IMPEC
Case Study Methodology

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IMPEC
Improving Government Performanc

IMPEC- Case Study Methodology

Introduction

The Department of Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) has developed a system and format of annual assessments. DPME was founded two years ago. IMPEC (acronym for Independent Monitoring Performance Expertise Center) has an agreement with DPME to exchange knowledge on how to improve government performance. A number of Dutch Universities is associated with IMPEC in order to outline a replicable structure of creating knowledge through qualitative research (lessons learnt and best practices) based on the information gathered in the annual assessment. The way in which this will be done is by conducting case studies, in order to distil best management practices among the departments that completed the self-assessment.
This document is set-up as a guideline for the execution of the case studies. First the general goals and approach will be shared, in order to 'create the right mindset' for the study. Next, the issue of reliability, the process of case selection , the scope of the case study and the six different steps of the research process will be described. The last section concerns the process and the methodology of the case studies, in which the six phases of the case studies are described. An interview protocol is attached as annex 1.

The target audience for this document are the persons who will collect the data and will write the case stories. The case studies will be written by external professional Researchers (the 'IMPEC Education Team' consisting of Dutch researchers from Nyenrode Business University, Tilburg University and Rotterdam School of Management). They will conduct the case studies in collaboration with Moderators (South-African governmental officers), and the DPME-Staff. For each case study a Research Team will be assembled, consisting of one Researcher, one Moderator and one member of the DPME-Staff. The first version of this methodological guideline will be tested during the first round of the self-assessment and peer-review in 2012, as organized DPME and in cooperation with the IMPEC initiative. Based on the experiences the methodology will be evaluated and revised. Version 2.0 should be of assistance to upcoming cycles of monitoring and evaluation, and be self-explanatory.

Goals and general approach

The case studies are part of the system of monitoring and evaluation of South Africa governmental bodies. After the extensive self-assessment and peer-assessment of all governmental bodies, a set of 9 cases are further elaborated. These case studies are mainly illustrative and serve two main purposes: (i) to allow for peer-learning by highlighting good practices, and (ii) enhance transparency towards the general public by giving insight in government practices. In a later stage, the case studies can possibly form the input for more in-depth scientific studies to be performed by the Researchers involved, since the assessment procedure developed in South-Africa is unique and an interesting study object in itself.[1] This second phase, however, is outside the scope of this document.

[1] Only few governments have similar monitoring departments. Other examples come from New Zealand and Canada. However, in both countries the departments mainly serve as general auditor. In the South-African case, the goal is to inspire and stimulate peer-learning and to communicate the process and the results to the South-African community. This makes the South-African case and the methodology developed unique. It could be interesting to start a follow-up research using the case studies materials in order to make the procedure internationally accessible and to evaluate the methodology.

The case studies are intended to share stories on what works and inspire others. 'Story-telling' is a strong means of communication, if well executed. Important characteristics are that the case stories are easy to follow and relate to – they should be appealing to the audience, and that they are positive and inspirational.
The first requirement addressed is that of *being appealing to the audience*. The target audience in this case is broad: both peers within other governmental departments, but also the general public. To even reach people that are less skilled in reading, the case studies will be also translated into drawings and cartoons, etcetera.
A narrative concerns sequence and consequence of events. The storyteller will provide the reader with a story in which key events are connected, contextualized and made meaningful. A good case story offers sufficient background information for the reader to understand the context. It poses a clear question which is central in the story. A story does not merely involve basic facts. It searches for drivers, motivation of key players, contains challenges and responses. The focus is on understanding 'how' the process evolved and who took what kind of action, based on which motivation. Introducing the key players with names and functions and including quotes helps to make the story resonate.[2] Most importantly the story should give the reader/listener an insight in the world described and points of recognition and relation to his/her own reality.
The second key characteristic of the stories envisioned is that they are *positive and inspirational*. We deliberately select good practices to stimulate peer learning and give perspectives for further improvement. The intention is not to blame or criticize; negative, defensive spirals should be avoided. The goal is rather to appreciate what is going well. Therefore an appreciative approach is chosen in the research and in the interviews specifically. By means of the interviews the Research Team and interviewee cooperate in finding the things that work. Key questions in appreciative inquiry are:

1. Which elements have – in relation to the issue researched – made you reach the level where you (as an organization) are now? Which factors made this possible?
2. Which possibilities do you see to improve even further in future? What actions would be required to achieve that?[3]

Although people can learn from the past, moving on gives opportunities to develop. Questions during the research should therefore focus on the desired status as much as possible. At the end of the interview one or two questions are posed on what could have been differently looking backwards.

