



I Feel Case-Study Method of Teaching Is”...Student Speaks!!

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ABSTRACT

Theory should be practiced to get the benefit out of the learning. The traditional way of teaching any subject/discipline is by providing the understanding of concepts via oral communication termed as LECTURE. The various pedagogical methods used in business management as a discipline ranges from lecture, case-study, role-play, simulations, web-based E-learning and the various combinations of these all. The paper here presents the business management students' view point regarding one of these methods, i.e. Case-study Method of Teaching. The study is based on the responses provided by 214 students of various B-Schools ranging from IIMs, Private B-Schools, University Affiliated Institutes and Deemed Universities. The original responses are quoted to get the perception and views of students for the case method of teaching. Analyzing the responses have provided with the useful tips and ways to make the method of instruction effective and beneficial for students.

Keywords : Case-study, Pedagogy, Business Management, Instructors, Students

1. Introduction:

It is said, "It is easily said than done". A person can learn better if it is done practically. Theory should be practiced to get the benefit out of the learning. The traditional way of teaching any subject/discipline is by providing the understanding of concepts via oral communication termed as LECTURE. The domain of management education can't be sufficed with only lecture delivery for concepts and subjects; it requires many add-ons. The various pedagogical methods used in business management as a discipline ranges from lecture, case-study, role-play, simulations, web-based E-learning and the various combinations of these all. The paper here presents the business management students' view point regarding one of these methods, i.e. Case-study Method of Teaching.

The paper is divided into four sections. After Introduction the literature available on case-method of teaching is discussed. Next section is about the methodology used to study the students' views followed by the major implications and utilities of the study. The last section concludes the study followed by references.

2. Literature:

The case method is nothing more or less than an attempt to find a better way of teaching than it is known before (Jackson, 1926). Although it is not perfect it seems to be giving much better results than any other method that has been used in the past. Jackson (1926) believed that with a reasonable amount of experience and additional hard work on part of the instructor that type of instruction can be worked out very successfully and be made to strengthen the courses; materially. Teaching business and other subjects by the case method has resulted largely from the desire of instructors and school administrators to bring into the class room a larger sense of the practicality of things; this in turn presumably has meant greater orientation for the student in the field of his interest (Jackson, 1928). The primary objective of lecturing is to impart factual and theoretical knowledge; the aim of case-based teaching is to develop the student's ability to deal effectively with problems arising in new settings within an ever-changing environment. The case method is intended to help students discover things for themselves. Steps such as problem finding, selecting and justifying the chosen form of analysis and concern for implementing an action plan are central in this interactive teaching style: with case teaching, the process of ar-

iving at answers is as important as the answers themselves (Bell and Lanzanauer, 2000).

A research assistant at the Harvard Business School in writing of the case method identified three factors which are common to the various ways and techniques used in the case method of teaching at the School. They are as follows:

1. A focus on a business experience. This experience which is the case emphasizes the fact that in business "all things aren't equal." The student is forced to deal with the uncertainties, imperfections and problems of personalities, which characterize the business world.
2. A focus on the particular vs. the general. The case method strives to consider a topic in a specific situation requiring decision and action and attempts to avoid the consideration of a topic in general only.
3. A focus on student participation. The case method emphasizes the active participation of students in case analyses and resulting decision for action. This participation is not conceived to be the question.

It is perceived by many; students as well as instructors that the case method is ideal for lazy teachers if used correctly. No lecture notes need be prepared. No final exam questions either-just use a case. In its purest form, a case is a "do it yourself project" for the student (James A. Wickman, 1963). Wickman describes the importance of case method of instruction by saying that in all of its (case) variations, serving many purposes, the call of the case method is beguiling. Through using the case method, students can be exposed to recitation, simulations, stimulation, emulation, desiccation, evaluation, dissection, reflection, and even encouraged to think. Cases can be long or short; concrete or abstract; single-problem or multi-problem; factual or hypothetical; narrative or "incident." Cases can be used for class discussion, and for examinations. Students can even be assigned to develop new cases as term papers. With so many attributes, cases can also be leading the unwary instructor and the ill-prepared student to a common disaster. The prospect of utilizing the case method is a typical situation of risk. Consider the major entities exposed in this risk situation-the student, the instructor, and the curriculum objectives. The wellbeing of each of these enti-

ties is exposed to impairment when the case method is used. Through careful recognition of hazards, evaluation of alternatives, steps to reduce the risk, exposure to potential impairment of well-being can be minimized.

Problem-oriented and interactive approaches in teaching technical courses like operational research (OR) have been strongly recommended as one possible way to strengthen the role of OR in business school curricula. It is observed that the use of cases is common in fields such as marketing, human resources, strategy. The case-based teaching of the ideas and the potential of Operations (OR) has had a difficult time gaining general acceptance. Evidence of movement in this direction, however, is appearing (Bell and Lanzanauer, 2000). J.J. Cochran (2000) also had a similar view of effectiveness of case-method over the traditional lecturing for teaching OR courses. He further had a view that the case method in the technical courses like OR provides students at the introductory level with an opportunity to think critically and creatively, synthesize and integrate ideas, and apply previously learned concepts. Thus the case methodology of teaching encourages students to further develop and enhance their modeling, communication, analytic and problem-solving skills, all of which are now primary goals of these courses.

