

A-The Case Method

SECTION 1

WHAT IT IS

001. Batty, J. (1966). Management Accountancy. 2nd Ed.
MacDonald & Evans, London, England.

....the written procedures followed or problems being encountered within a business.

002. Bligh, D.A. (1971). What's the Use of Lectures.
D.A. and B. Bligh, Briar House, Clyst Honiton, Exeter,
Devon, England.

Case discussion - real or simulated complex problems are analysed in detail for students to suggest their own solutions or decisions.

003. Easton, G. (1982). Learning from Case Studies.
Prentice-Hall International, Inc., London, England.

A case, short for case history, is a description of a situation.

004. Ellington, H.I. & Harris, D. (1986). Dictionary of Instructional Technology. Kogan Page, London, England.

Case study: an in-depth examination of a real life or simulated situation carried out in order to illustrate particular characteristics - either characteristics specific to the case being studied or more general characteristics of the wider set to which it belongs.

005. Encyclopaedia Britannica.(1979). Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc. Benton, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.

Case study, method of studying social phenomena through the analysis of a particular set of circumstances. The case may involve an individual, group, institution, process or community, or any other social unit. Everything relevant to the case is studied in an attempt to make an intensive and detailed analysis. Case studies are widely used in teaching law, business and public administration. They are also used in scientific research, though they have been called unscientific because they do not develop testable generalizations. Case studies, however, may provide preliminary categories and variables that can then be tested statistically. Generalizations from statistical analyses may also be examined in detail through individual cases.

006. Gordon,P.&Lawton,D.(1984). A Guide to English Educational Terms. Batsford Academic and Educational, London, England.

Case study: a method of teaching in which a situation is presented to students by means of film or document as a basis for discussion.

007. Kletz,T,A.(1970). Putting Knowledge to Use. In, Education in Chemistry, 7 (6) p.229.

Essentially the case study method consists of a particular example (what it is an example of depends on the subject). It usually involves consideration of an actual example requiring the synthesis of a large amount of different kinds of information, and the making of recommendations or decisions. It is applicable in law, medicine, education, business studies, politics, English or any subject that studies the making of decisions. Because it is appropriate for the study of complex interactions of principles, it could be used by teachers in almost any subject. It is useful for demonstrating the application of principles for practising the analysis of complex situations.

008. Page, G.T. & Thomas, J.B. (1977). International Dictionary of Education. Kogan Page, London, England.

Case study - 1

2 Used particularly in management education and training. The presentation, sometimes involving role-playing, of a true or synthesized situation to develop the judgement of students who evolve and propose possible solutions, either individually or in groups.

009. Reynolds, J.I. (1980). Case Method in Management Development. International Labour Office, Geneva, Switzerland.

....a short description, in words and numbers, of an actual management situation.

THE CASE METHOD - SECTION 2

TYPES OF CASES

There has been a tendency for the case study method of training or teaching or learning to be regarded as a tool for training in the business field - indeed, at one time there was a supposed attempt in a book to claim the case method as a product of the Harvard Business School and that the right to market such cases was the exclusive right of that institution.

As can be seen from the definitions quoted though, this is a very restrictive view, and it can be considered as a method for practising problem solving which is applicable in any subject which has problems - the answer may be a single one, a variety of possible options, or there may be no answer at all.

We shall, though, in this booklet be looking at the use of the case method predominantly within the area of management development - that is, keeping to the more traditional area for the use of the case study - but the reference sections are subdivided into

- references on the case method itself
- references on training, including the case method
- references on public administration
- references on the position of women in society.

This last-named section is included as being of current interest and concern to the Commonwealth Secretariat.

There are several major skill areas which it is claimed that the case method can help to develop; Easton suggests they can all be described as contributing to creative problem-solving. These are considered in the next section, 'Why Use Cases?'

Attempts have also been made to categorize cases into particular types, though Culliton has suggested that

"...there is no such thing as the case method. The term has many different meanings - at least as many as there are people using it, and probably more."