Reliability

When stories share drivers, relations, challenges and responses – one should realize that the aim of a narrative cannot be to provide an objective presentation of the past. Narratives refract the past, which makes the role of the story-teller huge.[4] All interviewees will tell their own story – give their own interpretation of what's happened. The Research Team – relative outsiders to the field of the case study - will set out to collect multiple narratives of different actors within the case under analysis and will have to balance them into one story. The overall story should be credible, balance the different perspectives and still makes sense to the audience. So the Research Team plays an important role.
Although it is a fact that it is impossible 'to share the truth' in the case stories, the ambition to strive for is a good balance of perspectives. To secure the reliability of the case studies

[2] Business Case Guidelines Global Compact (last updated June 2008)
[3] Barrett, Fry & Wittcox (2011), p. 35
[4] Riesman, Catherine Kohler (2005)

the following measures (familiar in the field of qualitative research) are included in the methodology:

- The Research Teams consist of three people, one Moderator from inside the South-African government, one (neutral) Researcher, and one DPME-Staff member, most familiar with the overall ambitions of the evaluation process;
- The Moderator will not assess his/her own department;
- For each case a number of five interviews will be conducted, three with insiders in different positions and two with outsiders (the interviews will be facilitated by DPME);
- The interview reports drafted after the interviews will be checked and approved by the interviewees;
- Besides interviews relevant documents will be studied (in the first place the documents required as evidence for the assessment, and where relevant additional documents);
- The Research Team will also make their own assessment on their own observations during the field visits (i.e. interviews);
- All Research Teams will receive the same training, and these methodology working guidelines;
- In drafting the case story the sources for conclusions/statements will be documented, based on a foot-note system, to be transparent on the analysis;
- The case stories will be reviewed by independent South-African researchers (not part of the Research Team) and peer-reviewed during the Moderator Workshop in August.

Case selection

The four key performance areas of DPME's assessment are: (i) strategic management, (ii) governance & accountability, (iii) human resource and systems management, and (iv) financial management including supply chain management. In each of the four Management Performance Areas a number of subfields have been assessed. (See Figure 1.)

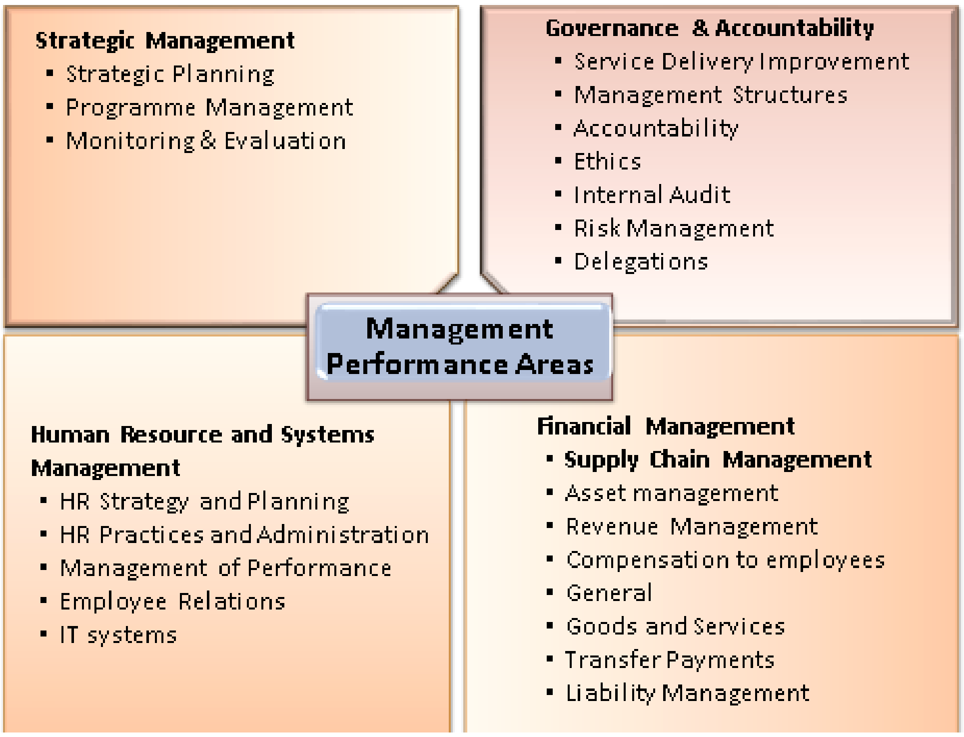

Figure 1 – Management Performance Areas

After the self-assessment and peer-assessment by the Moderators, final scores in each of the subfields are attributed, meaning that each governmental body that replied to the call for self-assessment attains 23 scores. So a 'case' does not refer to an entire department, but to one of the 23 subfields of the management performance areas within a department.
The scores range from: (1) 'non-compliance with legal/regulatory requirements; (2) 'partial compliance with legal/regulatory requirements'; (3) 'full compliance with legal/regulatory requirements'; to (4) 'full compliance and doing things smartly'. The pool of scores 4 on the subfields of the management performance areas (after the peer-assessment) make the population for the case studies. From this pool 9 cases will be selected.
Criteria for case selection are:

