

CASES AND READINGS

CASE STUDY GUIDE

Case studies attempt to bridge the gap between classroom work and real-world situations. Though usually simplified, many cases are based on real-world incidents. The student is expected to sort through the data presented and *separate* relevant and irrelevant facts, *organize* them into a clear summary of the problem, *formulate* possible solutions, and *choose and defend* a particular alternative. As a final step, the student is often asked to design the implementation of the solution. For emphasis, let's repeat in the box below what was just stated:

*separate relevant and irrelevant facts
organize them into a clear summary of
the problem
formulate possible solutions
choose and defend a particular
alternative
design the implementation.*

A Suggested Methodology

There is no single way to develop a case solution. If you know a methodology and you have used it successfully in other courses, you may want to adapt it to use here - with provision for required components as described below. However, if your experience has been with case development in a business law course, note that a business law case is a discussion of a decision (a legal precedent) that has already been made - it is often a study of history. Precedent is not necessarily important in business management. In fact, the argument could be made that the less "history" that is used to develop business solutions, the better! Here is a case plan that is suggested for this course.

A. *Executive Summary & Table of Contents (Required):*

The opening section of the case analysis should provide a short summary of the situation, the recommended solution, a short defense of that solution, and the implementation plan. (Obviously, the executive summary is written last.) The summary helps management identify the major points quickly. An executive summary may be all that your marketing manager will have time to read. Obviously, the summary must be well written and to the point. Normally, in business, executive summaries are one page in length, typed single-spaced. Because our cases are typed double spaced, the summary can be up to two pages long - no longer! **An executive summary will be required for all full written cases.**

The executive summary is followed by a table of contents that directs the reader to backup information in the analysis that supports the statements in the summary. With a well written summary and table of contents, the format of the remainder of the analysis can be of your own design, incorporating, as stated above, methodology used in other courses.

The following steps may assist you in the organization of your case study efforts. If working in groups, the results of your discussions can be organized around these steps. These steps suggest the flow of your analysis and discussion; they are not a required outline.

B. *The Problem:*

Every case requires the identification of the principal problem(s) or question(s). Sometimes, these will be obvious. (Example: "Low sales volume" would not be a problem, but symptomatic of a problem, such as poor sales management or poor promotion, etc.) In our class, guide questions will often be provided to assist in problem identification. Please note that these guide questions are intended to start you on the right path in your analysis and should be the basis of discussion within your case study group.

C. *The Facts:*

Each time you read the case, (and you should read it several times), you will recognize additional facts. Here is a partial list of things to consider. Not all of these points will be present in every case, nor is every possible point covered in this list.

1. How does the situation fit with the mission of the organization?
2. The market and its influence on problem and decision (situation analysis - the "snapshot"); buying habits and motives.
3. The product; what it is, its characteristics, life cycle, and classification.
4. Reaction of sellers, business owners, middlemen/channel participants, buyers, and others and their influence on the situation. What are their expectations? How will changes impact their positions?
5. Competition - types, reaction, probable future action, channel structure, and the impact on the situation. What effect, if any, will competitive retaliation have on the situation?
6. The environmental factors, both of the marketplace and the unique fit of the institutions involved in the case. Not all will be significant to your evaluation, but all should be examined to the degree that their significance is determined.
7. Financial position of the organization. Does it limit options? What can the organization afford? What financial data is in the case that can assist in determining budget constraints?
8. Impact of changes on other product lines, if any.
9. How does the potential customer buy? What is the context of their buying center?

Sometimes data may be presented in tables and graphs, sometimes in the text of the case - usually a combination. Unless otherwise directed, assume that each case will have enough facts to organize and present an intelligent decision. It may help to list the facts you have developed in order of their importance. *If you make assumptions about the case, be sure to state them clearly.* In your paper, do not merely restate the facts of the case. *Do not spend time presenting a pointless summary of what is already written in the case - this will only lower your grade.* Repeat only that

information that is significant in the development of your marketing logic.

