

Changing Futures Programme Sussex

What Makes a Good Case Study



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Case Studies are a tool to learn more about complex situations, allowing evaluation and reflection on system problems and approaches. In writing Case Studies, we can learn more about what has worked well, what has not, and what we might want to change in the future. Furthermore, it has been shown that case studies may improve outcomes for clients by using them as a tool to reflect on your own practice and enable advocacy for wider system change.

Case Studies can be written in a variety of ways. At the heart of a Case Study is an examination of a client's journey through interaction with services in an organised, chronological way, from presenting needs and background to describing the barriers and opportunities that may occur. Case studies can offer insight into patterns in the way services respond to the individual and highlight both system barriers and opportunities for development of best practice. The best case studies tell a story, clearly illustrating an identified message to the reader.

They are a valuable resource because as they outline interventions and enable opportunities for frontline practitioners to review progress with their clients and reflect on which interventions have worked well to ensure that their work going forward is better informed.

Case studies are used within the Changing Futures Programme to illustrate good practice, including what works well when working with clients and highlight systems barriers or challenges that clients may experience whilst engaging with services or organisations. They enable client and frontline practitioner experiences to be illustrated more vividly when advocating for change in various forums.

This document is a best practice guide to what makes a good Case Study. First it summarises research about case studies and then identifies how they can be transformed into journey maps.

It is important to note that any guidance is not exhaustive and there is not one correct way to write a case study. It is useful to think of this document as a guide in the first instance.

Top Tips For Writing Case Studies:

- **Informed consent** - If your case study involves a real person, obtain informed consent from the individual. This is crucial to maintain ethical standards.
- **Confidentiality** - Anonymise and protect privacy. Protect the privacy and confidentiality of the individual or organisation involved. Use pseudonyms, avoid revealing personal information and maintain confidentiality.
- **Story** - A case study tells a story. Identify what it is you are trying to communicate with this story. As with all good stories it should have a beginning (Client Background), middle (Support Plan Details) and an end (Reflections and Summary of Learning).
- **Stay on message**
 - It is important to stick with what you are trying to tell your audience about the client. Think about the key message and purpose. This is likely to emerge over time as you get to know someone. As you begin to build up a picture and narrative, repeating issues may begin to emerge.
 - For clients experiencing multiple disadvantage this can be difficult to map, as there may be many things happening to a client at any one time. It might also be evident that difficulties are regularly or repeatedly emerging in the services with whom the client comes into contact. In this case the first step is to locate clear example of a journey that illustrates this and build your case study from there.

- To help shape the case study, include a purpose statement at the beginning of the case study, which tells the reader what to expect and what the specific focus will be. Common purpose statements include 'this case study will examine...' or 'the aim of this case study is to...'

- **Keep the intended audience in mind** - Understanding who will be the key audience for the case study, and what their interest in it is, will help you frame it in such a way that will be the most relevant or appealing to them.
 - **Language** - Write in clear, non-technical English. Don't assume that the reader will know what you do on a day-to-day basis. Explain any acronyms or technical detail.
 - **Accuracy** - Be accurate and specific with any numerical data (e.g., dates, amounts of substances used, ages of those involved.)
 - **Good Practice, Challenge and Opportunity** - You don't just have to focus on the successes. Case studies can be about challenging situations when difficult problems have not been overcome.
 - **Keep it relevant and to the point** - Share only what is relevant to the story / system challenge / opportunity you are trying to convey to the reader.
 - **Use evidence or data** - If available, incorporate data, statistics, or relevant research to support your case study.
 - **Visual aids** - Consider using charts, graphs, images, or other visual aids to enhance the presentation of your case study.
 - **Less is more!** - Keep case studies short and to the point to maintain your readers' attention and interest. Exact length will vary, but two sides of A4 should be the maximum.
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The Process of Writing a Case Study

- **Identify a relevant case** - Choose a case that is relevant to the topic or issue you want to address in your case study. Ensure it highlights the key elements you wish to discuss.
- **Obtain informed consent** - If your case study involves a real person, obtain informed consent from the individual. This is crucial to maintain ethical standards.
- **Set the scene** - When describing a client's background, describe the context and presenting needs / issues that your client has. You can use a bulleted list to summarise longer descriptions.
- **Support Plan** - Outline the support plan that you and other professionals have identified to address the client's needs. Be SMART in goals you have set. If possible, include the client's own priorities and goals.
- **What Happened?** - Develop the case study by explaining what happened next. In some case studies a chronological narrative that explains events step by step will work best. In others you may choose to sum up the story quickly and focus on next steps. Explain the interventions. Describe the care interventions that were applied. Explain why these interventions were chosen.
- **Reflect / Summarise Learning** - This is arguably the most important section of the case study. It is important to clearly define the key issues, challenges, or problems that the case presents. Have you addressed the key issues you identified before writing the case study? Assess the outcomes of any interventions. Did they have the desired impact? Were there any unexpected results?
- **Reflect and analyse** - Analyse the case, considering the social cultural and ethical aspects. Reflect on what worked well and what could be improved.
- **Outline any system barriers** - getting in the way of progress. What worked and what didn't work. Share insights and lessons learned from the case. What can others in the field or community learn from this experience?
- **Conclude with recommendations** - Consider providing recommendations for improving services or addressing similar issues in the future.
- **Use direct quotes** - Hearing things from a client perspective, or in the words of another health professional, can be a powerful and persuasive tool and gives a voice to those most affected.

