
CHAPTER 2

Cases and their Types

Learning Objectives

After completion of this unit, the students will be aware of the following topic:

- *Classification of Cases*

What is a case? The question has no single acceptable answer. Reproduced below are some of the descriptions for a case obtained from diverse sources:

- the written procedures followed or problems being encountered within a business. (Batty, 1966)
- Case discussion - real or simulated complex problems are analysed in detail for students to suggest their own solutions or decisions. (Bligh, 1971)
- A case, short for case history, is a description of a situation. (Easton, 1982)
- Case Study: an in-depth examination of a real life or simulated situation carried out in order to illustrate particular characteristics - either characteristics specific to the case being studied or more general characteristics of the wider set to which it belongs. (Ellington and Harris 1986)
- Case study, method of studying social phenomena through the analysis of a particular set of circumstances. The case may involve an individual, group, institution, process or community, or any other social unit. Everything relevant to the case is studied in an attempt to make an intensive and detailed analysis. Case studies are widely used in teaching law, business and public administration. They are also used in scientific research, though they have been called unscientific because they do not develop testable generalisations. Case studies, however, may provide preliminary categories and variables that can then be tested statistically. Generalisations from statistical analysis may also be examined in detail through individual cases." (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1979)
- Case Study: a method of teaching in which a situation is presented to students by means of film or document as a basic discussion. (Gordon and Lawton, 1984)
- Essentially the case study method consists of a particular example (what it is an example of depends on the subject). It usually involves consideration of an actual example requiring the synthesis of a large amount of different kinds of information, and the making of recommendations or decisions. It is applicable in law, medicine, education, business studies, politics, English or any subject that studies the making of decisions. Because it is appropriate for the study of complex interactions or principles, it could be used by teachers in almost any subject. It is useful for demonstrating the application of principles for practising the analysis of complex situations. (Kletz, 1970)
- a short description, in words and numbers, of an actual management situation. (Reynolds, 1980)

As can be seen from the definitions quoted, case method can be considered as a method for practising problem solving which is applicable in any subject which has problems - the answer may be a single one, a variety of possible options, or there may be no answer at all.

Our view in this monograph shall however be confined to looking at the use of the case method predominantly within the area of business management education - that is, keeping to the more traditional area for the use of the case study.

CLASSIFICATION OF CASES

Attempts have also been made to categorise cases into particular types. Simmons (1975) has suggested the following classification for cases:

- Exercise cases
- Situation cases
- Complex cases
- Decision cases
- In-tray cases
- Critical incident cases
- Role-play cases

Simmons explained these types of cases as under:

The Exercise Case

Where the application and practice of particular techniques is needed, particularly quantitative techniques. It is suggested that this type of cases develop technical and analytical capabilities.

The Situation Case

Describes (fairly clear) issues in events which are either successes or failures, but the issues are often not those stated by the characters in the case, so that such statements need to be looked at critically in the light of other evidence.

The Complex Case

A situation case where the problem is to diagnose the underlying issues, which are difficult to distinguish as they are mixed with a number of other interdependent but superficial issues in a mass of irrelevant data.

The Decision Case

Requires the learner to analyse a situation, exercise judgement and make suggestions as to what to do in the circumstances described. Essentially, a decision has to be made in the light of uncertainty. This also requires the formulation of an action plan.

The In-tray case

A variation of the decision case consisting of documents that an administrator might find in the in-tray. Some background information is provided and the learner is allowed a limited - though usually inadequate - amount of time in which to determine and record action to be taken on each of the documents. This is intended to develop administrative and managerial skills.

The Critical Incident Case

An item of information is provided about a situation. If the learner then asks the right questions, more data is supplied, in a variety of possible forms and the case situation can be understood, perhaps leading to suggestions for action.

The Sequential Case

The action is stopped at a critical point in the story and the learner is required to predict outcomes or suggest courses of action. The story is then continued and the reasons for any differences between the forecasts and what actually happened are analysed.

The Role Play Case

This is in effect a 'live' case study. A player receives an outline of the role that he/she has been designated to play. This person will assume this agreed role during the case study. The characterisation of the role is then developed as the player sees fit. Once the characterisation of the role is developed, it cannot be changed while the game or role is in progress.

An alternative description of the 'live' case method is that it is a report of events that have just happened or are still in process. This should be compared with the so-called True Live Case Method (as described later in this section).

There is another classification suggested by Tixier and Berridge (1985) for the identification and generation of case material:

- Learning need method
- Concept illustration method
- Consultancy method
- Research material method
- The Interesting or Oddball situation

Most commonly used
Accidental learning
Highered notes
Agencies, journals, etc.
Highered notes
Vocational education (but not business schools)

The Learning Need Method

Centered on the requirement to develop material that will allow students to acquire or increase a skill.

The Concept Illustration Method

In which the case teacher fulfils a need to illustrate, put into operation (perhaps to simplify, perhaps to deepen) a concept, so that students can apply an abstraction to concrete instances.

The Consultancy Method

In which very realistic and topical material can be presented to students as a means of simulating 'sharp-end' situations and inculcating suitable attitudes and beliefs, often of a deterministic nature.

The Research Material Method

In which research data are presented to students in the hope of developing insights through joint teacher-student analysis.

The Interesting or Odd-ball Situation

Which may have proved insoluble in practice and which is written up as a case, which provides a challenge to students. It does not merit the label of a 'method'.

The extent to which a particular method of case generation is used will reflect variation in the definitions of students' needs, as shown below:

Table 2.1

Type of case	Definition of students' needs	Most commonly used in
Learning Need Method	Pragmatic, practical, problem solving	Vocational training
Concept Illustration Method	Abstract, conceptual, analytical	Higher education
Consultancy Method	Pragmatic, practical, problem solving	Aggressive business cultures
Research Material Method	Abstract, conceptual, analytical	Higher education
The Interesting or Odd-ball Situation	Difficult to categorise	Vocational education (but may be difficult to teach)

There are varieties of ways in which cases can be classified; those given above are merely examples, not definitive categorisations. Further cases and types of cases are continually being developed. Leenders and Erskine (1978) state that,

"New cases are as essential to the case method as new blood to a donor clinic. There are many reasons for the continuing development of new cases. Cases become obsolete. Student and faculty interest can be maintained primarily with current material. New problem areas, new theories and new subject approaches need to be exposed. All cases are dated. The environment within which the organisation exists changes after the case has been written".

An example is the True Live Case Method, devised in part to combat the lack of practical effect of correctness or otherwise of a decision might have. A live case (in business and management) is usually a present and future oriented case, presented jointly by people from an organisation and the trainer, and which focuses on present-day problems which have emerged in a real life organisation and on which decisions need to be made. It encourages a greater sense of responsibility in that the trainees' proposals may be of sufficient value to the firm for them to be implemented.

Indian Institute of Management at Ahmedabad has been experimenting with this method for some time now.