Case Study Method of Teaching In Management Education

Dr. Suresh Reddy Jakka, Assistant Professor, Department of Business Management, Mahatma Gandhi University, Nalgonda, Andhra Pradesh, India
Sita Ramanjaneyulu Mantha, Head & Associate Professor, Department of Business Management, Adarsh P.G. College of Comp. Sciences, Mahabubnagar, Andhra Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT
Management Education is dynamic in nature and need diverse information to handle different management problems. Management student’s should undergo in depth training to learn the management concepts. To understand the peculiar situations and to handle them effectively, case studies are widely used. The case study method helps the students in developing wisdom and gives lot of scope for application of knowledge. The purpose of the case method is to bring into the classroom “a chunk of reality,” which is complex and multi faced, it follows that teaching cases should present, as a whole, a balanced view of the many dimensions of the organizational life.

Key Words: Case Study Method, Management Education, Decision making, Faculty Role, Competitive Advantage.

INTRODUCTION
Let no man ever contemplate an act ill-conceived and ill-considered, ill-done without proper scrutiny. Inspect a matter with utmost care before reaching conclusions and rushing into actions; else, bitter remorse is let loose. — Panchatantra

Indians are credited with the invention of the zero, as well as algebra and its application of astronomy and geometry. What has been discovered by modern progressive sciences had been already expounded and mapped in those thousands of years old ancient philosophical scriptures in India. So also this Case Study Method. The Great King (Chandra Gupta) Bhatti Vikramadithya cracked several cases put forth by the vethala. They were all cases where wise decisions were made in the context of that peculiar situation.

Pancha Thanthra stories followed an unique way of enabling learning by children. They teach morals to be imbibed in the minds of children. Abimanyu learnt cracking of Padma viyugam from womb, as was described by Lord Krishna. Paramartha Guru and His Five Sishyas teach our children how ignorant they should not be. These are all nothing but case studies under different names, enabling the reader or listener to position himself in that situation and think and act swiftly.

In the 5th-century BC, the philosopher Lao-Tse (also Lao-tzu) wrote "If you tell me, I will listen. If you show me, I will see. But if you let me experience, I will learn.” And so began one of the first active learning philosophies. Other Chinese philosophers, such as Kung Fu-tse (Latinized as Confucius) and Han Fei-Tzu, followed Lao-Tse by using a method that closely resembles what we now call the case method or case study.

In Management Education Case Method of teaching may be used like practicals in science. But in science we get the unique answer at all times under given circumstances, whereas in Management it varies based on time, environment, competition and people.

Literature review:
In an ambiguous and uncertain world, the most difficult part of decision making is not choice making, but sense making (Weick, 1995). That is, how to digest the information “to structure the unknown” (Waterman, 1990:p. 41). In that sense, the most critical task of business education is not about teaching students analytical tools but developing appropriate “mental models.”

The case method plays an essential role in management education (Banning, 2003; Dooley & Skinner, 1977). According to “an introduction to cases” published by the Harvard Business School, the function of a case is to provide a “description of real business situations that serve as a metaphor of a particular set of problems” (Shapiro, 1984: 1). Lawrence (1953: 215) described a case as “the vehicle by which a chunk of reality is brought into the classroom to be worked over by the class and instructor.” Erskine, Leenders, and Mauffette Leenders (1981: 10) defined a case as “a
description of an actual administrative situation, commonly involving a decision or problem. It is normally written from the viewpoint of the decision makers involved a decision or problem. It is normally written from the viewpoint of the decision makers involved and allows the student to step figuratively into the shoes of the decision maker or problem solver.”

Management Education
The intention of an MBA programme is not only to train the students in the specific management science, but also to equip them to hold leadership positions in life, contributing meaningfully as change agents and creating ‘good’ wealth for the society while remaining socially responsible and ethical. The objective (stated on almost each B-School’s website) is to create change agents. Today’s organizations want the fresh management students to be “job ready” from day one of their appointment. Therefore the management students are better trained on live organizational situations with the help of case studies. This underlines the relevance of case studies in Management Education even today.

Management studies is a science to be learnt as well as an art to be practiced. Case study method is more relevant to Management Studies in the context of functioning as a platform for visualizing different situations and learning by practicing solving various problems. In Management Studies, while text books help acquiring more knowledge, Case Studies help in developing wisdom. Case Studies give lot of scope for application of knowledge and mind which is the crux of wisdom. Case studies fix the minds of the students in a specific situation and facilitate them to develop the proper thinking skills, according to Maxwell, will grow into adults ready to face the challenges of their lives.

Schools of business have been most aggressive in the implementation of case based learning, or "active learning" (Boisjoly & DeMichiell, 1994). Harvard University has been a leader in this area, and cases developed by the faculty have been published for use by other institutions. The School of Business at Fairfield University has revised the curriculum so that in place of the individual longitudinal courses in the areas of Management, Marketing, Operations, Finance, and Information Systems, students take one course. That course is designed around cases that encompass those disciplines, but are presented in an integrated manner. The students are therefore made aware of the interrelatedness of the various disciplines and begin to think in terms of wider problems and solutions. Later courses add the international dimension to the overall picture.

