

## ANZSOG CASE PROGRAM – TEACHING NOTE

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### Vaccinate WA: The Role of Leadership in Rapid Project Delivery

**An ANZSOG Teaching Note by Susannah Nichols**

**Keywords:** COVID-19, project management, vaccine administration management system, leadership, accountability, values, organisational culture, Western Australia

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#### Summary

In April 2020, three months into the critical phase to plan and mobilise delivery of the new Western Australian Digital Strategy Roadmap, the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic radically shifted priorities for Health Support Services, the health service provider that provides shared services (including ICT) for the Western Australian (WA) public health system. The WA Department of Health played a central role in the State's pandemic response to protect public health. Health Support Services was required to urgently develop a vaccine administration management system (VaccinateWA) to assist in the delivery of the State's COVID-19 immunisation program. Delivering Vaccinate WA presented a series of risk considerations to the Health Support Services team tasked with developing the system. These considerations included an extremely time-pressured environment, a high degree of uncertainty and the high-profile nature of the project that attracted strong levels of public scrutiny. This case study will explore the leadership dynamics involved in delivering critical digital infrastructure to support rapid population

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immunisation against COVID-19, while overcoming a significant risk profile and ensuring the wellbeing of the team tasked with developing VaccinateWA.

Key lessons can be drawn from this case about the critical role leadership plays in a high performing public sector agency. The case demonstrates that leadership at all levels across an organisation plays a central role in establishing and embedding values and culture within the organisation, enhancing accountability and integrity amongst its staff, and expanding the capacity of teams to mitigate risks and deliver outcomes despite uncertainty.

### **Learning Objectives**

- Critically engage with the concept of decision-making under uncertainty and the strategies that are needed to mitigate any associated risks with this approach
- Consider and discuss the role of organisation culture in achieving outcomes
- Examine the role of leadership in empowering teams to navigate challenging situations
- Understand the strategic importance of genuine and effective leadership behaviour modelling of organisational values
- Consider the tension that exists between leaders and employees needs in the workplace and the potential benefits of prioritising wellbeing over outcomes.

### **Course Audience**

The audience for this case study may include:

- Postgraduate students enrolled in a Masters (or other postgraduate course) in public policy, management, government, public administration and related areas
- Final year undergraduate students in any of the above areas
- Public sector leaders on relevant training courses (i.e. leadership)

### **How the case can be used**

This case can be used to facilitate critical and strategic thinking with regards to leadership in the areas of decision-making in uncertainty and the role of leadership in the development/maintenance of culture and values in an organisation. This case should encourage discussion on:

- The role of culture and values in the workplace
- Leadership qualities (strengths and weaknesses)
- Decision-making under uncertainty
- Managing risk in high-profile and high-stakes projects
- Responding to rapidly shifting priorities
- Accountability and integrity measures within critical projects/short timeframes

This case reflects on the learnings of a COVID-19 project and the role leadership played in redirecting an agencies workforce to meet community needs. The case revealed the importance of a pre-existing productive culture underpinned by the agencies values with the workforce rising to the challenges presented by the pandemic. Discussion of this case can also be used to look at other areas within the public sector that didn't achieve its objectives during the pandemic (or other crises) and reflect/compare leadership strategies and how this influenced the observed outcomes.

