

TEACHING TECHNIQUE

Case Study An Effective Tool

By Ms. Mekhla Sinha and Ms. Aradhana Changkakoti
(Centre for Management Education & Research) GHRDC

Research has proved that students can learn more effectively when they are actively involved in the learning process and the Case Study method can be considered as one of the teaching tools which can facilitate that. It is an effective learning method where students' active participation and involvement are required. The application of a case study can be observed mostly in management education which provides the students a feel about the real world situation that they will have to come across, once they step out of the classroom and start their career as professionals. So, what is a Case Study after all?

Case Study—A perspective:

There are a number of definitions for the term "case study" and it may mean different things to different people. According to the business dictionary, the term "case study" may be defined as documented study of a specific real life situation or imagined scenario, used as a training tool in business schools and firms. Students or trainers are required to analyse the prescribed cases and present their interpretations or solutions, supported by the line of reasoning employed and assumptions made. A case study is not similar to a problem. A problem has a specific and correct solution, whereas in a case study, there may be a number of alternative solutions which are supported by analysis and logical arguments. The definition of case study covers variety of teaching structures like short individual case studies to longer group-based activities or classroom discussion.

Introduction and Analysis of Case Study in the Classroom:

It is important to introduce case studies in classroom teaching structure as it familiarises the students with real life situations which they might face in future. A case study helps students to understand the management theory by providing real life examples of the underlying theoretical concepts and thus provide an integrated view of management. It is also linked with increased student motivation and interest in a subject.

Case Studies are generally discussed in a classroom in large groups and require



preparation on students' part before the discussion starts. Students need to read the case study thoroughly, understand the situation and key issues involved, design strategies and provide recommendations towards solution. The steps involved in a case study analysis are:

- Read the case carefully
- Understand the current situation and future needs in the case
- If required, design SWOT
- Identify the goal and objective
- Identify the problems associated in achieving the goal/objective
- Evaluate possible strategies and action plans
- Recommend solution.

The classroom discussion of a case study is generally facilitated by an instructor. The instructor encourages and motivates the students to look at the situation from different perspectives, analyse the problems and finally arriving at possible alternatives. Different students may have different views on the situation and the instructor may challenge their views. The instructor may later evaluate the performance of the student in the discussion on the basis of the quality of his participation. The evaluation of students' performance in a case study can be assessed by:

Case presentation—by assessing the student's presentation skill, whether the content can express the communication skill of the student, level of analysis and recommendations etc.

Students' participation in the discussion of the case—the extent of involvement, quality of input, interpersonal skill during discussion etc.

- Assignments on the case study
- Examination based on the case study.

Developing a Case Study :

The basics of developing a case study can be summarised as follows:

Collection of data—all the data related to the case should be collected. Data collection sources may be documents, records, interviews with clients, observations etc. For example, if we take the case study of an educational institute which is yet to make an impact in the educational sector we must collect all data related to the institute like data regarding its infrastructure, library, classrooms, faculty, students, admission process, placement record etc.

Organising data—data should be organised in order to focus on the objective of the study. It should be organised in chronological order to portray the objective and the problem associated with the case. For example, in our case, it should start with the history of how the Institute was started, its objective, the structures used for running the Institute and how it did not receive the desired results etc.

Narrative—next step is the development of the case study narrative. The case study should be written in such a way that it integrates all the information around the focus of the study. For example, in the case study of the educational institute, the narrative should include all the information about the institute, the phases through which the institute had passed—the early indicators of failures, its future goals etc.—everything should be reflected in the narrative.

Validation of narrative—the narrative might be validated by review from programme participants. The narrative should be read carefully to ensure that it fully reflected the client's experience and results.

The basis of developing a case study may be different. It may be developed based on research interest of the faculty and students may also propose about selected topics. Sometimes involving external person from industry or outside may also help in developing a programme which the students may find interesting.

Benefits from Case Method:

The case method has several benefits compared to traditional method of teaching. Besides developing the key skills of student, the case study method can help student enhance his/her capabilities.

Developing key skills from Case Study Method:

Group working—Students learn to work in groups and thus they develop interpersonal and social skills, dealing peers and how to ease out conflicts and make compromises in large groups.

Individual study skill—students can be encouraged to carry out their own research and finding the facts about the case.

Information gathering and analytical skill—the students have to find out the data about the case, thus improving their data handling skill, problem identification skill, quantitative and qualitative analytical skill and critical thinking skill.

