

Teaching With Cases

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Sample Case and Training Note

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Part 8 brings together both the students and professor's case preparation. This section describes one approach, structured case discussions, to organize and lead the in-class case discussion (in the large group). After reviewing this method of case instruction, an overview on how to evaluate case sessions and learning is introduced. This evaluation leads to a discussion on how to use and revise training notes to improve subsequent case sessions.

Part 9 provides an overview of other approaches to organizing and leading case sessions.

Appendix contains a sample case and training note that is referenced later in the discussion to help illustrate some training concepts.

Teaching With Cases

Part 8

Leading and Evaluating Case Sessions

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Additional Notes:

Structured Case Discussions

1. Select Problem Solving Model Steps
2. Develop a “Blackboard” Plan
3. Conduct Session
4. Revise Training Note

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In preparing for the case session, the professor will sometimes find that the training note provided by the case writer does not contain specific directions on how to organize and conduct the case session. What is often included in the training note is a list of suggested student assignments and discussion questions. The professor may want to understand how these assignments and questions help the students learn about some business concept. It is suggested that the professor use the problem solving model introduced earlier (to guide student case preparation) to gain this understanding. This problem solving model (see slide #27) also is a good way to think about organizing the in-class case discussion. The model’s systematic and thorough approach lends itself to conducting a very structured and organized class discussion. The type of class session is called a structured case discussion. The steps to conduct and evaluate such a session are identified above.

The first step in conducting a structured case session requires the professor to understand how the suggested student assignment and discussion questions support the analysis of the case. Again, the “Problem Solving Model” for individual case preparation is a useful framework for doing so. Slide #41 demonstrates how to apply this model to a case, “The Partnering Proposal”. A copy of this case is included in the appendix at the end of this text. You might want to read the case and the training note to see how to apply the problem solving model (see slide #41). Note that the professor may or may not elect to follow the lead (i.e., training objectives, suggested assignment and discussion questions) suggested by the case writer.

Second, the trainer needs to develop a board plan to guide and record the case discussion. The board plan spells out where the discussion for each question (or step in the problem solving model) will be recorded as well as the time allotted for each. Slide #42 suggests a board plan for the case, “The Partnering Proposal”.

Following the case analysis, the trainer should consider revising the training note in order to improve the quality of case discussions. Training note evaluation and revision is covered later in slides #45 through #49.

Selecting Case Issues For Discussion

Problem Solving Model

Problem Statement

Causes and Analysis

- *DQ #1. How does it feel to look at this from a suppliers' perspective?*
- *DQ #2. Why might Southwest Division want to partner with Lyfann?*
- *DQ #3. Why might Southwest Division want to approach Lyfann without involving corporate purchasing at Marko Electronics?*

Alternatives Generated

Decision Criteria

Alternative Analysis & Evaluation

- STA #1. As Bill Jones, how would you feel about the partnering proposal from Southwest Division?
- *DQ #4. What are the risks for Lyfann?*
- *DQ #5. What are the risks for Southwest Division?*
- *DQ #6. If you were Bill Jones, what would you do for the next three weeks to get ready for your meeting with Casey Williams?*
- *DQ #7. What happens to suppliers who refuse partnering proposals?*

Decision

STA #2. What kind of partnering agreement would you like to see if you decided to accept?

Action Plan

STA #3. How would you reply if you decided to refuse?

Implementation

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Evaluation

The problem solving model (see above) was introduced earlier (individual case preparation). The model can be used by students to ensure that their approach to solving cases, and business problems in general, is systematic as well as thorough.

This same model can be also used by professors to gain some perspective on what the case writer was trying to accomplish via the suggested student assignment (SSA) and discussion questions (DQ) included in the training note. Here, "The Partnering Proposal" SSAs and DQs are placed in the problem solving model. SSAs are often developed to ensure that students are well versed in the case. The SSAs used here do a good job of this by requiring students to evaluate alternatives, make a decision as well as try to implement one suggested course of action. The case writer's intent (see analysis section of the training note included at the end of this text) is to get students to explore the motivations and reactions (i.e., causes and analysis) of those involved in this business proposal. Note how DQs #1 - #3 examine the thinking behind SSA #1. DQs #4 - #6 do the same for SSA #2 while DQ #7 helps examine the thinking behind SSA #3. The SSAs and DQs deliver the case writer's objective to demonstrate that partnerships are not a gift that customers give suppliers. They must be evaluated closely to determine if they make good managerial and fiscal sense for the firm. How to deliver this message via group discussion is found in the next slide that outlines a structured approach to this case .

