

# SMART

## JOURNAL OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT STUDIES

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Vol.2

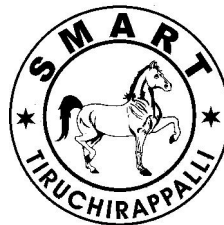
No. 2

July - December 2006

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ISSN 0973 - 1598

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**Chief Editor**



SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT AND ADVANCED RESEARCH TRUST  
(SMART)

***TIRUCHIRAPPALLI (INDIA)***

**<http://www.geocities.com/smartbard>**

# CASELETS TEACHING IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

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## *Abstract*

*Short cases, increasingly used as teaching aid, are known as caselets. They are popularly used both in B-Schools and in executive education programs. Since it briefly focuses on a specific topic, it is a useful supplement to a lecture. The aim of this article is to share the thoughts on how caselets can be taught effectively in business education.*

## **Introduction**

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 stimulated business environment and substitutes the student in the place of the manager to make a set of business decisions. The student is required to determine the problem as well as the solution. The case study method of teaching transfers much of the responsibility to the students. Now a days the use of caselets in the place of case study method is gaining popularity as a pedagogical tool in management education. It is against this background that the present study attempts to discuss the various issues related to the caselet method of teaching in business education.

## **What is Caselet?**

The caselet is a shorter version of a case study, generally two to three pages in length. The caselets are similar to case studies in that they may either describe a sequence of events or put forth an issue or problem that requires decision-making. The basic objective of caselets is to allow the learners to apply ideas and insights gained from theory to the real-life issues and problems contained in the caselets. This helps the learners to obtain a deeper understanding of all the relevant factors in a particular problem or situation as well as gain insights into the finer nuances of a topic in a particular field of management.

## **Activities Involved in Caselets**

The learners in the classroom should practise the following activities that are involved in the caselets method of teaching.

1. Read the caselets quickly to become familiar with the topic, characters/leading players and to form an idea about the basic problems/objectives
2. Read it second time, slowly and deliberately and prepare notes keeping in mind the basic problems and objectives.
  - a. The notes contain the students' 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 problems rather than the symptoms.
  - c. Statements which would help to understand the environment in which the caselets are conceptualized by noting down constraints, opportunities, resources, etc.,
3. 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 learner - participant must

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

4. Evaluate the effects of each alternative and outcomes of each action/alternative. The students normally may not be able to analyse all the alternatives and outcomes. Thus, an important aim of this technique is to develop the skills of understanding and analyzing the alternatives.
5. Evaluate all the alternatives listed earlier and choose the best alternative which would help to achieve the desired objectives in the best possible manner. Real life managerial problems are complex and they do not have one correct answer. The answer could even change with time and place. The underlying idea therefore is to develop a logical argument.
6. Implement the selected alternative through actions having measurable outputs. A feedback system should thus be developed to ensure that implementation of proposed actions is proceeding as planned and the results obtained so far do not call for a mid-course correction. The corrections should be generated if there are variations between the results obtained and those visualized during planning.

#### **How Caselets aid the Learning Process?**

The caselets aid the learning process in many ways. Some of them are briefly discussed below.

##### **a) Teaching Approach**

The Caselets are one of the important teaching aids for the faculty to adapt the teaching style to the needs of the situation. The comprehensive cases can be replaced with

caselets to help the learners in applying the concepts gathered from the lectures. In short, while cases may be used as a substitute for lectures, caselets may be used as a supplement to the lectures.

##### **b) Logic and Options vs. Facts**

The discussion leading to managerial decision-making is based on the interplay of facts, logic, and opinion. A comprehensive case study encourages the learners to sift through the information provided and identify the relevant facts, and then use logic and opinion to arrive at a set of decisions. The caselets, being brief and focused on the core issue, usually provide only the relevant facts. This forces the learners to add value during the caselet analysis by logically arguing his/her position based on stated opinions, rather than spend time in identifying and summarizing the relevant facts. However, it should also be made very clear to the learners that in real life, such a precise statement of a problem would be an exception rather than the rule.

##### **c) Comparative Study**

The caselets are also useful in the comparative study of a particular topic or industry to illustrate the variations in approaches adopted by different organizations. For instance, a set of three caselets on segmentation could cover three different sectors- consumer goods, industrial products, and services.

##### **d) Specificity and Timeliness**

A caselet helps the learners to relate abstract models and theories to concrete situations and practical experience, and this makes the job of a faculty in the classroom easier. Due to its specificity, the faculty can lead the learners to focus on narrow issues within the topic. Due to its smaller size, a caselet does not eat into the classroom schedule or faculty's time and yet accelerates the learning process. Another

advantage that the caselet offers is its ease of development. To develop a caselet for classroom discussion, the faculty need not spend much time due to its focused approach and brevity. For instance, if a faculty member intends to focus only on the finer nuances of the bidding process in e-procurement, caselets can be quickly developed on reverse auctions in the steel industry.

### **Conclusion**

In India, the caselets method of teaching has been adopted in a limited way. The growth of this method has suffered in the country due to shortage of caselets 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 caselets developed in the US and European environment. However, required arrangements could be made to develop cases in Indian environment and fruits of caselets method could reach our students also.

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