Specialized Knowledge Area Module VII  
Case Study in Health Services

Introduction

A case study differs from a theoretical analysis by reaching beyond the intellectual domain while still making full use of that domain. You will demonstrate your mastery of knowledge by engaging in some practical activity related to a specific area in community health and by showing that your involvement reflects a conceptual framework based upon principles and concepts of social change.

Change processes characterize the events of our daily lives. We see change occurring within ourselves, our family members, our colleagues, and the organizations and community in which we participate. Many of these changes appear to be the result of planned interventions, while other changes seem to be unplanned and the consequence of environmental forces beyond our awareness and control. Theoretical accounts and attempts at planned change at the individual, group, institutional, and community level represent the subject matters of most professional fields. Health psychology, for instance, represents a field committed to the theoretical and applied understanding of how changes occur in health behavior. Similarly, medical sociology focuses on the nature of change processes in social groups and health institutions. Health education is a field concerned with the systematic changes in individuals and groups that lead to new and more complex health skills and knowledge. Health administration deals with principles and processes whereby goal-directed organizations such as hospitals and governmental health agencies function. Just as the above fields represent the collective efforts of groups of professionals to explain theoretically the processes of change, these professionals individually attempt to produce intended changes through appropriate strategies. In a sense, these efforts represent the scientific enterprise. At an individual level, each professional attempts to explain how change occurs and to guide his/her efforts according to this theoretical account.

As a doctoral student in Walden's program, you will be expected to apply these theoretical principles to practical problems in community health. The case study represents the method by which you will eventually demonstrate your proficiency in applying change principles to solving significant unresolved social problems in your professional field.
This case study KAM is based upon your readings and professional experiences in applied change. This KAM is designed to help organize your knowledge of community health, and to focus upon theories and strategies of implementing change in your profession. As you read and think about change, how to operate on a set of philosophical and theoretical assumptions in your professional practice should become clear. Analyze and present your assumptions about human nature and the processes of social change that shape our behavior. Compare your assumptions with other points of view. For instance, physicians, nurses, administrators, psychologists, dentists, pharmacists, physical therapists, and other health professionals may perceive different aspects of human behavior based upon their individual frames of reference. An outcome of this assignment should be a case study that clearly analyzes and presents your theoretical perspectives of the change processes and the strategies for effecting change consistent with your perspectives. After you have identified these general elements, you will relate them to community health.

An educational goal that many Walden students share is to increase their conceptual and performance proficiency as a responsible change agent in their professional practice. The spirit reflected in this goal seems to characterize those students who find the preparation of the case study challenging and intellectually stimulating. You may wish to define the case study situation by retrospectively reflecting on your previous KAMs, workshops you attended, or books/articles you read that dealt with the change aspects of your professional area. These topics and others (organizational development, systems analysis, and social processes) all directly and indirectly deal with theories of change relevant to individuals, groups, organizations, and communities.

**Overall Learning Objectives**

Completion of this KAM requires you to critique theoretical explanations of change processes and strategies for planned change relevant to community health (breadth). You will also identify and define major professional issues and problems in need of change (depth). You will design a strategy for change compatible with your own philosophical beliefs, professional practices, and theories of social and organizational change. You will describe and explain a specific case in which you observed or carried out an intervention or strategy to produce a planned change (individual, group, organizational, or community focus) and will evaluate the described situation in the context of your theoretical account of change processes. In addition, you will compare and contrast your approach with alternative change strategies that potentially could have been applied to the case (application).
Breadth Component
Theories of Case Study Research and Applied Change in Health Services

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of the breadth component of this KAM, you will have developed a sense of what constitutes case study research and applied change in a health services setting. Additionally, you will understand the methods and techniques employed in case studies and change interventions. This will be accomplished by completing an integrated written assignment demonstrating your breadth of understanding of case studies of applied change in health services.

Learning Resources and Bibliographic Guidelines

Philosophical and Theoretical Issues

Methods


See Also:

Demonstration of Competence

Write a scholarly paper that reflects a critical examination of the methods and techniques employed in case studies and applied change in the health services setting. This assignment must demonstrate a command of the broad literature of this KAM component, the ability to compare and contrast theories and methods, and the use of critical thinking that challenges presuppositions.

**Depth Component**

**Relating Change Theories to Practice in Health Services**

**Learning Objectives**

Upon completion of the depth component of this KAM, you will more fully recognize the powers and possibilities of case study-based research and will appreciate the sense of satisfaction provided by an analysis of planned change in a specific health services context related to your profession. You will demonstrate familiarity with the relevant literature and understanding of the principles of applying theory to practice by completing the written assignments outlined below.

**Learning Resources and Bibliographic Guidelines**

In consultation with your faculty assessor, select at least five sources. These must be directly referred to in the depth component of your demonstration.

