
Analyzing Case Studies

A case study is a detailed story about a problematic real life situation that is used to help you apply the theories you are studying. It gives you an opportunity to analyze and evaluate information and so develop a greater understanding of situations that are both complex and ambiguous. A case will contain enough information for you to think in depth about the situation and to make good decisions, but it will not provide any clear answers or have a single 'right' solution. Instead it gives you practice in the role of problem analyzer and consultant.

Preliminary Steps

First, read to identify which theories and principles that you have been studying are embedded in the case. There are often more than one since humans create very complex interactions. Whether doing the analysis individually or as a team, suspend judgment until you have all logical ideas on the table. Once you have a list, consider the course learning objectives/outcomes and content. You should be able to narrow the focus down by matching your observed principles with course outcomes and asking what is the purpose of this case study?

Collate the Evidence

Using the ideas implicit in the theories and principles that you have identified, think about the situation in the case study through these lens. Who are the main players? What are the challenges, constraints, resources, and opportunities? Each case usually has a range of information that you need to identify, including: What is known? What is unknown? What pressures exist? What is the context? What assumptions are being made? What problems are evident? What needs to be done, decided, or resolved? What biases are evident?

Recognize Multiple Perspectives

Any case study, by the nature of the story, has multiple perspectives. Each case must be considered from all of the available points of view with an eye to the various impacts on the people and situation. What outcomes are expected? What resources are available? What decisions need to be made? Within what time frame? How do you understand and interpret the data provided? What assumptions and inferences do you see?

Analyze the Issues

Each issue should be supported by the information found in the case linked to the relevant theory and course concepts. Always search for multiple *underlying* issues. I.e., an apparent cross-cultural conflict may be a symptom of inadequate policies and practices within the company. Dig deeper for complex issues.

Discuss the Case

As you (and your team members) discuss the points offered in the case, it is important to detail what you know and what you think you know. Presenting your opinions to others and listening to their understanding of the situation expands everyone's thinking based on the diversity of opinion offered. The point of the exercise is to consider a variety of approaches, develop critical and analytical thinking, and to propose plausible suggestions. This leads to the ability to make reasonable recommendations that can be acted on.

Develop Recommendations

When the preceding steps have been completed, detail recommendations to be done, by whom and by when.

Consider Implications

The next step is to consider how your recommendations would play out when implemented and what impact they might have on the situation and the actors. Are they grounded in reality? Explain why and how.

Conclusions

Ensure that your analysis is based on solid theory, principles, observations, and achievable recommendations. This analysis should read as a compelling story that continues the narrative of the original case study. Finally, summarize the main points from the findings and discussions to wrap up your analysis.

