

Case Studies

Designing Change

Edited by June Gwee





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The Civil Service College Singapore has been redefining learning in the Public Service since 2001. We are a future-oriented Centre of Learning committed to nurturing a learning mindset and culture in the Singapore Public Service.

As the central learning institution for the Singapore Public Service, we take pride in leading the practice of learning design, leadership development and organisation development. We provide timely, relevant and innovative programmes and services that build strategic capacity in governance, leadership, public administration and management for the Singapore Public Service.

By partnering with government agencies, we are able to offer opportunities to network and exchange views, build shared ethos and perspectives, in a rich and safe environment for dialogues, knowledge-sharing and learning.

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INTRODUCTION

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TWO DECADES OF STORYTELLING

The year 2021 marks the 20th anniversary of the Civil Service College (CSC) being established as a statutory board. Even though case studies have been used in the training of public officers since 1993, it was only in 2002 that the Institute of Policy Development Research Unit (IPD RU) was set up in CSC to conduct research on public sector governance and document important insights of how the Singapore government works.¹ Research findings were written into case studies for knowledge capture and used in CSC programmes, particularly as part of the case method.² Today, CSC case studies are also published in books and with digitalisation, made accessible via the LEARN digital learning platform of the Singapore Public Service.

Case studies distil important learning points about issues, events, incidents and people. Describing these in narrative form is a compelling way to communicate real-life experiences and learn from them. The stories in case studies are extracted from rigorous research; they are purposefully composed and intricately weaved to engage a given target audience. CSC's house view and approach to developing and learning with case studies can be summed up as:

“The purpose of case studies is to inform, teach and inspire the public officer on the challenges of public governance, the rationales of policy decisions and the ethos of the public service.”³

The story of CSC's journey in case study development can be told through the three publications in this book series. This series supports CSC's case writing workshops and is a resource for case writers. The first 10 years of CSC's case development centred on the need and desire to capture tacit knowledge of first-generation policy veterans and public sector leaders who were instrumental to Singapore's transformation since its independence. Hence, the first book in this series, *Case Studies in Public Governance: Building Institutions in Singapore* was a collection of multi-layered, complex narratives about the 40-year transformation of Singapore institutions. These case studies were detailed documentaries written from the perspectives of policy leaders and practitioners. The narratives described the key turning points of institutions, including their challenges and dilemmas.

In 2014, with declining reader attention spans, we began developing shorter case studies. The desire for deep reflections was replaced by an appetite for quick takeaways. The second book, *Case Studies: Building Communities in Singapore*, was a stark contrast with more compact and less complex case studies which focused on short- and medium-term issues. During this period, ideas of good governance had also evolved. Singapore had entered an era that emphasised a strong focus on citizens, a deep sense of public purpose and a continuous search for new and better ways of generating public and civic results.⁴ Public agencies were reframing our roles and transforming the way we approached policy development and service delivery. Published in 2015, during the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence, the second book described Singapore's approach in co-creating and co-delivering public goods and services with citizens.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed the way we live and work. With prolonged periods of working from home, learning from home, or just being home, we see people going back to reading and spending more time reading.⁵ Responding to this trend, this third book contains both complex case studies for deep reflections while retaining several compact case studies for quicker insights. With 'Designing Change' as a central theme for this book, the case studies in this collection describe how public officers remain sharp, alert and responsive in harnessing the feeling of discontent to stay ahead of the curve. These narratives focus on

organisation- and industry-level transformations where leaders and individuals reimagine operations, reengineer business processes, redesign service delivery models, and revamp the way they use technology. Although these organisations began their change efforts before the COVID-19 pandemic, some of their best-laid plans were abruptly altered. These case studies describe the special mix of leadership, strategy and organisational practices that defines the Singapore Public Service when dealing with change and disruptions. For anyone interested in change and innovation, these practitioner-centred stories will offer insights on the complexity and challenges of public governance.

WRITING AND LEARNING FROM CASE STUDIES

There are two learning arcs in this book. First, learning from the experience of individuals and organisations as they designed change. Second, learning from the way authors 'design' and write their stories.

The theme 'Designing Change' is based on two powerful ideas—design and change. The etymology of design originates from the Latin word *designare* which means to make, distinguishing by a sign, and giving significance.⁶ Later, the word acquired additional meanings in French, Italian, Greek and English.⁷ Fundamentally, the task of making something requires sense-making, imagination and planning which are the same key ingredients of most change efforts. Organisations and leaders who design change for their industries and organisations are taking a step into the unknown to shape, plan and reinvent their products, services, processes and operations for the future. To illustrate this, the case studies in this book are grouped into two bundles:

- reimagining industries, and
- reshaping behaviours and practices.

The following section describes the angle of each case study in this book and unpacks some of the features of these case studies, as well as the writing approach taken by authors. Even though I have attempted to describe the two learning arcs separately, it is difficult to separate the theme from their form and expression. These are interwoven within each of these stories which give case studies distinctiveness as a learning tool.

