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CASE METHOD

Case method is instruction that utilizes descriptions of actual situations to develop a discussion among students and instructor. These case descriptions are usually written, but they may be oral as well. The intent of the case method is to narrow the gap between theory and practice by giving students more or less accurate previews of the kinds of situations they will encounter, to press them to analyze those situations, to come to a conclusion, and then to defend that conclusion among their peers. Cases were used early in medical instruction and then in law. The technique was borrowed for use in business instruction early in the 20th century.

In a typical case-method course, students read a written case in advance of each class. The case may or may not be accompanied by a "technical" note that introduces theory or an analytical framework that the students can apply to the case. Sometimes the theory is given in lectures either before, during, or after the case discussion or through readings in various texts. Students are expected to read the case in advance, analyze it, reach a conclusion, and then come to class prepared to join with their classmates in an active debate of the issues in—or related to—the case.

Although many schools use cases to varying degrees, the Harvard Business School, the Darden Graduate School of Business Administration at the University of Virginia, and Western Ontario University in Canada are generally recognized as the primary case-oriented institutions in North America. These institutions use cases in over 90% of their classes. Other business schools at Stanford, Dartmouth, Northwestern, and Wake Forest use cases for a part of their curricula.

There is no one case method. Rather, a range of techniques often fall under the conversational use of the term. Perhaps the most clarifying taxonomy is Dooley and Skinner's, where the proportion of talking—instructor versus student—is used to create a classification scheme of case use. In "classic case method," the instructor may speak from 0% to 15% of the time. In other classes designated by their instructors as "case method," because they use a written case as a basis for the class, the instructor may speak up to or more than 90% of the time. And some instructors will vary the proportion of teacher-talk versus student-talk over the breadth of a course or course module, depending on student preparation and objectives. In my view, classes in which the instructor speaks more than 50% of the time, even though they may be using a case or cases as illustrations or as the center of analysis, are more accurately termed discussion classes or lectures. Surely one can give a lecture where one analyzes a case and presents conclusions.

This note was prepared by Professor James G. Clawson.

In my view, the essence of case method includes two key elements: (1) decision-oriented descriptions of actual professional situations and (2) significant student involvement. We may distinguish between pure description cases and decision-oriented cases, but it is the latter that provides energy and enthusiasm when the students get involved. Thus, it is the students' participation in the analysis, discussion, and decision-making of actual, practical, and current situations that, for me, defines the case method.

It is this involvement that makes it an extremely powerful technique, one that can engage students deeply, both intellectually and emotionally, and that can greatly strengthen their abilities to deal with the realities of their professions. Case method is, I believe, applicable to most forms of professional development. I have seen finance, marketing, quantitative analysis, medicine, law, real estate, and public administration, as well as organizational behavior and management, taught very effectively with case method. Although one might not use case method to introduce theoretical constructs in the natural sciences or mathematics, I can easily see how this could be done. Descriptions of research dilemmas and previous studies could be used to deepen students' understanding of and ability to apply those constructs.

The case method *works*. It engages students. Applied well, it builds a variety of skills, and it works across a wide range of pedagogical material. Let's look more carefully (1) at how case method relates to research, (2) at some of the benefits of case method, and (3) what case method demands of the instructor and the student. This may help you consider whether or not it makes sense for you to think about developing case-method skills and whether it would fit your teaching situation.

Relationship to Research and Theory

The relationship between case-method teaching and materials development (case writing) and what some others call "real" research is something that should be considered carefully. Many schools have developed cultures that are critical of case-method teaching and writing, so it is important to know an institution's values when considering learning to teach and write cases.

A major criticism of the case method and its precursor, case writing, is that it is not research; and worse, it siphons off time and energy from real research activity. Many scholars decry case writing as overly subjective and narrow. It is said that with sample sizes of one, a writer cannot hope to generalize to other situations. While both of these points are true, scholars overlook similar arguments that can be made against broad survey-based research: that the results are overly narrow and do not take into account softer, more difficult-to-measure factors in an organization and that their conclusions are limited by the kinds of samples they were drawn from. The research advantage of case research and writing lies in the richness of the data that one collects. Time spent in an organization, lengthy interviews corroborated by others, and reflection on the data combine in the careful case writer's mind to produce patterns of behavior that are unlikely to be seen or clearly outlined in survey research. The intimacy of understanding that comes from talking with and observing managers and workers up-close, in their natural work setting is irreplaceable both in research journals and the classroom.