Two contrasting examples which have been suggested are those of Simmons, who classifies by type of case, and of Tixier and Berridge, who subdivide them by reference to the purposes they are intended to fill; their groupings are given in Table 1.

Simmons	Tixier and Berridge
exercise cases situation cases complex cases decision cases in-tray cases critical incident cases sequential cases role-play cases	learning need method concept illustration method consultancy method research material method the interesting or oddball situation

Table 1: two examples of the classification of cases.

Simmons expands his classifications as follows:

The **EXERCISE** case.

where the application and practice of particular techniques is needed, particularly quantitative techniques. Suggests this type develops technical and analytical capabilities.

The SITUATION case

describes (fairly clear) issues in events which are either successes or failures, but the issues are often not those stated by the characters in the case, so that such statements need to be looked at critically in the light of other evidence.

The COMPLEX case

a situation case where the problem is to diagnose the underlying issues, which are difficult to distinguish as they are mixed with a number of other interdependent but superficial issues in a mass of irrelevant data.

The DECISION case

requires the learner to analyse a situation, exercise judgement and make suggestions as to what to do in the circumstances described. Essentially, a decision has to be made in the light of uncertainty. This also

requires the formulation of an action plan.

The IN-TRAY case

a variation of the decision case consisting of documents which an administrator might find in the in-tray. Some background information is provided and the learner is allowed a limited - though usually inadequate - amount of time in which to determine and record action to be taken on each of the documents. This is intended to develop administrative and managerial skills.

The CRITICAL INCIDENT case

an item of information is provided about a situation. If the learner then asks the right questions, more data is supplied, in a variety of possible forms, and the case situation can be understood, perhaps leading to suggestions for action.

The SEQUENTIAL case

The action is stopped at a critical point in the story and the learner is required to predict outcomes or suggest courses of action. The story is then continued and the reasons for any differences between the forecasts and what actually happened are analysed.

The ROLE PLAY case

is in effect a 'live' case study. A player receives an outline of the role that has been agreed will be assumed, and the characterisation of the role is then developed as the player sees fit. Once the characterisation of the role is developed, it cannot be changed while the game or role is in progress.

N.B. An alternative description of the 'live' case method is that it is a report of events that have just happened or are still in process. This should be compared with the so-called true live case method (as described later in this section).

These should be contrasted with Tixier and Berridge's classification for the identification and generation of case material:

(a) The LEARNING NEED method

centred on the requirement to develop material which will allow students to acquire or increase a skill.

(b) The CONCEPT ILLUSTRATION method

in which the case teacher fulfils a need to illustrate, operationalise (perhaps to simplify, perhaps to deepen) a concept, so that students can apply an abstraction to concrete instances.

(c) The CONSULTANCY method

in which very realistic and topical material can be presented to students as a means of simulating "sharp-end" situations and inculcating suitable attitudes and beliefs, often of a deterministic nature.

(d) The RESEARCH MATERIAL method

in which research data are presented to students in the hope of developing insights through joint teacher-student analysis.

(e) The INTERESTING or ODDBALL situation

which may have proved insoluble in practice, and which is written up as a case which provides a challenge to students. It does not merit the label of a "method".

"The extent to which a particular method of case generation is used will reflect variation in the definitions of students' needs, as shown in Table 2 overleaf.

There are a variety of ways in which cases can be classified; those given above are merely examples, not definitive categorisations. Further cases and types of cases are continually being developed. Leenders and Erskine state that,

"New cases are as essential to the case method as new blood to a donor clinic. There are many reasons for the continuing development of new cases. Cases become obsolete. Student and faculty interest can be maintained primarily with current material. New

Type of case	Definition of students' needs	Most commonly used in
a	Pragmatic, practical problem solving	Vocational training
b	Abstract, conceptual, analytical	Higher education
c	Pragmatic, practical problem solving	Aggressive business cultures
d	Abstract, conceptual, analytical	Higher education
e	Difficult to categorise	Vocational education (but may be unteachable)

Table 2: Areas of use of cases in Tixier and Berridge's classification.

problem areas, new theories and new subject approaches need to be exposed. All cases are dated. The environment within which the organization exists changes after the case has been written".

