Curriculum Guide for Advanced KAM VII: Advanced Case Study in Human Services

Note: A student admitted to a specialization within Human Services after 9/1/97 must use the newly revised advanced curriculum. If a student is admitted to general studies in Human Services or was enrolled before 9/1/97, they can choose to stay with the old advanced curriculum for that KAM. Students eligible to use the old KAM curriculum are strongly encouraged to use the newly revised KAM bibliographies as they are current and up to date.

Introduction

A case study is different from a theoretical analysis in that it goes beyond the intellectual domain while still making full use of it. Theoretical accounts and attempts at planned change at the individual, group, institutional, and community level represent the subject matters of most professional fields. At an individual level, each professional attempts to explain how change occurs and to guide her/his efforts according to this theoretical account.

This KAM is designed to help the student organize her/his knowledge of case study research in human services; and to focus upon theories and strategies of implementing change in clinical social work, counseling, criminal justice, family studies and intervention strategies, social policy analysis and planning, human services administration, or in another area specialized practice in human services selected by the student.

The student will find it helpful to begin defining a case study situation by retrospectively reflecting on her/his previous KAM demonstrations, workshops attended, or books or articles read that dealt with the change aspects of the her/his specialization. These topics and others (organizational development, systems analysis, and social processes) all directly and indirectly deal with theories of change relevant to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

Overall Learning Objectives of this Knowledge Area

This Knowledge Area Module requires the student to:

- become knowledgeable about and critique the philosophical foundations and theories or models of change processes and strategies for planned change relevant to her/his specialization area or another area of specialized human services practice selected by the student,

- utilize the academic and scholarly literature to become knowledgeable about case study research; and identify and
describe major professional issues, problems, or policies which are in need of change, and

- design a specific strategy for change which is compatible with the philosophical foundations, professional practices, and theories of social and organizational change.

**Breadth Component**

**Learning Objectives**

The student will:

- familiarize her-/himself with the philosophical and theoretical foundations of qualitative inquiry concerning case study research and applied change in human services, and

- understand the methods and techniques employed in case studies and change interventions.

**Demonstration**

Write a scholarly paper of 30 pages or more that reflects:

- a description of the philosophical and theoretical foundations, methods, and techniques employed in case studies and applied change in human services,

- an evaluation of the research that supports and challenges the foundations, methods, and techniques referred to in number one.

The paper should be well-researched, -organized, and -documented, free of grammatical, structural, and punctuation errors, thorough, and reflect critical analysis.

**Depth Component**
Learning Objectives

The student will:

- utilize the research literature to identify and comprehensively describe major client-system issues or problems, which are in need of change in clinical social work, counseling, criminal justice, family studies and intervention strategies, social policy analysis and planning, human services administration, or in another area of human services practice, and

- demonstrate familiarity with the relevant literature to assist her/his understanding of the principles of applying theory to practice.

Demonstration

- Develop an Annotated Bibliography of at least 15 sources (consisting primarily of recent journal articles) which discusses research relating to change needed in a client-system problem or issue in a specialized area of human services practice.

- Using the sources cited in the Annotated Bibliography, write a scholarly paper of 30 pages or more that identifies and describes a current or emerging client-system problem or issue 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, or strategies). [Note: Appendix A provides clarification as to problems, issues, and theories.] The paper should be well-researched, -organized, and -documented, free of grammatical, structural, and punctuation errors, thorough, and reflect critical analysis.

The following tasks might be of assistance in initiating this demonstration:

Task One

List client-system problems or issues which only those who are considered less conservative or who are mavericks in your profession would concentrate on. The idea behind this task is that through examination of so-called "outliers," it is possible to get a sense of what various segments
of a profession consider to be critical future problems. You can include in this discussion a list of what the futurists in your profession would consider to be important problems and issues.

**Task Two**

List client-system problems or issues which your profession has, in your opinion, failed to provide an adequate explanation or solution.

**Task Three**

Try to define what the characteristics would be of a client-system problem or issue which your profession would consider "non-trivial" or important. You might ask yourself what kind of solution generated by your profession would win a Nobel prize if it were made, or some similar recognition as having been a major contribution.

**Application Component**

**Learning Objectives**

The student will:

- be able to integrate and apply knowledge gained in the Breadth and Depth components to enhance her/his understanding of the philosophical, theoretical foundations, and research methods and techniques employed in case studies and applied change in human services,

- be familiar with the strengths and limitations of the case study approach, and

- demonstrate this knowledge by completing a case study analysis of a client-system problem or issue in human services.

**Demonstration**

Design, execute, and evaluate a case study which demonstrates the process of planned change concerning a client-system problem or issue in human services. (Note: Appendix B should prove helpful in the evaluation and report-writing of your case study.) The report, which should be 30 pages or more in length, should be well-organized and documented, free of grammatical, structural, and punctuation errors, thorough, and reflect critical analysis.

The following might be of assistance in initiating this demonstration:
Select a Strategy for Your Case Study

The first step in choosing a strategy for your case study situation is to review your previous KAM demonstrations, workshop materials, books/articles, or other experiences which you have had that influenced your theoretical views about humans and their organization. Then focus on experiences which you have had that influenced the practical or technical approaches you use when attempting to change some aspect of individual, group, or community behavior. Focus on experiences which have influenced how you practice, the strategies you use to teach, supervise, sell, counsel, persuade, etc. Again, list as many appropriate experiences which influence your theoretical notions about change processes as well as experiences which influenced the strategies, techniques, and methods you employ to produce changes in individuals, families, groups, organizations, and/or communities.

Appendix A: Problems, Issues, and Theories

It is important in relating theory to issues and problems that clear distinctions be made among the three. Problems are concrete, theories are abstract. Theories are made up of generalizations which are 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 can help you see those commonalities; likewise, a search for the commonalities can give you a clue as to what theory you are dealing with. 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 of political action which results 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 their internal coherence, their adherence to first principles of logic, or their ability to provide a simplified picture of a complex phenomena. Questions which should be asked about theory include: Does the theory account for the known facts? How many unknowns are need to complete the theoretical explanation and are we capable of discovering those unknowns? Is the theoretical
explanation able to account for specific facts under a variety of conditions?

**Appendix B: 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). It is not merely a descriptive account of what transpired, but an analytical, interpretative assessment by which to evaluate or develop generalizations about behavior or social phenomena. 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. Data collection 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.

Although at the outset a specific orientation may not exist, it is likely to emerge during the field work, or during the analysis phase. Frequently, it 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

Among the components/elements in a case study report are:
A. Social Unit/System Description: This element provides a description of the salient features of the enterprise being studied, as well as the degree to which it is representative of the population being studied.

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" element represents the social factors, such as demography, ethnicity, education, mobility, and health status. The "T" element represents the technological factors, such as environmental management technology, production technology, and health and human 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 and human resources, health and human services, and environmental health (water quality, air quality, etc.). The "P" element 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. It presents their respective "agenda" 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 did the change events occur as they did.

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 can 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?
   - 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, which are 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 about which generalizations are likely to be constructive are presented here.

**Reading List**

[In addition to the references below, the student should re-acquaint her/himself with the literature on (the nature of ) change processes within specialized areas of human services practice cited in the reading lists provided for KAMs V and VI.]

**Philosophical and Theoretical Issues**


Methods