It is often good practice to share thoughts with your team and safely discuss with others to ensure that you are creating an understandable case study. In discussions with others, you could utilise a star style 'constellation' to help map out issues (detailed below.)

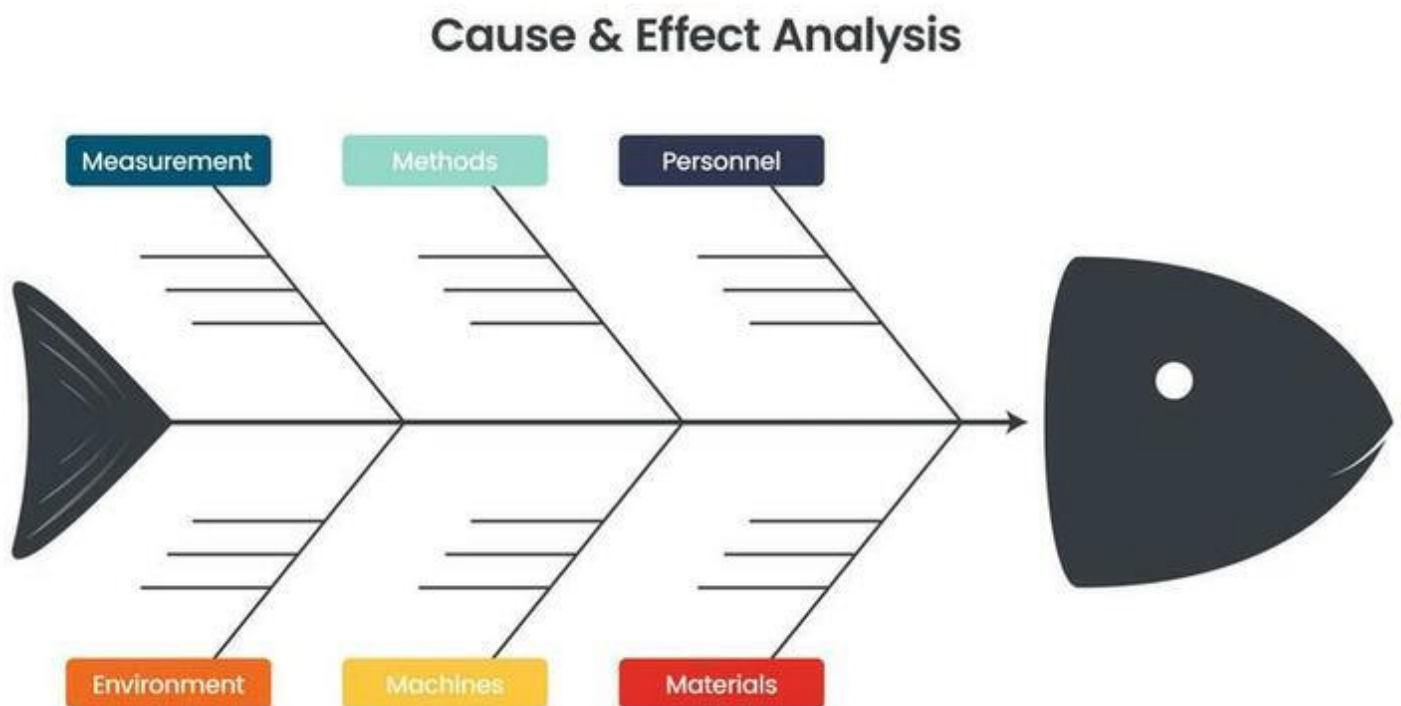
Other Good Practice

- **Incorporate team inquiry** into regular meetings - including a case study component to team meetings to establish the one case study that is telling the story you want to tell and create a problem statement / purpose. Get cognisant of whether a journey map could emerge from this. Use the team to review and support the process.
 - **Identify a case study**, which clearly demonstrates a recurring problem and how that problem gets better or worse. Ask why this is the case?
 - **Identify the outcome**, positive or negative that becomes a crossroads or a junction in the story where a change could / should be implemented. Was or wasn't this, and then what was the outcome of the activity or inactivity?
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Visualising A Case Study

There are various methods that you can utilise to brainstorm the main points that you would like to make within a case study, including the fishbone method, star, or mind map.