Kolhapur and other Business Schools are widely using case study method of teaching in their MBA Programme. They made case method of teaching as Mandatory in their MBA Curriculum.

Case studies have been used to develop critical thinking (Alvarez, et al., 1990). The unit of analysis is a critical factor in the case study. It is typically a system of action rather than an individual or group of individuals. Case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined.

The case method allows the students to create mental structures and frameworks of a particular situation and a feeling of the context under which decisions are to be taken. In a management case study, the contexts are dynamic— either the technology shifts or competition makes new moves or the government policy undergoes a change. This calls for managerial judgments on a continual basis.

The most crucial element of management education is developing the student’s ability to critically evaluate information and ‘think.’ The student must acquire skills that enable him to form a view of the future (call it an element of foresight) and then be able to act upon it to profit from the coming opportunity. The children who have acquired proper thinking skills, according to Maxwell, will grow into adults ready to face the challenges of their lives.

The purpose of the case method is to bring into the classroom “a chunk of reality, ” which is complex and multi faced, it follows that teaching cases should present, as a whole, a balanced view of the many dimensions of the organizational life. The "truthfulness" of teaching cases should be evaluated from multiple theoretical perspectives that collectively represent all fundamental aspects of organizational life.

From the student's point of view, the case study method provides a number of important action-oriented skills. It differs markedly from more traditional text by reading a case study-or research-based learning experiences. While the student may begin by reading a case study, the real learning takes place in the preparation of an analysis and in the presentation of one’s own observation s to the class.

Cases can be analyzed in two ways (1) Static and (2) Dynamic. In static analysis, the situation should be fully understood along with the environment which prevailed during the occurrence of the case; the resources that were available at that point of time should be fully assessed. Then the solution should be suggested based on that particular situation subject to resource constraints.

In the dynamic method of case analysis, one has to visualize the situation at the current point of time.
Advantages of Case Studies

i. Case studies improve creativity and innovations in decision making.

ii. Case studies fix the minds of the students in a specific situation and facilitate them to develop the art of making smart decisions by practicing.

iii. Case studies enable the students to visualize real life situations in the organization and facilitate the students in making trial and error attempts to solve the issues.

iv. Case studies simulate organizational situations, requiring strategic as well as tactical decisions.

v. Case studies require the students to position themselves amidst the given situation and demand their wisdom to come out.

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Pit Falls in Usage of Case Studies

i. Case study method requires serious involvement both from the teacher as well as the students; unless everyone takes it seriously, the outcome cannot be productive. At times, it may turn counter-productive.

ii. Every case is unique and more so the solutions. It is dangerous to generalize and apply them universally.

iii. Optimal solutions are always dependant on resources available at that point of time. Decisions may need to be modified at a later date because there is bound to be some change in the resources which are dynamic.

iv. It is always easier said than done. It is very easy to stand off and suggest on matters which do not affect us immediately; but it is very difficult to make even simple decisions when we are under tense situations, pressuring our minds which may not work at times of real crisis.

v. Cases should not be over used since the students might have already known the best answers. Giving them new cases will be possible only if we have a storage of good cases which are updated.

vi. Serious problems in real life situations need serious attention and enormous thinking; solutions may not be that much simple, which can be arrived at by theoretical analysis.

ROLE OF FACULTY

In tune with the above observations, the teacher’s in a case study does not throw information at the class; instead, he actively participates in clearing (and creating!) the ‘ambiguities.’ It is quite possible that a case may be comprehensive enough to be used to teach several dimensions of management in multiple courses. Therefore, at times, the teacher’s role may require directing and channelizing the discussion (lest it would go adrift from the main theme). One of the main skills lies in bringing out newer perspectives to the case by encouraging students to share their personal experiences. He/she may allow two main groups holding opposite positions to ‘muscle it out.’ The class, therefore, not only hums with enjoyable action, but in the process, ‘tells’ the students about the importance of respecting others’ perspectives, the need for negotiations, consensus, and compromise, and importantly that no one solution is the ‘best’ solution for all times to come.

Conclusion:

Case study method compliments the academic delivery and adds value to the text book teaching. Text books and other teaching methods help to acquire more knowledge in the subjects while case studies provide for application of that knowledge. Therefore, in spite of arguments against its usage, the case study method makes the subject to come alive. Moreover, case studies inculcate the habit of logical approach rather than theoretical approach to any problem. Lastly, Indian philosophies have stood valid even after several centuries. On the same lines, adoption of different forms of case study methods in teaching in India since ancient times itself highlights the relevance of Case Studies in Management Education.

In the present turbulent environment, most of the Business School’s including State Govt. Universities, Private Business Schools and all are extensively adopting the Case Study method of teaching as one of the tool to gain competitive advantage on others.

References