1. From each of the four Management Performance Areas a minimum of two cases is selected;
2. Of the two cases per Management Performance Areas, one comes from a technical department (like Planning and Treasury) and one from a thematic department (like environment, water, safety, or education)
3. One case study per governmental body that participated in the self-assessment;
4. A variety of national and provincial departments is desired.

The selection of case studies is visualized below.

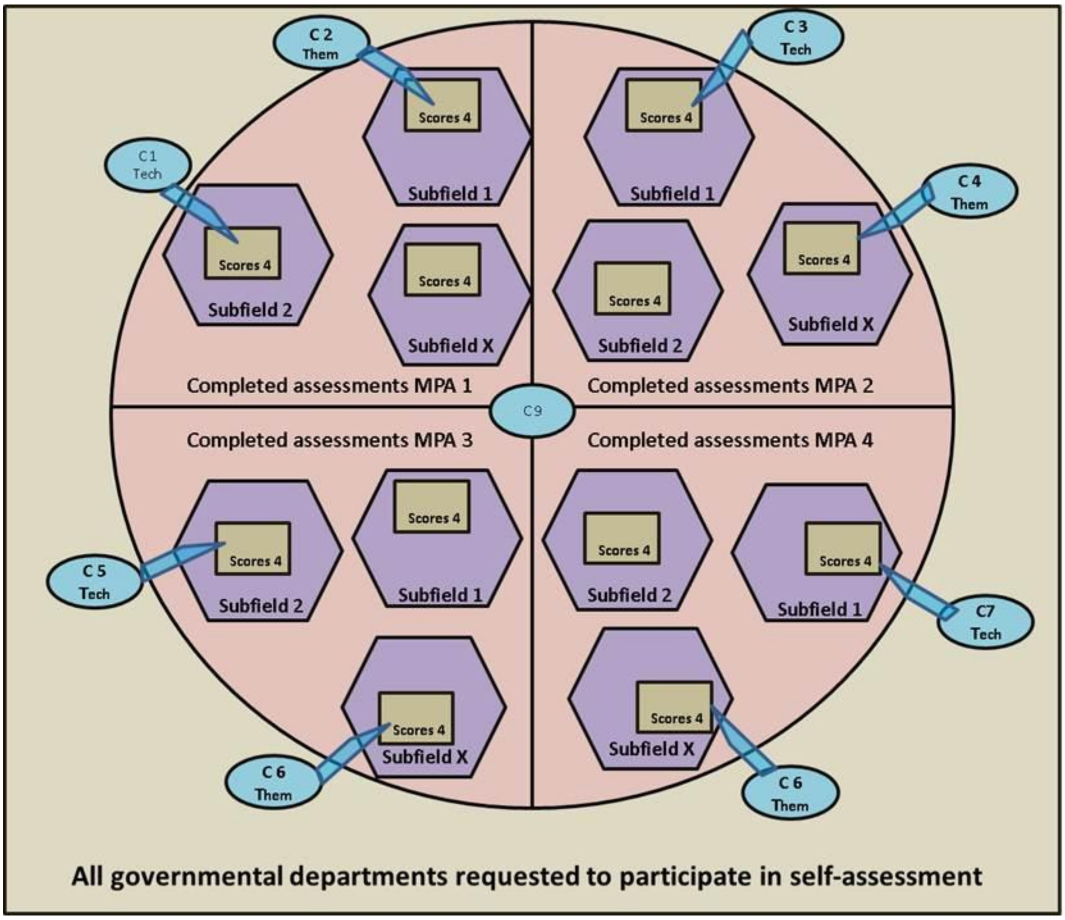

Figure 2 – Selection of case studies
Note: The 'C' refers to case studies, 'Tech' to technical and 'Them' to thematic.

The selection will be made by DPME, in or after the Moderators Panel Week in which the peer-assessment has been finalized. The DPME also provides a long list of persons and/or organizations who could be interviewed for each case study.
The cases will be divided amongst 9 Research Teams. The Researchers will perform multiple case studies. Each Dutch university will have the responsibility to perform 3 case studies. Per case study, one Moderators and one DPME Staff member will be part of the case study Research Team. The division of the Moderators over the case study Research Teams will be made based on expertise and interest. The only strict requirement is that a Moderator cannot assess his/her own department and preferably not a department it has close professional ties with.
The Researchers all are professional academic researchers and have their training and experience obtained in (qualitative) research methods. The Moderators are part of a pool of Moderators (app. 40/50) and will participate in two or three Moderator events in which they are guided through the process. The DMPE-Staff is familiar with the assessment procedure and will also prepare for the case study through this document.