## Suggested Teaching Approaches

| Activities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Instructional strategy        | Duration |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|
| <b>1. Watch the short video below, which outlines public sector leadership</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">What Does Public Sector Leadership Look Like?</a> (published by the Australia and New Zealand School of Government) [3.44]</li> </ul>                                                                        | Class video (Facilitator-led) | ~4 mins  |
| <b>2. Based on viewing the video above – organise into small groups and discuss the following:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Critically discuss the concept of reflection or 'learning' as a leader</li> <li>Discuss the impact that uncertainty has on leadership resilience</li> <li>Identify strategies/qualities that a leader can employ to prepare for situations of uncertainty</li> </ul>                  | Small group activity          | ~20 mins |
| <b>3. Watch the short video below, which outlines workplace culture and responsibility</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Why Workplace Culture is Everyone's Responsibility</a> (published by SHRM) [2.44]</li> </ul>                                                                                                   | Class video (Facilitator-led) | ~3 mins  |
| <b>4. Based on viewing the video above – organise into small groups and discuss the following:</b> <p>Reflect on your own organisation and experiences, and discuss the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the qualities of an effective workplace culture?</li> <li>What role do leaders play in workplace culture</li> <li>What strategies are needed to strengthen workplace culture?</li> </ul> | Small group activity          | ~20 mins |
| <b>5. The case identified the importance of 'leadership shadow' as a concept for modelling agency values</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss the value of this concept in the context of small, medium and large sized organisations</li> <li>What are some alternative strategies that leaders can employ to demonstrate organisational values?</li> </ul>                                                      | Class discussion              | ~15 mins |
| <b>6. The case identified that during a period of crisis, public sector employees are expected to meet the demands of the situation (including extended work hours). This has the potential to create tension between leaders and their teams.</b>                                                                                                                                                                              | Group exercise                | ~30 mins |

| Activities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Instructional strategy | Duration |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|
| <p>Organise into small groups (3-4 people) and do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocate a leader within each group with the remainder making up 'the team'. Allow groups ~5 minutes to identify/discuss a crisis situation and determine their role within an organisation and the crisis response.</li> <li>• Groups are to role play a leader/team situation and the leader should employ strategies learned in class to engage with their team. This activity would work best if each team member has different needs. ~15 minutes</li> <li>• Facilitator-led class discussion at end of role play to discuss outcomes and lessons learned ~10 minutes</li> </ul> |                        |          |
| <p><b>7. Consider the following statement:</b></p> <p>'Public services face increasing and more varied demands, but public service managers often lack the resources to develop their staff to effectively deal with them' (Franken et.al. 2021).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss this statement with regards to the case study.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Class discussion       | ~10 mins |

## Recommended readings and further resources

### Academic literature

- Franken, E. A., Plimmer, G., Malinen, S. K. (2021). Building people up: Growth-oriented leadership in the public sector. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 80(4), 661-689. doi: 10.1111/1467-8500.12520
- Glennon, R., Hodgkinson, I., Knowles, J., Radnor, Z., & Bateman, N. (2017). Public sector 'modernisation': examining the impact of a change agenda on local government employees in England. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 77(2), 203-221. doi:10.1111/1467-8500.12294
- Shannon, E. A. (2016). Beyond public sector reform – the persistence of change. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 76(4), 470-479. doi: 10.1111/1467-8500.12235
- Taylor, J. (2019). What causes employees to whistle while they work? Factors affecting internal whistle-blowing in the Australian Public Service. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 78(4), 497-515. doi: 10.1111/1467-8500.12401.
- Wipulanusat, W., Panuwatwanich, K., & Stewart, R. A. (2018). Pathways to workplace innovation and career satisfaction in the public service: The role of leadership and culture. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 26(5), 890-914. doi: 10.1108/IJOA-03-2018-1376

### Additional resources

- The current face of VaccinateWA is now linked to a broader information page, 'Roll up for WA' / Roll up for WA. (2022). Roll up for WA. <https://rollup.wa.gov.au/>
- Additional information on the approval process for COVID-19 vaccines in Australia Therapeutic Goods Administration. (2022). COVID-19 Vaccines. Retrieved from Therapeutic Goods Administration, Department of Health and Aged Care: <https://www.tga.gov.au/products/covid-19/covid-19-vaccines>
- WA Public Sector Commission, Leadership Capability Profiles Western Australian Public Sector Commission. (2020). Public Sector Capability Profiles. <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/public-sector-capability-profiles>

### Feedback on Teaching Note use

To assist with continual improvement, if you've used this Teaching Note, we'd greatly appreciate your feedback and suggestions for improvement. To do so, please email [caselibrary@anzsog.edu.au](mailto:caselibrary@anzsog.edu.au) with the name of the case and your comments. Many thanks in advance.

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