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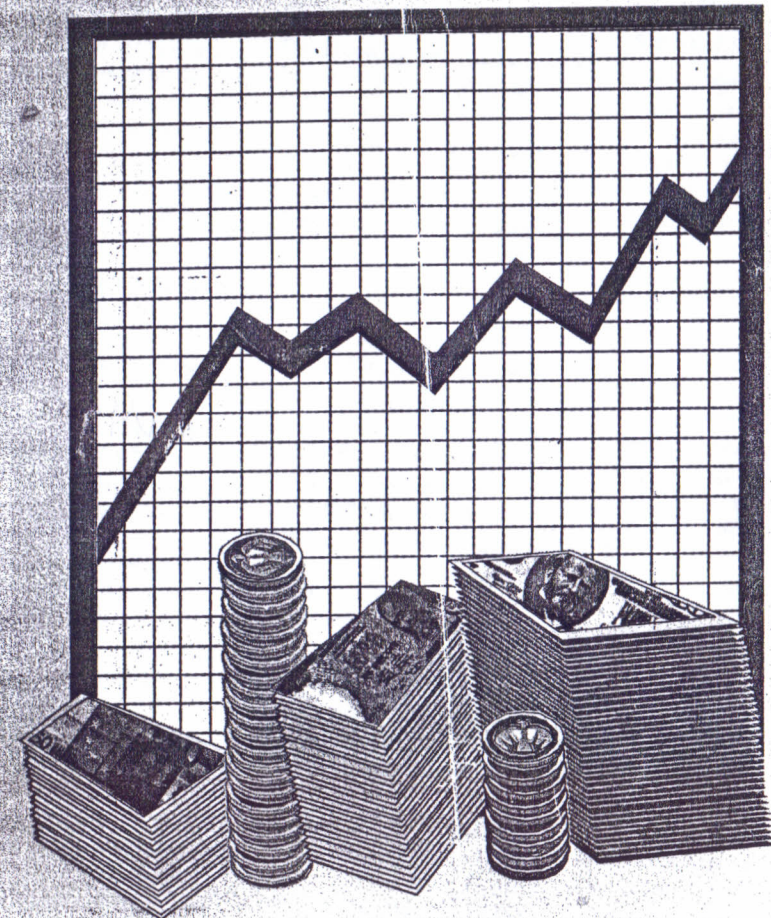
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CASE STUDY METHOD OF TEACHING

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The case method is different from other methods of teaching because it requires that students take an active role rather than a passive one. The case method places the student in a simulated business environment and substitutes the student in the place of the business manager to make a set of decisions.

The student is required to determine the problem as well as the solution. This method of teaching thus shifts much of the responsibility to the student and a great deal of effort is required on the part of the student. In this background, the present paper attempts to discuss the various issues relating to case study method of teachers.

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In the case method, the process of arriving at an answer is more important than the answer. The

instructor's expectation is that the student will develop an ability to make decisions, to support those decisions with appropriate analysis, and to learn to communicate ideas both orally and in writing. A case study is a written description of actual managerial problems, situations and events. It provides factual information about an industry, an organization, its products and markets, its competitive position, its financial, structural and economic data in essence. A case study provides a simulation of various organizational problems facing managers on a daily basis. The Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration did substantial path-breaking work by introducing the case study method of teaching in man-

agement education. This technique has been incorporated in the curriculum of that institution for over six decades now. Many management gurus have been making extensive use of this technique and have successfully taught complete management syllabus by this method alone. The International Labour Office, Geneva has further privileged this technique in recent years.

Indian Scene

In India, a lot of work on case studies was done by the Administrative Staff College, Hyderabad, Sri Ram Center for Industrial Relations and HRD, New Delhi. A number of business schools like Indian Institute of Management, have also been associated with the growth of this technique. Evolv-

ing solutions through the case studies was popularized from 1991 through the management pages of some magazines.

