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Case Method of Teaching in Management Education



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Abstract

Case method of teaching has been a significant innovation of Harvard Business School (HBS) to help develop managerial competencies in the participants of management education programmes. The use of case studies in management education is now universal and ubiquitous. This method of teaching is now taken for granted by the B-schools. The case method brings the field to the class and provides an opportunity to the participants to get involved in real life situations. It is a powerful student - centered teaching method that can impart students with critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills. The objective of this articles is to highlight the utility of the case study as a teaching pedagogy. In this study, the literature related to the case study method was examined. This article explains the concept of case study method, its origin, its advantages and its limitations. It also describes the instructor's role and participant's role in case method of teaching.

Key Words : Management Education, Case Study Method, Instructor's Role, Participant's Role.

1. Introduction

Case study method is a powerful student - centered teaching method that can impart students with critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills. Case studies are by their nature, multidisciplinary, and allow the application of theoretical concepts. It helps in bridging the gap between theories and practice. Case method increases student proficiency

with written and oral communication as well as collaboration and team work. Daly (2002) states that case studies force students into real life situations and train them in managerial skills such as holding a meeting, negotiating a contact, giving a presentation etc.

Management education is under multiple pressures; pressure from business school leaders for profitability and reputation, pressure from students for clarity, consistency and personalization, and pressure from employers for relevance. The choice of appropriate teaching method is a key aspect of course success and satisfying the demands of multiple stakeholders. Management education is dynamic in nature and need diverse information to handle different management problems. Management students should undergo in depth training to learn management concepts. To understand the peculiar situations and to handle them effectively, case studies are widely used. The case study teaching method is highly adaptable style of teaching that involves problem based learning and promotes the development of analytical skills (Bonney, 2015). Faculty from a number of institutions have reported that using case studies promotes critical thinking, learning, and participation among students, especially in terms of the ability to view an issue from multiple perspectives and to grasp the practical application of core course components.

The graduate business schools at Harvard, University of Virginia, University of Navarra (IESE Business School), HEC Montreals, and the University of Western Ontario are well known for their commitment to the case method and their extensive case libraries. Teaching case studies are also used in nursing, information systems, education, sociology, public administration and other disciplines. Additionally, teaching cases are used in professional training outside academia (Giulioni & Voloshin, 2014). The case study method is a teaching method that enables students to acquire the knowledge and skills to deal with the problem they are working on and to produce information based solution in real life situations similar to the situations they are working with. This method is used to help the students find effective solutions to problems they encounter in similar real life situations in a shorter time.

2. Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study is to examine the theoretical aspects of case study teaching method in management education. The specific objectives of the study are as under :

- To examine the concept of case study method.
- To trace out the origin of case study method.
- To assess the advantages and limitations of case study method.
- To examine the instructor's role and participant's role in case study method.

3. Methodology of the study

This paper is based on extensive review of literatures related to case study method of teaching. For this purpose, various research articles on case study method at national and international level, working papers, e-papers, and text books are reviewed carefully. This paper is theoretical analysis of case study method. Hence, this study is descriptive in nature based on information from secondary sources.

4. Literature Review

The case study is a method which provides descriptive situations which stimulate students to make decisions. The purpose of case method is to make students apply what they know, develop new ideas to manage a situation or solve a problem. The case study method can be used to develop decision making skills, enhance team spirit, better communication and interpersonal skills as well as to strengthen analytical skills of students. The most critical task of management education is not about teaching students analytical tools but developing appropriate "mental models". Banning (2003) explains that the case study method plays an essential role in management education. Shapiro (1984) describes that 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. Jakka & Mantha (2012) describes that 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 platform for visualizing different situations and learning by practicing solving various problems.

