TEACHING CASE GUIDELINES

ULYSSES

DIGITAL STUDENT COMPETITION ON FAMILY BUSINESS

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1. INTRODUCTION

A teaching case is a snapshot of a management situation which presents a problem, a challenge or an opportunity faced by an organization. The teaching case has to be made to compel the students to take the role of the decision maker in the organization.

A good teaching case has two components: a sharp focus and an interesting story. The focus must be sharp so that students will be immediately drawn into the situation and know up front what they are expected to do. The interesting story comes from the ability to write it as a case story: it has a setting, actors with their perspectives, and dramatic elements such as a dilemma or a conflict.

A good teaching case has to be easy to read but difficult to solve. The clues to resolving the case issue are in the text hidden. It is up to students to use the tools they have learned, and the information provided in the case to analyze the situation and come up with solutions.

When you set out to write a case, you must have a clear idea what purposes the case serves. Make a list of the teaching objectives you want to achieve with the case. Then make another list of several key discussion questions with analytical tools that can help answer these questions. Make a list of relevant readings that might be helpful for better understanding and solving the case.

The decision focus is the focal point of a case. It has to be: specific, general and urgent:

- ***Specific*** as the decision focus should be situation-specific and concrete; it cannot be vague or abstract.
- ***General*** as the decision focus should also support a deeper and broader discussion and can serve as a general lesson on how to approach issues of similar type.
- ***Urgent*** as the decision focus should be of immediate importance.

You may be tempted to include various issues in one case to remain true to facts and show students the intricacy of actual business. However, it is better you focus on one issue only and the decision behind it. During classroom discussion, this focal issue will lead to many sub-issues. If you can explore the focal issue thoroughly, you already will have covered a wide range of questions and the complex decision-making processes behind them.

The decision maker in a case is the protagonist. A protagonist can force students to examine the situation from a particular person's perspective, thus creating an identification with the organization and the urgency for problem solving. A protagonist can be an executive, a manager, or an entrepreneur, depending on your case subject. It is not, however, advisable to make the protagonist an external consultant.

Dramatic elements like a controversial topic, disagreement between stakeholders, conflict of interest or personality clash between decision makers, are important for a teaching case.

The opening section is the most important part of a case. It usually consists of one to three paragraphs, serving as the stage setting and a "hook" at the same time. In this section you should tell:

- ***who*** the protagonist is (name and position),
- ***what*** kind of decision he or she has to make,
- ***when*** this is happening,
- ***where*** this is happening,
- ***why*** and how this would happen.

It is good to finish the opening section with one or two key questions facing the protagonist. A good opening section is brief, direct, and has a dramatic effect that can serve as a "hook" to motivate the reader to keep on reading.

2. DATA

Industry and organization background may seem the easiest part in a case to write but it is a hard case. A teaching case is not the entire history of an organization. The background part should include only the most relevant information for the protagonist to take a decision, as needless information will only muddle the case presentation and bore the student. Figures, tables, and exhibits are always useful to economize the text and give a direct impression of the facts.

The background information mostly can be gathered from published sources either online or offline. But to write an effective case, it is helpful to obtain "insider information". Therefore, interviewing the organization is rather necessary, even when you think you already know the organization well.

When you propose interviews to an organization, they would certainly want to know what is in it for them to cooperate. An organization can expect three kinds of benefits, depending on the nature of the case:

Enhance the brand name: a case, if widely used by educational institutions and businesses, can be a highly effective medium to showcase an organization's best practice, expertise, or innovation.

Improve organizational learning: an organization can use a case as internal training material to reflect on its effective or ineffective practices and decisions.

Aid managerial decision making: a case can provide an external view of a complex issue, which helps management to make difficult decisions.

The organization would also want to know how you are going to use the outcome of the interviews. It is fair for them to expect that the exclusive information they provide you will not be used against their interest. You can propose signing a confidentiality or non-disclosure agreement between the two organizations to guarantee good conduct on your part.

