

# “Doing Something with Nothing”

## *Trying to Make Kampala’s Primary Schools Safer and Healthier*

### *Educator Guide*

JORRIT DE JONG AND ERIC WEINBERGER

### Overview

This Educator Guide is designed to assist instructors in teaching this case to students and practitioners. It is based on [case pedagogy](#), which invites participants to put themselves in the shoes of the protagonist(s) of the case and imagine how they would respond to the circumstances. Participants should read the teaching case in advance and identify key issues as a preliminary step toward meeting the learning objectives. Instructors may then use the time in the classroom to guide participants in exploring the issues and examining the challenges in the case; to introduce key concepts, tools, and frameworks; and to assist participants in applying their learning to their own environments and challenges.

This guide includes learning objectives, a synopsis, key questions, a roadmap for discussion, and appendices with additional pedagogical information and theoretical applications. The roadmap and appendices are offered to initiate meaningful conversation but are by no means the only way to teach the case. Each educator or facilitator should feel free to design their own teaching plans; both the structure and the time allotted for each component are suggestions.

### Learning Objectives

The overarching learning objective of this case is to help senior leaders in government understand how to mobilize resources for important priorities and based on public spirit, especially when it seems likely resources will never fully match the need. In particular, the case study considers:

- Problem-solving without resources
  - How do you do something with nothing?
- Mobilizing new resources
  - Resources are not always what you have in your budget or revenues; a leader may need to invent or mobilize other resources such as fellow citizens, other urban leaders, or even goodwill.
- Creating a *public value proposition* that asserts however unsuccessful or incomplete the project is likely to be, it is still very much worth doing.

- Government or state institutions belong to everybody; all should be encouraged to feel they have a stake in their strength or success—in this case, Kampala’s schools. At the very least, students and teachers will spend the day in a safer environment.

## Case Synopsis

By late 2012, well into Jennifer Musisi’s second year as executive director of the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), city revenues were improving. But there was little in the budget for schools, and no further assistance was expected from national government after paying teacher salaries and a tiny allocation for infrastructure. To improve the schools that were educating sixty-one thousand primary-school-age students, the KCCA would have to do something with nothing, or as Musisi put it: “I need to fix the buildings, but I have no money.”

At the time, student numbers were rising in Kampala, partly because of an influx of rural migrants and refugees who were entitled to a primary education. Kampala’s eighty-one primary, government-aided schools, most of them built before the 1970s, were dilapidated and unsafe, lacking sufficient furniture, supplies, equipment, and even toilets. Roofs were made of asbestos, a carcinogen. Safety was further jeopardized by frequent trespassing by street vendors and local residents who might endanger the children (the premises were unfenced); girls were especially vulnerable. In many respects, fixing the schools was an urgent matter of public health and Musisi realized that presenting it as such could help attract support.

For Musisi, improving schools to the best of her abilities was a moral imperative; “I respond to need,” she said. The private sector—local small businesses, charities, multinationals, NGOs, even foreign embassies— might be able to help, but first the KCCA would have to demonstrate competence and integrity, qualities not recently associated with Kampala city administration. Only then might she start to see progress and, perhaps, the best solution: increased regular funding from national government.

## Key Questions

1. What was Musisi’s strategy to improve Kampala’s schools?
2. How sustainable were Musisi’s accomplishments? If not sustainable, would her efforts still have been valuable?
3. Limited in what she could do directly to improve educational outcomes for Kampala’s primary students, Musisi opted for creating a healthier environment. Can many issues be generally reframed in terms of public health, and thus create public value?

## Roadmap for Discussion

**Introduction** (3-10 minutes): Briefly state the goal of the session in reference to the case, cite specific major conflicts facing the protagonist, and foreshadow broader learning objectives.

**Exploration** (30-45 minutes): Use class discussion, “buzz groups,” and board work to examine the issues and options confronting the protagonist.

**Diagnosis** (30-45 minutes): Introduce key concepts, frameworks, and tools to help participants pinpoint possible solutions to major conflicts in the case.