Note that neither the case or training note cover all of the steps found in the problem solving model. They do not have to. The case writer can stop the case at anytime. What's important is whether the case delivers the intended training objective.

Additional Notes

Board Plan

Discussion Plan

- Identify steps in the Problem Solving Model to be Included in the Case Discussion
- Assign Steps to Specific Boards
- Set Time Limits

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Above are some general guidelines to help the trainer prepare for a structured case discussion. The structure is found in setting limits for what parts of the problem solving model will be examined, where responses will be recorded, and how much time will be allotted for each DQ and/or SSA.

For “The Partnering Proposal”, a board plan might look like this:

Board 1: Causes and Analysis (DQ # 1 - DQ#3) - 20 minutes

Board 2: Alternative Analysis & Evaluation (DQ #4 - DQ #6) - 20 minutes

Board 3: Decision (DQ #7) - 15 minutes

Again, whatever plan is adopted must support progress toward delivering the intended training objective. For example, using the discussion questions from the training note for “The Partnering Proposal”, the training objective is to demonstrate the realities and concerns with partnering with key customers.

Additional Notes

Structured Case Discussions

Advantages

1. Helps keep systematic records of discussion to track progress,
2. Allows group to quickly and reliably review points/decisions made earlier,
3. Facilitates the analysis of complex issues by keeping the whole discussion in plain view at one time, and
4. Enhances the understanding of mathematical calculations or technical issues central to the case analysis.

Limitations

1. Taking time to record response can slow down the case discussion,
2. The fixed nature of the “Board Plan” might stifle creativity,
3. Selectively recording some responses and ignoring others produces an incomplete record, that
4. May discourage future participation by those who are ignored.

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The structured case approach just described has a number of advantages as well as limitations. They are listed above. It's important for the professor to know before hand what are the pros and cons of any approach to case instruction they are planning to use.

Additional Notes

Evaluating Case Discussions

IF,

- Participants were well prepared,
- Participants were motivated,
- The case addressed a critical issue,
- The session promoted a “free” atmosphere to encourage risk-taking and experimentation, and
- The session was fun and at the same time promoted concern and serious involvement.

Source: Erskine, James A., Michiel R. Leenders and Louise A. Mauffette-Leenders (1998) “Teaching with Cases”, Ivey School of Business, Ontario, Canada.

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No matter what type of approach to case instruction the professor might adopt, it’s important to evaluate how well the case session worked. For the most part, most professors when asked to evaluate case discussions will focus on items #2, #4 and #5 above. That is, good case discussions will be seen as those that contain energetic and interesting debate about important business issues. It’s important here to note, however, that there are some preconditions (items #1 and #3) that must be met before such debates can be realized. It’s important to encourage students to follow the outline provided earlier to maximize individual case preparation and small group discussions. Additionally, note that careful case selection and adaptation by the professor helps ensure that the session focuses on issues important to students. Good “case-program” fit helps sell the session and encourages discussion and learning.

Additional Notes:

The Case Training Note

1. Immediate Issue(s)
2. Basic Issue(s)
3. Suggested Student Assignment
4. Discussion Questions
5. Analysis
6. Suggested Session Approach and Plan

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To help the professor deliver a good case session, the case writer will often include a training note that contains an overview and analysis of the case. Only professors, not students are provided access to the training note. An outline of a training note is provided above.

Immediate/Basic Issues: The immediate issue is the business situation or decision that the manager is presently facing (e.g., for the “Training Proposal”, whether or not Lyfann should partner with a key account). The basic issue represents a more fundamental concern that has broader implications that the firm must consider (e.g., how firms should plan for and manage growth) in the long-term. Students can apply the lesson from the basic issue to their own situations or ones they’ll encounter in the future. Often resolving a more basic concern leads to some position statement or policy that management can use to guide the business in the future. Many students as well as professors often have a difficult time identifying and responding to the basic case issues. Often, the immediate issues take center stage in case discussions.

Suggested Student Assignment: The case writer may also provide an assignment for students to work on prior to the large group discussion. In “The Partnering Proposal” a few questions are posed at the end of the case itself. These questions guide individual preparation and small group discussions. Often the student assignment addresses the immediate issues found in the case.

