

A case study, just like a group discussion, is designed to assess certain group performance skills of the individual. The difference stems from the fact that a Case Study tests a larger and slightly different skill set as compared to a normal group discussion. The following is a list of special traits, which the evaluators look for while assessing a candidate. Cases are certain illustrative situations depicting the profile and context of any problem. To make sure you are able to handle a case study successfully, it is important to be able to identify and develop a strategy. Case Studies require a more analytical approach than a group discussion. Generally, the questions asked at the end of the case study are a “trap” for the students. The symptoms should not be mistaken for the root problem.

HOW TO CRACK A CASE STUDY

Collect the facts and analyze them - While reading the case, underline the main factual statements, decisions made by the firm and key points which will highlight the main problems of the case and then analyze the facts by interpreting and reviewing the decisions of the individuals and the firm.

Identify the main problems/key issues and analyze - Problems in the case are mostly hidden. So read the case again and again to identify the key issues. Facts may help you in identifying the problem. Analyze the characteristics and reasons of the issues involved in the case. Examine them with your knowledge of the concepts related to the subject.

Do a SWOT analysis of the case - Find out the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of the company/ case which will help you to find the possible solutions to the problems.

List alternative course of action and evaluate them and Recommend the best course of action – Be precise about which alternative is best and make realistic conclusion. It should reveal your good understanding of the case and have logical reasoning.

SOME DO'S AND DON'TS IN THE CASE STUDY

Things to do:

- ☐ Take time to analyze and think through the case.
- ☐ Weigh the pros and cons and various trade-offs between two or more choices
- ☐ Break down the complex problem into small, distinct pieces to enable better articulation
- ☐ Listen attentively, even to conflicting ideas, as they might provide part solution to the problem
- ☐ Summarize the analysis periodically

Things NOT to do:

- ☐ Jump to a conclusion at the start

- Worry about speaking all the time
- Worry if you are not able to completely solve the case. Remember – The structure of thoughts is as important as the final result.

The 'SPACER' format for Case Analysis:

This standard format is applicable to most of the case studies that you would be required to tackle. Some minor variations might be needed depending on the specific situation. It might not always be possible to fit the entire format to a specific case; however, an attempt should be made to incorporate as much as possible. It usually helps to write down the format headings on a sheet of paper and then fill in the details.

S- Synopsis: A quick synopsis of the case given for discussion projects your ability to assimilate facts, recapitulate, organize and set the path for subsequent discussion.

P- Problem Definition: The problem should ideally be defined in a crisp, single line incorporating the most important decision issue to be solved in the case. It helps to be quantitative at this stage to have a better grasp of the problem. An important thing to remember is not to mistake the symptoms for the root problem. For example a falling market share or a decline in sales is, invariably, a symptom while the real problem may lie with the nature of the industry or the quality of the product.

A- Alternatives Generation: The next step is to list down the various alternatives to resolve the problem and achieve the objectives set out in the case study. At this stage, all the alternatives that come to mind should be listed even if an alternative provides only a part solution to the problem at hand. Sometimes, this part solution can be later combined with some other alternative to provide a complete solution.

C- Criteria for evaluation of alternatives: List down the parameters that are important to the solution of the problem at hand. These parameters can be profitability, growth in market share, image, sales etc.

E- Evaluate the alternatives: This stage uses the criteria to evaluate the various alternatives generated earlier. The positive and negative aspects of each alternative are to be kept in mind while evaluating the alternatives. A cost benefit analysis of the various alternatives will help you assess the feasibility of these possible courses of action.

R- Recommendations: At the end of the analysis, provide recommendations to resolve the situation. Also look at short-term as well as long-term implications of the recommendations in solving the problem.

SAMPLE CASE STUDY SOLVED: CHEMCO CASE

Started in 1965, ChemCo is a leading manufacturer of car batteries in the U.K. market. Since then, it has been under the charge of Mr. Jones, the founder-owner of the firm. In 1999, the company decided to go for a diversification by expanding the product line. The new product was batteries for fork-lift trucks. At the same time, Mr. Marek was appointed the Senior Vice President of marketing in the company. However, soon after its successful diversification into fork-lift batteries, the sales in this segment began dropping steadily. Mr. Marek wanted to introduce some radical changes in the advertising and branding of the new business but the proposal was turned down by the old-fashioned Mr. Jones. At this juncture in 2002, the firm is losing heavily in the fork-lift batteries business and its market share in car batteries is also on a decline. Mr. Jones has asked Mr. Marek to show a turnaround in the company within a year. What steps should Mr. Marek take to take the company out of its troubles?

Some of the facts on the case are:

- ChemCo is a quality leader in the U.K. car batteries market.
- Customer battery purchases in the automobile market are highly seasonal
- The fork-lift business was added to utilize idle capacity during periods of inactivity.
- This is a low-growth industry (1% annual growth over the last two years)
- Large customers are sophisticated and buy based on price and quality. Smaller customers buy solely on price.
- There is a Spanish competitor in the market who offers low priced batteries of inferior quality

Situation Analysis

Company

- ☐ Established player in car batteries
- ☐ Losing heavily in fork-lift truck batteries
- ☐ Old fashioned owner resistance to change

Competition

- ☐ Low priced competitors
- ☐ Foreign competitors gaining market share

Customers

- ☐ High quality product, but low end customers care more about price than quality

Problem Definition: Mismanaged product diversification in a price sensitive market

Alternatives

Alternative 1: Establish an Off-Brand for the fork-lift business

Alternative 2: Educate the customer market about product quality

Alternative 3: Exit the fork-lift battery business

Criteria for evaluation of alternatives

- ☐ Establishing the firm's quality image
- ☐ Increase in market share and sales
- ☐ Cost of the product

Evaluation of Alternatives

Alternative 1

- ☐ Protect firm's quality image in the automobile industry
- ☐ Redesign product to reduce the cost of manufacture
- ☐ Low price to enable it to compete with Spanish producer

Alternative 2

- ☐ Make use of the quality leadership in car batteries market
- ☐ Offer reliability testing, extended warranties etc. to promote quality image
- ☐ Set higher prices to extract surplus from these advantages

Alternative 3 and 4

- ☐ A passive strategy, not proactive

Recommendations

Alternative 1 is recommended in this case. Since the firm operates in an industry which has low growth, hence it can expand market share and sales only by taking the customers from other players. Hence, it needs to tackle the Spanish competitor head-on by aggressively pricing its product. At the same time, launching a low priced product under the same brand name erodes the high quality image in the car batteries market. Hence, the best option is to go for an off-brand to target the fork-lift customers who are increasingly becoming price sensitive. This will enable the company to ward off the threat in short-term and build its position strongly in the long-term.