At the initial meeting with the organization, you should present a case plan that includes your teaching objectives, an outline of the case, what information you wish to obtain from the organization, and how you will use the outcome of the interview. The meeting is usually between the organizational head who authorizes the interviews, the model for the protagonist, and the case writer. The purpose is to define the decision focus (often the case writer's understanding of a situation is not completely true to reality), establish an agreement for cooperation (interviews, feedback to case draft, and case release), and set an action plan. It is also useful at the first meeting to inquire about any internal documents you may use for case writing.

After the initial meeting, it is always helpful to have a contact person at the organization who can oversee the coordination of interviews. You may suggest several people you would like to interview, but it is best to leave it to the organization to decide to whom you should talk – they know their own people much better.

You need at least two interviews with one person: the first to get a good understanding of the case issue, and the second to clarify vague points and ask in-depth questions following the previous interview. Often you do not get satisfactory answers where you hoped but get interesting or even inspiring answers where you did not expect. As an interviewer, you must learn to improvise. But be sure to keep time: Some interviewees are less structured than others; when they drift away, do not be shy to pull them back. Try to raise concrete questions and ask for examples – during the first interview in particular, the interviewee tends to give "correct" official lines.

It is advisable to voice record every interview so you can concentrate on listening during the interview and ask intelligent questions. Please do not wait for too long to transcribe the recording – you can easily lose the fresh impression within a few days. Quotations are a powerful tool in case writing. Judgments, evaluations, or emotions that are awkward for a case writer to state can be put in the mouth of an actor. Quotations should not be long: usually no more than three sentences. It is less important whether a quote captures the exact words of an interviewee. It is more important that a quote correctly express their meaning. In this case, before the case is released, you should run the quotes by the interviewees to get approval.

You should also get the organizational head to sign a case release document. In most cases, once an initial agreement is established, the organization will not object to the case being released. But we cannot exclude the possibility that after they have read the case, they decide to withdraw their permission to publicize the case. In this situation, you can propose to disguise the identifying information (organization's name, interviewees' names, financial data, and sometimes even the product, the industry, and competitors) to make the organization anonymous or at least have deniability if speculations arise about the organization's identity.

Nevertheless, an undisguised case is always preferable, as it comes out more credible and powerful than a disguised case.

3. WRITING STYLE

Try to compose the first draft as soon as possible after the interviews. As time goes on, the real story easily fades away. Writing up the draft will take a few days if you do not encounter a block during writing. A writing block has several possible causes:

- Lacking a sharp decision focus;
- Lacking a clear case structure;
- Lacking concrete details from which to build a story;
- Overwhelmed with details and not knowing what to choose;
- Lacking understanding of your students and their level.
- You can only write clearly if you think clearly.

First and foremost, a case must be written with an objective voice. You – the case writer – should take a neutral stance and make no biased statements. You should remain objective and let readers draw their own conclusion.

Secondly, a case should include neither analysis nor lessons learned, which can go into the accompanying teaching note. Remember, you want to present your students with an intriguing case to solve, so too obvious direction or hints will defeat your purpose.

The language of a case should be clear, direct, and concise. Think of newspaper language, not academic paper language. A case is limited in length, and you cannot be wordy or indirect. Try to limit the information in the case to "just enough" – not too much to be overly detailed and not too little to be skimpy – and organize this information in a tight way.

There are several conventions in case writing:

- **Always write a case in the past tense.** The reason to use the past tense is that situations are always changing, and a true statement now may be false in a few months. This technique ensures that the case will remain relatively timeless. The trick is to set a time frame for the case from the very beginning. For example, when you talk about "Firm A is the industry leader," you can rephrase it as "at the end of 2021, Firm A was the industry leader." Also, try to avoid words like "currently" and "presently." Instead, use concrete time frames like "in October 2021."
- **Refer to actors by their last names.** The first time you introduce an actor, specify his or her full name, and from then on, use only the last name.
- **Number exhibits and refer to them in the text.**

4. TEACHING NOTE

When you have drafted both the case and teaching note, it is time to edit the case. Work backward from the teaching objectives and discussion questions and check whether the case includes adequate information to address them. You have to ask yourself:

- Is the information sufficient to support a lively discussion with possible variations of solutions?
- If yes, is it clear enough with no needless details muddying the presentation?
- Are there any impactful quotes you can use to enhance the case?
- Is the case easy to read?
- Are the exhibits numbered and references sited correctly?

4.1 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RESEARCH CASE AND TEACHING CASE

Even if you are already an expert in your area of research, you may still encounter something new during writing a teaching case study. A research case and a teaching case differ in many ways:

- A research case describes an organization or its decision-making process; a teaching case tells a story with a decision focus.
- A research case explains or analyses organizational decisions; a teaching case offers no obvious explanation or analysis.
- A research case is faithful to "truth" or "the fact"; a teaching case may contain selected and simplified information.

A research case is mostly written chronologically with little personal touch; a teaching case can be written with flashbacks and should have actors, perspectives, and drama.

A research case study	A teaching case study

Describes an organization or its decision-making process.	Tells a story with a decision focus.
Explains or analyses organizational decisions.	Offers no obvious explanation or analysis.
Is faithful to "truth" or "the fact".	May contain selected and simplified information.
Is mostly written chronologically with little personal touch.	Can be written with flashbacks and should have actors, perspectives, and drama.

5. TOP TIPS FOR WRITING A CASE STUDY

Teaching case studies are written in the third person, in the past tense and establish an objectivity of core dilemmas in the case.

Collect information: Cases can be based on primary or secondary data, however where possible, carrying out interviews with the protagonist and others in the organization often results in a better case study. Make sure that you have all the materials you will need before you start the writing process. Most case studies have a mixture of primary and secondary sources to help capture the spirit of the protagonist.

Structure the narrative: Tell the story in chronological order and in the past tense. Identify and establish the central protagonist and their dilemma in the first paragraph and summarize the dilemma again at the end of the case.

Get permission: You must include signed permission when you submit your case study and teaching note from the relevant protagonist or company in the case, as well as permission for any material that you don't own the copyright for.

Be clear on your teaching objective: The case method offers a variety of class participation methods such as discussion, role-play, presentation or examination. Decide which method best suits the case you want to write.

Writing a teaching case requires a distinctive literary style written in the third person, in the past tense and establishing an objectivity of core dilemmas in the case.

To begin with, a case has to have a hook: an overriding issue that pulls various parts together, a managerial issue or decision that requires urgent attention.

The trick is to present the story so that the hook is not immediately apparent but 'discovered' by students putting the relevant pieces together. More importantly, the hook must be linked to a particular concept, theory, or methodology.

A teaching case reflects the ambiguity of the situation and need not have a single outcome, as the intent is to create a dialogue with students, encourage critical thinking and research, and evaluate recommendations.

A good teaching case still needs to be updated in two or three years – the usual life cycle of a case. You can update the financial data and background information or add an epilogue if the decision focus remains unchanged. If you wish to introduce a new decision focus, you can write up part two of the case as a sequel to the previous one.

The objective of case studies is to focus on the complexities of decisions that are encountered within organizations.

If the entity that is the subject of the case refuses to allow the publication of the case under its actual name, the author may disguise the name of the company and individuals as well as the geographic setting. However, the narrative of the case must be true. Cases may have a decision focus, or they may be illustrative or descriptive of a particular situation that is intended to be used for discussion of theories essential for the context in which they are used.

Case studies can be developed by using either qualitative or quantitative evidence. The evidence may come from fieldwork, archival records, verbal reports, observations, or any combination of these.

Find a good idea: The typical "good idea" is a scenario that provides an example and illustrates a situation that instructors can use to achieve desired learning objectives. A case study must include a significant issue to be analyzed, sufficient information from which to propose a solution for the issues that were identified, and no started solution (Ellet, 2007).

Purpose: Uniqueness of the message and the organizational circumstance enhance the case's appeal. Consequently, the WHY question, if used early in the process, aids in the selection of the target company to be featured in the case and enables the case writer to move forward to the next stage without ambiguity.

