

## When Case Creates Competitive Advantage

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### ABSTRACT

When the academics talk about the case method of teaching, it sounds great. Most of the leading business schools in the world have adopted the case method of learning and teaching. Rests of the business schools also appreciate the outcome of such a pedagogical attitude. In reality, some deep-rooted challenges are evident concerning the case method of teaching. For instance, the literature on case method pedagogy and on how to write a robust teaching or business case is very limited and outdated. Secondly, many of the business schools embraced theoretically case method of teaching, but in practice, either they do have few numbers of trained faculties on the case method of education or they do invest little for faculty capacity building in the domain comparing to the set expectations. Thirdly, most of the available business cases are boring, which fail either to build compelling angel or to get substantial attention to the class. This is, however, not the focus area of the concept paper, but the grounded reality of developing the same. The current round paper emphasizes on case research method, writing and analysis a case, and competitive advantage of case method schooling.

**Learning objective:** The paper intends to make students understood the case research method, tailor how students can confidently write and analyze a business case, and inform readers how the case method schooling can gain a competitive advantage.

**Relevant courses:** BBA - Entrepreneurship Development; BBA and MBA - Strategic Management; MBA - Strategic Marketing; MBA - Strategic Human Resource Management; MBA - Leadership and Management in Organization.

**Theoretical frame:** Case-based pedagogy - Guess (2014), one of the proponents of case-based education, points out that case-based teaching connects students with the complexity come across in the environs of the concerned domain.

**Study method:** The concept paper follows the epistemological view 'Positivism' for the case writing stage, and 'Post-Positivism' for the case analysis stage.

**Keywords:** Analysis; Case; Business; Method; Pedagogy; Research; Writing

### INTRODUCTION

A case is nothing but a story regardless the fact is individual or system or organizational focused. Case method of research is widely accepted in social and medical sciences, psychological study, law and criminal justice study, political, administrative and organizational system and culture learning, and business studies. It is both a research and analysis strategy that either entails an empirical inquiry and investigation of a phenomenon within its real-life context of the entity or makes a systematic

analysis of the facts of the entity with critical reasoning and strategic management approach.

The concept paper follows epistemological view positivism for the case writing stage, and post-positivism for the case analysis stage. Certainly there are rationales for this. Case writing is empiricism and case research method based (i.e. observation, measurement and realism focused) to uncover the truth. Conversely, case analysis is critical realism centric that leads towards the goal of getting fit and relevance in the multiple reality, and thus it requires multiple measures and observations,

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each of which may retain different types of errors. To minimize the effects of unintended measurement errors, case analysis entails systematic analysis upon problem diagnosis to quest for multiple solutions or strategies with the triangulation of internal Strengths and Weaknesses (SW) and external Opportunities and Threats (OT) analysis, termed as Strengths and Weaknesses, and Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis.

**Theoretical frame**

A case study seems to be an empirical inquiry that examines a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life framework, especially when the margins between phenomenon and context are not visibly evident [1]. In this sense it is exploratory and research focused. But in another sense it is descriptive or explanatory that allows making systematic analysis of the facts of the entity within the charter of analytical reasoning, which is supported by Yin.

Although case studies indeed can be used for exploratory purposes, the approach also may be used for either descriptive or explanatory purposes as well-i.e. to describe a situation (e.g., a case history), or to test explanations for why specific events have occurred. In the explanatory function, the case study can therefore be used to make causal inferences [2].

**Case research method**

Conducting a research with the case study approach, and analyzing a case, is different things, but the essence could be the same. Analysis could begin only when a case is already developed. Former (i.e. the case study research) requires systemic investigation and detailed scrutiny of the unit of analysis, termed as the entity or the case, by employing any or mixed of the following techniques: documents and contents review, in-depth interviews of the relevant key stakeholders, overall and participant observations, focused synthesis, and questionnaire survey. It produces either a research report or a case research article or a teaching case.

The case study research may focus on single or multiple entities. But each case is to be dealt with a unique entity. It may embrace qualitative or quantitative or quali-quant mixed form of evidence and/or data. Nevertheless it is unlikely that a case could be developed solely based on a quantitative research approach. It is predominantly a qualitative school of thought, simply because of its story making nature.

**Case Writing and Analysis**

Likewise case study research and case analysis, writing a case and analyzing a case is different competence. Research with the case study method helps yield a written case. Case writing requires storytelling, compelling and writing ability, while case analysis requires speedy reading, analytical and interpretation talent. In both gears, detailed scrutiny of the facts is the homogeneous spirit. While the former is research inclined, the latter is review centric. So the case writer is a researcher and story maker, and the case analyst is a critic and strategist. (Table 1) below shows at glance the difference between writing and analysis a case.