Reimagining Industries

In *Chapter 1: Shaping Smart Hotels*, we see how key players of the hotel industry leveraged technology and digital tools to rethink the hotel business. Digital disruption presented an opportunity to redefine the hotel industry. Hotels constantly struggle with manpower constraints and changing customer expectations. One way is to use technology to refresh hotel services, redesign operations, boost productivity, and keep manpower lean, but hoteliers traditionally believed that hotels should be high-touch and that a high-tech approach would compromise the “human” element of the hotel experience. This case study shows the collaborative efforts of the Singapore Tourism Board, hotels and industry partners to change mindsets, rethink processes and business models, while building a strong culture of innovation to ensure that tech transformation is sustainable and impactful.

Likewise, *Chapter 2: Fireworks in the City* describes the innovations of the creative industries, led by the National Heritage Board. Every event has a meaning and a purpose. The Singapore Night Festival is a well-loved event that brings life to the Bras Basah Bugis precinct. Although it started as a placemaking event to create quality places for people to live, work, play and learn,⁸ the Singapore Night Festival is also a means to engage local artists, enrich the cultural sector, enhance social cohesion by fostering shared experiences in the community, as well as build the Singapore brand. Large-scale festivals need an ecosystem where artistic creations are supported by strong teams from the technology and technical sectors. As the festival grew and the environment changed, different operational challenges emerged where new systems and structures are needed to keep the Festival exciting and safe for visitors. This case study gives a behind-the-scenes look at the ground realities of running a mega event—what it takes to organise it well, and the many considerations for each decision that had to be made—while safeguarding the original intent and soul of the Festival.

The reason for highlighting two industry-level cases studies in this book is to demonstrate the similarities and differences in writing about a single genre of case studies. Both cases studies contain elements that are common to narratives on industry transformation. In such case studies,

there are sections that highlight the drivers of change, main decision-makers, key stakeholders, strategic plans and ground level operations even though the subheadings may be different.

There are several ways to learn from the two case studies in this section on reimagining industries. First, they can be read on their own and the discussion questions at the end of each case study will help readers think about issues and draw lessons from them. Second, the case studies can be used for comparative analysis, that is, to identify similarities and differences between the hotel and creative industries, analyse them, and surface new ideas about industry transformation.

Reshaping Behaviours and Practices

The desire for change and constant reinvention in *Chapter 1: Shaping Smart Hotels* and *Chapter 2: Fireworks in the City* deepens the mystery of innovation—where does innovation come from? If we believe that the source of innovation is multifaceted—that it comes from our passions, our interactions with the world around us, our history and culture, our survival instinct, and our identity—then one of the places to harness all these elements could be in a sandbox.

The idea of sandbox dates back to 1850 where sand gardens were created in Berlin's public parks for children.⁹ In these gardens, children expressed their imagination, using the elements around them to design the worlds in their minds. Today, our gardens of innovation are found in buildings and virtual rooms. These are intentionally created for ideas to flourish within agreed boundaries. This next bundle of case studies highlights how three different organisations design change and suggest what some of the ingredients of innovation could be.

Chapter 3: From Skunkworks to Sandbox highlights the process of instilling a change mindset into an organisation's culture. As part of its Redefining Learning strategy, the Civil Service College created a sandbox called INN x CSC in 2018 to challenge existing processes, prototype ideas, and reframe organisational thinking and culture. Three years into the INN x CSC journey, small successes from the sandbox were replicated in other parts of the College. This case study explains the driving forces of

the sandbox, highlights the importance of courage to defy norms, and underscores the substance of leadership in corporate experiments.

Case studies about organisational change are among the most complex. Seemingly strategic and structured, the organisation can be an oasis of irrationalities, simply because it is a multi-dimensional entity made up of interactions among people, issues, mind-sets, systems, processes, values, desires, cultures and traditions. Change within such an environment is unpredictable and dynamic. A story about organisational change is the story of behaviours and outcomes, as a result of the interactions of all these elements. Hence, one of the key features of *From Skunkworks to Sandbox* is the deliberate inclusion of names of main characters and their specific actions. This puts readers in the shoes of the characters and to see their dilemmas, often asking the question: "What should they do?"

For this reason, *From Skunkworks to Sandbox* is sometimes referred to as a decision case study. The story is chronological and highlights the key milestones where decisions were taken. There are no right or wrong answers but with each decision, there is a rationale and a consequence. The story guides readers to reflect on the path taken, and at times, to question the assumptions behind each decision.