An example is the true live case method, devised in part to combat the lack of practical effect the correctness or otherwise of a decision might have. A live case (in business and management) is usually a present and future oriented case, presented jointly by people from an organization and the trainer, and which focusses on present-day problems which have emerged in a real life organization and on which decisions need to be made. It encourages a greater sense of responsibility in that the trainees' proposals may be of sufficient value to the firm for them to be implemented.

SUMMARY

Classification of cases into types may constrain you; it is better to decide what your objectives are for your participants, what you hope they will gain from the use of a case, and only after that might you see whether any particular type meets your needs.

SOURCE REFERENCES

Those reference numbers marked with an asterisk, e.g. 003*, have abstracts given in the 'Abstracts' part of this booklet.

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- 010* Kralj, J. (1985) The live case method for teaching, consulting and research in business studies and management. In, Winterburn, N.R. (Ed). Proc. 3rd Int. Conf. on Case Method Research and Application. Centre for Continuing Education, The City University, London, England.
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- 012* Simmons, D.D. (1975). The Case Method in Management Training in Management Development and Training Handbook ed. Taylor, B. & Lippets, G. McGraw-Hill, Maidenhead, England.
- 013* Tixier, M. & Berridge, J. (1985). Cultural Transfer in Case Study Usage. In Winterburn, N.R. (Ed). Proc. 3rd Int. Conf. on Case Method Research and Application. Centre for Continuing Education, The City University, London, England.

THE CASE METHOD - SECTION 3

WHY USE CASES?

Learning can be regarded as the process of preparing to deal with new situations. It may occur consciously, or often unconsciously, usually from experiencing real-life situations, although simulated or imagined situations can also induce learning.

Thus, new situations and new contexts may help in increasing both learning and knowledge. The use of cases allows the introduction of new contexts which may correspond to real-life situations. Consequently, many complex interrelationships may be better understood and much knowledge may be gained because issues are dealt with in their context and environment. Learning becomes more useful and effective, in that it consists of much more than just the translation by the learner of an input into an output. Essentially, cases are assumed to favour integrative and systemic thinking, corresponding to the higher-order cognitive skills of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Hofer and Schendel mention that different types of business require different strategies; getting exposure to different industries and to different situations within important time limits helps, they suggest, to give an appreciation of the limits imposed by incompleteness of information, ambiguity of many situations and lack of time available. This is why the case method has become a popular method for learning business and management skills; it has been used to attempt to develop skills and knowledge through the analysis of an actual situation needing a solution. Cases are presumed to allow for realism, including feelings, values, discussions and critical judgements - all characteristics which help the development of managerial competence.

It has been suggested that if it is believed that the students should experience for themselves the intricacy, excitement and perplexity of acquiring and practising knowledge, then the use of the case studies must be considered. Teachers and trainers who regard the learning of their students as being important will, it has been

argued, favour the use of the case study approach because of its presumed benefits.

There are also a number of perceived weaknesses in the case method, though the challenge is sometimes as much for the content of the cases as for the method itself. Argyris believes that it "may act paradoxically in that though it is a method of instruction designed to enhance individual and through that organisational double loop learning, it may inhibit both by reducing double loop learning ." (Doubleloop learning = detection and correction of error plus changes in underlying policies, assumptions and goals, as opposed to single loop learning which assumes error correction but no accompanying change).

There is an approach suggested to solve cases, which might seem too rigid and which reduces the 'inspirational' phase of the solution produced. It can be argued that sometimes cases are no better than a good problem - probably mostly when cases are not discussed thoroughly. There are undoubtedly some concepts which are learned more easily through problems and examples, or by other methods, than through cases ; the use of cases as the sole method of teaching is certainly not to be recommended - it is but one technique among many - but for certain types of learning it is regarded as invaluable. Whatever the type of learning situation, cases could be used; however, they might not correspond to the best method available.

