



ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS FOR EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM CASES

Students of universities and colleges often have very little exposure to real-life situations. On the other hand, subjects like social science, management, and humanities require students to analyse real-life problems to master decision-making when they join the industry. Case studies, often referred to simply as *cases*, are commonly used in business schools and similar institutions as instructional tools. Case studies present specific business scenarios or challenges, serving as metaphors or representations of broader, more general business issues. When students are assigned a case, they are expected to analyze the situation and make decisions as if they are the key decision-maker in the scenario—this role is known as the *case protagonist*. This approach helps students to develop critical thinking, strategic analysis, and decision-making skills by immersing them in real-world business contexts.

A well-crafted case should provide the necessary (critical) information that enables students to grapple with the central problem in a realistic and meaningful way. Additionally, it should present the context and the protagonist with depth and richness, allowing students to fully engage with the situation and its complexities to evaluate the pros and cons of multiple alternatives to make decisions. Such an approach enables the student to identify with the manager and other decision makers in the case, which eventually prepares them to face critical situations in business when they join the industry by obtaining an in-depth understanding of the complexity the real world imposes on choices and decisions. A good case study achieves its learning objectives through a combination of:

1. **A compelling story** that engages students emotionally or intellectually, immerses them in a real scenario, and helps them care about the decisions or dilemmas faced by the protagonist.
2. **Opportunities for analysis and decision-making** by embedding dilemmas, trade-offs, incomplete information, and multiple possible solutions, so that students must actively apply frameworks, tools, or reasoning to arrive at their conclusions or recommendations.

Components of Excellent Teaching Cases

While cases may cover a wide range of topics and substantive areas, they must consistently excel in three critical dimensions:

- **Clarity and Readability:** Cases should be written in a clear, engaging, and accessible style to facilitate ease of understanding for diverse audiences.

- **Discussion Potential:** Each case should be crafted to stimulate thoughtful, productive, and dynamic classroom discussions, encouraging participants to *analyze, debate, and apply concepts*.
- **Intellectual Depth and Learning Value:** Cases must offer intellectual richness and practical relevance, contributing meaningfully to the achievement of clearly defined learning objectives.

To ensure that case studies are clear, engaging, and intellectually stimulating, each case should be thoughtfully designed to incorporate 9 key elements such as authenticity and relevance, focus, clarity, complexity and so on. These elements are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, contributing collectively to the overall effectiveness of the case. While each element plays a distinct role, all are essential, and careful attention should be given to their integration throughout the case development process. The key elements include the following:

i. Authenticity and relevance

To ensure authenticity and practical relevance, ensure the case studies are focused on real individuals, organizations, and events. As a policy, fictional cases or disguised cases are not accepted for publication at present in Gyanodaya. In addition, case studies should be on events/ dilemmas that occurred within the past six years.

ii. Focus

Focus is an important element in the case study as it helps to anchor the narrative around a central managerial problem. A well-crafted case centred on one or more managerially significant, real-world challenges contributes to a deeper understanding of management practice.

The case must present a challenge or dilemma faced by an individual or organization, requiring the formulation of a plan of action and/or decision. Developing a case with a clear focus helps to

- Explains the learning goal by directing attention to the specific decision or dilemma that needs to be understood and resolved.
- Supports critical thinking by encouraging the in-depth analysis of the main issue rather than a shallow approach across many unrelated issues.
- Keep the discussion structured by focusing on the main issue.
- Makes the case memorable since learners are more likely to retain key takeaways when the case has a clear and compelling focal point.

A case without focus can be scattered, and it overwhelms the reader with too many issues, which may weaken the clarity of the intended learning objectives. In a case study, focus can be maintained by

1. Identifying one main decision or conflict encountered by the protagonist
2. Eliminating *unnecessary* subplots or side issues while bringing the ones that are connected to the main issue.
3. Aligning all data and context to support analysis of the central issue.

iii. Completeness

A case study should provide all critical information for students to conduct meaningful analyses independently, without the instructor needing to supply additional data or perform the analyses for them. A complete case makes students to engage fully with the material, while still allowing space for interpretation and discovery when appropriate. Completeness matters because it

- Enables independent analysis by giving opportunity to students for exploring the case, analyse options, and draw conclusions without needing additional information beyond what is provided.
- Builds confidence and engagement by encouraging students to take ownership of the learning process and trust in their analytical skills.
- Promote effective discussion in the classroom as everyone has access to the same comprehensive information.
- Encourage in depth learning, even if some information is not provided in the case. In such cases, information can be derived by connecting other information provided in the text or exhibits.