Scope of the case study

The focus of the case studies will be on the state of management practices. The output/impact of the actual policies is out of scope, as illustrated in the picture below. Each case study will focus specifically on one of the subfields of the four management performance areas.

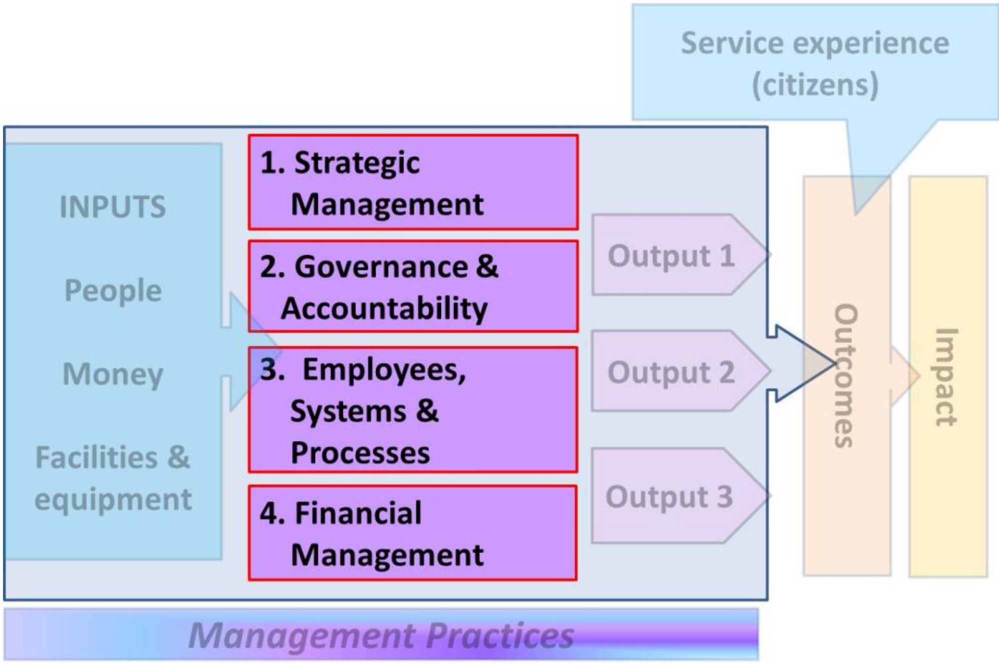

Figure 3 – Scope of case studies

Also the assessment of individual performance is out of scope. Although personal stories are a key element in the case study, the assessment will refer to the department and not to the person. It is important to keep this in mind and make this explicit, to create a willingness to cooperate with the interviewees. Therefore real names will be replaced by fictitious names in the actual case stories.

The case studies will focus on the conditions and critical factors for success. A list of specific topics to address:[5]

- *Vision* – Does the department have a clear philosophy on performance and core values? Is this lived and experienced throughout the department?
- *Leadership* – How involved are the leaders/management board in implementation of good management practices? Do they engage in the implementation process? Are they active promoters? Do they set the right examples?
- *Empowerment* – How well are the employees empowered and involved? E.g. focus on access to information, motivation from the managers, trust, training, rewarding good performance, trust, channels to share their experiences and thoughts.
- *Policies and strategies* – How clearly is documented and stated how the department works and towards which goals it strives? Are the policies clearly visible, digestible, up-to-date, effective, efficient?
- *Resources* – Are the resources (employees, finance, facilities) needed to reach the targets set available and efficiently used?
- *Innovation/improvement* – Are the ways of working and managing regularly evaluated on effectiveness and efficiency? Are adjustments made when thing can be done better and/or easier?
- *Reporting and communication on progress* – How well are results measured and is progress monitored? Is up-to-date available and is communication on progress transparent, both to internal and external audiences?
- *Involvement of other stakeholders* – How is the communication with outside stakeholders (e.g. citizens, interest groups, business councils) arranged? Do they have access to up-to-date and transparent information? Is the department open to receive feedback and/or complaints? What value does the department aim to create for the South-African people/society?

Process of case study

All case studies will evolve in six phases, as indicated in the picture below. In principle these phases will be addressed in chronological order. However, in some cases the steps might overlap or it might be necessary to make some adjustments or additions to prior phases. Each of these steps will be addressed separately in the remainder of this document.