It has been suggested that the emphasis placed on results in cases makes them less oriented towards ethics, but the various aspects and information included in cases leaves room for flexibility. It is the trainer's approach and priorities rather than just the actual content of cases that should be seen as significant.

The evaluation of the performance of the case method as compared with other teaching methods is important. Understanding better when the case method is appropriate and how well it aids learning would be of value. So far, though, to a large extent a positive answer with regard to benefits has been taken for granted by the users of the case method.

If we consider the instructional functions as classified by Klingsberg, the appropriateness of case studies for each of these can be suggested:

MOTIVATION AND PREPARATION for the new topic by e.g. showing the relations between the old and the new knowledge and explaining the importance of the new topic.

A motivational case should break false illusions and a wrong reliance on one's (insufficient) knowledge.

ORIENTATION to the structure of the topic and objectives of learning. This includes the basic principles, key concepts and the logical model of the topic in a nutshell.

A case study may not be appropriate for this.

TRANSMISSION OF NEW INFORMATION and its processing in order to acquire a full understanding of the topic.

Cases certainly depend on the processing of new information as a basic function, but there is not necessarily any consequent understanding of the underlying principles that the case is meant to illustrate.

REVIEW AND REINFORCEMENT of the key points of the topic.

Can be achieved by use of a well-designed succession of cases.

SYSTEMATIZATION, i.e. reflection, emphasis on the important points and integration of the material into a coherent scheme of concepts.

This may be achieved by some of the participants by themselves, but depends mainly on the quality of the discussions which accompany and conclude the case.

EXERCISE AND PRACTISE means development of skill, so that newly learned cognitive models are transferred into operations.

A case study is suitable for this, and should be designed so that the theoretical concepts and logical structure of the topic can be discovered.

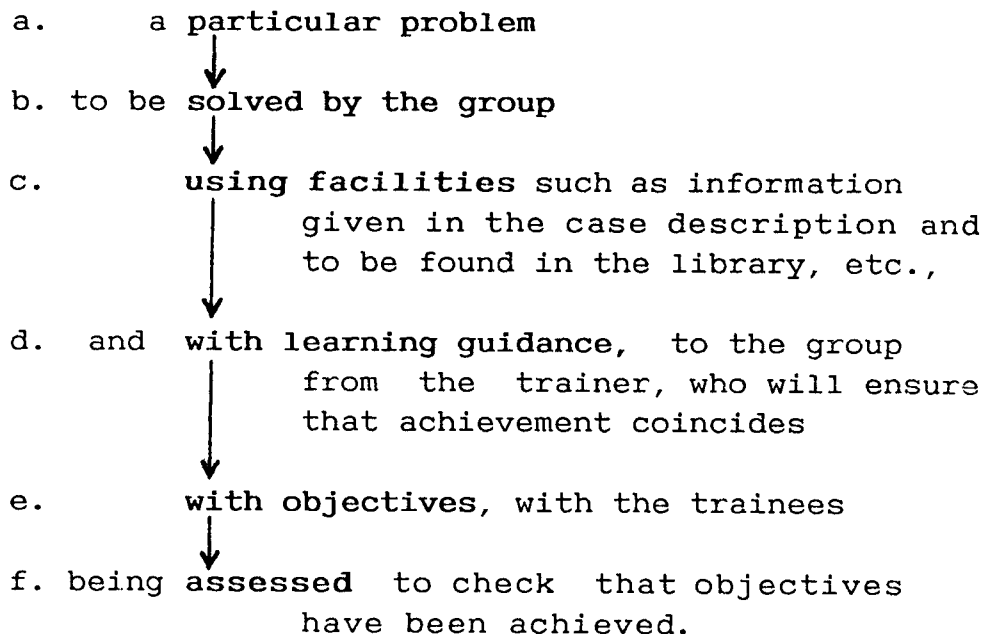
APPLICATION - use of the learned knowledge and skill independently in new situations and problems outside the teaching/training context.

Cases can be used, preferably taken from the learner's environment and in real conditions rather than in the classroom.

CONTROL - the critical evaluation of the acquired knowledge and structure, its comprehensiveness and usefulness; and critical evaluation of the learning.

Tests, examinations, critical assessments, self-evaluation, practical application, etc.

The case can be considered as a teaching-learning or a training-learning situation which has a sequence of involvement, in that there is



This representation of the situation is rather a static model; it indicates only the constituent elements. The training-learning process is, though, very dynamic, with learning occurring by interaction between a, b, c and d (e and f are generally fairly fixed). When organising these four elements, attention must be paid to the process of learning and to the process of problem-solving.

On the basis of learning theories and of suggestions in the literature, together with observations of the behavior of teachers and students while running cases, van Woerden has developed a provisional case format for teachers, to be used for the design of a course, based on the case method of teaching. The first two phases, dealing with the

<u>1. Feasibility study</u> a. What are the course objectives, and how do they relate to the overall programme objectives? b. Is the case method the most appropriate teaching method for attaining these objectives?
<u>2. Design</u> c. What previous knowledge and skills must the student and the teacher have? d. Which specific objectives must be achieved by the case? What type of case is best suited to achieve these objectives? e. What are the (external) constraints and (internal) starting points to be considered when using the case? f. How are the following tasks to be structured -motivating students (to the problem-solving tasks) -aligning with the initial level (of knowledge and skills) -providing insight into the objectives -orienting the student in the problem-solving tasks (to make the student's knowledge operational) -giving opportunities to practise the different problem-solving tasks -providing feedback -assessing results? g. What (approximately) are the content and presentation of the case?
<u>3. Planning</u>
<u>4. Writing</u>
<u>5 Use</u> (including evaluation)

Table 3: van Woerden's case format course design.

core of the teaching-learning process, are given in Table 3 above.

Though these formats are designed on the basis of theories of learning processes and of problem-solving processes, there is a place for experience to be incorporated into both formats. Even so, some applications of learning theory can be of help to you as a trainer. It has been

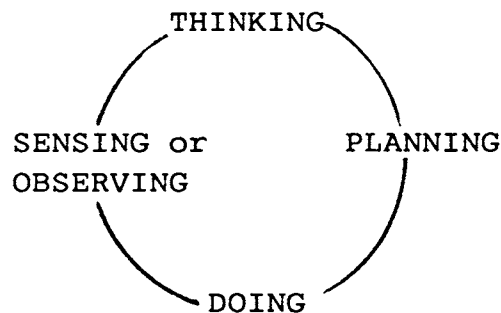
suggested that different trainers can use an identical technique and claim to be involved in the same process and yet seem to provide quite different experiences for an individual learner; an individual trainer can appear to give quite different learning experiences to different learners in the same group.

These factors are a function of different learning styles, and it can be useful to determine the learning styles of your trainees, or at least to take into account the different styles which have been identified. Kolb's Learning Style Inventory Test (LSI) is often used, in which Kolb conceives learning as a 4-stage cyclic process, and for learning to be effective a learner:

- a) must be involved in new concrete experiences (CE);
- b) must be able to observe and reflect on these experiences from many perspectives (RO);
- c) should be able to create abstract concepts (AC) that integrate observations into logically sound theories;
- and d) should be able to apply ideas by active experimentation (AE).

All four abilities are considered essential, with no one in principle more desirable or more useful than the others. His 'labels' for abilities and for identifying them have been regarded as too academic, and it is difficult to differentiate between AE and CE - CE is liable to show considerable inconsistencies, and manual, physical and motor skills do not appear in the vocabulary of Kolb's model - so you may find that the variant devised by Juch is of more use to you.

Juch's Learning Profile Exercise (LPE) is an attempt to clarify and make more appropriate the terms for the four abilities and, more particularly, the determination of them; he uses the words



and he puts forward the suggestion that that the four quadrants of this learning cycle correspond in many respect with education (sensing and thinking); teaching (thinking and planning); training (planning and doing); and instruction (doing and observing).

These he defines:

EDUCATION - (in its organized, institutionalized and contrived forms, it generally means) the up-bringing of young persons:

TEACHING- (mostly means) presenting useful principles and generalizations to pupils, explaining the basic laws and rules that are valid and useful in the concrete world of things and people:

TRAINING - (for the trainer) it means arranging opportunities and resources in such a way that physical and operational skills can be acquired or improved.

INSTRUCTION- to improve behavioural operational skills through telling and showing how-to-do-it.

He suggests that each of these modes is potentially of equally great value, but that education and teaching put an emphasis on thinking, while training and instruction stress doing. None of these give as much attention to the observing/sensing or the planning aspects, and he proposes that there should be much more explicit education, teaching, training or instruction done with respect to skills at these stages.

The case method does require participants to be active in all four stages of the proposed learning cycle of

sensing or observing (studying, finding facts, evaluating, reviewing);

thinking about these things (reflecting, analysing, creating ideas); through

planning (discussing, working out ideas, proposing);

to doing (testing out and applying ideas, practical experience).

However, your case study participants may not be prepared for these activities, and this aspect is considered further in the section on running cases.

Other methods of teaching/training/learning could also be said to deal with the stages of the learning cycle, so are there any other factors which can help us to decide on the

appropriateness or otherwise of the case method for particular teaching/learning situations. How are you to decide what is appropriate? Are there any helpful guidelines, comparisons, or evaluations of the case method with other methods?

Dooley and Skinner differentiate the use of the case method along three broad dimensions:

- a. the educational objective;
- b. the pedagogic philosophy and convictions of the instructor, including
- c. views regarding the instructors' and students' classroom roles.

They state that the case method is 'poor' for developing concepts, but 'excellent' for acquiring skill in analysis for business problems. They don't elaborate why the case method is good for one and poor for the other.

Reference to learning taxonomies, of which Bloom's is perhaps the best known, may be of value in that the case

ANALYSIS OF THE SYSTEM	establishes the formal organizational relationships and the informal relationships between people concerned with the problem.
ANALYSIS OF THE OPERATIONS	carried out such as production or information processing needs detailed flow-charting, preliminary estimation of production rates, identification of bottlenecks, etc.
ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS IN THE ENVIRONMENT	which may affect the system needs basic knowledge of political systems, competitive features, labour markets and customers.
BASIC STATISTICAL SKILLS	needed to make a preliminary analysis of the available information - tabulating data, graphing, doing simple statistical tests.
COMMUNICATION SKILLS	are needed to present proposals, including giving oral presentations, writing reports, and interpreting clients' knowledge and motivation.
KNOWLEDGE OF BEHAVIOURAL ASPECTS	of organizations is needed in preparing proposals for implementation of change.

Table 5: skills needed for operational research cases.

method can be equated with the various levels of knowledge or skills in the taxonomy that it ought to develop.

Luck and Walsham define the skills which need to be practised when dealing with cases on operational research as shown in Table 5.

Reynolds states that the rigorous analysis required, especially in the longer and complex cases, is said to develop the skills of logical thinking, of searching for relevant information, of analysing and evaluating facts and of drawing conclusions needed for managerial decisions. He also claims that the experience it gives in arguing a viewpoint before one's peers develops the ability to communicate clearly, to consider the views of others and to arrive at solutions that would gain collective support. Unfortunately, it does not appear to have been shown at all conclusively that the skills needed and said to be developed are developed, or that the case method develops them better or faster than other techniques.

A critical view has been put by Argyris, who found that the case method, as used by others when he was observing its use, included other methods - lectures, role-play, simulations, films - and posed the question that if the case method includes them, how is it different from them?

