

3. **Group discussion and interviews:** The students may be presented with part of the information and be required to ask particular questions to extract the rest of the data needed for their analysis and recommendations. These days, this method is widely used for campus recruitment process as well (see Chapter 12).
4. **Assignments:** The case study may be given as an assignment wherein the student is required to write an analysis and recommendations. This may be done as a take-home assignment or as part of an examination. Most B-schools use this method for their teaching and evaluation purpose.

Hence, the use of case studies is a widely accepted means used for bringing theoretical concepts and practical situations together on the same platform. As it is not possible to take a class of students to an organization and make them observe the subject matter of management or organizational behaviour in real life, a case study outlining a real, or realistic, situation is the best available alternative.

What Is a Case Study?

We have already discussed above that case study is a kind of qualitative research method. However, if we go by definition, a case study is a story about something unique, special, or interesting. It can be about individuals, organizations, processes, programmes, neighborhoods, institutions, and even events¹². Yin explains that 'A case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and uses multiple sources of evidence'¹³. Case studies are often based on actual situations, which may be fictionalized to protect confidentiality. They are usually institutionally organized, dealing with a situation within an organization or agency. The term 'case study' covers a wide range



TECH WORLD

Podcast, Webcast ... and Now Pencast!

Livescribe, located in Oakland, California, has been developing new low-cost mobile computing platforms that enhance productivity, learning, communication and self-expression for anyone who uses pen and paper. With its Echo and Pulse smartpens, the company has revolutionized the act of writing by recording and linking audio to handwriting in a way that users never miss a word. With the launch of its Livescribe Echo, a high-tech bridge between analog, handwritten notes and the digital world, the company has synchronized audio and text to make notes even more useful¹⁸.

Nestled inside the tip of the Livescribe Echo pen, there is a high-speed, infrared camera that captures 70 frames per second. This camera captures anything you write, as long as it's on the specially imprinted notepaper the company supplies. It also has a built-in microphone that records audio as you write¹⁹. For instance, if you want to find out what the professor was saying when you were taking your notes, you just need to tap a spot on the paper and click 'Play', and you will hear exactly what he was saying as you wrote in that spot. When you are finished taking notes, you can play back the audio on the pen or export it to your computer or laptop²⁰. Getting your notes and complete audio records of meetings and classes downloaded onto your computer is the real reason to use the Livescribe. The Echo comes in 2GB, 4GB, and 8GB models, which can store between 200 and 800 hours of audio.

On the other hand, its Livescribe Connect software makes those notes available everywhere through pencast, a combination of text and audio, which allows you upload notes to Evernote, Google Docs, and elsewhere and send them to people and destinations of your choice—all from your paper or Livescribe Desktop. A pencast is a digital version of your notes and audio that comes to life as an interactive document, which can be played back on the smartpen itself, or on your computer at the same time, also lets you turn your notes—or more specifically your note-taking—into a flash-based video that you can embed on the Web and allows you to hear, see and relive notes exactly as they were captured. Watching the authors' words flow onto the page in synchronicity with the audio is quite an educational experience.

Besides, the company's site has a forum where you can post your podcast by using the Livescribe Connect™, which arrived as a firmware update in May 2011. It lets you upload your own podcasts to the Web and access them from a variety of different places. With just a few taps of the smartpen, you can send your notes and podcasts via email, or to Google Docs, Evernote, Facebook, Mobile (iPhone and iPad) and MyLivescribe (an online storage space for podcasts). Once you set up your connectors—basically just inputting your name and password for the various services—uploading your notes is simple: Draw a line back and forth on the page, underneath your notes. The smartpen will beep and the LCD will say 'Command?' Write 'Evernote', or 'Google', and then tap once on each page you want to upload and twice when you are done. Next time you dock your pen, everything gets uploaded¹¹. All of the Livescribe Connect apps can open PDF files, and a couple of them, like Evernote, can even search the text within them. All support the podcast features, since it's just Flash embedded in a PDF.

of problems posed for analysis. Though most case studies do not have one obvious or clear solution, they tell a story involving issues or conflicts which need to be resolved. The information contained in a case study might be a simple human story that illustrates a difficult situation requiring a decision or a complex presentation of financial data in form of charts, graphs, tables, historical background etc. that call for a lot of number crunching ability. A case can be of a whole industry, a single organization, or some part of an organization. The student's role in learning through the case method is to diagnose and size up the situation described in the case and then to recommend appropriate actions by applying concepts learnt within the four walls of the classroom and building on his/her analytic skills that distinguishes the high priority from the low priority elements. Besides, working in groups on cases also helps students develop interpersonal skills and the capacity to work in a team—a skill that differentiates a good manager from a not-so-good one.