[5] Strongly inspired by the Business Case Studies guidelines released by the Global Compact (last updated 17 June 2008).

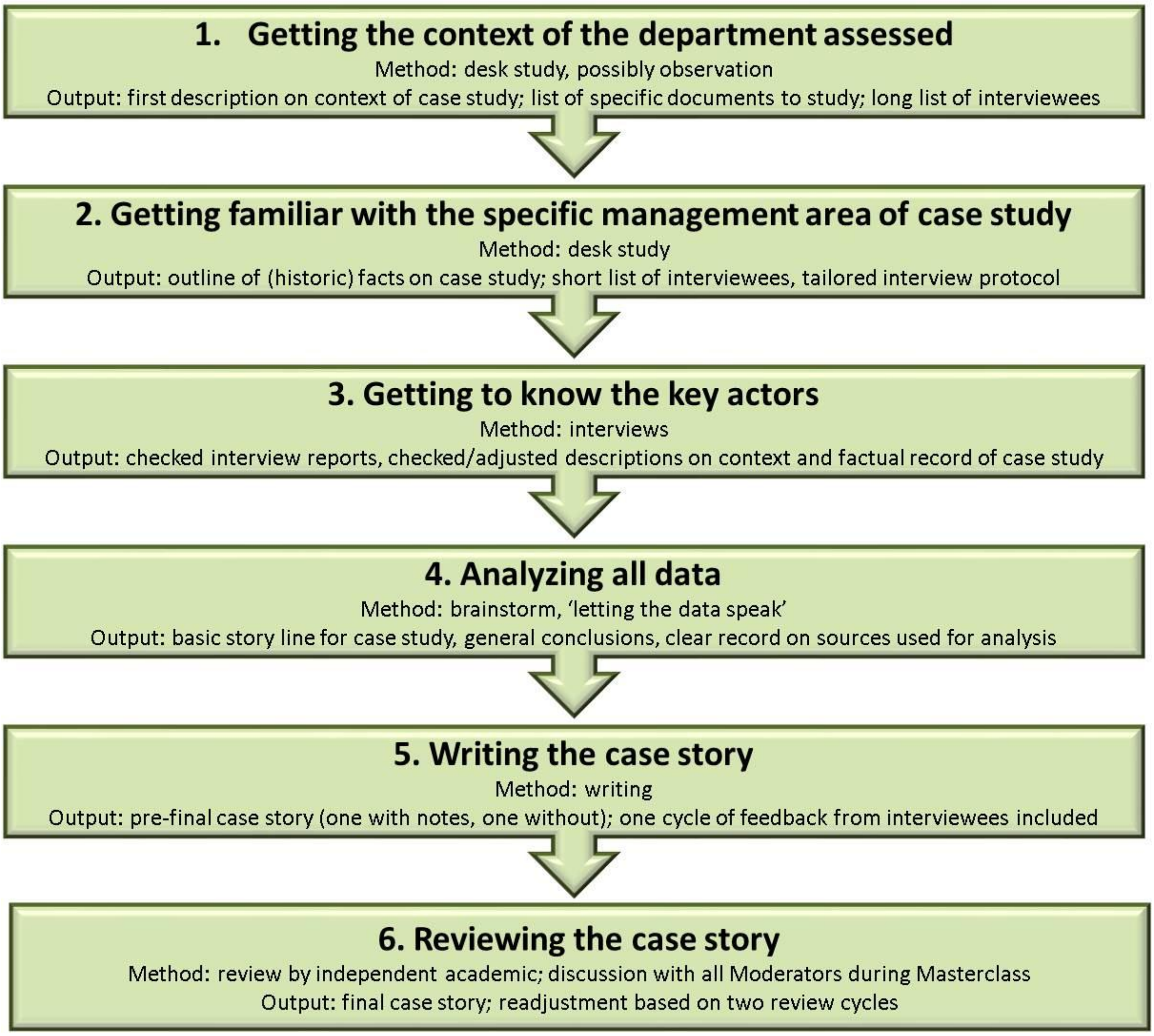

Figure 4 – Process of case study

1.Getting the context of the department assessed

The first step is a general orientation on the department that will be assessed. Questions to be asked are e.g.: what is the core business, what the mission of the department is, how is the department organized, who are the key stakeholders, how is the organization culture, what are the strategic goals, what is the history and which are the plans for the future, et cetera. This provides the context for more detailed information acquired later on in the process.

The main method will be that of desk study. Helpful sources are internal documents like year reports, websites, where relevant media coverage or external studies on the department, public-consultation reports. Observation during a visit to the department might also be very insightful. Observations during interviews might add to the description later on.