Discussion Questions: Case writers also provide a set of discussion questions that can be used to begin the case session. Ideally, the questions review then build upon the student assignment. Questions that start somewhere else and fail to build upon individual/small group preparation, make the case session seem disorganized. In subsequent case discussions, students might do little preparatory work figuring out that it will be of little value in upcoming case discussions. Thus, students may come to case sessions less prepared which will have a negative impact on learning.

Analysis: The training note should have an analysis section where the case writer shares insights and answers to the student assignments and discussion questions. Ideally, the analysis also includes a discussion of how previous case sessions have worked out. In the analysis section, the professor should be apprised of what issues are difficult for students to grasp or bring out in discussion sessions.

Suggested Session Approach and Plan: Sometimes the case writer will outline how to organize and carry out the case session. This section might include some ideas on how to lay out the structured case discussion and how much time to devote to each question. Alternatively, this section might identify a number of other case instruction methods (e.g., role-plays).

The Case Training Note

Rules

1. Your Property
2. Share with fellow trainers
3. Not for public consumption!

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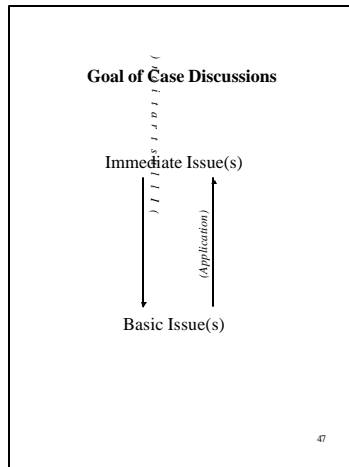
Obviously, good training notes are an asset for the professor. There are some rules, however, that professors are asked to follow regarding the training note. The three rules suggested above help preserve the integrity of the training note itself.

Rule #1 - Your property. Assuming you are the case writer, you own the rights to both the case and training note.

Rule #2 - Share with fellow professors. When you order a case from a publisher for use in some educational or training session, the training note (if available) is sent along with the case to the instructor. If the case is yours and you are sharing it with colleagues, its good professional practice to share the training note. You can ask your colleagues to suggest revisions to the training note and thus improve the quality of subsequent case discussions.

Rule #3 - Not for public consumption. As noted in the discussion of the previous slide, only professors not students should have access to the training note. Part of learning via the case method is based upon the debate that occurs among students and the professor as well. Such debates are truncated when some or all students have the answers up front. If the training note is somehow made public, the case no longer has much value as a training tool.

Additional Notes:



The case and training note are aimed at delivering good case discussions. Good case discussions help realize two goals.

First, we want to work closely with facts presented in the case and address the immediate issue(s) facing the firm. The success of the case method rests in part on students becoming intimately involved in resolving the crises at hand. This is a necessary step in using cases but not the ultimate goal. The immediate issue often arises because some more basic issue has gone unnoticed or unattended. One goal of the case discussion is to use the immediate issue to illustrate the basic issue underlying the case. For example, in “The Partnering Proposal” the immediate decision at hand is whether or not to partner with a key account. This immediate issue might be used to examine a more basic business concern of developing and managing relationships with key accounts. Failing to do so (i.e., work closely with and understanding key customers) may have led to the immediate problem facing the firm.

The second goal of the case discussion is to use the “lessons” learned about the basic issue and apply them back to the case at hand. In doing so, the immediate issue can be addressed as well as any future related problems can be anticipated and perhaps prevented. For example, in “The Partnering Proposal”, developing and implementing some framework on how to work closely with key accounts might help set some direction and objectives to apply to working with the Southwest Division. This same framework might be applied to other accounts to improve present operations as well set some precedent on how to work with new customers in the future.

In sum, immediate and basic issues can be thought to occur along a time line. Immediate issues require some immediate decision and thus are more short-term in focus. Resolving more basic issues can give rise to policies or procedures (both formal or informal) that can provide direction in the longer-term. Immediate issues require management to act, basic issues require management to plan and lead.

Additional Notes:

Revising the Training Note

1. Immediate Issue(s)
2. Basic Issue(s)
3. Suggested Trainee Assignment
4. Discussion Questions
5. Analysis
6. Suggested Session Approach and Plan

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Following the class, the professor may want to revise the training note in order to improve subsequent case sessions. If the case is being used/tested for the first time, a number of changes might be considered. For more seasoned cases, like “The Partnering Proposal”, revisions tend to be more limited in scope (e.g., clarify a question).