**Application** (15 minutes, optional): Ask participants to relate the concepts and frameworks to their own organizations’ challenges.

**Wrap-Up and Takeaways** (15 minutes): Review the learning objectives and discuss insights most relevant to the participants’ organizations’ challenges.

### Introduction (3-10 minutes)

Frame the primary learning objectives of the session: problem-solving without resources; mobilizing new resources; and creating a *public value proposition*, which is a shared understanding that renovating schools—no matter how complete or thorough the effort—is nevertheless worth doing.

### Exploration (30-45 minutes)

A quick synopsis of the case should set the stage, and along with that a focus for the discussion to come. A key initial question: *What does success look like?* Write down respondents’ answers on Board 1. (See Appendix 1, Board Plans.)

To be successful, Musisi and her KCCA administration had to demonstrate effectiveness, especially in light of the longtime corruption and incompetence of the body it replaced, Kampala City Council (KCC). Ask the group: *How did Musisi’s administration demonstrate that it was capable, legitimate, and effective?* Write down answers on Board 2. (See Appendix 1 for sample answers.)

### Diagnosis (30-45 minutes)

Start with a straw poll (Y/N): *Was focusing on schools the right choice for Musisi?* As you tabulate numbers, ask for reasons why it was or was not the right choice, using Board 3 for answers. (See Appendix 1, Board Plans.)

Asking “*What makes something the right choice?*” brings us to a public-management concept known as the *public value proposition*, or a description of the positive social outcomes that constitute the public value of a given public enterprise. Here, that “given public enterprise” is renovating schools one-by-one as resources become available. The “positive social outcomes” include healthier children, safer schools, engaged supporters, community backing, and more.

Appendix 2 (“What is Public Value?”) offers a helpful description of what public value is and is not—especially in the public sector as opposed to business. As participants work through the concept,

record (on Board 4) what seems to be the *public value proposition* that Musisi is offering her Kampala stakeholders, which might be something like: “There is need everywhere, but investing in children is a sign of seriousness, and if you can deliver results and work with integrity, you increase public trust in government and affirm your legitimacy.”

Creating a *public value proposition* leads to another useful diagnostic tool, the *strategic triangle*, which is discussed in detail in Appendix 3. The *strategic triangle* is an iterative process, whose three corners or parts (*Public Value, Operational Capacity, Legitimacy and Support*) are always shifting and thus require alignment. As Musisi builds “value,” for instance, she may receive increased “support,” which could, in turn, affect KCCA’s “capacity.” Question for the group:

- *What did Musisi do to get the three parts (Capacity, Support, Public Value) of her strategic triangle aligned? Use Board 5 for answers.*

One way to think of Musisi is as a kind of public entrepreneur. In the words of Harvard’s Howard Stevenson, “entrepreneurship is the pursuit of opportunity beyond the resources you currently control.” If Musisi’s goal was to pursue opportunities for children in Kampala’s schools (also to make them safer and healthier), despite not having resources, how did she identify resources nevertheless and build capacity and support?

Final questions, if time allows: *Looking back at Musisi’s entrepreneurial efforts, do you think she was successful? If you were in her position, what would you have done differently?* Use Board 6 for answers.

#### **Application** (optional, 15 minutes)

Now that you have examined Musisi’s decision making as she worked to improve the physical condition of Kampala’s schools, think of a change initiative of your own in terms of (a) *the public value proposition* you are offering; and (b) a strategy that aligns the three parts of your *strategic triangle* (*Public Value, Operational Capacity, and Support*).

