

HIGH FLYER

Student Notes for Success

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Case studies: analysing and evaluating

Combining theory with practice

Case studies tell a story. They set out a situation or actual event. Case study analysis involves reading the story, determining what is happening, finding the problem, and analysing and finding possible solutions to the problem.

Why use case studies?

Case studies are often used as situational examples to be reviewed and evaluated, to examine how the problem occurred and who the key players were, and to ensure that similar problems do not recur. Case studies are effective step-by-step ways-of-thinking through a situation, evaluating the issues, and taking logical and educated steps towards effective decision-making.

As the problem in a case study is not always clear at first reading, critical analysis skills are applied to the case to determine what the problem actually is. Often there is an underlying problem, or an overall problem, underpinning the situation.

Therefore, the case study needs careful analysis or evaluation. Critical analysis questions and uncovers what is happening at particular times during the case study. Some of the information uncovered is not relevant to the problem and must be carefully filtered and eliminated. Case studies sharpen and hone critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills.

Analysis: the key to reading case studies

The case study must be carefully read and critically analysed using questioning techniques, reason and logic. It is important to make notes as you read and to continually evaluate what is happening at critical times during the case.

Finding the problem

Actively reading and criticising the case in this manner, enables you to focus on the details to find the problem or problems associated with the case then applying problem-solving skills to the identified situation.

Case studies challenge and broaden thinking skills. They encourage students to ask questions of the text and evaluate answers, clearly and logically.

Ask: What is happening here? Who are the key players? How could this be done better? What is wrong and why? Is this the problem or is there another problem impacting the situation? What must be done to get a better result?

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Often the answers to these questions lead to more questions and answers and new pathways to solutions.

How to read a case study: five easy steps

Step 1 - Read the case study from beginning to end and get an overall idea of what is happening.

Step 2 - Actively read again, making connections with the text by highlighting anything you feel is important and related to the problem.

Step 3 - Review your theoretical papers, journal articles or other texts and find material that you can apply to the text. These theoretical papers provide a framework for analysing the situation and for keeping you focussed on the situation, the theory and the language when writing. Apply the theory to the case and use it as an investigative and application tool to find solutions to the problem.

Step 4 - Re-read the case

- Highlight areas that seem important to the case.
- Ask: Is this correct or is there a problem? Ask questions: What? How? Who? How can this be?
- Be a detective: investigate and eliminate what is irrelevant to the situation and does not logically appear to fit the context.
- Apply the theories you have read and consider possible solutions. The theories are your evidence for your ultimate decisions for problem-solving.
- Make notes. Analyse and organise the information.

Step 5 - Write your answer, detailing the issues, your analysis, findings and recommendations for solutions based on the theories read. Use the theory as evidence for your decisions.

You could structure your case study as follows:

- Introduction
- Analysis of the case
- Identification of major issues
- Possible solutions (with reference to existing theories/ literature)
- Conclusion.

Remember:

- Your lecturer may prefer a different format; be sure to check first!
- The best case study answers integrate the theory with the practical.

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