularly in initial instruction, can only serve to impede the later acquisition of more complex understandings.

Their assertion seems to be well supported by previous research. Research evidence dating back to at least 1987 indicates that case studies used in the context of learning need to be studied in their real-life richness and complexity and not as ‘stripped down “textbook examples” that conveniently illustrate some principle’ (Spiro et al 1987: 181).

In particular, a research case study can provide an authentic, rich and complex context, not only to link the learning to the world of work of the learners, but to ensure that their learning activities make practical sense. Research case studies provide the necessary access point to learning from expert performances and model processes; to identifying and reflecting on multiple roles and perspectives; to participating in the collaborative construction of new insights and knowledge, opportunities for reflection and articulation, and coaching and scaffolding by facilitators or lecturers; and to the authentic assessment of learning.

Considering the work referred to above, researched case studies are therefore not ‘taught’; instead, they serve as authentic contexts for learning professional capabilities. This is because authentic learning occurs through learners’ actively engaging and co-operating with co-learners. The evidence of the learning occurring lies in the meaningful performance of authentic learning tasks and ultimately in the capability to perform meaningfully in practice. The authenticity of learning tasks and meaningful performance are therefore determined by a combination of the level of functioning and learners’ prior knowledge of and preconceptions about their practice.

The facilitation and scaffolding of the learning process may include several consecutive steps:<sup>3</sup>

1. posing provocative questions or signposts for a deeper understanding of the case study;
2. introducing learners’ own experiences and perspectives;
3. introducing relevant theoretical voices;
4. inventing solutions to the case problem; and
5. reflecting about the learning experience with reference to their specific way of being and becoming a public administration professional.

3 In recognition of ‘The Praxis Learning Cycle’ as suggested by Marié Nothling.

The researched case studies used to encourage learning are not supposed to be model cases; instead, they should be instances that are typical of the complex world of work in which public administrators are expected to function. The diverse case studies collected in this book are able to serve as authentic scenarios for making sense of the challenges that arise in public administration. These challenges should be related to a diversity of thematic foci and transversal issues: service delivery, governance, leadership and management, innovation, strategic planning, project management, finance management, communication, monitoring and evaluation, impact and transformation, to mention only a few.

A researched case study should not comprise a technical toolkit for learning appropriate professional capabilities. It should serve as an authentic scenario in a learning process in which a diversity of thematic foci can be applied. However, these case studies may not provide authentic scenarios for learning capabilities that could be required in all public administration contexts and at every functional level. As indicated in the study completed under the auspices of the NRC (1999: 10), facilitating learning entails, in the first instance, engaging with learners' prior knowledge and preconceptions about their practice. Researched case studies are therefore not the only source of authentic scenarios.

Studies by Keppel, Herrington and Herrington have revealed the use of a variety educational 'triggers' for developing authentic settings for learning (Herrington & Herrington 2005; Herrington et al 2010). These authentic settings may provide for learning authentic collaborative tasks, whether they are complex or of a routine (or routinised) nature.

### **FURTHERING PRACTICE: CASE STUDIES AND LEARNING**

Scholars and practitioners often lament the limited influence of scholarship on both public administration practice and policy development and the imperative for knowledge of public administration to be made more meaningful. This gap can be attributed to perceptions among decision-makers and the wider public that the research is often of a 'mixed or inferior quality' that does not result in 'meaningful, actionable knowledge' (Wessels 2021: 2).

In order to remedy this divide, it is necessary first to appreciate the situatedness of scholars, practitioners and citizens, and to focus on the important contribution that quality scholarly work makes to knowledge production and dissemination. Situatedness implies that specific scientific knowledge, the contributions of scholars and the tacit knowledge inherent in the complex challenges in public administration and the actions of practitioners contribute to the meaningful knowledge that is required for sense-making and understanding (Wessels 2021: 9–10).

Just as the scholarly analysis of reality contributes to our ability to make sense, so researched case studies make an important contribution to knowledge. They provide a rich description of authentic scenarios and the complex environment in which public administrators function. They highlight real-life experiences and actions in a contextualised, realistic way by focusing on the multifaceted challenges that public administrators must deal with. And precisely because of their authenticity, such studies have credibility and are memorable; and those studying them will be better placed to attempt to make sense of the specific events that occurred.

A good narrative (as represented by case studies for the purposes of this discussion) appeals to human existence, is often not too narrowly limited to specific cultural, ideological, temporal or academic areas, while it is capable of explaining processes, methods and academic content (Rossiter 2002: 1–2).

Case studies are valuable pedagogical tools in adult learning as they often involve a dilemma or a problem that must be negotiated or solved. They make it possible to engage individuals with multifaceted practical realities and new knowledge and to broaden their perspectives. In addition, depending on their focus area, case studies could be instruments of transformation, in the sense of supporting personal growth and stimulating an alternative understanding of challenges.