Thus, a case study can best be described as a well-composed short story that presents essential information and data on corporate operations.

Analysing a Case Study: A Four-step Process

As the purpose of the case study is to let the reader apply the concepts gained through *theoretical knowledge, for analysing a case study*, therefore, you as a case analyst must closely examine the issues with which the company is confronted before setting out to take a standpoint on 'how to solve' the problem. It can be analysed in two ways: *static* and *dynamic*. In 'static method' of case analysis, you need to understand the situation along with the environment which prevailed during the occurrence of the case; thoroughly assess the resources that were available at that point of time and then suggest the solution based on that particular situation. While in the 'dynamic method' of case analysis, you need to visualize the situation at the current point of time together with the resources available at present and then suggest the solution. Whatever method of analysis you choose following are the steps you need to take in order to analyse your case:

Step 1: Thorough Reading for Understanding the Case

Most often you will need to read the case several times to grasp the overall picture of what is happening to the company and then several times more to discover and grasp the specific problems it poses. Pay attention to the information in any accompanying exhibits, tables, or figures. Many case scenarios present a great deal of detailed information. Underline and list the most important facts and figures that would help you define the central problem or issue. Identify the major problem or challenge faced by the company by using the facts provided in the key issue or issues. At times, cases present multiple issues or problems. Identify the most crucial one and separate it from the other non-serious issues. For example, organizational conflict, power, and politics are some of the important issues for any company. Try to find out whether these areas have any problem and if so why problems are occurring. Do they occur because of company's bad strategy formulation or because of bad strategy implementation? However, if the case does not give key facts and numbers, you can make assumptions, but these assumptions

should be reasonable. In order to get an insight of the company's strategy, its structure, its founding, its initial products, its new-product related marketing decisions, its functional competencies and all other related information that affect it in the present. It is important to follow the following reading steps:

1. **Previewing:** It helps you get an idea of what the case is all about without actually reading the main body of its text. It helps identify the purpose of the case and locate relevant information pertaining to the issue. It requires you to read only the parts that 'jump out' from the rest of the text such as main headings and sub headings, executive summaries, any highlighted text and examine the illustrations, graphs, tables, etc.
2. **Skimming:** It involves running your eye very quickly over large chunks of text. It is different from previewing because skimming involves the paragraph text. It allows you to pick up some of the main ideas without paying attention to the details. It is a fast process to add further information to an overview of the case. It helps to quickly locate relevant sections from a large quantity of written material. It requires you to start reading from the beginning of the text and glide your eyes over the text very quickly noting any bold print and graphics. Here, you actually do not read the text in total but read a few words of every paragraph, especially the first and last sentences.
3. **Scanning:** It involves sweeping your eyes (like radar) over part of a text to find specific pieces of information. It allows you to quickly locate specific information from a large quantity of written material. It requires you to start reading the text by allowing your eyes (or finger) to move quickly over a page. As soon as your eye catches an important word or phrase, stop reading to understand whether the information requires more attention, if so, then slow down to read the relevant section more thoroughly.
4. **Intensive reading:** It is a detailed, focused, reading of the important parts of the case. Start at the beginning. Underline any unfamiliar words or phrases, but do not stop the flow of your reading. If the text is relatively easy, underline, highlight or make brief notes. However, if the text is difficult, read it through at least once before making notes. When you have finished reading the complete text, go back to the unfamiliar vocabulary or complex data. Read it several times until you understand the information it conveys.
5. **Critical reading:** The purpose of critical reading is to gain a deeper understanding of the material. It involves reading in depth and actively questioning what you read. Here, being 'critical' does not mean criticizing or 'finding fault' with the data presented in the case. Rather, it means understanding how results have been arrived at, and evaluating their strengths and weaknesses. It also involves the identification of the company's internal strengths and weaknesses.

Based on the thorough reading and understanding of the case, identify the problem statement of the case. It is unlikely that the problem statement will 'jump out at you' in words, rather you need to make assessments based on the facts and figures presented in the case.