This stage serves as a preparation for the following stages in the following ways:

- Based on the context information **a short description is drafted** of approximately two pages. This helps to document the findings and to offer one of the pieces for the final case story.
- Also this document will be distributed to the interviewees as **preparation for the interviews**. Factual points can be corrected and different perspectives can be added.

- An **inventory** will be made of **the more specific documents** needed for the assessment of the Management Performance Area under study.

2.Getting familiar with the specific management area of the case study

The focus of this second stage concerns the specific subfield of the management performance area the case study addresses. Goals are getting a better understanding of the topic, getting into the details of the (self- and peer) assessment and relating the score to the evidence provided. Also the roles of the key actors is specified.
The method is a desk study of the assessment forms, evidence documents required in the assessment and any other relevant documents found in the first step of the desk research.
This stage results in the following output:

- A short **description of the facts** regarding the specific subfield of the Management Performance Area, of also approximately two pages. This is also input for the case story.
- This document will be distributed to the interviewees as **preparation for the interviews**. Factual points can be corrected and different perspectives added.
- The **short list of interviewees** (total of five; three internal, two external) will be decided on.
- The **general interview protocol will be tailored** to the specific context and performance area.

3.Getting to know the key actors

The third phase is the interview phase and serves to get to know the people that play a key role in the case story. The goals of the interviews are understanding the people involved, gathering stories with respect to the topic of the case study. This concerns both insider and outsider perspectives.
The method is a set of semi-structured interviews. The general topics are listed in the protocol attached as annex 1, which can be tailored for specific interviews. However the encounter strived for is rather a 'good conversation' than a straightforward process of questions-answers. The interviews will be appreciative in nature, which requires a positive ambiance. It is important to emphasize that the cases are selected as best-practice and that the case stories are aimed to distill lessons learnt and inspire peers. Also it should be specified that the interest of the study not only concerns facts, but also the actions and motivations of the actors involved. So the intention is to get to know the interviewee as a person (in professional context of course). In the actual case stories, fictitious names will be used.
The Research Team knows in general want kind of information it needs from the interview, but this goes beyond 'box-ticking' for concrete questions asked. So the questions in the annex will serve as a guide, but there is no need to read the questions word for word. Also the sequence might alter, to keep the natural flow of the conversation. Many questions concern 'why' and 'how', in order to understand the perspective of the interviewee. If it remains unclear what is driving the interviewee or how some events took place: just ask for more information. This can be done by posing many 'why' and 'how' questions, or by stimulating the interviewee with remarks like: 'Interesting, could you tell me a bit more about that?' 'That is a good story, I would like to know more details'. Also the interviewee might need to think about some answers. This needs time and an atmosphere which allows for brainstorming. The interviewee might need some confirmation on the fact that some answers are not clear-cut, so it is normal that it takes time to formulate answers.
Another important aspect to keep in mind during interviews is: *listen*. The goal is to understand the interviewees perspective. The Research Team is not there to judge or

debate. The study aims to get deeper understanding of why this specific case was assessed a score of '4'. And to do that, it is essential to understand the key actors that are part of this story. Only in the phase of the analysis the Research Team will draw all information and perspectives together. The stage of analysis is where the main story line is developed. Of course ideas and thought will pop up during earlier parts of the study. It is valuable to make notes of these ideas, but as long as new information is being gathered, the Research Team needs an open mind.

For each case study five interviews will be conducted: three from different positions within the department (most relevant based on the analysis in step 1 and 2; strive for variety), two from outside the department (e.g. interest group, media, clients, business associations).

As a preparation for the interviews, the interviewees will receive the short description of the context (phase 1) and of the facts regarding the MPA (phase 2). These will be discussed during the interview and the interviewee have the opportunity to suggest adjustments, additions or nuance facts.

It is recommendable to record the conversation (but only as the interviewee agrees of course). This can be used as a back-up. Since reporting on the base of recordings is time-consuming, it is essential to also take field notes during the interviews. After the interview the interviewee will receive a summary of the interview to check whether he/she approves with the records taken.

It is valuable for the Research Team to also take some private notes of observations during the interview. How was the ambiance? How was the attitude of the interviewee? Was there a willingness to cooperate? Et cetera. These observation notes are for internal eyes only and will not be included in the interview report.

The general interview protocol can be found as annex 1 to this document.

This stage results in:

- Five approved interview reports;
- Five observation notes, for use by research team;
- Checked/adjusted/enriched outlines of context and factual information.