Types of Case Study

Generally there are two case studies 1) Case studies about corporate struggles to overcome different situations and 2) Case studies that need to be solved by the participants, or students of business schools or practicing managers. The first type of case studies are for reading and citing as examples to illustrate important points during management studies. Many such cases are available in textbooks, i.e. case studies that need to be solved by the trainee managers.

Characteristics of a Good Case Study

The following are important characteristics of case study

- 1) A good case study should present a problem, which is centered around a critical management issue rather than around personal dilemmas.
- 2) It should use an ordinary and familiar environment to present extraordinary problems.
- 3) The problems must be narrated in an interesting manner and by avoiding a cut and dry approach.
- 4) The case narrative must contain a deliberate mixture of relevant and not so important facts so as to give the participants a chance to sieve and evaluate the information.

Steps for Solving a Case Study

The process of solving case study consists of four basic steps

as detailed below.

- 1) Study
- 2) Contemplate
- 3) Decide
- 4) Implement

Activities involved in these steps

The following activities are involved in the case study method of teaching.

- 1) Read the case study quickly to become familiar with the topic, characters/leading players and to form an idea about the basic problem/objectives.
- 2) Read it second time, slowly and deliberately and prepare notes keeping in mind the basic problems and objectives.

a) The notes should consist of Statements that would help the definition of the problem more accurately set goals and nature of decisions required.

b) Statements that would help the formulation of solutions to tackle the problem rather than the symptoms.

c) Statements which would help to understand the environment in which the case is contextualised by noting down constraints, opportunities, resources, etc.,

3) A good case study would highlight the real life problem and adequate information about the problem which the managers seek to solve. The student, therefore, must identify the shortfall of information and make realistic assumptions in the light of the environment established earlier. Incidentally, the participants

must develop the skill of taking time-bound decisions and learn to solve the case in the given time frame. This will help acquire skills for reaching decisions in actual life i.e. under pressure of time and often on data which is insufficient

4) Evaluate the effect of each alternative i.e. think about the outcome of each action/alternative. A student normally may not be able to think of all the alternatives and he cannot be certain about the outcome. Thus, an important aim of this technique is to develop these skills.

5) The student should evaluate all the alternatives he had listed earlier and should choose the alternative which would help achieve the desired objectives in the best possible manner. Real life complex managerial problems do not have one correct answer. The answers could even change with time and place. The underlying idea therefore is to develop a logical argument.

6) The selected alternative has to be implemented through actions having measurable outputs. A feedback system should thus be developed to ensure that implementation of the proposed actions is proceeding as planned and the results obtained so far do not call for a mid-course correction. Corrections should be generated if there are variations between the results obtained and those visualized during planning.

are discussed above to a condition where for a manager is required the case individually and independently. There can be two variations to this approach. First, solution may be developed in a classroom with the help of a teacher and second, a syndicate may tackle a case.

Classroom Approach

Students should be given the narrative before hand so that they can complete the reading and understand the narrative of the case study before they enter the class. The teacher could either call every student to individually present his entire analysis or invite different students to discuss specific aspects. The teacher must ensure that the basics of the case study solution technique have been covered in the class and the students are familiar with the method. The teacher should act as a facilitator and help develop a unanimous solution if possible.

The Syndicate Approach

The syndicate should be encouraged to act as a team to promote learning group interaction. The teacher need not be present during the deliberations of the syndicate, to enable quiet students to open up. Different members in the syndicate bring different specializations into the discussion and each participant would benefit by listening to the arguments of other syndicate members. Participants may be able to ask questions in a smaller group and appreciate the differing approaches of fellow participants. This would reinforce the statement that there is no single solution case studies. The selection of the spokesman

of the syndicate and presentations may be conducted as suggested for the classroom working.

Report Writing under Case Study

The solution of a case study is finally presented through a written report. Some important points for writing the report are summarized below.