A common learning approach associated with case studies is the case method. The method was developed and implemented initially at the Harvard Law School by Langdell in the late 19th century. Through a focus on existing case law, Langdell aimed to simplify legal education, provide structure to learning and emphasise principles. Students analysed cases explaining the state of contract law ‘during Socratic question-and-answer sessions in class’ (Harvard Law School 2021). Soon afterwards (in 1909), the Harvard Business School decided to implement such a ‘laboratory method’ of teaching to ‘stimulate discussion in the service of thinking’ (McGuire & Whaley 2017: 237).

Business and management schools worldwide have since adopted this approach, placing emphasis on the pedagogical value of an analysis of actual situations taken from practice. However, developing and compiling good case studies for teaching purposes requires a special approach that is different from that of academic writing, which focuses on developing a strong and empirically supported thesis, with deductions emanating from various other cases or examples (Guttieri, Franke & Civic 2014: 9). Cases might also be analysed from a theoretical angle, one often aimed at validating a specific theoretical model or approach (Kjellén 2007: 118–119).

Typical teaching cases should ideally commence with a short narration that immediately focuses the attention of participants on specific dilemmas that

managers or leaders have had to deal with and create anticipation about how such dilemmas must be approached or resolved. Background on the institution and persons involved in the case study should be provided, with a summary of the course of events. The notion of chronology – explaining events in the order in which they occurred – remains important as it provides a good impression of how problems have evolved over time, when they possibly got out of hand, at which stages it was still possible to intervene with success, and when a specific problem spun out of control (McGuire & Whaley 2017: 258).

As participants are placed in the context of the problems real people had to wrestle with, they will ponder on and discuss the problems and the decisions taken, explore different options and possibly consider various ways of approaching and solving problems through an interpretation of relevant principles. Here, attention often falls on opposing positions taken (the role of a protagonist or an antagonist), which should stimulate deliberations about various options and solutions. Case studies should provide participants with the opportunity to place themselves in the position of the original actors with differing cultural, organisational and professional backgrounds and then lead them to identify important contextual issues and viable courses of action. Well-developed teaching cases often do not provide a clear indication of the best resolutions. Instead, they offer learners the opportunity to review alternative solutions in order to stimulate debate that might even leave participants uncertain as to the best course of action.

The proper application of the case method can stimulate the development of cognitive patterns such as distinguishing between peripheral and crucial information, problem identification, determining alternative courses of action and possible solutions, formulating strategies and identifying obstacles to implementation (Guttieri, Franke & Civic 2014: 8). Cases could typically focus on the problem identified (case dilemma), the policy aspects (policy dilemma), or indicate how poor policy development and implementation caused a dilemma. Because participants are forced ‘into the problem ... [that brings] life to theory’, it might become evident that multi-disciplinary approaches are often best suited to solving complex problems (Marcella & Fought 2009). Depending on the topics at hand and the theoretical understanding required, case studies could be used for both undergraduate and postgraduate studies, for executive education, and for professional development.

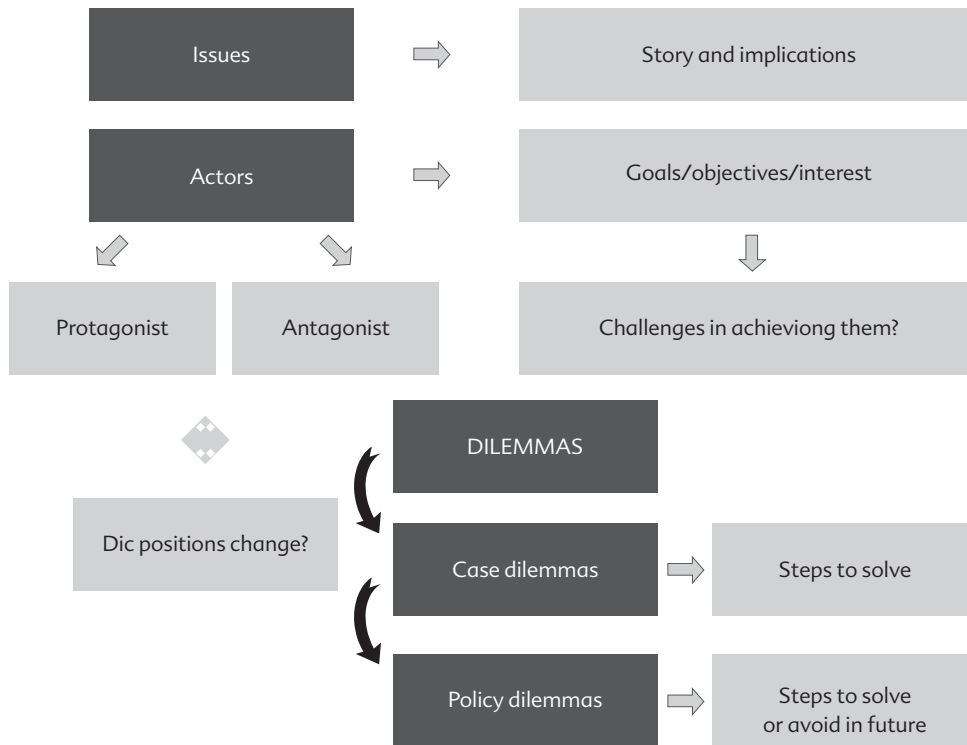
The value of case studies lies in creating active and engaging practical learning processes while allowing for peer learning exchanges. This learning method enables facilitators to assign specific questions or task settings beforehand or to identify individuals or groups to take opposing views in order to stimulate debate. Besides encouraging wide participation, though, facilitators need also to ensure