**Demonstration of Competence**

Complete both of the following:

1. Compile an annotated bibliography of sources relating to change in an area in health services. This bibliography must have a summary and critical analysis for a minimum of fifteen sources drawn primarily from current (past three years) research-based articles in scholarly/professional journals.

2. Write a scholarly paper that identifies current and upcoming social problems/issues (with research-based documentation) that your profession can/should address. For each, outline possible
alternative solutions (including past attempts that are documented by the research literature) and specific change implications (i.e., possible change agents, change process, change techniques / methods / strategies).

Note: Appendix B provides clarification as to problems, issues, and theories.

The following tasks might be of assistance to you in initiating this assignment.

**Task 1**
List social problems or issues that only those who are considered radicals or mavericks in your profession would concentrate on. Through examination of so-called "outliers," a sense of what various segments of a profession consider to be critical future problems is discovered. You may include in this discussion a list of what the futurists in your profession would consider to be important problems and issues.

**Task 2**
List social problems or situations that your profession has failed, in your opinion, to provide an adequate explanation or solution.

**Task 3**
Try to define the characteristics of a problem your profession would consider "non-trivial" or important. Ask yourself what kind of solution generated by your profession would win a Nobel Prize or other similar recognition of a major contribution to the field.

**Application Component**

**A Case Study of Applied Change in Health Services**

**Learning Objectives**

Upon completion of the application component of this KAM, you will feel confident of your ability to complete case study-oriented research. You will understand the methods and techniques utilized in case studies and will be familiar with the strengths and limitations of the approach. You will demonstrate your knowledge by completing a case study analysis of an issue important to you in your current professional role.
Learning Resources and Bibliographic Guidelines

In consultation with your faculty assessor, select at least five sources. These must be directly referred to in your application project.

Demonstration of Competence

Design, execute, and evaluate a case study demonstrating the process of planned change in a health services setting. Note that the case study may be based on your role as an (internal or external) consultant (using process and technical skills) or college/university teaching (full-term course with a didactic and preceptorship component). Further, the setting for the case study may be domestic or international. Regardless of the specifics of your case study approach, Appendix C should prove helpful in the evaluation and report-writing of your case study.

Beginning this Endeavor: Select a Strategy for Your Case Study

The first step in choosing a strategy for your case study situation is to review your previous KAMs, workshops, books/articles, or other experiences that influenced your theoretical views about humans and their organization. Then focus on personal experiences that influenced the practical or technical approaches you use when helping others to change some aspect of their behavior. Focus on experiences that influenced how you practice and the strategies you used to teach, supervise, sell, counsel, persuade, etc. Again, list as many appropriate experiences that influence your theoretical notions about change processes as well the strategies, techniques, and methods you employed to produce changes in individuals, groups, organizations, and/or communities.

The following example may help you envision your case study:

Maria Lopez holds an MBA in strategic planning and currently functions as vice president for planning in a large urban hospital. She has received intensive training in concepts of strategic planning but has received little training in social psychology. Consequently, her change efforts in areas of modifying organizational behavior and implementing new planning models are not always successful.

She is confident that she will have little difficulty identifying prospective interviewees for her case study. She hopes to learn more about how her own philosophy and understanding of change processes effect the strategies and change interventions she characteristically employs. She decides that readings on change theory and strategy will prepare her to develop a case study of a particular situation that was important to the hospital and did not succeed. By involving herself in the situation, while at the same time considering its theoretical aspects from new perspectives based upon her reading, ideas may occur.
which would lead to greater understanding of how the earlier project failed and how future projects may be made more successful.
Appendix A
Guidelines and Criteria for Assessment

Assessment of your competence in this particular knowledge area will encompass three different modes—breadth, depth, and application—based upon demonstrated competence in a specific area in community health. You will be evaluated on the quality of your demonstration of the critical issues (breadth), your presentation of the research supporting the critical issues (depth), and the usefulness of this knowledge to your profession (application). Individual wants and needs, and the expectations of your faculty assessor, will determine the specific nature of your readings and assignments. While we have suggested general assignments for each section of the KAM, we encourage developing a unique approach. In all cases, the project chosen must be the equivalent of a final project in a five-credit doctoral seminar (four credits for the application component). In addition, the paper should be structured in a format acceptable to refereed journals.

Although not required, consider developing your application project with a publication or presentation in mind. As your project will reflect a sufficiently high degree of originality, rigor, and quality anyway, a publication or presentation will greatly enhance your professional stature and credibility.
Appendix B

Problems, Issues, and Theories

In relating theory to issues and problems, clear distinctions among the three are made. Problems are concrete, theories abstract. Theories are made up of generalizations derived from more than one version of a problem. Thus, you should look for commonalities in the existence of problems across different groups at different times and under different conditions. A theory helps you see those commonalities; likewise, a search for the commonalities is a clue to the theory used. Problems are descriptive and pose questions: What is happening? What is wrong? Theories provide explanation and answer questions relating to why something is happening or why something is wrong.

