

Indian Legacy of Case Study Method

– An Ancient Idea Invading Internet Era

Indians are credited with the invention of the zero, as well as algebra and its application of astronomy and geometry. What has been discovered by modern progressive sciences had been already expounded and mapped in those thousands of years old ancient philosophical scriptures in India. So also this Case Study Method. The Great King (Chandra Gupta) Bhatti Vikramadithya cracked several cases put forth by the *vethala*. They were all cases where wise decisions were made in the context of that peculiar situation.

In the 1880s, Christopher Langdell, the dean of the Harvard Law School, revived the case method that the early Chinese Philosophers used in 5th century BC. Late Prof. MN Vora of IIM-A is credited as the pioneer of the case study approach in management education in India.

Management studies is a science to be learnt as well as an art to be practiced. Case study method is more relevant to Management Studies in the context of functioning as a platform for visualizing different situations and learning by practicing solving various problems. In Management Studies, while text books help acquiring more knowledge, Case Studies help in developing wisdom. Case Studies give lot of scope for application of knowledge and mind which is the crux of wisdom.

Case studies fix the minds of the students in a specific situation and facilitate them to develop the art of making smart decisions by practicing. Today's organizations want the fresh management students to be "job ready" from day one of their appointment. Therefore *the management students are better trained on live organizational situations with the help of case studies*. This underlines the relevance of case studies in Management Education even today.

Indian philosophies have stood valid even after several centuries. On the same lines, *adoption of different forms of case study methods in teaching in India since ancient times* itself highlights the relevance of Case Studies in Management Education.

Introduction

Indians are credited with the invention of the zero, as well as algebra and its application of astronomy and geometry. Modern people divide the day into 24 hours, the hour - into 60 minutes. Ancient Indians were dividing the day into 60 periods, lasting 24 minutes each. Many hundreds of years before those great European pioneers, Galileo and Copernicus, had to pay heavy prices in ridicule and excommunication for their daring theories, a section of the Vedas of medieval India contained the astounding statement: "*The sun never sets or rises*".

By the time Ptolmaic Egypt and Rome's Eastern empire had established themselves just before the beginning of the Common era, Indian civilization was already well developed, having founded three great religions – Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism – and expressed in writing some subtle currents of religious thought and speculation as well as fundamental theories in science and medicine.

What has been discovered by modern progressive sciences such as quantum physics and by Communication Psychology such as Neuro Linguistic Program (NLP), had been already expounded and mapped in those thousands of years old ancient philosophical scriptures in India. So also this Case Study Method.

Case Study Method - Mere Adoption by Western World

In the 5th-century BC, the philosopher Lao-Tse (also Lao-tzu) wrote "If you tell me, I will listen. If you show me, I will see. But if you let me experience, I will learn." And so began one of the first active learning philosophies. Other Chinese philosophers, such as Kung Fu-tse (Latinized as Confucius) and Han Fei-Tzu, followed Lao-Tse by using a method that closely resembles what we now call the *case method* or *case study*. A member of the study group would present a paradox, which would be in the form of a parable. They would then discuss it and explore possible resolutions.

In the 1880s, Christopher Langdell, the dean of the Harvard Law School, revived the case method that the early Chinese Philosophers used. It slowly won acceptance in the schools of business, law, and medicine. Langdell felt students could learn more about the law by studying actual court opinions than by reading legal texts. By the early 20th century, virtually every American law school had adopted Langdell's method. In the 1960s, most schools began to introduce some form of clinical education to supplement the classroom study of cases. Although the classic Harvard case is quite comprehensive in nature, cases used at present are not long and detailed to excite and encourage the creative efforts of the learners.

A Strong Case For Indian Wisdom

The Great King (Chandra Gupta) Bhatti Vikramaditya cracked several cases put forth by the *vethala*. The *vethala* described several social, political and managerial issues and paradoxes which were intelligently solved by Vikramaditya. They were all cases where wise decisions were made in the context of that peculiar situation.

Pancha Thantra stories followed an unique way of enabling learning by children. They teach morals to be embibed in the minds of children. Abimanyu learnt cracking of Padma viyugam from womb, as was described by Lord Krishna. Paramartha Guru and His Five Sishyas teach our children how ignorant they should not be. These are all nothing but case studies under different names, enabling the reader or listener to position himself in that situation and think and act swiftly.

A Pioneer of the Case Method

Many are grateful to Late Prof. MN Vora of IIM-A for helping to shape them into successful businessmen or academic scholars. He is credited as the pioneer of the case study approach in management education. His contemporary cases had been compiled and published by IIM-A. He had co-authored with many scholars including the marketing guru Philip Kotler. Being one of the first Indians to get MBA from Wharton in 1961, he joined IIM-A in 1963 where he worked for 30 plus years. His biggest contribution was really to organize common sense which never gone out of fashion. He invented the “*endless why*” techniques much befor Toyota and ITC.