In a case, completeness can be ensured by

1. Including all necessary background, context, and data within the case itself either in the text or exhibits.
2. Make the case self-contained, avoiding reliance on external readings unless referenced and integrated into the teaching plan.
3. Use exhibits, figures, or multimedia elements to convey complex data or qualitative aspects. For example, videos showing location context, processes, or personalities and perspectives of the protagonist.

iv. Clarity and succinctness

Clarity and succinctness make the dilemma accessible, engaging, and easy to follow. It helps to ensure that students can focus on the core managerial issues without confusion or distraction. A well-written case draws the reader into the situation while maintaining neutrality and narrative flow. Clarity and succinctness help to

- Enhance comprehension as students can quickly grasp the context, key facts, and decision points if the case is written in clear and well-structured sentences.
- Maintains engagement and objectivity in a smooth, well-paced narrative by focusing on analysis rather than opinion.
- Strengthens learning outcomes by facilitating precise discussions, promoting better reasoning, and yielding clear conclusions.

In a case, clarity and succinctness can be achieved

1. If the case is written in a clear and engaging style, **using the past tense** and active voice.
2. Organize content logically, ensuring that each paragraph builds on the previous one and contributes to the central issue.
3. Start with an opening that signals or states what the case is about and why it matters to the protagonist or organization.
4. End with a closing section that sets up the decision or action required, encouraging analysis.
5. Avoid unnecessary or inconsistent information that doesn't support the learning objectives.
6. Ensure that the case authors remain neutral regarding the entire situation and do not provide their own thoughts and judgments in the case.

v. Engagement

Engagement is a vital element in the case study because it captures the attention of the students and motivates them to actively participate in the learning process by empathizing with the protagonist and thinking critically about real-world challenges.

In a case study, engagement can be created by

1. Present the narrative with a strong sense of momentum, ensuring a dynamic progression that maintains student engagement and builds toward key decision points.
2. The narrative should be based on real-world business scenarios involving high-stakes decisions with substantial consequences.
3. Mentioning the dilemmas/challenges in multiple sections of the case. It facilitates the reader to strongly identify with the key factors, their challenges, situations, and business context, by promoting intellectual curiosity and emotional involvement via preparation and participation by students.
4. Focus on topics and situations that are relevant to the time. For example, sustainability, AI diversity, or crisis management

vi. Controversy

Controversy is an essential element in a case study because it introduces tension, disagreement, or competing interests that spark critical thinking and lively discussion. It pushes students to grapple with real-world ambiguity, assess multiple viewpoints, and make judgment calls in uncertain or politically sensitive situations. It challenges students to think harder, speak up, and defend their reasoning in a way that prepares them for the real decisions they'll face as leaders.

1. Controversy can be introduced into a case by presenting conflicting stakeholder interests, such as a clash between shareholders and employees, or between social responsibility and profitability, etc.
2. Providing multiple perspectives of the involved parties on the same problem.

3. Use dialogue, quotes, or data that reveal tension or disagreement between key players.

vii. Complexity

A complex case challenges students to connect information, uncover hidden insights, and make decisions without obvious solutions. It can be achieved by

1. Create cases on complex, multi-dimensional real-world issues without easy answers where analysis and solutions would diverge in class discussion.
2. Avoid presenting obvious answers. Hide them under a different section or between the text and exhibits. For example, the author may like to mention the market size in the 'Industry Background' section, while providing sales of the company in 'About Company' section, providing a complexity to the students to calculate the market share of the company, taking data from two different sources.
3. Develop cases on dilemmas that are difficult to resolve, with trade-offs and uncertain consequences, forcing students to balance risks, values, and incomplete information.

viii. Robustness

Robustness ensures the case supports rigorous, high-quality analysis that challenges students intellectually while remaining manageable within the available time. A robust case pushes learners to conduct high-quality analysis, make arguments for different positions or perspectives, and promote critical reasoning. Robustness can be ensured in a case by

1. Including ample data and background information that allows for both qualitative and quantitative analysis, such as financial figures, industry trends, and stakeholder perspectives.
2. Design problems that require trade-offs. For example, balancing profitability with ethics, or growth with sustainability.
3. Formulate problems that highlight non-economic trade-offs. For instance, balancing employee well-being with organizational performance, or fostering corporate social responsibility while managing stakeholder expectations.

ix. Intellectual richness

Intellectual richness stimulates deep thinking, encourages diverse interpretations, and enables in-depth decision-making to explore broader themes, insights, and learning opportunities. It can be introduced into a case study by

1. Using real-world scenarios that incorporate new technologies, business models, or global challenges to illustrate timely and relevant insights.
2. Present the material in innovative formats, such as using multimedia or decision trees to enhance the learning experience and to achieve learning objectives.
3. Embed conceptual frameworks subtly within the narrative or exhibits, allowing students to "discover" them during analysis rather than being told directly.

References:

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4. The Case Centre. (2025, June 17). *Webinar - Competitive case writing: Preparing for our competitions* [Video]. Vimeo.