4.Analyzing all data

In this phase all information gathered is brought together and analyzed. Goals are to make connections, to balance stories and perspectives, to understand sequences of drivers - action – reaction, challenges – solutions, causes – effects and to distill key lessons. This phase should result in a basic 'story-line' for the final case story. Which insights need to be communicated to the peers and the general public?

It is difficult to provide clear guidelines for this stage, as much boils down to brainstorming by the Research Team. There are little 'pre-cooked' recipes for this, like are available for statistical analysis. However some advices can be provided.

First of all: it is important to enter the analysis phase open minded and 'let the data speak to the Researcher Team'. Jumping to conclusions can make relevant points invisible. It is helpful to always think of alternative conclusions and scenarios, even when we are most convinced that we 'know the truth'. As a Research Team – critical questions on each others suggestions are essential.

Also it is important to have sufficient time for brainstorming (e.g. four hours), to be in a convenient setting, to have flip charts available to sum up observations and to make sure there is no distraction by other business. After the brainstorm session, some time is needed to let the information sink, before reaching final conclusions.

Keep track of the sources on which the conclusions/observations are based. This will help to answer any questions regarding the analysis - during or after review procedures - and provide transparency on the conclusions.

Sometimes some blank spots might turn up in the information gathered or possibly there is some confusion on certain facts/stories. In that case it might be necessary to go back to your interviewees or do some additional desk study. However, in general this stage does not include new information.

Output of phase 4:

- a basic story line for the case story;
- general conclusions;
- clear record of sources of findings.

5.Writing the case story

In the fifth phase the actual case story is written. The goal is to make the most relevant insights available/accessible to the target audience for the case studies.

The Researcher within each Research Team will be the author of the case story. Each Research Team will decide on the level of participation of the other two members of the Research Team.

The draft version of the case story will be sent for feedback to the interviewees.

The case stories cover approximately **10 to 15 pages** and are organized following this outline:

- An abstract of the storyline presented to prepare the reader and share the main challenge/story line addressed (including clear mentioning of the subfield of the management performance central in the study) ;
- The context needed to understand the story presented: describing the organization, the main stakeholder and introducing the key actors (interviewees);
- The process in the development/unfolding of the story line: starting point, ambitions set out, motives, key decisions, outcomes, challenges, turning points;
- The outcome (the current level 4 with regard to the subfield of the management performance area) and summarizing the lessons learnt during the process;
- Some ambitions for the further development with respect to the case topic, new steps to be taken, possibilities to make progress.
- The final case story that will be distributed does not include any annexes or notes on sources used. However, the Research Team also prepares a version which is annotated for its own record, based on the Criteria and Spelling and Annotation Guidelines of the UK Oxford University.

When it comes to style, the following recommendations can be provided:

- Make active sentences;
- Use quotes;
- Use fictitious names for the actors as the focus is on performance of management and not of individual persons (the change of names will be mentioned with all case stories);
- Use past tense for the process description and present tense for the future ambitions/context description;
- Writing is rewriting and reducing. Always keep in mind that the goal is to prepare a message for a target audience. Reducing and leaving out a big pile of interesting information is difficult for the researcher. But it is always better to reach the audience with a clear and understandable story than losing an audience by lack of focus and overestimating the concentration span.

Output of this phase is:

- A pre-final case story which will enter the review procedure (phase 6), on which the interviewees have give feedback;
- An annotated version of the case story which will be administrated and helps to address feedback from the research procedure.

6.Reviewing the case story

The pre-final case story will be reviewed in two cycles.

1. First the case story will be read by a South-African academic, which was not involved in the case study. Each Research Team will approach a South-African academic reviewer on it’s own.
2. Secondly, during the Moderator Masterclass in August all case stories will be discussed. All Moderators will read the 9 pre-final case studies and provide each other with feedback. These feedback sessions will be guided by an external moderator.

After these two cycles of review, adjustments will be made to the pre-final case story, which results in a final case story. The Researcher (author of the case story) is responsible for this. He/she will approach the other members of the Research Team for input where needed.

Epilogue

After phase 6 the case studies are finalized and closed. The case stories will than be translated and transformed by social media experts associated to IMPEC into targeted message for a broader audience. The Research Team is no longer accountable in this part, but can of course offer suggestions or input to the social media experts.

Annex – General interview protocol

The introduction

Standard suggested text for the introduction:

"Thank you very much for participating in this interview. Our names are ***[XXX, add affiliations].*** *As we explained we are conducting a number of case studies on departments that score excellent on a specific Management Performance Area. In your case that concerns* ***[XXXX]****. The goal of these case studies is to provide learning and inspiration to other governmental departments to achieve successful management performance. Also the stories will be communicated to the general public in order to enhance transparency. We will conduct five interviews for each case study.*

During this interview we would like to know what worked well and what are in your opinion critical success factors. We are also very interested in your personal drivers, motivation and roles/actions within this process. So we would like to ask you to share with us your personal experiences and perspective. We have selected you as one of the interviewees, because we think you can offer a unique perspective or story that needs to be heard.
We have some topics we would like to address, but we will not state all questions word by word. We hope that this interview will rather be an open, positive conversation in which you can help us to understand the process that took place in your organization.

