



## Case Study Method – An Ideal Tool of Learning

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### ABSTRACT

Since the Gurukulam method of teaching, various methods of teaching are practiced by teachers according to their convenience. The main purpose of teaching methodology is to communicate something new to the students, which will make desirable behavioural changes among the students. Due to the development in technology, nowadays, power point presentation, LCD, OHP and the like are used even in lower classes. The students in commerce and management study the matters related to business and administration in the business concerns. So the faculties in commerce and management use many methodologies for teaching these subjects. Industrial visits, seminars and guest lectures, role play method of teaching and case study method are the various methods followed by the teachers. Case study method of teaching is considered as an important one, which will make the students understand the concepts of the particular problems. A good case often ends with a critical decision, conflict or issue faced by the institution. This allows learners to use the case study to analyze, interpret and debate how the situation has emerged and to design strategies for taking the next steps. This will help the students to take situational decisions in their future career. But the case study method is not familiar even among the faculties in some areas particularly in rural and semi urban areas. Students studying in rural areas feel difficulties in case studies. Even in urban areas many faculties do not use case study method of teaching. By keeping all the above views in mind the writers present this article on "CASE STUDY METHOD – AN IDEAL TOOL OF LEARNING".

### Keywords :

#### INTRODUCTION

Since the Gurukulam method of teaching, various methods of teaching are practiced by teachers according to their convenience. The main purpose of teaching methodology is to communicate something new to the students, which will make desirable behavioural changes among the students. Due to the development in technology, nowadays, power point presentation, LCD, OHP, etc. are used even in lower classes. The students in commerce and management study the matters related to business and administration in the business concerns. So the faculties in commerce and management use many methodologies for teaching these subjects. Industrial visits, seminars and guest lectures, role play method of teaching and case study method are the various methods followed by the teachers. Case study method of teaching is considered as an important one, which will make the students understand the concepts of the particular problems. A good case often ends with a critical decision, conflict or issue faced by the institution. This allows learners to use the case study to analyze, interpret and debate how the situation has emerged and to design strategies for taking the next steps. This will help the students to take situational decisions in their future career.

A case study is a description of an actual administrative situation involving a decision to be made or a problem to be solved. It can be a real situation that actually happened just as described, or portions have been disguised for reasons of privacy. Most case studies are written in such a way that the reader takes the place of the manager whose responsibility is to make decisions to help solve the problem. In almost all case studies, a decision must be made, although that decision might be to leave the situation as it is and do nothing.

The case study method of analysis is a learning tool in which students and the instructor participate in direct discussion of case studies, as opposed to the lecture method, where the

instructor speaks and students listen and take notes. In the case study method, students teach themselves, with the instructor being an active guide, rather than just a talking head delivering content. The focus is on students learning through their joint, co-operative effort.

#### HOW TO DO A CASE STUDY

While there is no one definitive "Case Method" or approach, there are common steps that most approaches recommend to be followed in tackling a case study. It is inevitable that different instructors suggest different methods to do analysis of a case but this exposure is beneficial since it gives the students an idea of the different ways of approaching decision making.

#### STEPS IN SOLVING A CASE STUDY

The initial steps to be followed in solving a case are:

1. Quickly read the case. If it is a long case, read only the first few and last paragraphs. This will help to answer the following questions:
  - a. Who is the decision maker in this case, and what is their position and responsibilities?
  - b. What appears to be the issue (of concern, problem, challenge, or opportunity) and its significance for the organization?
  - c. Why has the issue arisen and why is the decision maker involved now?
  - d. When does the decision maker have to decide, resolve, act or dispose of the issue? What is the urgency to the situation?
2. Take a look at the Exhibits to see what numbers have been provided.

3. Review the case subtitles to see what areas are covered in depth.

4. Review the case questions if they have been provided. This may give some clues as to what the main issues are, to be resolved.

The initial steps are only meant to give a brief idea of what the case deals with. The next step is to do a detailed reading of the case and its analysis for which the steps are as follows:

1. Defining the issue(s)
2. Analyzing the case data
3. Generating alternatives
4. Selecting decision criteria
5. Analyzing and evaluating alternatives
6. Selecting the preferred alternative
7. Developing an action/implementation plan

#### DEFINING THE ISSUE(S) / PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem statement should be a clear, concise statement of exactly what needs to be addressed. This is not easy to write! The initial analysis is only to help in answering the basic questions. Now it is time to decide what the main issues to be addressed are going to be in much more detail. Asking the following questions may help:

1. What appears to be the problem(s)?
2. How to know that this is a problem? By asking this question, it is possible to differentiate the symptoms of the problem from the problem itself. Example: while declining sales or unhappy employees are a problem to most companies, they are in fact, symptoms of underlying problems which need to be addressed.
3. What are the immediate issues that need to be addressed? This helps to differentiate between issues that can be resolved within the context of the case, and those that are bigger and need to be addressed at another time (preferably by someone else!).
4. Differentiate between importance and urgency for the issues identified. Some issues may appear to be urgent, but upon closer examination are relatively unimportant, while others may be far more important (relative to solving our problem) than urgent. It may be required to deal with important issues in order of urgency to keep focussed on the objective. Important issues are those that have a significant effect on:
  - a. Profitability,
  - b. Strategic direction of the company,
  - c. Source of competitive advantage,
  - d. Morale of the company's employees, and/or
  - e. Customer satisfaction.