With repeated use, more information is gathered on how different groups respond to and learned from the case. This information is included in the analysis section as a “heads up” to professors on possible pitfalls as well as good practices to be followed. This information may be used to reformat the session approach and plan or suggest other ways to conduct the case session in order to ensure that training objectives are met in an efficient manner.

Additional Notes:

Revising the Training Note

1. Immediate Issue(s)
2. Basic Issue(s)
3. Suggested Trainee Assignment
 - Suggested Additional Reading/Data Gathering
 - Possible Teaching Aids (samples, advertising materials, videos, etc.)
4. Discussion Questions
5. Analysis
 - Additional Points to Raise
6. Suggested Session Approach and Plan
 - Teaching Suggestions
 - Suggested Board Plan

Source: Erskine, James, Michiel R. Leenders, Louise A. Mauffette-Leenders (1998) "Teaching With Cases", Richard Ivey School of Business, Ontario, Canada, pg. 92

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The trainer can revise the training note further by adding a few new topics to the standard training note depicted in slide #45.

Suggested Additional Reading/Data Collection: To help prepare students for the case discussion, the professor may assign relevant outside readings or ask students to complete some other task (e.g., interview managers who have experience with developing partnerships) before the case session.

Teaching Aids: Over time, the professor may come across materials (e.g., news articles, trade press releases, sample, etc.) that help provide additional background to make the case "come alive". Professors should use these materials in the case session judiciously. One needs to assess how these teaching aids contribute to the case analysis before including in the training note.

Additional Points to Raise: With repeated use of the case, professors begin to identify case subtleties (e.g., unspoken assumptions that have a large impact on how the case is solved, basic issues that are overlooked by discussants, etc.). By including these in the analysis section, the case writer gives the professor more options on how to dissect the case.

Teaching Suggestions & Suggested Board Plan: Finally, the professor may elect to outline different approaches to presenting the case and leading the discussion. A good training note gives the professor several options on how to conduct the case as well as the strengths and limitations to each session approach. In this way, the professor can select an approach that best matches the needs of their students and supports the training objective at hand.

Additional Notes

Part 9

Alternative Case Teaching Approaches

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Part 9 presents an overview of 4 other approaches to teaching with cases. Following a brief description of each (see slide #51), the advantages and limitations of each approach is discussed (slides #52 - #55).

Additional Notes:

Alternative Case Teaching Methods

Case Reports
Case Presentations

- To Class
- To Class and Visitor/Expert

Role Plays
Videoconferencing

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The structured session approach to case instruction has already been demonstrated. The advantages and limitations to this approach were also discussed. You may recall that this approach makes use of a problem-solving model to organize the case session around. This model was outlined earlier when we examined a systematic approach for individual and small group case preparation. This model included steps like “problem statement, causes, alternatives, decision criteria, etc.”. One advantage to this approach was that it helps ensure that decision-making is systematic and thorough since all of the steps involved in problem resolution are examined individually and in considerable detail. A number of other approaches to teaching with cases are available. Below each approach is briefly defined. The pros and cons of each approach are found in slides and notes that follow.

Case reports - Individual students work alone, analyze a case and prepare a report for the professor.

Case presentations (to class) - One or more students make separate presentations to the large group. Others critique the report(s) and presentation(s) as well. A case competition can be held where individual presentations are evaluated and ranked. This same case presentation format can be applied to small groups as well (e.g., a small group makes a presentation to the “class” or small groups engage in a case competition).

Case presentation (to visitor/expert) - This approach is the same as the one discussed directly above with one exception. A visitor is invited to hear and critique the reports. The visitor has some special knowledge/perspective (e.g., works in the industry featured in the case, lives in the country where the case takes place, etc.) useful in providing feedback to students.

Role Plays - Students are invited to assume the role of key managers and agents depicted in the case and asked to play out some decision or action to be taken. Doing so is thought to help develop decision making skills since students are acting on and using information as it is presented by others.

Videoconferencing - Videoconferencing really is more of a transmission mode than a teaching approach. Via videoconferencing the “class” can work with the management team of the firm depicted in the case, “invite” outside consultants to the case session as expert “visitors”, and/or present to a larger group (e.g., students at other sites) to receive additional case feedback or increase the number of competitors in a case competition.