D. Your Analysis and Alternatives:

You now have the problem defined and the relevant facts of the case sorted out. Most cases fall into two general categories; those that present a business situation where action has already been taken and an analysis (a postmortem?) is required, and those that describe a situation and require an analysis and development of a next step to reach a goal. In either circumstance, developing alternatives will be necessary.

Often there will be several alternative courses of action - your ideas on what should be done, or what should have been done. Develop a list of these alternatives and examine whether they fit all the conditions of the case. (Perhaps making a table or matrix will help). For example, some alternatives may be inconsistent with the long term goals of the organization. Others may clash with short term limitations, competitive restraints, or legal implications. Establish an evaluation criteria, apply it to each of your alternatives, and identify the restrictions on your freedom to arrive at certain types of solutions. Again - be sure to state clearly any assumptions you make. Your alternatives should be part of your case study.

E. Your Decision and Justification:

From your list of alternatives, select the one that, in your judgement, provides the best solution within the bounds of the problem. Whichever alternative you select, you must be able to demonstrate, with supporting evidence from the case, that this is the best alternative. Note that there may not be just one "best" alternative, but there may be an almost infinite range of wrong answers. An answer is wrong when it is based on faulty logic, facts not presented in the case, jumping to conclusions, failure to consider all available data, and not coinciding with the evaluation criteria you establish. Your process of reaching a decision will demonstrate your analytical ability - and don't worry - you will develop improved skills with each case you examine.

F. Implementation:

Your decision is not complete unless you have a plan to make it work. As you devise your implementation plan, many aspects of the case that you did not fully recognize may become apparent. Things to keep in mind: What personnel will be necessary to carry out the plan? Can you afford them? Is your plan legal? Is there a potential competitive reaction that will require handling? Are other groups in your organization (manufacturing, finance, etc.) on board with the plan? What will happen to the individuals or organizations in your "old way" of doing business once you implement the new plan? *Because of the lack of complete information in most cases, precise answers will not be possible.* However, it is important to recognize what impact your plan will have on the entire organization (a major oversight in many business situations). Most importantly, devising even a limited implementation plan will assist in clearly demonstrating the logic of your decision.

WORKING IN GROUPS

Working in a group is an adult process wherein everyone shares responsibilities and rewards. Group work requires co-equal participation by everyone to create the best results. Individuals should not be "carried" by the rest of the group. Carrying someone can limit the results of the group effort and drag the group down. Essentially, an individual who is willing to be carried is saying to the rest of the group "I don't care enough about you to help with this effort, and I am willing to let you do the work that will earn a grade for me." Don't let this happen in your group. Take a pro- active approach to both your participation and the full participation of other group members.

Here are a few suggestions to help your group achieve the best possible results.

1. Schedule the first meeting about a particular case well in advance of the due date. Pick a location conducive to studious discussion.
2. Thoroughly read the case before the first meeting. Develop thought-provoking questions about the case situation. Your questions at the first meeting can help focus attention on the case situation. The discussion of these questions can lead to new ideas and paths to possible

solutions.

3. Facilitate the discussion of ideas of all group members. Don't minimize ideas that are contrary to your own. Examine the situation and, using good marketing logic, screen ideas that work in the case situation.
4. Don't be shy about your strengths and weaknesses and how you can best contribute to the group.
5. In all group meetings, stay focused - discourage private conversations.
6. Leave the first group meeting with a specific assignment for each member and a plan of action for the entire group. Hold each member responsible for their portion.
7. Meet several times. Student surveys have shown that about four meetings is the minimum for successful case studies.
8. Have a finished first draft completed one week before the paper is due. Don't fall into the trap where each person writes a portion of the case and then all the pieces get stapled together for the final paper. (They might staple well, but they seldom read well.) Critique the draft - does it make sense? Do you understand it? Can you defend it?
9. After the critique of the first draft, meet to agree on necessary modifications and create the final draft.
10. Be willing to ask for help.