Problems are solvable; issues are resolvable; theories are testable. What might be called empirical verification for a problem would involve answers to questions such as: Does the problem really exist? How many people are affected by it? What are its likely effects upon a given agency, society, or culture? Verification of issues typically takes place in terms of the persuasiveness of logical argument, or political action resulting in one side of the issue being chosen over the other or of both sides of the issues finding resolution in a higher synthesis.

Theories are testable, either logically in terms of internal coherence, adherence to first principles of logic, or ability to provide a simplified picture of complex phenomena. Questions that should be asked about theory include: Does the theory account for the known facts? How many unknowns are needed to complete the theoretical explanation, and are those unknowns discoverable? Is the theoretical explanation able to account for specific facts under a variety of conditions?
Appendix C
Writing the Case Study Report

I. Introduction

The case study is a narrative account of social action in a social unit (such as decision making), an analytical, interpretative assessment by which to evaluate or develop generalizations about behavior or social phenomena, not merely a descriptive account of what transpired. The case study method is not simply the chronological presentation of events but the selective presentation of facts and activities.

Commonly, participant observation is a part of the methodological approach, and the data collection aspect is eclectic in that the investigator (a) studies all available public and private documents, including committee minutes, policy and procedure manuals, personal letters, and other forms of institutional documents; (b) records observations based upon personal "participation" in organizational activities; and (c) conducts interviews with knowledgeable informants and principal players.

Perhaps not present at the outset of a case study, a specific orientation usually emerges during the fieldwork or during the analysis phase. Frequently, an orientation for the case study emerges because of the interplay between the concepts and empirical observations.

II. The Report

An important learning task for the case study is to prepare a report analyzing and evaluating your experience. Acquiring the discipline associated with objective descriptions of factual information and systematic presentation of salient information requires practice. You will need to describe the approach you used in selecting an appropriate topic for your case study, collecting appropriate background and supporting information, and in preparing the narrative description section of the case study.

III. Elements

The components/elements in a case study report include:

A. Social Unit/System Description: This element provides a description of the salient features of the enterprise under study, as well as the degree to which it is representative of the studied population.

B. Problem Statement: This element identifies, and clearly describes, the behavior or social action that is being studied, the issues or problems confronting the enterprise, the options considered,
and the resultant outcomes (decisions).

C. Environmental Factors: This element presents the various environmental factors—social, psychological, economic, political, legal, institutional, etc.—that influenced the behavior and its outcomes, with particular emphasis on how each influenced the behavior and resultant outcome.

The STEEP acronym serves as an aid to insure that all salient factors are addressed. The "S" represents the social factors, such as demography, ethnicity, education, mobility, and health status. The "T" represents the technological factors, such as environmental management technology, production technology, and health services technology. The first "E" represents the economic factors, such as major sources of employment, occupations, income, natural resources, transportation systems, and land use. The second "E" represents the environmental factors, such as health resources, health services, and environmental health (water quality, air quality, etc.). The "P" represents the political factors, such as government, policy, law, and public expenditures.

D. Background/History: This element covers the relevant events and activities with emphasis on providing an accurate accounting of the direction and complexity of the process without getting "bogged-down" in trivia.

E. Stakeholder Perspective: This element presents the perspective of each of the principal actors/stakeholders, including their interests, intentions, and interpretations of the issues and forces involved. Their respective "agenda" is presented, as well as their perception of the environment.

From analyzing the situation, you will include:

F. A description from a theoretical perspective of how and why the change events occurred.

G. An evaluation of the change strategy that was employed, as well as an analysis of alternative strategies that could have been employed.

H. Include in your report a description of your philosophical assumptions and theory of change as a professional practitioner functioning in your setting; try to focus on your roles and the type of change efforts that typically confront you in your organizational setting.

I. Considering the following questions may also be helpful in writing the report:
1. What leadership roles or styles appear to be effective in your setting? How does your own style facilitate or impede your change efforts with others?

2. Group composition, organizational setting, and type of institution may have a great influence on the behavior and strategies of the change agent. How do these factors influence you in the changes that you have attempted? Have these factors generally been beneficial or impeding forces for you in the past?

3. Have your knowledge, skill, and background experiences aided or hindered you in bringing about intended changes with the people and/or organizations with which you work? How have your attitudes about these people/organizations facilitated or hindered your change efforts?

4. What ethical or moral considerations have you grappled with as a change force in the lives of others? How have these issues influenced your own life?

J. Conclusion/Interpretation: This element contains the presentation of the findings and propositions (interpretations) derived from the study and supported by the narrative presentation. The presentation of the propositions should be in such a manner as to enable evaluation by other study methods or other perspectives. Further, unexplored issues in which generalizations are likely to be constructive are presented here.