The fishbone diagram is a technique that encourages you to explore the cause and effect of various actions. Define the issue that you would like to discuss and brainstorm potential causes of this by extending these from the root problem. This can push you to consider various causes of an issue, rather than only thinking about the most obvious ones.



When visualising your case study, be sure to include:

- Date - what is the chronological order in which events took place.
 - What happened - what are the main events or interventions that you want to portray.
 - Consequence - how did you and your client respond to these events or interventions?
 - Outcome - what happened because of these actions?
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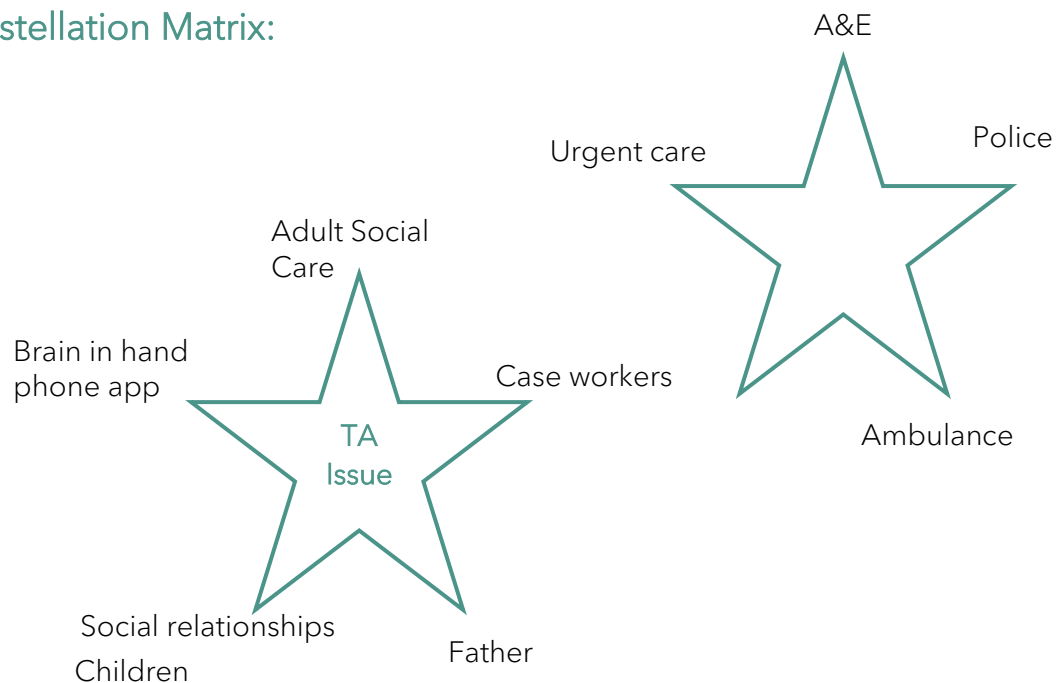
Reflections

Reflection within case studies is important as a tool for continuous improvement because it enables you to identify and appreciate positive experiences or interventions, which can inform your practice going forward. It can also help you to process and learn from more challenging experiences.

When writing your case studies consider:

- What worked well?
- What didn't?
- What would you do differently?

Case Study Constellation Matrix:



Constellation Matrixes can help to visualise the case study and prompt discussions by drawing connections and seeing where there might be gaps. Mind maps are a similar way of doing this.

Miro board is a few online tool, which can help you to visualise using a wide range of accessible tools, which can be dragged across the screen and connections made. Click [HERE](#) to visit the site.

Moving To A Journey Map

A Journey Map is a way of visualising the experiences that clients have with different services or organisations. They can be used to illustrate a challenge (for example, many experiences within various different services/organisations, where they feel that they were not adequately supported or listened to) or an intervention that has worked well (for example, an illustration of many services/organisations working together effectively and the part they all played within this.)

Journey Maps should be concise so that other people can draw out a very specific timeline of activity that is designed to show a result from a situation or set of situations that has had an impact on the client.

To move from a Case Study to a Journey Map, it can be helpful to visualise the key points and interactions and the consequence of this to help you frame what you would like to demonstrate. It can be helpful to work in reverse. For example, "this person has been made homeless because of unmanageable site rules." "This person was ejected from hospital case because no one was aware of their Acquired Brain Injury."

Visualisation can take a variety of forms. Like the fishbone diagram above, which is a visual way to look at cause and effect. The problem or outcome is displayed at the head of the fish and then you can work back to consider all of the events that lead to this.

[5 Whys](#) is a simple process, which can be a useful technique to determine the root cause of an issue. It is a simple process of continually asking why something happened from the start point, to get to the centre of an issue.