Nature of Management Studies

Science holds a lot of theories and conditional behavior. They are applicable universally for ever and remain constant under standard conditions. The student has to simply learn and adopt them as such e.g. properties of matter are the same under similar conditions. On the other hand, art is learnt by mere practice. It is always dynamic and requires different skill sets at different times. Every time that part of the art becomes unique and the skill to handle it gets improved over practice.

Management studies is a science to be learnt as well as an art to be practiced. There are some fixed theories, standard norms and prescribed regulations, making it to appear as a science. Some times, the situations change dynamically, requiring an unique solution. At least one parameter would have changed at least a little thereby necessitating different actions and reactions.

Case Study as a Lab Experiment

Science subjects require laboratories for the students to experiment and learn. Arts subjects require models as the basis for students to practice. Management Studies being both science and arts, can be learnt better by analyzing different situations and understanding why and how important decisions were taken. *Case study method is more relevant to Management Studies in the context of functioning as a platform for visualizing different situations and learning by practicing solving various problems.*

From Knowledge to Wisdom

Knowledge is awareness on various aspects of a particular object while wisdom is all about application of that knowledge. Knowledge can be acquired by extensive learning while wisdom can be developed by extensive practicing. Knowledge is “what to do” and “how to do” while wisdom is on the contrary. Managers should have more of wisdom than knowledge. Knowledge level being almost equal among the managers, it is their wisdom which makes them distinguished and enables them to excel and raise above all others.

In Management Studies, while text books help acquiring more knowledge, Case Studies help in developing wisdom. Case Studies give lot of scope for application of knowledge and mind which is the crux of wisdom.

Efficiency Versus Effectiveness

Efficiency is all about doing things right whereas effectiveness is more about doing the right things. No doubt, managers should know how to do things in the right manner, more important for them is to know which things to do in which order. In Management Studies, text book knowledge equips the budding managers how to do a thing efficiently with the available resources. Case Studies enable the management students to evaluate comparatively various options and decide upon how the resources can be deployed effectively to solve the immediate problem / tide over the situation.

Static & Dynamic Case Analyses

Cases can be analyzed in two ways (1) Static and (2) Dynamic. In static analysis, the situation should be fully understood along with the environment which prevailed during the occurrence of the case; the resources that were available at that point of time should be fully assessed. Then the solution should be suggested based on that particular situation subject to resource constraints.

In the dynamic method of case analysis, one has to visualize the situation at the current point of time together with the resources available at present. Obviously, the solution may differ between static and dynamic analyses mainly because the resources availability is normally subject to change.

Advantages of Case Studies

- Case studies improve creativity and innovations in decision making.
- Case studies fix the minds of the students in a specific situation and facilitate them to develop the art of making smart decisions by practicing.
- Case studies enable the students to visualize real life situations in the organization and facilitate the students in making trial and error attempts to solve the issues.
- Case studies simulate organizational situations, requiring strategic as well as tactical decisions.
- Case studies require the students to position themselves amidst the given situation and demand their wisdom to come out.

Pit Falls in Usage of Case Studies

- Case study method requires serious involvement both from the teacher as well as the students; unless everyone takes it seriously, the outcome cannot be productive. At times, it may turn counter-productive.
- Every case is unique and more so the solutions. It is dangerous to generalize and apply them universally.
- Optimal solutions are always dependant on resources available at that point of time. Decisions may need to be modified at a later date because there is bound to be some change in the resources which are dynamic.
- It is always easier said than done. It is very easy to stand off and suggest on matters which do not affect us immediately; but it is very difficult to make even simple decisions when we are under tense situations, pressuring our minds which may not work at times of real crisis.
- Cases should not be over used since the students might have already known the best answers. Giving them new cases will be possible only if we have a storage of good cases which are updated.
- Serious problems in real life situations need serious attention and enormous thinking; solutions may not be that much simple, which can be arrived at by theoretical analysis.

Case Studies Come of Age

“Speed” is the buzz word in this internet era. People everywhere want everything instantaneously. So do the present day organizations. Unlike olden days, today’s organizations does not waste their resources in training the managers; rather they want the fresh management students to be “job ready” from day one of their appointment. Therefore *the management students are better trained on live organizational situations with the help of case studies*. This underlines the relevance of case studies in Management Education even today.

There is no dearth of information in this internet era; abundant information is in the “finger tips” when we have the right connectivity. Encouraging students to develop case studies goes a long way in enhancing the problem solving skills of the management students.

Conclusion

Case study method compliments the academic delivery and adds value to the text book teaching. Text books and other teaching methods help to acquire more knowledge in the subjects while case studies provide for application of that knowledge. Therefore, in spite of arguments against its usage, the case study method makes the subject to come alive. Moreover, case studies inculcate the habit of logical approach rather than theoretical approach to any problem.

Lastly, Indian philosophies have stood valid even after several centuries. On the same lines, *adoption of different forms of case study methods in teaching in India since ancient times* itself highlights the relevance of Case Studies in Management Education.

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