Bonoma (1985) describes that a management case is a written description of a real situation involving real people in a real organization (whether for profit, non-profit or governmental). Thus, the unit of analysis is usually the organization, and the study describes an issue, problem or challenge whether already solved or yet to be solved. Jain (2005) states that the use of case studies in management education is now universal and ubiquitous. So much so, this pedagogy is now taken for granted by the B-schools.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction to case method of teaching

A case, as a learning tool in management, is a description of a problem / issue that a manager actually faced. It is not a hypothetical illustration. Whether the source is disclosed or masked, the case is riveted to an actual situation. The case description stops when the problem / issue is posed. It does not describe what the manager did. How to solve the problems, what decisions to take, what concepts to draw upon, and what tools and techniques to use are left to participants to discover. A case is a narrative of selected aspects of an actual

situation faced by a manager in the real world presented in such a way that it interests and challenges the students. A case is not meant to highlight successful or unsuccessful handling of management problems / issues. Cases usually contain a description of a business situation that leads to a decision point. Students consider the information presented in the case, develop action alternatives, analysis the effect of each of the alternatives and recommend a path to take.

The case method refers to the use of a sequence of cases in a course curriculum which enables the student to get into the heart of subject and its practice with all complexities of the real world. The course material or curriculum may include theoretical readings, but the main focus of the course and class discussion is the case. The objective of case method is to introduce a measure of realism to business education. A case approach forces you to deal with problems as they actually occur in a business or a not for - profit organization. Each case is simply a written description of factors surrounding a particular business situation. With the case approach, it is your duty to develop solutions to the problem. A case is a description of an actual situation and it usually involves a challenging situations or dilemma which requires analysis of the situation and the environment and leads to decision making. The case study does not focus on getting the right answer; in fact there never is a single right answer for the case unless it is a mathematical problem. Emphasis is laid on the manner in which the solution is arrived at, the deliberations involved and the practicality of the solution.

In case method of teaching, when students are presented with a case, they place themselves in the role of the decision maker as they read through the situation and identify the problem they are faced with. The next step is to perform the necessary analysis - examining the causes and considering alternative courses of actions to come to a set of recommendations. To get the most out of cases, students read and reflect on the case, and then meet in learning teams before class to "warm up" and discuss their findings with other classmates. In class, students probe underlying issues, compare different alternatives, and finally, suggest courses of action in light of the organization's objectives under the questioning and guidance of instructor.

5.2 Origin of case method teaching

The case study method of teaching has roots in the field of law and medicines. Law schools have case histories as an integral part of their curriculum. In the study of law, notable court decisions have long been discussed by students in the class room, so that students might develop their own sets of rules to apply to similar situations. Similarly, medical education is

not complete without studying patients (medical cases). The case method of learning was first introduced in 1871 by Christopher Langdell in the Harvard Law School.

The first substantial use of cases in the teaching of business subjects is credited to the Harvard Business School, which was founded in 1908. By 1924, the bulk of the instruction in most of the courses in the school was on the case system. Harvard Business School is seen by most as the main proponent of case method teaching, with a heavy, almost exclusive reliance on this method to deliver their graduate MBA course materials. Over the years, HBS has build up a substantial resource of case method materials, including cases, teaching notes and other supporting materials.

In India, Indian Institute of Management, Ahemdabad (IIMA) is one of the pioneers in the use of case method mainly because of its original association with Harvard Business School (HBS). The HBS itself is considered a pioneer in developing case method as a management teaching pedagogy. IMD in Switzerland claims to be using cases for more than 50 years (Jain, 2005). Nowadays, most graduate and undergraduate business schools use case method teaching to some extent, although there are strong options held in the academic world, both pro and con, on the appropriateness of the method for quantitatively oriented subjects.

5.3 Advantages of case method of teaching

Corey (1980) suggests that students can learn inductively through case studies in four ways i.e. learning by discovery; learning through probing, learning through practice and learning by contrast and comparison. Using case study method in the teaching process has many advantages. These advantages are expressed as follows :

- The case study method is a student centered method that enables the students to be active rather than passive.
- It helps in improving the communication skills as well as interpersonal skills of the students.
- If facilities the students to develop decision making and analytical skills.
- With this method, students develop skills such as sophisticated and independent thinking, producing original ideas and constructive discussion.
- Because students have the opportunity to work collaboratively, they can develop discussion, collaboration and social skills.
- By washing on case studies, students can develop multidimensional and critical thinking skills by learning the existence of different solutions to a problem.