Some facts to check before the interview*:*

- *Is it ok if we record the interview? It will only be used as a back-up during the analysis of the results. After the case stories are finalized we will erase the recordings.*
- *We will draft a short summary of the things we discuss today. We will send this to you after the interview. This gives you the opportunity to check whether we understood things well.*
- *In the case stories we will probably use some quotes from the interview. We will use an alter-ego for this to keep your privacy. Do you agree on this?*
- *Once we have completed all interviews, we will analyze all input. Based on that analysis we will then draft a case story. The first draft will also be send to you and we would appreciate feedback on this.*
- *We expect that the interview will take about 1 to 1,5 hours. Was this clearly communicated to you?*
- *Do you have any questions?"*

Getting to know the interviewee

Suggested text:

"Could you start by telling us something about yourself? Name, age, career, education, position within department, motivation to work in this specific field, core values within your work, ambitions within the organization?"

[For outsider interviews: also gather information on goals/strategy organization the person works for and relation to the governmental department assessed.]

Checking prior conclusions on context

Suggested text:

"We would also like to understand the department we investigate in this case study. We have done some prior desk study of which we sent you the summaries. Did you have a chance to read this? We would like to go over this document together. We would like to ask you to correct any factual mistakes or indicate when you miss important aspects. In addition we would like to get a clear perspective on your place within this context. Where are your relations, tasks, roles?"

Checking prior conclusions on (historic) facts MPA

Suggested text:

"Also we have drafted some conclusions and observations based on the study of the evidence provided with the self-assessment. This is the second document we sent you. Again we would like to go over these conclusions together. Make any adjustments where needed. But more importantly, can you tell us about your involvement and the process you observed by designing and implementing these management procedures? What is the story that took place between these facts? What were key events, and where were important decisions made? How did people respond to these events? And how did you respond?"

Interviewees assessment of MPA

Suggested text:

"We have now discussed the performance of your organization on the MPA assessed, based on the formal evidence provided. What is your assessment of performance on this area? Could you describe in three sentences?
Which are the most important key elements to success to allow for this positive performance? We have drafted a list of possible important elements. This is not a complete list, but we would like to shortly hear your view on the relevance of these aspects, in relation to the successful performance on this MPA.

- *Vision – Does the department have a clear philosophy on performance and core values? Is this lived and experienced throughout the department?*
- *Leadership – How involved are the leaders/management board in implementation of good management practices? Do they engage in the implementation process? Are they active promoters? Do they set the right examples?*
- *Empowerment – How well are the employees empowered and involved? E.g. focus on access to information, motivation from the managers, trust, training, rewarding good performance, trust, channels to share their experiences and thoughts.*
- *Policies and strategies – How clearly is documented and stated how the department works and towards which goals it strives? Are the policies clearly visible, digestible, up-to-date, effective, efficient?*
- *Resources – Are the resources (employees, finance, facilities) needed to reach the targets set available and efficiently used?*

- Innovation/improvement – Are the ways of working and managing regularly evaluated on effectiveness and efficiency? Are adjustments made when thing can be done better and/or easier?
- Reporting and communication on progress – How well are results measured and is progress monitored? Is up-to-date available and is communication on progress transparent?
- Involvement of other stakeholders – How is the communication with outside stakeholders (e.g. citizens, interest groups, business councils) arranged? Do they have access to up-to-date and transparent information? Is the department open to receive feedback and/or complaints? What value does the department aim to create for the South-African people/society?

Would you like to add any factors? Summarizing, which do you think are key factors in your process?"

Lessons learnt & future ambitions

Suggested text:

"Your department as scored well in the self-assessment. If you look back on the development and implementation of these policies and management practices, what could or would you have done differently? Which mistakes or delays could have been prevented? Which are important lessons learnt?

And what are future ambitions on the management performance for this specific subfield of the management performance area and for the management in general? How will you continue this process? What will we find in your next annual assessment? What do you need to realize this?"

Any additional remarks

Suggested text:

"Thank you very much for sharing all this information with us. It was very useful to us. For now we do not have any additional questions. Do you have any questions? Have we missed any relevant points? Are there any documents we have to read or people we have to talk to in order to get a full understanding of this case study? In case any additional questions pop up during the analysis, could we call or email you?"