With regard to the role of case method used in teaching, instructors who have a close perspective on the day-to-day experiences, demands, and difficulties of the practicing manager will be much better prepared to help students deal with and anticipate those realities than the classical researcher/instructor who teaches theory, survey analysis, and repeating of facts and figures. The question of whether-or-not or how a theory applies can be discussed; but without real situations in which to consider them, discussions are often "other-worldly," when observed by a practicing manager or organizational consultant. Cases provide a natural and powerful avenue for exploring what works and what doesn't work and adds the immediacy of having peers to listen to, convince, and evaluate.

I agree with Lewin's comment that there is nothing so practical as a good theory. I also note that theories or conclusions drawn from narrowly sampled data, using techniques that hold constant a myriad of other factors, are often not all that good. This is precisely because the other factors are *not* constant in the "real world." In the ideal world, the accomplished scholar would have several clubs to play from his or her research and teaching bag. Such clubs would be named *survey research, case research, discussion technique, case method, role playing*, and so on. To the extent that scholars can add new skills and use those skills to complement others, they will become more flexible, more informed, more able to work in multiple environments, and more able to guide new students to anticipate and deal with the realities they will face at work.

I won't rehash the arguments made earlier for quality teaching. If you have gotten this far, you've reached some peace with yourself about whether or not teaching is important and how that balances with your research activities. That aside, some criticize the case method for being atheoretical as a teaching technique. The argument goes something like this: classical case method minimizes the input of the instructor and relies on the experience of the group. The group may lead itself to a false conclusion. Thus, without the instructor telling the students where to go and telling them the proper theoretical constructs, the students are not only ignorant but think they are wise in concluding things that are untrue.

In my view and experience, case method and rigorous theory work rather well together. Case method provides the means for allowing students to either develop theory or make their own theories-in-action explicit in a forum where they can be reexamined in ways that are not likely to happen elsewhere. Case-method teachers can—and do—introduce rigorous theoretical constructs throughout their courses. Learning how to do this in a way that keeps the students open to input and connects the theory to practical application in a real setting is the challenge and privilege of the case teacher.

Instructors have a responsibility for learning and for the accuracy of that learning in the classroom. Lecturing gives one an opportunity to insure accuracy of teaching but does little to test accuracy of learning or of skills in applying that learning. Case method provides a good channel for the latter. I often assign theoretical notes and readings along with cases and will often give "lecturettes" in class to either introduce or further explain relevant theoretical constructs. What separates these unilateral communications from the typical lecture is that the students have led themselves to the point of needing that additional information and are,

therefore, open to it. The information is unfolded in a context where its utility is immediately apparent.

Case method can be used to develop theory. If a case rich in data on relevant dimensions is used without a theoretical base, such as a technical note or prior theoretical understanding by the students, the material can be the mechanism for the students to develop the theory themselves. Is this reinventing the wheel? Perhaps, but with the additional benefit that the inventors seldom forget their discoveries and are always able to find ways to use them. Recipients of free theoretical gifts, just as recipients of free tangible gifts, seldom value them as much as when they can see how these gifts would be of value in their lives.

Is the case method less efficient than simply telling students? I don't think so. It may seem so when only the delivery portion of the overall learning process is considered. But if one looks at the learning process as extending from the introduction of a concept to the point of capable application, case method gets one well along that continuum, oftentimes significantly more than unilateral lecturing. Learning includes not just the hearing but the understanding and application as well. A concept heard, vaguely understood, and then not used is not learned.

As students deal with case after case, related to a broad topic, each experience presses them to apply, reexamine, and wrestle with their peers' applications of concepts in given areas, and they begin to see similarities, dissimilarities, and obstacles not only to understanding but to implementation. Students form conclusions about what works in what situation and what the more portable concepts and principles may be.

Attempting to manage a case-method class so that the students arrive at a particular conclusion or theoretical construct can be dangerous. If the instructor controls the discussion so carefully that he or she can plan each step and make certain that the class takes each step, the experience becomes a thinly-veiled lecture with the case as an illustration. In this format, the power of the discovery process is largely lost.

