

Religious Education Support

Second Level Support Service

Case Study

What is a case study?

[Noun] a study of an individual unit, as a person, family, or social group, usually emphasizing developmental issues and relationships with the environment, esp. in order to compare a larger group to the individual unit.

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/case%20study>

1. A detailed analysis of a person or group, especially as a model of medical, psychiatric, psychological, or social phenomena.
2. A detailed intensive study of a unit, such as a corporation or a corporate division, that stresses factors contributing to its success or failure.
 - a careful study of some social unit (as a corporation or division within a corporation) that attempts to determine what factors led to its success or failure
 - a detailed analysis of a person or group from a social or psychological or medical point of view

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition
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Dictionary.com

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A case study allows an opportunity for an aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth. Yin (1994,p137) advises that 'the more a study contains specific propositions, the more it will stay within reasonable limits' (Yin, R.K. 'Designing single – and multiple-case studies', Chapter 10 in N. Bennett, R. Glatter, and R. Levacic (eds) 'Educational Management Through Research Consultancy', London: Paul Chapman Publishing, in association with the Open University, 2004

'Case studies may be carried out to follow up and to put flesh on the bones of a survey. They can also precede a survey as a means of identifying key issues which merit further investigation, but the majority are carried out as free-standing exercises. Researchers identify an 'instance'...Evidence has to be collected systematically, the relationship between variables studied and the investigation methodically planned. Though observation and interviews are most frequently used, no method is excluded'

Judith Bell, 'Doing your Research Project', Berkshire: Open University Press, 2005, p10

All organisations and individuals have their common and their specific features. A case study will try to identify such features and how they interact with one another to show how they affect the implementation of systems or influence particular outcomes. Such processes can potentially be hidden in a survey but may be unearthed in a case study.

Generalisation is not always possible with a case study. However, 'the extent to which findings from a case study can be generalised to other examples in the class depends on how far the case study is similar to others of its type'

Denscombe, M. 'The Good Research Guide for Small-scale Social Research Projects',
Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998, pp36-37

So, for example, a student conducting a case study might obtain data on the significant features under study and then show where the case study example fits in relation to the overall picture.

'An important criterion for judging the merit of a case study is the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his decision making to that described in the case study. The relate-ability of a case study is more important than its generalizability'

Bassey, M. 'Pedagogic research; on the relative merits of the search for generalisation and study of single events', Oxford Review of Education, 7 (1) (pp 73-93), 1981, p85

Case study refers to the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular participant or small group, frequently including the accounts of subjects themselves. A form of qualitative descriptive research, the case study looks intensely at an individual or small participant pool, drawing conclusions only about that participant or group and only in that specific context. Researchers do not focus on the discovery of a universal, generalizable truth, nor do they typically look for cause-effect relationships; instead, emphasis is placed on exploration and description.

<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/research/casestudy/pop2a.cfm>

A case study is basically a study based on the analysis of one or more cases or case histories. E.g. a case could be around a person's commitment to faith. The researcher would need to analyse how and where that person showed commitment to faith. Information will be gathered and organised in a systematic way and then analysed by the researcher.

Stages in a case study might include:

1. Preparation
2. Inquiry
3. Analysis
4. Report

Preparation: This stage investigates the background or context to the case. For example, if conducting a case study on a piece of art the researcher might find out about the artist, when this piece of artwork was painted, under what circumstances was it painted, what factors influenced the artist to paint this piece of art at this particular time, what religious/cultural/social/political background may have influenced the artist, was there any movement in art that was of particular interest to artists at that time, what helped inform his understanding of the subject matter etc. These are just some of the contextual factors that could help 'set the scene' for understanding something about this particular piece of art.

Inquiry: The researcher will investigate various sources to probe more deeply. This may require reading literature or web-based sources for example, recording, interviewing, observation, visiting a place of interest, accessing a wide range of sources and people who can help inform the understanding of this piece of art. Learning about different peoples' perspectives on the topic is valid. The researcher will note which perspectives s/he agrees with and which s/he disagrees with, which raise further questions or interest, which may be biased, which are well-informed etc. Primary and secondary sources of information are valuable here. Is there anything dating from the original time that is relevant to the investigation (primary source)? Are there more modern, second-hand accounts or perspectives that can help build a bigger picture (secondary source)? Does any one have any vested interest in promoting one perspective over another? Are the findings reliable? Do any contradictions emerge or any patterns / similarities / differences? Etc

Analysis: In any analysis the situation is broken down into its component parts, and each part is investigated in order to enhance understanding. The researcher will analyse the facts that s/he has gathered and identify the key issues that emerge.

Report: The researcher will offer a summary of the facts, the inquiry and the analysis. Since the R.E. syllabus structures learning around a framework of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes, these will be conveyed in the report. Researchers will demonstrate their learning, how they have researched and critically engaged with the topic, reflected on it, analysed and drawn conclusions. Questions that emerge are noted and any insights are also noted. How has the investigation helped to deepen the researcher's understanding and/or appreciation of a given topic? What challenges did it present? What understanding / belief did it confirm for the researcher? What questions were left unanswered? What new questions /directions emerged? What assumptions were raised, confirmed or challenged? What alternative views or possibilities emerged that the researcher may not have been aware of at the beginning of the investigation? Reflection on the learning process will show how the engagement has progressed, how the researcher becomes better informed etc. The researcher is exposed to a variety of sources and perspectives and has an opportunity to examine some of these, and to articulate which ones are more appealing than others and why this is so. Conclusions are drawn based on the overall investigation and analysis of the case.