- ◆ Clearly identify the problem, the environment in which the case study has been developed and the alternative solutions considered. The final recommendations should be brought out in the report.
- ◆ Facts, charts, graphs, etc., which support or explain the arguments should be included. Appendices may be used for long write up.
- ◆ All possible alternatives need not be included.
- ◆ The report must clearly show how the present situation falls short of the desired results and how the recommended actions are the best course for achieving the objective.
- ◆ The length of the report will depend on:
 - a) The word-limit laid down or time available for writing the report.
 - b) The report can be smaller if the inferences can be directly derived from the facts given in the narrative. However, if the inferences have to be developed/ based on assumptions, then the report will be longer.
 - c) The report will be short if the approach/ recommendations are conventional. Unconven-

tional solutions would require longer explanations to bring out the logic.

- ◆ A summary of the report containing the problem, the recommendations, facts, charts, graphs, possible alternatives and important reasons should be written in the report.

Advantages of Case Study Method

The advantages of case study method are:

Comprehension

An important requirement of solving a case study is to read the case study narrative, at least, twice so as to fully comprehend the details. Continued and regular solving of case studies will therefore improve comprehension ability.

Objectives

The ability to clearly identify the problem/ objectives is essential. The student must focus on the objectives and not on the symptoms. The ability to penetrate case study helps the students to reach the basic objectives.

Relevant Information

The case study solving technique builds up the ability to search for information, relevant to the objectives, from the narrative. The ability to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant is an important and useful skill for a manager.

Evaluate Facts

The student develops the ability of analyzing and evaluating the facts as obtained from the case study narrative.

Making Assumptions

Neither a manager in real life nor a

student solving a case would have access to all the needed data. Solving case studies teach the management trainee to make realistic assumptions, which should be in line with the environment in which these have been developed.

Rigorous Analytical Skills

Analyzing data and evaluating various alternatives develop rigorous analytical skills.

Decision-Making Abilities

Solving case studies require making decisions. Repetitive decision-making and getting feedback about the correctness of the decision or its drawbacks improves the students' ability to make correct and quick decisions.

Managerial Concepts

The student learns to apply management principles to problems of daily life. He may be forced to develop some concept of his own. It is perhaps the best way to understand management principles.

Generates Creativity

Cases cannot be solved by logic alone. Creativity is essential and gets developed while solving cases.

Extends Experience of Role Playing

The student must project the personalities of major players in the case study as to visualize the effects of different alternatives being evaluated and assign suitable importance to the statements and actions attributed to different players in the narrative.

Understanding Managerial Problems

Case studies illustrate the type of problems likely to be faced by the student during his life as a manager. He appreciates how issues are linked, counter – pressures develop and so on.

Slow Speed Zero Risk Activity

The student gets acquainted with business life at a slow and understandable speed and learns to take actions in a zero risk environment. It is easier to graduate from case studies to real life.

Differing Situations

Student learns that no two situations are alike and that a solution, good under one set of conditions, could be wrong in another situation.

Not Applicable to Management Alone

The technique of solving case studies is not applicable to any one special field of management or even to the field of management alone. Case studies in the book will illustrate this point further.

More Interesting

Case studies are more interesting than abstract theoretical learning.

Teaches Team Spirit

Working as a syndicate teaches the need to work as a team.

Enhances Competence

Solving cases enhance all faculties and therefore total competence is built up.

Improvement of communication Skills

Written communication skills are improved during classroom/

syndicate work and through report writing.

Time Management

Case studies normally have to be solved within a specific time frame. Solving case studies therefore develops time management skills among the participants.

Conclusion

In India, the case study method of teaching has been adopted in a limited way. The growth of this method has suffered in the country due to shortage of case studies especially in areas of HRD, industrial relations, financial management etc., Non availability of properly trained faculty has also been responsible for its slow growth. As a result, our domestic educational institutions have reduced the use of this excellent mode of teaching management. Some institutions use case studies in the US & European environment. However, required arrangements could be made to provide case studies in Indian environment also and fruits of case study method could reach our students also.

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