- *State the public value you intend to produce*
- *What operational capacity do you need to deliver this public value?*
- *What sources of legitimacy and support do you need to deliver this public value?*

#### **Wrap Up and Takeaways** (15 minutes)

Summarize the process and learning objectives and discuss insights most relevant to participants’ organizations’ challenges.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Board Plans

Board 1: What would success for Jennifer Musisi have looked like? Sample answers:

- Healthier environment for students, especially girls
- Rising student numbers (because schools are deemed safer, more successful, and a decent alternative to private schools)
- Better educational outcomes (higher test scores, literacy rates, etc.)
- More government investment in schools

Board 2: How did Jennifer Musisi’s KCCA administration demonstrate that it was capable, legitimate, and trustworthy? Sample answers:

- Senior leadership monthly donation of percentage of salary to schools fund
- Tried to keep executive director at arm’s length from donors with financial concerns in city
- Asked donors’ permission to put excess funds or resources to other school projects
- Regularly lobbied parliament and President Museveni for proper funding
- Drew up “needs assessment” for individual schools so work was properly researched and targeted

Board 3: Was this the right choice for Jennifer Musisi? (Collect Y/N votes, and reasoning.) Sample answers:

Yes, the right choice	No, a poor choice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Only thing she can do; otherwise means ignoring schools</li> <li>○ Progress incremental but still progress</li> <li>○ Modeling good government for a future payoff</li> <li>○ Possibility that success might bring real budget support</li> <li>○ Bringing new attention to the schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Unsustainable: repairs, improvements, equipment can be undone, damaged, or stolen without continued funding</li> <li>○ Not demonstrably tied to what’s really at stake: better educational outcomes or prospects, higher literacy, etc.</li> <li>○ Little measurable, even health outcomes</li> <li>○ Too dependent on private sector</li> </ul>

Board 4: What was Musisi’s *public value proposition*?

Board 5: What did Musisi do to align the three parts of her *strategic triangle*?

Board 6: If you were in Musisi’s position, what would you have done differently?

## Appendix 2 What is Public Value?

Public leaders create public value when they make better and more just social conditions. They can act from a variety of positions and platforms: elected, appointed, or career government officials, or community organizers, nonprofit managers, philanthropists, social entrepreneurs, and so on.

The social conditions they aim to improve may concern the material welfare of individuals and society as a whole, or the status of relationships among individuals and groups.

To improve material welfare, public leaders produce material conditions not reliably produced by the market, such as widespread access to essential goods and services, security and protection from risks over which individuals have little control, or special services for vulnerable individuals and groups.

To improve social relationships, public leaders: establish and uphold rights to ensure individuals can live free from oppression and discrimination; perform duties that ensure individuals and groups do not violate the rights of others; and make opportunities available to help create the norms and pass the laws that govern the public.

### Creating Public Value

Creating public value is the purpose of public management or, more broadly, public leadership. Public leaders are ultimately responsible for:

- pursuing ultimate social outcomes that help establish justice and material wellbeing for each and for all.
- deploying public assets through activities that create net positive effects.
- being accountable for these efforts to a public that is constantly debating, reimagining, and negotiating the terms of accountability in the realm of politics.

### Misunderstanding Public Value

Creating public value is not:

- “achieving a mission” because missions may be outmoded, narrowly or rigidly interpreted, or too vague.
- “satisfying customers” because citizens are not analogous to customers:
  - they do not pay fully or directly for services and benefits;
  - they cannot earmark their tax dollars for their preferred activities; and
  - as government clients, they often have duties imposed on them in addition to receiving services.
- “maximizing outputs” because the value of outputs lies in their capacity to produce the intended social outcomes, and the connection between outputs and outcomes is often uncertain and untested.

To help clarify the concept of public value, you may compare and contrast management in public and private sectors. Unlike in business, concerned with productivity and profits, the essential question in public management is: *What are the valuable social outcomes I am trying to produce (and how do I optimize production)?*

In the public sector, the assets a public manager can turn into (net) public value include:

- tax dollars;
- legal and regulatory authority; and
- public spirit (the public’s willingness to support government goals with voluntary labor).

While business revenues register dollar amounts with each purchase, the value of public-sector outputs is highly subjective and its link to outcomes uncertain. Without a revenue measure to set against costs, it is hard to tell if outputs are creating public value at an acceptable price.