Case Reports

Advantages

- Promotes rigorous case analysis
- Simulates management reporting
- Can test out newly written cases

Disadvantages

- Contacting managers for more information
- No case discussion

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There are several advantages to assigning case reports. First, given the thought involved in organizing and laying out your arguments, often case reports encourage rigorous analysis. Second, if the case report is similar to a brief that might be prepared for upper management, students receive valuable feedback about their written communication skills. Finally, the case writer can “test out” a new case quickly to see how a large number of individuals responded to it.

On the downside, individuals can often be quite competitive and will go to considerable lengths to obtain information about the company in order to solve the case correctly. It is not uncommon for individuals to contact the firm depicted in the case for more information in order to obtain an advantage in the class. Also, the case report does not permit discussions. The case approach depicted in the training materials you have been using here assumes that much of the learning occurs during small and large group case discussions.

Often case reports are used to test students over some content area in order to award some certification or grade.

Additional Notes

Case Presentations

Advantages

- Presentation & time management skills
- Obtain direct feedback from others (visitors)

Disadvantages

- Success of case session dependent upon work of one group/individuals
- Focus on oral communication rather than the case analysis
- Others do not prepare rigorously

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Using this teaching approach, students have the opportunity to develop their skills at making and managing group presentations. Also, where the number of presentations is limited to one or a few individuals/groups, direct and detailed feedback about one's case analysis is possible. When experts or visitors are present who possess special knowledge about the case, additional feedback to presenters is possible.

This approach does have its limitations. First, the success of the case session is dependent largely upon the motivation and talents of the presenters. Second, presenters may spend a lot of time preparing slides and organizing materials at the expense of conducting more detailed analysis of the case and the issues at hand. Finally, knowing that you will not be responsible for presenting during the session encourages some students to fail to prepare the case thoroughly. Consequently, any case discussion and/or feedback offered to presenters might be curtailed.

Still, this approach when used with some discretion can add variety to classes/training programs that rely heavily upon cases for instruction.

Additional Notes

Role Plays

Advantages

- Encourages creative problem solving
- Builds on tendency of trainees to assume management role in case
- Develops communications & negotiation skills

Disadvantages

- May appear contrived, discourage participation
- Success relies on all “performing” well
- Can easily be derailed
- Time consuming

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Role plays can add some diversity to case sessions and have a number of advantages. First, since they can not be completely planned out in advanced, there is much room for creative problem solving as students present and defend arguments on the spot. Second, role plays build upon the tendency of participants to identify with management and the issues they face as depicted in the case. As such, more involvement and discussion results. Finally, the give and take found in this approach provides students an opportunity to improve their communication and negotiation skills.

Still, this approach has a number of liabilities. First, role plays can seem somewhat childish and contrived especially when trainees are professional managers not students. They have to be presented in the right spirit and only after some trust has developed among trainees/students and the trainer/professor. Second, the success of this approach is dependent upon the skills and motivations of each individual involved. If any one student or trainee is not up to the task, the role play can fail. Third, one individual can derail the role play by making an erroneous assumption or perhaps by becoming defensive. Finally, role plays can be time consuming.

Given these limitations, trainers often find that its important to have some contingency play (e.g., alternative assignment or planned discussion) to rescue the session if the role play does not deliver the training objective of interest.

Additional Notes

Videoconferencing

Advantages

- Increases access
- Share training resources

Disadvantages

- Considerable time and expense to set up
- Can discourage participation
- Slows down discussion

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Videoconferencing of a case session can be novel and exciting. One very important advantage it provides is access. More individuals who are removed from the training program can be invited to attend and participate in the case analysis. If experts in the area or the company that is depicted in the case itself can be “invited” to sit in on the discussion, the realism and interest in the case are enhanced. Also, videoconferencing helps training programs and institutions to share resources and reduce operational costs.

Videoconferencing, however, has considerable set up costs in terms of equipment and hiring personnel to manage the system. Also, many are intimidated when the cameras are turned on which could result in fewer students joining in on the case discussion. Finally, some professors find it difficult to manage the case discussion at the same time as they try to produce the session (e.g., involve other sites, select cameras angles, etc.). This can slow down the professor’s spontaneity as well as the session itself.

As noted earlier, videoconferencing is more of a case format than a teaching approach in itself. It can be used to deliver a number of training approaches. For example, a role play can be conducted and discussed by the experts attending the session via the videoconference format.

Additional Notes

Appendix

Sample Case and Training Note

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The appendix contains a sample case (“The Partnering Proposal”) and training note. It is referenced in the test to illustrate some teaching with cases concepts.

Additional Notes: