

D-The Effective Use of Cases

SECTION 1

SKILLS IN PRESENTATION

Preparing yourself

The main test for your new case will come when participants work through it and discuss it amongst themselves and with you. The most important question which must be answered is whether your case achieved the various objectives you had for it.

The answer to this will depend as much on the way in which you run the case, and the way participants approach it, as on the intrinsic virtues (or lack of them) that your case has. Some groups are inevitably better than others; they may relate better to the material, or to you as the facilitator, or to the use of cases as a more 'open' training method. Using case studies is certainly not an easy option, but their usefulness to participants is such as to make them an invaluable training or teaching method.

Because case studies can be in so many different forms in addition to the (so far) most common one of printed materials, there is no particular 'best' way of preparing for and using cases. Some suggestions as to factors you should consider are:

- (1) **Know your case!** While you are in the process of writing it, you will be familiar with it, but that intimate knowledge may fade a little between writing and presentation, and more particularly between successive presentations. Allow sufficient time for any special preparations which may need to be done.
- (2) **Check the teaching note** you have prepared, so that you are clear what your objectives are, and how you hope to achieve them. This can include how structured or unstructured the training session is going to be - you would probably be advised to keep it fairly well structured for your first case, and then relax the structure as you and your trainees become more accustomed to the technique - and how directive you are going to be. Again, you will probably feel more secure if you are in

control of the proceedings, but excessive control is often counterproductive. Once everyone is used to cases, the groups can probably become almost self-directing and self-controlling, minimizing their dependence on you.

Usually one of two methods is used. The Harvard case method uses an open class discussion; an alternative approach is to get individual trainees or groups of them to make verbal presentations of their analyses and conclusions, possibly followed by a plenary discussion.

(3) Following on from 2, the **size of the room** you are going to use, and the **type and layout of the furniture** in that room can be significant. As in most situations where discussion is going to form a major part of the process, a horseshoe-type formation will probably be the optimum arrangement.

(4) The **amount of time** you have available to you, and how that time is split up will have influenced your overall planning, and the balance between the amount of group work and of individual preparation and analysis that can be done. Time can affect whether the case is distributed for participants to read and to do some preparation before the first formal session, or whether they first encounter it in a formal session; whether all the case is presented at once, or in parts over a succession of sessions; the distribution of time between presentations, group discussions, plenary sessions; whether you make any input, and if so when; etc.

(5) The **number of participants** you have in the group; the minimum number is probably more significant than the maximum, in terms of the individual experiences and insights they can bring, and the amount of interaction that will take place. You will normally subdivide them into smaller groups of, say, 3-6 persons, and with several groups you will probably find the optimum number is between twenty and thirty.

There are no major difficulties with groups above this size, other than organization, and the cost of providing all with copies of the materials, but if the total number is half a dozen or less, they will probably need to operate individually. This will impose greater responsibilities on you to ensure that they all get the maximum benefit from the case (or some alternative

technique may need to be used), and the range of experience and insights that number will bring to a particular case will be limited.

As was said earlier, there is no one 'best' way of operating the case study method; a variety of ways can be effective in a variety of situations provided the main purpose is borne in mind - to help the participants to learn through interaction and participation.

Preparing your participants

The advantages to participants of using case studies in terms of the skills they develop have already been mentioned

analytical skills

application skills

creative skills

communication skills

social skills

self-analysis skills

though it is important in this regard to understand also what case teaching cannot accomplish. It is not a universal panacea.

To develop these skills to the best advantage, though, demands certain commitments from participants. It is as well to make clear right from the start what your expectations are of them, and also, and equally importantly, what they can expect of you.

The principal requirements of each participant are to:

- (a) **PREPARE.** Unless a participant reads the case and associated materials, analyses it, and then prepares some proposals as to one or a range of possible actions and solutions, any discussions will have little relevance.
- (b) **ATTEND,** for the entire session. Each of the participants needs to be present for the full length of each session so as to be able to contribute what has been prepared, to receive comments on it; and to be able to learn of others' thoughts and insights and to comment on those.

- (c) **PARTICIPATE.** The entire process is dependent upon each participant giving to, as well as taking from, each session. Without full and regular participation - which is as much about listening to others as about making oral inputs - the development of knowledge and skills by participants will not be as great as might otherwise be the case.

Some participants will need more effort on your part to motivate them to prepare, to attend promptly and regularly, and to participate. Those who fail in these responsibilities can, if you do not guard against it, have a disruptive effect on the session and on the learning of the more conscientious attenders. It is up to you to maximise the motivation and minimise the disruption.

Mettes & Gerritsma (1986)	Reynolds (1980)	Easton (1982)
Orientation	Analyse present situation	Understand situation
Planning	Predict future situation Choose objectives	Diagnose problem areas
Transformation	Define the problem Generate alternatives Predict outcomes	Generate alternatives Predict outcomes
Control		
Determine solution and evaluate it	Evaluate alternatives Choose alternatives	Evaluate alternatives Rounding out analysis
Interpretation	Implement decision	Communicate results

Table 6: comparison of some suggested problem-solving formats for participants in case method.

Equally, you may need to exercise some control over those who contribute too much and tend to dominate a session. Often the group itself will provide some peer group control, but you may need to back this up by, for example, the allotment of time for discussion, the encouragement

and even calling on shy members to give their opinions, or not allowing anyone a second contribution until all who wish to do so have made a first comment or suggestion.

If participants are coming to cases for the first time, they will need to be provided with guidance on how to deal with them. Several authors have suggested a problem-solving format for students, and three of these are compared in Table 6 on the previous page.

Reynolds emphasises the implementation of the solution; Easton is concerned with the presentation of the solution to an audience; while Mettes and Gerritsma emphasise the progress review aspects (control phase) and a final reflection on the problem-solving strategy or on the learning effects (integration-phase).

Whichever method or combination of methods is to be used, your trainees will probably need some preparation and guidance on factors such as

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- a. dealing with a considerable amount of (possibly conflicting) information;
 - b. deciding what the problems are, and which is the main one and which are subsidiary;
 - c. understanding how the problems arose - the what, when, where, who, how and why of the case;
 - d. devising and refining an answer or sets of alternative solutions to the problem, probably in groups;
 - e. predicting the possible effects of each of the proposed alternatives;
 - f. communicating the conclusions to others;
 - g. defending those conclusions;
 - h. listening to others' alternative conclusions;
 - j. reviewing the alternatives to feed back to and modify own conclusions if necessary;
 - k. making a final decision;
 - l. implementing that decision;
 - m. reflecting on the strategies taken to reach that decision;
 - n. considering the learning effects.
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Avoiding problems

If the case method is introduced without preparing the participants for it, there are liable to be a number of problems come up. The types will vary with different groups, but some of the more common ones are

1. the amount of time that is needed for individual preparation for the case study discussion - working through the basic material, sorting out the essentials, etc. This will diminish with practice, but the positive effect of learning how to structure complex problems creatively should be emphasised.

2. that the plenary sessions are dominated by a small number of participants, while the remainder feel shut out. This can be controlled and corrected by you, but a reminder that making a contribution can be a competitive process in all walks of life might be useful. Suggest that no-one can make a second contribution until all who wish have made their first contribution; put a time limit on the length of an individual's single or total amount of contributions; if a group's work is being given, suggest that different parts are given by different members of that group.

3. the case leader doesn't control and guide the discussion sufficiently strongly, and doesn't give the answer to the problem. Promotion of the idea that the discussion is meant to be the central focus, that there is not necessarily a 'correct' recipe, and that a monologue from you is not the purpose of the discussion, may help. A directive facilitator may pose questions to be answered, specify methods, control discussion, delegate tasks to participants, while a non-directive facilitator will tend to ask open-ended questions, and any control will be concerned with the process rather than the content.

4. the material provided is insufficient for making a judgement on the case. Case studies reflect reality in reduced form: in practice, information is often incomplete and decisions must be made despite that. Alternatively, the information gaps may give participants an incentive to try to fill them e.g. by work in a library.

5. the case material is too long and too complex. This is within your control, and you should be able to

ensure a gradual build-up of complexity. The problems in the real world are not likely always to be simple, but you should give participants a chance to get used to the method, and to build up their expertise in stages.

6. that analysis and synthesis are skills of quite a high order, and **case studies may not always be an appropriate technique**. Always keep in mind the level of the participants, and your overall objectives with them; cases can usually be used at many levels, but they are only one of a wide range of methods you could use.

SOURCE REFERENCES

Those with reference numbers marked with an asterisk, e.g. 041*, have abstracts given in the "Abstracts" part of this booklet.

- 041* Dixit, M.R. & Jain, A.K. (1985). Experience with Case Method in Short Duration Executive Development Programmes. Indian Institute of Management Working Paper No. 579. Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, India.
- 003* Easton, G. (1982). Learning from Case Studies. Prentice Hall International, Inc., London, England.
- 025* Rogers, J. (1971). Adults Learning. Penguin Books, London, England.
- 042* Roebuck, K. (1986). **Notes on a practical approach to the objectives and strategies of teaching by the case study method, in particular for teachers of management in colleges of further and higher education.** In, Selected Notes on the Case Method of Teaching. Case Clearing House of Great Britain and Ireland, Cranfield, England.
- 043* Shapiro, B.P. (1985). **An Introduction to the Case Method.** In Shapiro, B.P., Dolan, R.J. & Quelch, J.A. Marketing Management: Principles, Analysis and Applications. Irwin, Homewood, Illinois, U.S.A.