The "Puzzle": This part of the case crafting process revolves around the three questions posed in Exhibit 3 which focus on appropriate content.

- Who is the audience? Because the primary reason for a pedagogical case is to serve as a teaching tool, the question of who the target audience is and the course-levels for which the case is most appropriate would influence the content selection, the complexity, and the level of difficulty woven into the case. The first decision to make is whether the case is being developed for undergraduate, graduate, or executive courses.
- What is the intended level of challenge? The selection of the target audience for whom the case is being written impacts the level of challenge and complexity desired in the case.

- What are the background details to include? What is the central theme? What are the problems involved in the case? The narrative or the body of the case helps shape the entire case. It should engage and maintain the reader's interest in the story.

The case narrative is shaped by the details contained in the "Puzzle." Pertinent details must cover all information needed by students to analyze the case, apply suggested theoretical frameworks, synthesize, and make decisions required of them.

Including all information required to answer the questions posed is fundamental. Additionally, evidence pertaining to internal and external environments and stakeholders add a desirable layer of richness. A well-written case is one where the author assumes the role of an impartial news reporter and refrains from projecting self-bias upon readers.

Picture: The third and final part of the case crafting process involves competing the "Picture". Whom do I want to include? What is the scenario to be depicted?

Whom do I want to include? This question helps in selecting the central character or the protagonist to showcase in the story. Ideally, this individual is the decision-maker and your lead contact for cases crafted using mainly primary data sources. Besides the central character (i.e. the protagonist) of the case, it is important to consider other actors who will help to tell the case's story and make it more appealing for the readers.

What is the scenario to be depicted? This question helps to visualize the scenes and their sequencing in the case. *Reflect on the opening, the middle, and the closing scenes.* Critical to the appeal and the acceptance of the case study is its opening paragraph, where a brief summary of the situation is portrayed. This first scene serves to capture the readers' attention and pique their interest. If this opening scene is not compelling, readers may lose interest in continuing with the case.

The opening scene in the case should also serve to identify the setting and the period captured when the event occurred. Where did the event take place? Who is the protagonist and when did he/she face the crucial decision? A well-written case should be in the past tense, which makes it timeless. It also helps the readers understand in chronological order the series of key events that took place.

The goal is to craft a case that is effective (i.e. measures up to the stated objectives) and impactful (i.e. bridges the gap between theory and practice; extends or builds existing theory).

A good synopsis allows the instructor to get a feel for the contents of the case as he or she makes final preparations for class. It should also refocus the instructor's attention on the key issues of the case.

6. FINAL BULLET POINTS

How to write & structure a case

- Write in the past tense.
- Identify and establish an issue/problem which can be used to teach a concept or theory.

The opening paragraph should make clear:

- Who the main protagonist is.
- Who the key decision maker is.
- What the nature of the problem or issue is.
- When the case took place, including specific dates.
- Why the issue or problem arose.

The body of the case should:

- Tell the whole story – usually in a chronological order.
- Typically contain general background on business environment, company background, and the details of the specific issue(s) faced by the company.
- Tell more than one side of the story so that students can think of competing alternatives.

The concluding paragraph should:

- Provide a short synthesis of the case to reiterate the main issues, or even to raise new questions.

What makes a great teaching case?

- Written in the case teaching narrative style, not in the style of a research article.
- Submitting a case that has been classroom tested and therefore is much more robust
- Objectivity and considering all sides of a dilemma.
- Fit with the objectives of the publication it is included.
- Allowing for relevant learning outcomes and enabling students to meet them effectively.

Common pitfalls:

- The case has no clear decision focus;
- The case has many decision foci;
- The case has no clear structure;
- The case is not objective;
- The case offers a diagnosis of the problem or issue;
- The case provides little context;
- The case provides too many details;
- The case has no actors;
- The case has no dramatic interest;
- The case is too dramatic with complex sub-plots;
- The case is technical or theoretical (jargons and technical terms).

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