- With this method, students may develop the ability to identify and limit the problem, set up solutions for the problem and solve the problem by finding appropriate methods. In other words, students may develop scientific thinking, scientific study and research skills.
- Students can anticipate some problems they may encounter in real life and attempt to solve the problem without falling into pessimism as they face these problems.
- Because case studies are often taken from real life situations, they are concrete, and it is easier to learn concrete facts.
- Case study method enhances the managerial skill of the students.

5.4 Limitations of case method of teaching

While every method used in the teaching process has many advantages, they may have some limitations as well. The limitations of teaching by case study method are as follows:

- Preparing case studies takes a relatively long time and can be difficult to implement in crowded class rooms.
- Case studies require teachers to make good preparations before application.
- Challenges may arise in managing and evaluating debates in the classroom environment.
- It is not possible to achieve learning and teaching objectives if the students are not at a sufficient level of background knowledge and ability about the subject.
- It may be difficult to find a case that is fully relevant to the topic and subject of the course.
- Case study method requires serious involvement both from the instructor as well as the students; unless everyone takes it seriously, the outcome can not be productive.
- Every case is unique and more so the solutions. It is dangerous to generalize and apply them universally.
- 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.
- Optional solutions are always dependent on resources available at the point of time. Decisions may need to be modified at a later date because there is bound to be some changes in the resources which are dynamic.

5.5 Instructor's role

The instructor's has two important roles to fulfill in preparing for and running a case discussion course. The *planning and motivational role* requires that suitable, interesting and appropriate case materials are selected before the start of the course to meet the learning objective of the course. At the first meeting of the course, the instructor must make clear expectations of preparation and state how contribution will be evaluated. To encourage pre-class small group class discussion, the instructor should possibly organize study groups of 3 to 5 students among the class members. The *discussion leader role* focuses on management of the in-class discussion process. There should be a plan for each class to allocate time to discussion elements such as identifying critical issues, industry and organizational factors, and action alternatives. Most of the time in the class should be for students to contribute, rather than the instructor talking. However, the instructor must guide and manage the discussion process with a deft hand, primarily, by asking questions at key stages.

The instructor in a case study does not throw information at the class; instead, he actively participates in clearing (and creating!) the "ambiguities". The instructor's role may require directing and channelizing the discussion. According to Prof. S. Sreenivas Rao, Indian Institute of Management Ahemdabad, the instructor's role is :

- To create conditions and bring in appropriate situations of learning.
- To involve the learner actively.
- To reinforce the consequences of learning.
- To bring in reality into the learning process.
- To widen and deepen participant's thinking by questioning and making them discover answers.
- To guide and moderate the discussion.

5.6 Participant's role

The success of case study teaching depends as the joint effort of the instructor (teacher) and participants (students). To get the best out of case method, following are expected from participants.

(i) No preparation, no class: Participants attending the class without preparation gain very little. Moreover, they become dysfunctional to others learning. They hijack the class discussion asking irrelevant questions.

(ii) Participants go through four stages of learning: First, they individually study the case using the problem-solving framework. They think through what decisions to take, why,

and how, what tools and techniques to use and how, and what concepts are relevant. Second, in small groups they discuss the case to improve upon their individual decision - making process. Third, in the class, under the instructor's guidance, they open up their horizon reckon with realities of life, deepen and sharpen their thinking process and skills of applying tools and techniques and recognize the attitudes that determined decisions in the first two stages. Finally, after the class, they compare and contrast various situations that they had been exposed to in various classes and integrate the new learning with their own experience.

(iii) Without straining in full measure in the whole learning process, they will neither learn themselves nor help others learn. They must discuss and convince others of their views and listen to others to improve their own thinking.

6. Conclusion

Case method is a powerful pedagogy for learning decision - making or problem solving skills. Its approach starts with what is being practiced. Then, it spreads to concepts, tools / techniques, and attitudes. The success of case method of teaching depends on active participation of both instructor and students. Case method teaching can fulfill a major role in management courses. Courses such as marketing, human resource management, business policy, strategic management, organizational behavior, managerial communication and others can benefit from the use of case method teaching. The case method as a teaching pedagogy improves the comprehensive quality of the teaching quality of the teachers and students to meet the demands of various stakeholders. However, there should be a clear understanding of the application of the case teaching method and its limitations in the teaching of management course.

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