#### ANALYZING CASE DATA

1. Why or how did these issues arise? It is important to determine cause and effect for the problems identified. It is not possible to solve a problem without determining the cause of it. It may be helpful to think of the organization in question as consisting of the following components:
  - a. Resources, such as materials, equipment, or supplies, and
  - b. People who transform these resources using
  - c. Processes, which creates something of greater value.
2. Who is affected most by this issues? It is necessary to identify who are the relevant stakeholders to the situation, and who will be affected by the decisions to be made.
3. What are the constraints and opportunities implicit to this situation? It is very rare that resources are not a constraint, and allocations must be made on the assumption that not enough will be available to please everyone.
4. What do the numbers tell you? Taking a look at the num-

bers given in the case study helps to make a judgement as to their relevance to the problem identified. Not all numbers will be immediately useful or relevant, but it is required to be careful not to overlook anything. Comparisons with industry standards while making judgements helps to avoid jumping to conclusions.

#### GENERATING ALTERNATIVES

In generating alternatives, it is useful to keep the following tips in mind.

1. Be realistic! While it is possible to be able to find a dozen alternatives, they should be realistic and fit within the constraints of the situation.
2. The alternatives should be mutually exclusive, that is, they cannot happen at the same time.
3. Not making a decision pending further investigation is not an acceptable decision for any case study to analyze. A manager can always delay making a decision to gather more information, which is not managing at all! The whole point to this exercise is to learn how to make good decisions, and having imperfect information is normal for most business decisions, not the exception.
4. Doing nothing as in not changing the strategy can be a viable alternative, provided it is being recommended for the correct reasons.
5. Avoid the sandwich method of providing only two other clearly undesirable alternatives to make one reasonable alternative look better by comparison. This will be painfully obvious to the reader, and just shows laziness in not being able to come up with more than one decent alternative.
6. Keep in mind that any alternative chosen will need to be implemented at some point, and if serious obstacles exist to successfully doing this, then the person making the suggestion is the one who will look bad for suggesting it.

#### SELECTING DECISION CRITERIA

Once the alternatives have been identified, a method of evaluating them and selecting the most appropriate one needs to be used to arrive at a decision. This requires identification and analysis of the structure and control systems that the company is using to implement its business strategies. The organizational change, levels of hierarchy, employee rewards, conflicts and other issues that are important to the company also need to be analyzed. For a business situation, the key decision criteria are those things that are important to the organization making the decision, and they will be used to evaluate the suitability of each alternative recommended.

#### Key decision criteria should be:

1. Brief, preferably in point form, such as
  - a. Improve (or at least maintain) profitability,
  - b. Increase sales, market share, or return on investment,
  - c. Maintain customer satisfaction, corporate image,
  - d. Be consistent with the corporate mission or strategy,
  - e. Within our present (or future) resources and capabilities,
  - f. Within acceptable risk parameters,
  - g. Ease or speed of implementation,
  - h. Employee morale, safety, or turnover,
  - i. Retain flexibility, and/or
  - j. Minimize environmental impact.
2. Measurable, at least to the point of comparison, such as alternative A will improve profitability more than alternative B.
3. Be related to the problem statement and alternatives. If it is about something unrelated, that is a sign of a missing alternative or key decision criteria, or a poorly formed problem statement.

**EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES**

If the key decision criteria have been properly identified, it should be quite easy to measure the alternatives against each key decision criteria. A simple table can be set up with key decision criteria as columns and alternatives as rows, and write this section based on the table. Each alternative must be compared to each criteria and its suitability ranked in some way, such as met/not met, or in relation to the other alternatives, such as better than, or highest. This will be important to selecting an alternative. Another method that can be used is to list the advantages and disadvantages (pros/cons) of each alternative, and then discussing the short and long term implications of choosing each. This implies that the most likely outcome of each of the alternatives has been already predicted. Some students find it helpful to consider three different levels of outcome, such as best, worst, and most likely, as another way of evaluating alternatives.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Business people are decision-makers; this is an opportunity for the student to practice making decisions. There is need to give justification for the decision using the key decision cri-

teria. It is also necessary to make sure that it is one (and only one) of the alternatives already decided and that it does resolve what had been defined as the problem. Every recommendation should be made based on and supported by the context of the case study analysis.

**CONCLUSION**

Case study method is therefore a powerful tool to simulate real life business situations in classrooms and initiate lively decisions among students who can experience business and managerial decision making even without actually being managers themselves. It gives them ample opportunities to analyze issues facing a specific company and examine closely the issues with which the company is confronted. Moving through all the steps mentioned in this paper will enable them to grasp the overall picture of what is happening to the company and then deliver appropriate solutions to the specific problems.

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