Decision making skill—finding out different strategies, selecting the right strategy out of various alternatives, formulating action plan and finally the implementation of the plan.

Application skill—use of various tools and techniques and theories in finding the solution of the case study.

Communication skill—students improve their communication skill while speaking, listening and debating during the case study discussion.

Time management skill—longer case studies require students to carry out their work such as individual preparation, group discussion, presentation, etc. before the set deadline and thus teach students how to manage their time effectively.

Presentation skill—after collecting data, analysing them and thereafter finding the solution the students need to present their case. This improves their presentation and writing skill.

Besides developing the above mentioned skills amongst students, the case study method has various other advantages. Some of them are as follows:

The case study teaches students to practise important managerial skills like probing, observing, decision making etc.

The case study requires students to relate analysis and action, to develop realistic and concrete actions despite complexity of the situation.

It exposes students to the various functioning of industries, corporate houses and their responsibility level. It helps a student in choosing his/her career in future based on the responsibility he or she is willing to carry out.

It gives a student an integrated view of management. The students experience real life examples underlying the theoretical concepts they had learnt in the classrooms.

Disadvantages of Case Studies—Common Pitfalls:

Teaching by the case study suffers from some limitations like the following :

It may not be relevant in all situations. It cannot represent the whole complex and multidimensional structure of a business organisation.

Insufficient information in a case study may lead to inappropriate results.

It is not appropriate for elementary level.

Merely analysing a case and its inherent problems is not adequate to generate managerial skills in a student to identify a real life situation and derive solution.

Case studies cannot substitute for practical work like project, industry experience, field research etc. So, while giving importance to case studies, other practical works should not be ignored and there should be a balance between the two.

Case studies are more suitable for group study rather than individual research.

Case studies should be relevant to the situation students are familiar with. For example, most of the case studies discussed amongst Indian students are derived from American business situation which students cannot identify with.

Cased-Based Learning At Harvard Business School:

“There is only one way to learn the demanding art of leadership—and that is by leading.”

That is why the Harvard Business School education has been and continues to be rooted in the practical lessons of the case method. Through the case method, the students at Harvard Business School are exposed to real life situations that are relevant, intellectually and emotionally engaging and highly interactive. This creates a challenging learning environment that encourages everyone to share opinions and perspectives and learn from each other. By engaging students in business conflicts developed from real events cases involve students in the challenges they are expected to face which require detailed analysis with limited information.

At Harvard, the case method has evolved into a sophisticated teaching instrument, under the watchful guidance of carefully trained faculty, for transforming a student's potential talent into a powerful capacity for effective decision making. The Harvard Business School faculty continue to lead the world in case practice, creating more than eighty percent of the case materials used in business schools across the globe. With the emergence of new technologies the faculty at Harvard uses the case method with new teaching tools that enhance learning. These include:

Online simulation

Interactive exercises—video and multimedia

One-to-one tutorials.

Harvard reinforces its Case-based Learning Model through:

A first-year-section experience in a shared curriculum with 89 peers. The intensity of section-life builds a foundation of trust that enables the students to take risks and develop greater confidence.

Small cross-section-learning teams that help students prepare for their cases through collaborative study and opportunities to test their ideas.

Sophisticated and specially designed classrooms that reinforce the case method instruction through amphitheatre seating, outstanding acoustics and advanced multimedia technologies for audio, video and internet.

To get most out of the cases, students read and reflect on the case and meet in small study groups before class to warm up and discuss their findings with other classmates. The students have to play the role of decision maker as they read through the situation and identify the problems. The next step is to perform the necessary analysis of the causes, considering alternative courses of action and finally come to a solution with a set of recommendations. In class, under the questioning and guidance of professor, students probe underlying issues, compare different alternatives and finally suggest the course of action in light of the company's objectives. During the case study discussion, it can be observed that the students are doing 85% of the talking as the professor steers the discussion by making occasional observation and asking questions. The 80-90 individuals from diverse industries, functions, countries and experiences, enrich the classroom interaction. At the end of the class, it can be found that the day's lesson lay in exchange of ideas amongst the students and not in text book.

Class participation is so important in Harvard that 50% of the students' grade is based on the quality of class participation. This requires the student and faculty to work closely together—another hallmark of HBS experience.

During their time at Harvard, students study and prepare over 500 cases which help them to recognise the unique aspects of different situations, define problems, suggest further avenues of analysis and devise and implement action plans. Once they finish the programme the Harvard Business School Graduates have the confidence that they need to go off and tackle many business challenges they will face in their career.

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