Step 2: Applying SWOT to Analyse the Company's Internal and External Strengths and Weaknesses

In this step, read the case carefully again with the problem statement perspective. Next, use all the key areas that you have charted in Step 1 to develop an account of the company's internal and external strengths and weaknesses. On the basis of SWOT analysis, try to understand why the problem or challenge occurred; how this problem affects the strategy or performance of the organization; does the problem or challenge faced by the company come from a changing environment, new opportunities, a declining market share, or inefficient internal or

external business processes, etc. Examine each of the value creation functions of the company, and identify the functional areas in which it is currently strong and weak. For instance, some companies might be strong in research and development but weak in marketing; some might be strong in manufacturing but weak in supply chain management. Also assess the company's internal and external environment as identifying the functional strategies that a company pursues to build competitive advantage through superior efficiency, quality, innovation, and customer responsiveness to achieve its business goals is very important.

Step 3: Developing and Evaluating Solutions

Start this step by making lists of the strengths and weaknesses and analysing them to assess the company's overall competitive position. Try not to let your biases get in the way of your thinking. Use the results of your analysis as a starting point for developing strategic options. Evaluate the solutions by asking the questions like: what is the most suitable solution, in terms of the strategic position of the organization, for solving the problem; what is your justification for selecting that 'best solution'; would this solution achieve competitive advantage for the organization; even if it is the 'best' solution, what are its shortcomings or pitfalls that are needed to be avoided while selecting this option over the other alternatives, etc. Identify the



COMMUNICATION SNIPPET

Online Qualitative Market Research at Quipper

Exciting new things are happening in qualitative research and leading professionals who seek innovative ways to reach their audiences are embracing them whole-heartedly. The qualitative market research firm Quipper Research Pvt. Ltd., based in Mumbai and founded by Pia Mollback-Verbic and Piyul Mukherjee who claim to have 40+ years of combined experience and unique amalgam of 'Eastern' and 'Western' industry knowledge¹⁴, has pioneered the first digital platform in India for conducting online qualitative market research. With this model, consumers can be interviewed in a secure online environment where participants, including the moderator, respondents and clients, can interact via webcam and text chat. Instead of meeting consumers in focus group facilities, Quipper meets the diaspora of consumers online. This innovative approach expands reach, offers faster project turnaround, eliminates travel and reduces the cost of conducting tailored qualitative research¹⁵.

While marketers and qualitative researchers globally are moving to digital research and hybrid research designs (i.e., a mix of traditional face-to-face research combined with online components), it is often assumed that the mainstream Indian market cannot be reached online due to low internet penetration and tech-literacy. But Quipper has proved it wrong. Its online platform can be accessed anywhere where there is internet connectivity through mobile phones, tablets and computers. Instead of making an entire team (moderator, translator, recruiter, camera-man and client) travel to the respondent's home—the Company sends one person to the respondent's home with a laptop and broadband connectivity and everyone interacts live online. This innovative approach offers a heightened degree of context inclusion, especially when budgets don't allow for travelling or time constraints dictate a fast turnaround of findings. The main advantages of this approach are: reduced travel and time costs, and an expanded reach independent of location, not just the usual 10 km from facility as is the case in most studies¹⁶.

As corporates' and investors' interest in smaller Indian cities and towns grows, Quipper's online platform would give them the ability to get insights into consumer behaviour in these less accessible parts of the country. Damodar Mall, Group Customer Director, Future Group, is impressed with the platform's interface that demands negligible consumer tech-literacy.

The Company's growth has been phenomenal so far. In September 2009, it had started as India-Dutch team named Quipper Research, a unique startup that has an all women team dedicated specifically to the field of qualitative marketing research. Three years later, the venture has a team of eight professionals who have worked with over 40 brands globally including Domino's Pizza, Orra Diamonds, Rolex Watches and Dell Printers¹⁷.

constraints that may limit the solutions available. Remember, there is a difference between what an organization 'should do' and what that organization actually 'can do'. Some solutions are too expensive or operationally difficult to implement, assess the feasibility of the solution and avoid the ones that are beyond the organization's resources.

Step 4: Making Recommendations

This is the last step in the case analysis process. It involves making recommendations based on your analysis. The quality of your recommendation is a direct result of the thoroughness of your case analysis. State your choice for the best solution and provide a detailed explanation of why you selected it. You may also include an explanation as to why other alternatives were not selected. Your final recommendation should flow logically from the rest of your case analysis and should clearly specify what assumptions were used to shape your conclusion. There is often no single 'right' answer, and each option is likely to have risks as well as rewards.