
Empowering minds: The power of case studies

Case studies in academics are relevant across fields such as medicine, law, psychology and engineering, writes V Pradeep Kumar.



Case studies have long been heralded as a potent tool for learning across diverse disciplines. iStock Photo

How do we build management students' skills and competencies and prepare them to face career challenges? A dynamic learning methodology involves asking students to delve into complex, real-world corporate examples and encouraging them to propose viable solutions.

Take, for example, the case of a company forced to close a manufacturing unit as a consequence of causing environmental pollution or a beverage manufacturing company pulled up for high pesticide residues. Such case studies are designed to prompt discussions within student groups and propose viable solutions that the company could consider.

The primary objective of employing a case study approach is to illustrate how ethical challenges in business can be systematically analysed. Using real-world scenarios, students are urged to explore the complexities of corporate social responsibility and business decision-making complexities.

Case studies have long been heralded as a potent tool for learning across diverse disciplines. They are a crucial link between theoretical knowledge and its practical application, fostering an engaging and stimulating learning experience.

The concept of case studies traces back to the early 20th century at Harvard Business School, where they were first utilised to dissect intricate business problems. Since then, their utility has expanded across various fields such as medicine, law, psychology, engineering, and education. Typically, case studies present detailed accounts of specific situations, often riddled with dilemmas or challenges, enabling learners to engage deeply with the material and explore multiple perspectives.

How are case studies solved?

The process of using case studies in any field of study typically involves several key steps:

Selection: Educators handpick relevant case studies aligned with the course's learning objectives and subject matter.

Assignment: Student groups are assigned the chosen case study with a comprehensive background narrative for thorough analysis and interpretation.

Analysis: Students often conduct primary or in-depth research to supplement provided information, utilizing various analytical tools. For example, in management case studies, Michael Porter's five forces theory, PESTEL analysis, SWOT analysis, Ansoff's matrix, BCG matrix, etc., are popular tools. This phase involves identifying key issues, stakeholder interests and approaches to potential solutions.

Identification and evaluation of alternatives: Analysing facts and data leads to the emergence of alternative solutions, which students evaluate meticulously, considering costs, benefits, and viability before making their recommendations.

Presentation: The proposed solutions, backed by evidence from research and analysis, must be clear and logical. Every group in the class will present their analysis and recommendations, which are discussed in class and guided by the

educator. Inter-group discussions or debates are facilitated to encourage collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking, and exchanging ideas. Solution: Learners reflect on their analysis, considering the implications of different courses of action and drawing connections to theoretical concepts. The educator provides the actual solution or final strategy implemented in the case of a real-world scenario. This enables students to understand the utility of concepts and strategies and reinforces their learning through practical application.

Benefits of case study methodology

The advantages of employing case studies as a learning methodology are multifaceted:

Real-world relevance: They offer authentic scenarios mirroring professional complexities, enhancing the application of theoretical knowledge.

Critical thinking: By tackling complex problems, students hone critical thinking, analysis, and decision-making skills.

Active learning: Engagement with case studies breaks the monotony of classroom lectures and encourages active participation, questioning, and solution-seeking.

Multidisciplinary learning: Drawing from various disciplines, case studies promote holistic understanding.

Collaborative learning: Group activities foster team-building, peer learning and diverse perspectives.

Considering the immense benefits of case studies in learning, several universities organise case study writing competitions worldwide. Usually open to university faculty members, such competitions provide an exciting opportunity to demonstrate a deeper understanding of real-world challenges and competencies to develop viable solutions.

Interestingly, case studies can be illustrative, exploratory or simply narrating a critical instance in a real situation, providing ample opportunity to ignite creative minds to write meaningful case studies. In addition, universities organise case study-solving competitions to engage and empower students to learn the practical application of concepts and strategies.

Case studies offer a rich and dynamic learning experience that transcends beyond traditional teaching methods. Their value in deep learning and meaningful engagement remains unparalleled. By immersing students in real-world scenarios, educators can cultivate essential critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, preparing learners for success in diverse professional contexts.

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