3. Methodology:

The appendix at the end is the original views gathered from the students via interviewing which have been used here in the study for inference.

3.1 Objectives: The primary objective is to provide the instructors/faculties/teachers the view-point of students regarding the case-study method of instruction. The various issues being focused are, a) Experiments and Learning Outcomes in Case Method of Teaching: Teaching with focused case review questions (Structured) and without case review questions (Unstructured), b) Relevance of using "Alien" or "Foreign" cases for local audiences and / or "Native" cases for international audiences (like exchange students) in the era of Globalization, c) "Open Case Method:" Opportunities and Challenges of encouraging students to go beyond "case facts" to bring in facts and perspectives through self research, and d) Balancing Case Method with Lecturing and other methods as opposed to only lecturing or using Case Method alone as a delivery strategy. The excerpts of the interviews have been majorly used to get the results and implications; in that sense it is qualitative study.

3.2 Sample Frame: As the study is intended to get the views from business management students, the sample frame of the study is selected as all the students currently pursuing Business Management Courses from institutions ranging from IIMs, University Affiliated Institutes, Private B-Schools, Deemed Universities, and others, if any.

3.3 Sample Size: The sample selected for study is 200+ with actual response of 214 respondents.

3.4 Method: It is an exploratory research with the objective of looking for the perception of students of B-Schools for the case-study method of instruction. The method for sampling is convenience sampling method. The reason being for that is the limitation of time and easy access to the few institutions due to personal networks.

3.5 Instrument: The instrument used is online questionnaire survey and personal as well as telephonic interviews.

4. Implications:

214 students of business management courses have been interviewed and the following are the excerpts of their views for case-study as a method of instruction. Ten various factors considered are,

1. Size & Number of Cases

2. New Vs. Old Case
3. Factors Hampering Preparedness
4. Effectiveness of case discussion
5. Impact of Instructor on Discussion
6. Subject Suitability
7. Open-ended Vs Close-ended cases
8. Foreign Vs Local Cases
9. Proper blends of lecturing and case-study
10. Class Size and other physical settings

Based on the responses it can be inferred about the way the case method can be dealt with. The case method of teaching is effective, if handled well. Difficult and new concepts must be explained in class before moving on to the case discussion, where the concepts can be applied to appreciate them, limitations of the concepts realized, and understand the reconciliements required in practice. Without the cases, thinking would be uni-dimensional in management education. Also, if the case discussion is conducted in a structured manner by the instructor, it improves the skills/capability to analyze any situation in a structured manner. Large cases actually train us to handle information overload (which is typical in our future careers) and the ability to pick up the relevant information from them without getting overwhelmed by it. Most of the students reasoned time as the limiting factor hindering the proper effective discussion about the case. Over and above time as a factor, instructor himself plays a very important role for the success of healthy discussion. The capability, interest, dedication and efforts of instructor can certainly create interest among the students. It is desirable to avoid bombardment of cases; better to identify the concepts where case can be effective than lecture and vice-versa. Many students have explicitly or implicitly shown interest for multi-disciplinary cases. The study also brings out the need of short, local cases. Thus, it provides the direction and characteristics of a case which is to be written and encouraged among the academicians.

The primary objective of the study is to provide guidelines to the instructor regarding how to handle the case in the class, what are the factors of encouragement for the students' preparedness, what are the difficulties students face, how to deal with a foreign case, what should be the ratio of the cases per concept/topic and many other related questions. The result outcome gives valuable tips and insights to the instructor to be cautious for certain issues and enhance the level of his/her preparedness as per the students' expectations. The brief implications in the form of recommendations to the instructors derived from the study are given below:

- Use single case for multiple subjects
- Avoid cases in pure technical concepts/chapters
- Introduce the method for systematic discussion and analysis of the case before discussing for the first time in the class
- Avoid case method to be the only aspect to discuss, balance well with lecture
- Involve more regional/local cases
- Provide other inputs to support better discussion of case such as related articles & notes
- To encourage class participation, don't let the students depend totally on case
- Discourage wasteful class participation
- Discuss only important cases at length rather than finishing every case for the sake of finishing

5. Conclusion:

To conclude the study it can be said that the results are directly quoted from what students have responded. The respons-

es opened-up several opportunities for the instructors to deal with the students effectively while discussing a case. There are limitations of the study. The first and foremost limitation is the time taken to conduct the study. The study is carried out in very short time span. There are chances of getting biased responses based on the time and place the students being interviewed. The sample selected is only a portion of whole population where few institutes use the discussed method predominantly while few of them have very little exposure to this method of instruction.

There is further scope of quantitative study to get various correlations based on the sample selected to get more accurate measurable results. The next aspect to be studied will be based on the quantitative data to get more precise outcomes.

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