that important theoretical aspects, learning points or objectives are highlighted during discussions. This approach could be likened to the Socratic method as it is an enquiry based on debating different arguments and stimulating critical thinking through the question-and-answer method. The process eliminates hypotheses, highlights contradictions, while better solutions to complex problems are constantly considered through a test of logic. This is essentially a dialectic process, because it moves to a proposed solution or solutions by interrogating opposing views (Copeland 2010: 26).

Case teaching is a drawn-out endeavour during which participants must be 'guided, but not told'. The lecturer is replaced by discussions that must be guided and directed by a competent facilitator. To ensure that the pertinent issues are raised and analysed in the process, comprehensive teaching notes on each case should provide facilitators with clear guidelines. Although lectures are replaced by a seminar approach, it is still essential for facilitators to be well prepared for explaining, elucidating and analysing each case scenario. The available expertise in the group must be put to use and even the physical setting could influence effective learning (Guttieri, Franke & Civic 2014: 10).

As case studies must be relevant to the objectives or outcomes of a specific programme, additional reading relevant to the cases at hand should be provided. Although the discussion must remain fluent, facilitators should follow specific questioning sequences to guide discussions. Ideally, a session should commence with elementary questions, move to more difficult and controversial issues, and then take the group through an analysis of the opposing alternatives. In addition, it is important to get the participants to ponder on the relevance of the case to their organisations, experiences and work environments, and to reflect on how such issues would challenge their actions or their management and leadership roles (Guttieri, Franke & Civic 2014: 10–11). Facilitators could develop a broad plan to align key elements to specific cases and provide guidelines for using them in teaching and learning (see Figure 1).





Source: Adapted from Guttieri, Franke and Civic 2014: 11

**Figure 1:** Guidelines for developing a broad facilitation plan

Although much can be gained through a teaching approach that focuses on case studies, in general the following two pedagogical objectives linked to it might be most pertinent:

- They highlight topical issues or dilemmas which participants must grapple with in order to find solutions.
- They contribute to developing analytical skills and cognitive response mechanisms which can add to shaping behaviour patterns.

In this way, using case studies could also contribute to teaching the learners about ethics. Whereas individual preferences often dictate choices and in-depth analysis often produces sentiments that could be interpreted differently, complex ethical dilemmas must be considered, and ethical norms and principles must be applied (Kaurin 2014: 109). Both in learning and in practice, the quest for finding solutions must include a contextualised consideration of theory, ethics and what is achievable.

Participant-centred learning through using real scenarios as a tool for strategic analysis and thinking has become inherent in education at leading institutions across the world. It aids learning through an appreciation of the integrated and interrelated nature of business and organisational functions, of the importance of information and information flow and of the relationship between theory and practice (Mital 2008: 4). After years of application, the approach is still viewed as a fruitful 'inductive method'. It is also in line with John Locke's emphasis on a method of learning that does not necessarily focus on textbook content but which uses original sources, working from the specific to the general and learning by scrutinising complex situations (Coquillette & Kimball 2015: 351).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that the learning of public administrators is founded on the assumption that public administration is a complex, multi-faceted, socially constructed reality in which administrators, together with other inhabitants, are situated. This shared situatedness implies a diversity of knowledges and the need for distinct capabilities to perform their professional functions. For this reason, the capability approach to equipping public administrators to function optimally in dealing with challenges in public administration is proposed. This is complemented by professional enquiry as a learning strategy with which to instil the required capabilities in public administrators.

Finally, this chapter argued for the appropriateness of researched case studies as authentic environments on which to base this learning strategy. Rich and complex researched case studies serve as invaluable authentic contexts in which public administrators can learn those authentic professional capabilities necessary to dealing with complex and sometimes unexpected challenges.

Active learning processes enable participants to recognise, analyse, debate and reach conclusions on important issues and their implications. Participants find it relatively easy to identify with narrative case studies based on remarkable real-life events, recounted in a way that makes it possible to grapple with the complex issues decision-makers were confronted with. The connection between theory, problems and solutions is evident, as is the fact that a comprehensive multi-disciplinary approach involving many role-players is often required to solve problems. Furthermore, the use of case studies in learning stimulates the development of cognitive skills, further deep reflection and sense-making, and creates opportunities to recognise patterns and shape appropriate responses.

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## Chapter 17

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