*Lorraine Gillespie
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Writing a case study

A case study is a puzzle that has to be solved. The first thing to remember about writing a case study is that the case should have a **problem** for the readers to solve. The case should have enough information in it that readers can understand what the problem is and, after thinking about it and analyzing the information the readers should be able to come up with a **proposed solution**. Writing an interesting case study is a bit like writing a detective story. You want to keep your readers very interested in the situation. A good case is more than just a description. It is information arranged in such a way that the reader is put in the same position as the case writer was at the beginning when he or she was faced with a new situation and asked to figure out what was going on. A description, on the other hand, arranges all the information, comes to conclusions, tells the reader everything, and the reader really doesn't have to work very hard.

When you write a case, here are some hints on how to do it so that your readers will be challenged, will "experience" the same things you did when you started your investigation, and will have enough information to come to some answers.

There are **three basic steps in case writing**: research, analysis, and the actual writing.

You start with research, but even when you reach the writing stage you may find you need to go back and research even more information.

The Research Phase:

1. **Library and Internet research.** Find out what has been written before, and read the important articles about your case site. When you do this, you may find there is an existing problem that needs solving, or you may find that you have to come up an interesting idea that might or might not work at your case site. Once you have decided on the situation or issue you would like to cover in your case study (and you might have several issues, not just one), then you need to go to the site and talk to experts.

2. **Interview people who know the place or the situation.** Find knowledgeable people to interview.

When you are interviewing people, ask them questions that will help you understand their opinions, questions like the following:

"What is your impression of?"

"How do you feel about the situation?"

"What can you tell me about how the situation developed?"

"What do you think should be different, if anything?"

You also need to ask questions that will give you facts that might not be available from an article, questions like:

"Would you tell me what happens here in a typical day?"

"What kind of statistics do you keep? May I have a copy?"

"How many businesses are involved here?"

When you ask a question that doesn't let someone answer with a "yes" or a "no" you usually get more information. What you are trying to do is get the person to tell you whatever it is that he or she knows and thinks -- even though you don't always know just what that is going to be before you ask the question. Then you can add these facts to your case. Remember, your readers can't go to your site, so you have to "bring it to them."

The Analysis Phase:

1. **Put all the information in one place.** Now you have collected a lot of information from people, from articles and books. You can't include it all. So, you need to think about how to sort through it, take out the excess, and arrange it so that the situation at the case site will be understandable to your readers. Before you can do this, you have to put all the information together where you can see it and analyse what is going on.

2. **Assign sections of material to different people.** Each person or group should try to figure out what is really important, what is happening, and what a case reader would need to know in order to understand the situation.

3. **Try to formulate the case problem in a few sentences.** When you do this, you may find that you need more information. Once you are satisfied with the way you have defined the problem you want your readers to think about, break the problem down into all its parts. Each one represents a piece of the puzzle that needs to be understood before the problem can be solved. Then spend some time discussing these with the others in your group.

Once you have broken down the problem into pieces, you can analyse the information you now have and see if you can think about possible answers to each of the pieces. If you have enough information, then you can think about how to write the case study itself.

Writing the Case Study:

1. **Describe the problem or case question you want the reader to solve.**

In a detective story, the crime happens right at the beginning and the detective has to put together the information to solve it for the rest of the story. In a case, you can start by raising a question. You can, for example, quote someone you interviewed. For example, suppose you interviewed a tourist official and she told you she thought more people should be interested in visiting, and she can't understand why they don't come.

2. **Organize the sections of the case.** You will probably need to organise your information under topics like the following:

a. **Introduction** to the problem

b. **Background on the place** – e.g where is it, how big, what climate, etc. – this part should be a brief, overall description.. Summarise the main features of the place. What makes it special?

c. **Visitors to the place**

d. **Government Policy**

e. **Opportunities in**

f. **Potential employees.**

g. **Implications**

Other sections of the case. Depending on the case you are researching and writing, the sections of the case will need to be organised so that each type of information is in its own section and understandable to the reader.

Conclusion. Your case will need a conclusion. Rather than putting in your answer in the case, leave the reader with some more questions. The whole purpose of writing cases and sharing them with others is to share experience without all of us actually having to be in the same place.