Writing a case	Analyzing a case
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Writing a case necessitates conducting a systematic case method research on the unit of analysis or the case entity.	Analysis a case necessitates reading, reviewing, understanding, screening and scrutiny the case facts.
It requires storytelling, compelling and writing ability.	It requires speedy reading, analytical and interpretation talent.
The case writer is a researcher, story maker and essayist or script writer.	The case analyst is a critic and strategist.
The purpose of writing a case is to frame, investigate and document a case as a point of reference and lessons.	The purpose of case analysis is to learn lessons from the real world stories, and gain analytical capability.
It could be used as an undergraduate, graduate and post graduate level teaching material, as well as a living document of professional lessons learning.	The real world lessons learnt from analyzing cases could be utilized in strategic planning exercise as well as in problem identification, diagnosis and solving process.

**Table1:**Writing and analysis a case.

**How to Write a Business Case**

Case writing is nearly storytelling and script writing. It differs from the stories as are found in the novels and short story books, considering its nature of real-life or real world focused, where the latter is imaginary. Unfortunately most of the cases we found, particularly in the business domain, are dull, uninteresting, and boring, because these lack compelling angle. Those who claim themselves as a professional case writer, in reality they are not, unless they have made the cases, they developed, compelling to the readers and analysts. Table 2 below demonstrates the steps and techniques to be followed, as well as supportive points to be considered in business case writing.

Business Case Writing	
Steps and Techniques	Supportive Points
Yielding a precise, up-front and magnificent case title - with a very few words	Selecting an entity or unit of analysis that is termed as the case
Developing an opening or summery with the statement of origin of the entity, and then putting the theme or signature tune as well as case focus - case without formal introduction	Developing compelling angle and central character or hero/ heroine/protagonist of the case, as well as a draft outline of the case
Putting the vision-mission/ purpose and context of the business entity - with appropriate subtitles	Framing the business as an associate character of the case, and doing enough research with the case study method on the entity and on the focus area

Relating the phenomena, consequences and prospects with the case problem(s) and complexity of dilemma – storytelling approach with appropriate subtitle	Gradually revealing the protagonist's tune with his/her own words
Developing further narratives by addressing the facts concerning the routes towards overcoming the challenges, tackling the dilemma and trade off, and indicating the decision or actions if taken in this regard – storytelling approach with appropriate subtitle	Ending is supposed to spring up the impression of a short story without a formal conclusion
Putting sufficient data and evidence with figures, charts and tables as exhibits of the case, developed - but not in the body of the case	By the end of a case study, the readers or analysts are supposed to find themselves as the protagonists of their own stories

**Table 2:** Techniques and supportive points in business case Writing  
**How to Analyze a Business Case**

A business case analysis requires understanding the case facts and phenomena and background information of the entity, as well as identifying and analyzing the business problem(s), scrutinizing the alternative solutions, and suggesting the most effective solution or strategy along with appropriate evidence and recommendations and/or an operational plan. It reveals a compressed as well as comprehensive look on how to analyze a business case.

### When Case Creates Competitive Advantage

In most of the social science schools including law and criminal justice study, the entity or unit of analysis of the most cases is supposed to be individual. Same is true for psychology and medical sciences. Whereas the business cases are supposed to be organizational, but could be varied with cross-cutting strategic aspects, for instance, concerning long run business goals, external environmental aspects, contingency factors, gender responsiveness, and organizational policy, system and culture issues etc., or focused on any of the following portfolios: marketing, financial, human resource, management information or operational management. There might have both track cases – with individual and organizational entities - in sociology and anthropology, political and administrative, and entrepreneurial and philanthropic studies.

### DISCUSSION

Case analysis is always about past, whereas strategy making or planning process is always about future. Case analysis helps undergraduate, graduate and post graduate students, and social,

business, legal and medical practitioners and academics understand the real world context and phenomena of the entity. It helps them identify and analyze problem, and address strategic solutions to the problem with sensible recommendations and implantation plan. Such practices with real-life stories of the entities help them develop competence of problem diagnosing, strategy formulation and implantation planning.

Case writing and analysis competence in social sciences and business studies creates a competitive advantage for undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students. It also creates competitive advantage for teaching faculty members of social sciences and business schools of universities in particular. According to Guess (2014:123), case based teaching connects students with the real world environments, and with the complexity come across in the environs of the concerned domain [3-5].

Teaching with the case-based pedagogy requires faculty members to clarify the class contribution at the first day of the semester begins, by giving emphasize to the significance of the students' preparation with the reading materials and specified cases, and of their class involvement for making great contributions in the class. Gloria points

out the fact that encouraging students towards contributions is tougher than making them to just respond in the class [6].

### CONCLUSION

All leading business schools in the globe including the Harvard Business School, and Asian Institute of Management (AIM) are now following case method of teaching and/or utilizing business cases as the classroom materials, and building students' competence for well analyzing and writing business cases. Faculty of Business Administration (FBA) in American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) is at the transitional stage in this regard. Definitely analysis a varied and good number of business cases helps business school students build strategic aptitude and makes them confident with the real world lessons in the isometrics of business strategy formulation and implementation plan making, as well as in problem analysis and resolving process at individual, team, portfolio, and corporate and inter-organizational level.

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