- *What does the public want from government entities?*

In principle, the public tells public managers what outcomes it wants them to produce through the formal and informal mechanisms of representative democracy (elections, referenda, public opinion polling, citizen petitions, public hearings, and so on). Because the mechanisms do not generally produce clear mandates that public managers can easily translate into concrete action, however, some work is required to both articulate and realize those outcomes.

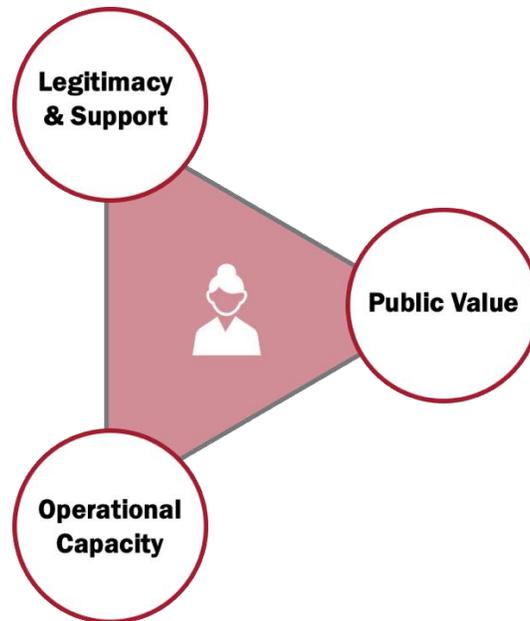
To formulate that proposition, public managers must understand what values, or dimensions of public value, are at stake in their efforts:

- As taxpayers who have handed over a portion of their money, the public wants the state to produce material benefits for themselves and the public at a limited cost.
- As democratic citizens who have handed over a portion of their freedom, the public wants the state to produce and uphold fair and just relationships among people, groups, and institutions—with a limited exercise of authority.

**Appendix 3** The Strategic Triangle<sup>i</sup>

The *strategic triangle* is a diagnostic tool to help public leaders create more public value. The three points of the triangle are:

- *Public value*: a conception of the outcomes you are pursuing
- *Operational capacity*: a characterization of the actions that, if taken, could reliably produce the desired results
- *Legitimacy and support*: an account of how public support for the proposed collective action could be mobilized



The challenge of the *strategic triangle* is using it to navigate a complex and dynamic environment by:

- ensuring that you have touched all the bases in developing your idea and aligned the different parts (completeness);
  - diagnosing the particular context in which you are working to confirm that the idea could be politically, legally, and financially supported, and successfully implemented in that context (coherence).
- *What does the strategic triangle mean in terms of diagnosing Musisi’s efforts to improve Kampala’s primary schools?*
    - A conception of the outcomes you are pursuing (*public value*); in this case, healthier children in a safer school environment better equipped and enabled for learning.
    - A characterization of the actions that, if taken, could reliably produce the desired results (*operational capacity*); in this case, refurbishing and equipping school buildings with more and better toilets, furniture, and so on, while removing dangerous substances (e.g., asbestos roofs) and improving an unsafe environment (fencing school grounds, etc.). Resources included cash (from government budgets or private donations), materials, and investment of labor and time.

<sup>i</sup> Shortened and adapted from the 3/2020 BHCLI “Public Value” concept note

- An account of how public support for the proposed collective action could be mobilized (*legitimacy and support*); in this case, a KCCA leader who demonstrated competence, upheld standards, and rejected corruption, and through those acts inspired confidence and trust in government, donors, and citizens that renovating primary schools was an important social project with a payoff for decades to come.

While one can divide thinking about action into the three particular elements of the *strategic triangle* and take up each element in turn, one has to keep the *relationships* among these three elements constantly in mind: the imagined means have to be capable of producing the desired ends; the desired ends have to be able to command *legitimacy and support* from those who can authorize and finance the effort; the support has to cover the costs and risks of the means one plans to use to make the desired changes. The tight interconnections among the parts of the *strategic triangle* force you to shift from linear thinking to a more complex, iterative “design challenge” in which you are constantly looking at the whole to ensure two features of the overall strategy: its completeness (all three bases touched) and its coherence (all three elements aligned).