THE EFFECTIVE USE OF CASES - SECTION 2

USING TECHNOLOGICAL AIDS

As has already been mentioned several times, cases need not necessarily be just paper and print based: you can have a variety of audio, audiovisual and computer-based materials which may contribute to your case anything from a small addition to almost the entire case. You may also have used similar techniques in preparing the case: your participants may use them in working through the case, and possibly in proposing their solutions.

In the section on writing the case it was suggested that audio or video recordings of interviews, (or of meetings or any event which might be of assistance in providing you with a good record of the information you need), might be useful in backing up, or in addition to, or as a substitute for your own written notes and your memory. These extra aids have the advantage that they can be played over and over again, and the material on them checked and rechecked, whereas for example with an unrecorded interview you have only your notes and your memory, and no real chance to check on these without re-interviewing.

Recordings can not only act as aids, they can also be included in the case materials, in part as additions to or complete as the main part of the case. For example, "Harvard Business School's videotapes supplement particular cases....These videotapes, which are mostly in colour, record actual meetings or other activities of managers engaged in work described in the cases. They also depict the conversations of top-level managers with the students in HBS classrooms. Used in conjunction with particular cases or course modules.....the videotapes add a dimension to the classroom experience that the printed word cannot convey."

Though the opportunity may not occur very often, there is sometimes the possibility of using a broadcast programme either as an adjunct to your case or as the main basis for the case. The broadcast may have been on public radio or television, so that you could take notes from it or, preferably, record it off-air either for analysis by

yourself or for your trainees to analyse. Care may need to be taken with regard to the completeness of the information - it will undoubtedly have been edited prior to transmission - but it can provide a valuable source. For this, and for many of the other items mentioned, make sure you have copyright clearance, though.

In composing the case it can be of great assistance to be able to make use of a word processor. The extensive use of, if not total dedication to, word-processing systems for assembling and updating of your case material can save time, can ease storage of your materials, and can be used to give a good quality printout of all the relevant materials when you want them. Don't forget to make backup disks of your stored data files, though.

On most occasions the printout from a word processor will be adequate for participants to use, but should there be a need for a higher quality output, computer typesetting can be used.

The preparation of other audiovisual components for your case can involve the use of e.g. photographic slide making; making overhead projector transparencies by hand, by reproduction on a suitable photocopying machine, or by (colour) graphics process on a computer; film; videosystems, either just using playback or interactive; computer programs; audio disc and video disc systems.

Cost and availability will often be the two criteria which will predominate in using any of these; the cost e.g. of mastering a compact audio disc with read-only memory (CD-ROM) or a similar videodic is at the moment too high to make either a viable proposition for putting your own case on. Both, though, may provide material on already existing ones which can be used by you. Interactive video systems - a television monitor, a video replay system, and some means of controlling what that system presents (a keypad; a typewriter-like keyboard; a computer; a touch sensitive screen) - represent an example of the very powerful types of training facility which could soon be in wide use.

Many cases now include some sort of computer program within them. The Harvard Business School case software, for example, is of three types:

- a data matrix. Simply a collection of data, which is used to build a model in a typically open-ended case, with

no single solution.

- a **model template** containing an analytical model and/or data from the case: for analyzing cases that describe a specific or classical model.

- **case application software** where the teaching purpose is to illustrate specific concepts.

Often, a required condition for entry to a U.S. college is the purchase of a personal computer of a specific type. Hopefully, this sort of condition will not spread: now that computer displays can be projected by means of an attachment on an overhead projector, rather than having to use a cumbersome and expensive video projection unit, small or large group use of one computer will suffice to allow the working through of the computer-based aspects of any case.

The implication is, though, that as the use of newer technologies increases, and as there is further integration or consolidation of case material with other training methodologies such as distance learning, games, role-play, you will need continually to upgrade your skills and become ever more versatile.

FURTHER READING ON TECHNOLOGICAL AIDS & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Those with reference numbers marked with an asterisk, e.g. 044*, have abstracts given in the 'Abstracts' part of this booklet.

[C] indicates that the abstract was taken from CET Information Sheet No.11, An Introduction to Information Technology in Training and Education.

044* Barker, P.(1986). **Information technology, education and training.** In, Rushby, N. & Howe, A.(Eds). Aspects of Educational Technology XIX: Educational Training and Information Technologies - Economics and Other Realities. Kogan Page, London, England.

045* Bayard-White, C.(1985). Interactive Video Case Studies and Directory. National Interactive Video Centre/Council for Educational Technology, London, England. [C]

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- 055* Zorkozy, P.(1984). Information Technology: an Introduction. (2nd.Ed). Pitman, London, England. [C]