Adapted from:

<http://www.ask.com/bar?q=Writing+a+Good+Case+Study&page=1&qsrc=6&zoom=Sample+%3CKW%3ECase+Study%3C%2FKW%3E%7CFree+%3CKW%3ECase+Study%3C%2FKW%3E+Examples%7COutline+for+%3CKW%3EWriting%3C%2FKW%3E+a+%3CKW%3ECase+Study%3C%2FKW%3E&ab=0&u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.gtpp.org%2Fdocs%2FHowToWriteAGoodCase.pdf>

The Seven Steps of Problem Analysis

1. **Read the case thoroughly.** To understand fully what is happening in a case, it is necessary to read the case carefully and thoroughly. You may want to read the case rather quickly the first time to get an overview of the industry, the company, the people, and the situation. Read the case again more slowly, making notes as you go.
2. **Define the central issue.** Many cases will involve several issues or problems. Identify the most important problems and separate them from the more trivial issues. After identifying what appears to be a major underlying issue, examine related problems in the functional areas.
3. **Define the relevant goals.** Inconsistencies between an organisation's goals and its performance may further highlight the problems discovered in step 2. At the very least, identifying the goals will provide a guide for the remaining analysis.
4. **Identify the constraints to the problem.** The constraints may limit the solutions available to the firm. Constraints have to be considered when suggesting a solution.
5. **Identify all the relevant alternatives.** The list should all the relevant alternatives that could solve the problem(s) that were identified in step 2. Use your creativity in coming up with alternative solutions. Even when solutions are suggested in the case, you may be able to suggest better solutions.
6. **Select the best alternative.** Evaluate each alternative in light of the available information. If you have carefully taken the proceeding five steps, a good solution to the case should be apparent. Resist the temptation to jump to this step early in the case analysis. You will probably miss important facts, misunderstand the problem, or skip what may be the best alternative solution. You will also need to explain the logic you used to choose one alternative and reject the others.
7. **Develop an implementation plan.** The final step in the analysis is to develop a plan for effective implementation of your decision. Don't overlook this step.

The Report

You may be asked by your teacher to give an oral report describing your solution to the case. The high quality of your analysis or the brilliance of your insights will do you little good if your solution is not expressed clearly. The teacher is more likely to accept your solution even if he or she does not agree with it, if you are able to identify the issues, explain the analysis and logic that led you to choose a particular alternative, and lay out a good plan for implementing the decision.

Written Reports

You probably will be asked to write reports for at least some cases. The following guidelines will help you write an effective case analysis. First, in business communications a **short report** is usually considered better than a long report. This does not mean that in your report you can skip key points, but rather that you state relevant points clearly and concisely. Do not include trivial matters.

Second, the report should be well written. It should not contain spelling or grammatical errors. The report you hand in for class should be equivalent in quality to a report you would write for your boss, a senior manager of a company. In the early years of your career, particularly in a large firm, you are likely to become known for the quality of your written reports.

A well-written report would contain the following elements:

1. *Summary.* This is a concisely written statement, less than one page. It briefly summarizes the major points of the case and your solution. It should describe the major issue, the proposed solution, and the logic supporting the solution.
2. *Problem statement.* Present the central issue(s) or major problem(s) in the case here. Do not rehash the facts of the case; assume that anyone reading the report is familiar with the case.
3. *Alternatives.* Discuss all relevant alternatives. Briefly present the major arguments for and against each alternative. Be sure to state your assumptions and the impact of constraints on each alternative.
4. *Conclusion.* Present the analysis and the logic that led you to select a particular solution. Also discuss the reasons you rejected the other alternatives.
5. *Implementation.* Outline a plan of action that will lead to effective implementation of the decision so that the reader can see not only why you chose a particular alternative but how it will work.

Oral Reports

Preparation of an oral case report should include the following:

1. *Description of the case situation.* Present a brief overview of the situation in the case. Sometimes a teacher will ask a student to start off the classroom discussion with this overview.
2. *Problem statement.* Describe the major issue(s) or problem(s) in the case.
3. *Analysis of the key alternatives.* Present the results of your analysis of relevant alternatives in a concise manner.
4. *Conclusion.* Briefly describe the logic that led you to choose the alternative. Summarize why the other alternatives were not chosen.
5. *Implementation.* Present your implementation plan if relevant.

Sometimes the teacher will assign a full-case presentation. In that situation you go through the presentation point by point. In a class discussion setting, however, even though you must be prepared, you will almost never make a full-case presentation. You will be asked to present pieces of your presentation. For example, you may be called upon or volunteer to present your conclusion. You are likely to be interrupted, and count on being asked to defend your statements.

Conclusions

The analysis of case studies may be among the most challenging assignments given to a student. Cases are not just "busy work" given to fill up a student's time. Approached properly, case analysis can be extremely beneficial in giving you a chance to develop decision-making skills in the classroom so that you will be better prepared to meet the challenges of your after-graduation job.

Your decision-making skills will be enhanced as you sift through large volumes of information to identify problems, determine goals, define relevant alternatives, and develop plans to implement decisions. You will hone your ability to apply analytical tools in true-to-life situations. By preparing reports, you will learn how to express yourself succinctly, both orally and in writing. You will also

develop the ability to defend the logic of your analysis and conclusions. These are all valuable skills for a future manager and will help you go a long way in a rewarding career.

Adapted from - Introduction to the Case-Study Method(Adapted from: Seperich, G.J, M.J. Woolverton, J. G. Beierlein and D. E. Hahn, eds., Cases in Agribusiness Management, Gorsuch Scarisbrick, Publishers, Scottsdale, AZ 1996)

Adapted from www.ask.com