On a practice-oriented basis, the so-called 'active' teaching-learning processes tend to be regarded as techniques suitable for practising problem-solving, and casework, roleplaying and simulation games tend to be used a lot. Rohn has prepared a table (see Table 4) which compares the qualities of each of these three methods in respect of a number of educational characteristics, so as to help in deciding which teaching/learning method could be the most appropriate in a specific learning situation. As these characteristics are on occasions complementary, a mix of methods might be the most suitable in certain learning situations.

Apart from the comparison of the case method with games and with simulations, very little seems to have been done to contrast it with the other techniques which are available. The only one reported of any rigour is that done by Stuhler in juxtaposing the case method with the lecture method: the principal characteristics found were that the case method instilled very positive attitudes

1. TYPICAL STRUCTURE	Interdependent business/economics/mathematics; quantitatively based.	Description of a 'real life' situation incorporating a problem.	Definition/description of a 'role'.
2. OUTCOME	Decision-free connections.	Alternative decisions.	Single decisions.
3. OPERATING CHARACTERISTICS	Dynamic and logical	Static.	Useful as a model.
4. FLEXIBILITY	Gaming and modelling flexibility	Solution flexibility	Role flexibility
5. CHARACTERISTICS OF INPUT DATA	Selection of all 'relevant' major influential material for the chosen model.	Appropriately complete presentation of a 'real life situation'.	Individual description of a 'role'.
6. COORDINATION OF DATA	Interdependent.	Coherent presentation of the 'problem'.	Individual briefing on 'role'.
7. DATA AND INFORMATION INPUT	Quantitative (numerical) and dependent information.	Definition of the problem.	Prescribed role.
8. PRODUCT/OUTCOME	Calculated (numerically based) decision.	Solution capable of presentation and explanation.	Attitude/behaviour development.
9. GAME AIM/OBJECTIVE	Best quantified decision.	Best solution.	Best discussion argument.
10. SUPPORT MATERIALS	Computer or calculator plus graphs or tables.	Training materials based on case resolution (case method training materials).	Counselling with roleplay.
11. COST/EXPENSE	High in time and basic costs, e.g. computer programming.	Medium in reaching solution, but high in case preparation.	Low cost in role formulation, cost variable with game length
12. MOTIVATION	Very strong in relation to 'hands-on' experience, and understanding of financial decisions. Cognitive and affective effects.	Strong in working on solution as an individual; moderate in presentation in plenary.	Very strong in personal role; strong in relation to any observers.
13. PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT	All participants very active.	Individual tasks and group work, very active. In plenary, variable	Roleplayers very active. Analytical observers active. 'Spectators' variable.

Table4: Matrix comparing and contrasting the learning aspects of STRUCTURED GAMES, CASE STUDY and ROLE PLAY as used in business applications (after Rohn).

towards its subject matter, and considerably more discussion by and among students; the amount of learning of the students did not always show greater amounts with the case method, but was certainly never less with it.

One of the major problems in this last study was accustoming students who normally were taught by lecture methods to the case method. Different learning methods and learning styles are involved, and you may find the same type of problem arising if your case participants are not used to the case method. Unless you prepare them for the change, you may find that using the case method does not give as much benefit as you had hoped.

SUMMARY

Cases are claimed to provide realism and in so doing to develop information-finding, logical thinking, analysis, evaluation, reaching conclusions, communication skills, feelings, and an appreciation of values; they are supposedly less good for developing concepts. Cases require active participation in all stages of the learning cycle, but verification that they develop the various skills mentioned better than other teaching/learning methods relies more on anecdotal than empirical evidence.

Problems may particularly be found if participants are accustomed to different learning methods and learning styles than those needed for the case method. There may also be a tendency to think through only as far as the 'solution(s)' without going on to examine critically the business, managerial, cultural, etc., criteria and objectives on which the case and the participants' thinking is based. Both of these two problems can be influenced by the capability of the instructor.

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