

**Saint Leo University**  
**Graduate Business Studies**

**MBA575**  
**Global Business Management**

Case Study Method:  
How to Analyze the Cases

“Real world” cases place the student in a simulated organizational climate as a manager, leader, or non-manager who must make decisions. A case is:

...a story of organizational issues which actually have been faced by people, together with facts, opinions, and prejudices upon which decisions must be made. A key feature of a case is that the decisions which require action must be made.

With the case method, the process of arriving at an answer is more important than the answer itself. It is anticipated that by working through cases the student will develop an understanding of the process of reaching decisions and be able to convincingly support and communicate these decisions to others. Instead of sitting back and reacting to the comments made by an instructor, a student in analyzing cases is asked to make decisions typically with incomplete information and in a limited time period, which is usually the situation faced by most managers.

There are no ideal solutions to any of the cases. Searching for the perfect answer will be futile. Instead, the student should learn to critically and thoroughly think through the issues, problems, facts, and other information presented in the cases. Critical thinking is required to make better decisions. Thorough thinking is needed so that decisions reached can be communicated and intelligently discussed in classroom discussions. Discussions about the cases should clearly illustrate the thinking processes used by a student.

The preparation for discussion of the cases can follow a set pattern. One suggested pattern would be to:

1. Read the case rather quickly to get a feel for what is involved.
2. Reread the case and sort out the assumptions, hunches, and facts. Since all cases are rather incomplete, the student will need to make plausible assumptions about the situation. List them and be able to support the plausibility of the assumptions. These assumptions will enable the student to “fill in the blanks” that exist in the cases. Remember that, in organizations, decisions are generally made with incomplete information and some uncertainty.
3. Identify the major problems and sub-problems which must be considered in the case.
4. List the problems in order of importance or priority. That is, what problems have to be solved first.
5. Develop a list of alternative courses of action that would minimize or eliminate the problems. If possible, have at least two fully developed alternatives which are feasible solutions.
6. In developing the alternative courses of action, outline the constraints (e.g., resources, historical precedent, competition, skill limitations, attitudes) which will limit success.
7. Select the course of action that is best for the problems identified in step 3 above. Show how the course of action would work and be able to discuss why it would be the most successful alternative to solve the problem(s).

The instructor’s role can vary from observer to active participator depending on the instructor’s preference. Whatever role the instructor uses, the steps outlined above will permit the student to integrate book material, personal experiences, and the case information in reaching decisions. In evaluating a student’s case analysis, instructors can evaluate many different factors. It has been suggested that a good case analysis will:

1. Be complete.
2. Avoid rehashing what is in the case.
3. Make feasible and sound assumptions.
4. Accurately identify the main problems.
5. Create good alternative courses of action.
6. Pinpoint potential constraints which could limit the solution selected.
7. Clearly communicate the decision.
8. Illustrate to others how the decision reached can solve the problem(s) present in the case.

Good case analysis requires time and a systematic plan of attack. The payoff is that the student will be able to communicate the student's thinking process. Another benefit will be to apply the content discussed in the book chapters to the case. This application and active involvement are why cases can be insightful, challenging, and interesting.

For more information about the Case Study Method see, Ellet, W. *The Case Study Handbook: How to Read, Discuss, and Write Persuasively About Cases*. Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 2007. (ISBN 13: 978-1-4221-0158-2)