Chapter 4: The LEAP in Telemedicine describes a different type of sandbox—a regulatory sandbox—a time-bound space where organisations test their innovative products or services in a live but controlled environment. Within and during a regulatory sandbox, certain legal and regulatory requirements are waived. Safeguards are also built-in to manage the risks and ensure that failures are contained within the sandbox. The Ministry of Health (MOH) designed the Licensing Experimentation and Adaptation Programme (LEAP) for telemedicine service providers to offer healthcare consultations remotely. This case study explains the Ministry's considerations when selecting sandboxing as a mechanism and the trade-offs between an inclusive and exclusive model. LEAP has helped MOH to keep pace with new developments. It also sends a signal to the industry that MOH is open to innovations and willing to update regulations.

The narrative of this case study is anchored on three pillars:

- a. What is a regulatory sandbox and why use it?
- b. When to use it?
- c. How to implement a sandbox using Pre-Sandbox, Experimentation and Post-Sandbox?

This technique of composing the story around these three pillars is typical of case studies that illustrate concepts and theoretical frameworks. By telling the story of how MOH considered, developed and implemented LEAP, readers gain insights on the nuts and bolts of operationalising the Pre-Sandbox, Experimentation and Post-Sandbox approach. This is the shortest case study in this book but it illustrates big ideas about the innovation process.

Unlike the other case studies in this collection which were based on many field interviews, *The LEAP in Telemedicine* was written largely from published sources. With good curation and storytelling skills, we can build an interesting story around existing facts, then validate it with stakeholders and experts. This was done well because there was clarity from the start that this case study would illustrate the regulatory sandbox approach.

Chapter 5: Agile for WINS rounds up the case studies in this book and highlights how the innovation process is shaped by the organisation's vision, history and culture. It describes the redesign of the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) work permit system using Agile methodology. The Ministry has been using design thinking as part of business process redesign for more than a decade. MOM became the first Singapore government agency to use Agile product development to redesign its online services. It is based on the simple premise of improving user experience. This case study explains the rationales and challenges of Agile product development. It details the lessons learnt from the Ministry's experience in scoping the project, setting up Agile teams and engaging users.

The *Agile for WINS* case study focuses on organisational-level process redesign. Process case studies are among the most straight-forward. The classic three-part story line technique of Beginning–Middle–End gives a clear spine to the narrative. Ultimately, the goal is to demystify the Agile methodology and help readers understand how things are done at each phase, including their corresponding considerations.¹⁰ Using the expository style to explain the implementation of Agile gives readers immediate clarity of how things were done. This is followed by a detailed comparison of the Waterfall and Agile product development methodologies, with explanations of MOM's decision to use the Agile approach. The comparative table is also a device to break up the monotony of text as well as offer more theoretical analyses of the Waterfall and Agile methodologies.

This Introduction only provides a glimpse into the richness of these five case studies. There are many more lessons that can be learnt, beyond what I have described here. As you read, and reflect on them, you will discover and form your own views. The authors have spent many hours researching the topics, interviewing people, and painstakingly building their narratives word by word. My deepest thanks to the authors for their curiosity and perseverance. I would also like to thank the public agencies highlighted in the case studies for generously sharing their insights and allowing their stories to be told. I have been fortunate to work with Sheila Ng and Liza Lee, whose sharp questions and diligent proofreading made this a much better book.

When we share our collective experience, including our struggles and best efforts, these stories help us to learn the lessons, lock in the gains and look ahead. I hope that readers will be inspired by the tenacity and resilience of people and organisations. May the case studies in this book be a useful resource and an encouragement to all.

Notes

- 1 *Sharpening Minds Beyond Public Service Excellence, 2001–2003* (Singapore: Civil Service College, Singapore), 29.
- 2 The case method is a way of problem-based learning where learners first read and analyse a case study, followed by active participation in a discussion led by a facilitator. The case method helps learners to gain critical thinking, communication and decision-making skills.
- 3 June Gwee, ed., *Case Studies in Public Governance: Building Institutions in Singapore* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2012), 3.
- 4 June Gwee, ed., *Case Studies: Building Communities in Singapore* (Singapore: Civil Service College, 2015), viii.
- 5 Isabel Cabrera, "World Reading Habits in 2020", *Global English Editing*, November 6, 2020, accessed July 9, 2021, www.geediting.com/world-reading-habits-2020.
- 6 Klaus Krippendorff, "On the Essential Contexts of Artifacts, or on the Proposition That 'Design Is Making Sense (of Things),'", *Design Issues* 5, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 9–38.
- 7 Cheng Chuko and Yang Ping-Yu, "A Discussion on the Changes and Progress of Design-Related Terms", presented at the International Association of Societies of Design Research, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, November 12–15, 2007, and www.etymonline.com/word/design, accessed July 16, 2021.
- 8 Robert Steuteville, "Four Types of Placemaking", *Public Square*, October 10, 2014, accessed July 16, 2021, www.cnu.org/publicsquare/four-types-placemaking.
- 9 Alexandra Lange, "An Intellectual History of the Sandbox", *Slate*, June 15, 2018, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2018/06/history-of-the-sandbox-the-origins-of-a-playground-for-kids-and-ideas.html>.
- 10 June Gwee, *The Case Writer's Toolkit* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 143.