

Growing Pains

How a Dutch Cross-Agency Team Took on Illegal Marijuana Production in Residential Areas

Practitioner Guide

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Overview

A case study is a story about how a person or group of people faced and dealt with challenges or opportunities. It is based on desk research and interviews with key actors but does not provide analysis or conclusions. Written from the perspective of the protagonist(s), it is designed to raise questions and generate discussion about the issues they faced. Cases are meant to help participants develop analytic reasoning, listening, and judgment skills to strengthen their decision-making ability in other contexts.

A case-based conversation is a way to anchor a conceptual discussion to concrete examples. It can bring a case to life and allow participants to place themselves in the shoes of the case protagonist(s), while also allowing a variety of perspectives to surface. This guide is designed to help you lead a conversation about the case, “Growing Pains: How a Dutch Cross-Agency Team took on Illegal Marijuana Production in Residential Areas.”

Role of Facilitator

The facilitator leads the conversation with a clear beginning and end, ensures that everyone is heard, and keeps the group focused. The conversation can be broken into three distinct segments: exploring the case, applying the central questions of the case to your organization’s challenges, and formulating takeaway lessons. Some facilitation tips and tricks to keep in mind are below.

BEFORE the discussion

Make sure everyone takes the time to read the case. When setting up the room, think about situating participants where they can see you and each other. Designate a notetaker as well as a place where you can take notes on a flipchart or white board. Plan for at least sixty to seventy-five minutes to discuss the case and takeaways and have a clock in the room and/or an assigned timekeeper. Mention that you may interrupt participants in the interest of progressing the conversation.

DURING the discussion

Encourage participants to debate and share opinions. State very clearly that there’s no right or wrong “answer” to the case; cases are written so that reasonable people can disagree and debate different ideas and approaches. Be careful not to allow yourself or others to dominate the discussion. If the

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conversation is getting heated or bogged down on a particular issue, consider allowing participants to talk in pairs for a few minutes before returning to a full group discussion. Do not worry about reaching consensus, just make the most of this opportunity to practice thinking and learning together!

Case Synopsis

In June 2015, a task force convened in the Netherlands to consider cross-sectoral approaches to fighting organized crime in the south of the country, particularly in the homegrown marijuana industry. From that larger group, five professional managers or officials—from the police, the regional utility company, the national tax bureau, the mayor’s office in nearby Breda, and the public prosecutor’s office—were assigned to devise an approach to target and break up criminal drug gangs that paid or coerced residents in beleaguered neighborhoods to grow pot in back rooms or attics; activities which put a huge strain on the power supply and greatly increased the risk of fire.

The five men did not know each other; they all came from different organizations or professional backgrounds with their own training and ideas. A policeman would not see the problem, or the solution, in the same way as a utility company manager. How would the five manage to work together—not just devise an approach, but return to their organizations and convince their bosses and colleagues this could work? Not all of the team were based in the City of Breda, but Breda, under the auspices of Mayor Paul Depla, would serve as the first trial ground to identify a neighborhood and carry out an operation to see if the new cross-sectoral approach could work.

Conversation Plan

Part 1: Exploring the Case (30 minutes)

Begin by asking if someone will volunteer to summarize facts of the case and the question facing the reader, without stating their opinions. The goal here is to review the case from the point of view of the people involved. Suggested questions:

- *What was the problem the team was supposed to solve?*
- *Was the team effective in solving problem? Why or why not?*
- *Why was it so challenging for this team to collaborate and take on this challenge?*

Introduce the general questions raised by the case:

- *How do the working approaches of various professionals differ? How is the work enhanced when they join forces toward a common goal?*
- *When and under what circumstances is a cross-agency collaboration necessary or desirable? What are critical factors for success?*

Part 2: Application (20 minutes)

Invite participants to break into pairs or work as a group applying the central questions of the case to the challenges and choices they face in their own professional lives.

- *What, if anything, is familiar in this case when you consider your own experiences in cross boundary or cross agency collaboration?*
- *What lessons have you learned—from your own experience or the case—regarding improving the effectiveness of cross boundary collaboration?*

Part 3: Formulating Lessons (15–20 minutes)

This part of the conversation focuses on the lessons of the case that participants will continue to reflect on and apply to challenges in their work.

- *What are the key takeaways for you and how will you apply to present or future collaboration?*

When problems span borders, cross boundary collaboration is needed. This slide explores its challenges.

Top 3 Common Challenges of Collaborative Governance

1. Substantive Problem-Solving Challenges
 - Agreeing on the problem definition and possible solutions
 - Developing a coherent and effective collaborative approach
2. Accountability Challenges
 - Developing a commitment to the collaboration
 - Dealing with competing commitments between collaboration and own organization
3. Team Design and Management Challenges
 - Trusting and understanding each other
 - Figuring out how to talk, decide and work together

Groenleer, M., J. De Jong, M. Waardenburg and B. Keijser
“Paradoxes in Collaborative Governance,”
Public Management Review (May, 2019)