Allowing the class to get wherever they may without more experienced guidance can also be dangerous. As with most things, the Aristotelian challenge is to find the useful middle ground. It is there the students experience some genuine control about what they talk about, the thrill of discovering truths in their areas of inquiry, and how to deal with the intimidation of making a decision—and all this amidst the patient, probing support of the instructor.

The use of cases for theory development is more problematic with younger students. Those who have not had enough experience with a topical area may need more theoretical inputs than those who have been working in their professions for awhile. Yet, even for undergraduates, the case method provides a rapid way of developing experience. Listening to theory and regurgitating it on an exam is quite different from trying new wings in class by mouthing one's opinions and decisions in fresh areas. While one may need more theoretical doses with younger groups, I find the case method an excellent way of fertilizing the growth of their practical wisdom. I also find that executive groups as well as MBAs welcome theoretical inputs when they can see the immediate relevance of it to the topic at hand or the problems they face.

Case method can also help students make their own operating theories explicit. When a student explores one line of analysis as opposed to another, one can ask the student: Why that route? This "meta-analysis,"—an analysis of our analysis—urges the student to make clear for self and others the thought process that guided the behavior. Revealed in this way, the assumptions and beliefs that comprise the thought process can be reexamined and perhaps modified, especially if the peers in the room begin to express their reservations.

The more direct method of simply telling someone their approach was wrong and they should try it another way seems on the surface to be more efficient; but again, consider the student's openness to the feedback and what he or she will do with it later on. Sending just the message versus having a dialogue that means it is not only heard but incorporated into a person's set of operating values and beliefs are two different things.

Finally, I do not hesitate to give students theory when it seems necessary. If their own explorations, for whatever reasons—their dullness, my dullness in leading the discussion, or the overpowering scent of red herrings—do not lead them to what I may consider necessary conclusions, then I may either interrupt the discussion to lay out some concepts or I may ask them to consider a theoretical reading we've had in connection with the current discussion. Bringing the theory and the practical situation together through case discussion is much less difficult than nuclear fusion, but it brings similarly rewarding results.

So—I say emphatically—case method does not preclude the introduction, the writing, the understanding, and the application of good theory. Rather, it invites it. But it does so in a way that makes students more open to theory and more able to use it. Rather than theory and cases being anathema, I find them to be complementary cousins that work very well together.

Benefits of the Case Method

Involvement

As I suggested above, perhaps the case method's strongest benefit is the way in which it can grab students' attention and torque it up into full-fledged enthusiasm. There is no escaping from the question, "What would you do?" Everyone can answer that question. Merely asking it of a person is a message of the worth and value of the person that alone pulls the individual into the class. That my opinion is sought tells me that I am worth the time and attention of the people in the room—the instructor and my peers. Case method does not allow the student to sit back and daydream—not so much by reason of force as by enticing invitation to engage one's group in current, pressing debate.

The case method also presses one to be more involved in the material even before class begins. Knowing that one may be called on to speak does marvelous things for a person's energy in preparing for class. Whereas one might skip some reading assigned for a lecture class, one cannot do that in a case class without risking embarrassment—not in private before the instructor alone—but publicly in front of one's peers. This is not necessarily an opportunity for public ridicule but rather a natural human desire to look good, especially among one's own reference group.

The case method involves people. I have known visiting faculty to get so caught up in a case-method class that they began to speak out or raise their hands, wanting to get into the discussion. I have known parents visiting a class who simply could not constrain themselves but demanded a chance to be heard. I have seen forests of hands rise instantaneously when one person begins to conclude. There is an electricity in the air that makes the hair on the back of the neck rise, that causes the heart to beat faster, that brings a tickling to the stomach, that flushes the face, and galvanizes the body generally in such an arena. When you have experienced this in a dynamic case discussion, it is difficult to return to a more level, unilateral, less exciting kind of instruction.

Focusing on the students' level of understanding

A major benefit of the case method is that it keeps the focus of the discussion close to the students' boundaries of what is known. Because people, in a group, will be encouraged not to repeat what is known to all and not to hold forth on that which is distantly unknown to the group, there is a certain self-governing system at work in the case method. People explore the boundaries of their own knowledge and beliefs as quickly as they can in the group.

This emphasizes the importance of the composition of the group. In classes where there is too wide a range of experience and understanding, this mechanism begins to break down, and the breadth of involvement is lost. With carefully chosen groups, similar in their backgrounds and abilities, the group's ability to monitor itself and keep the discussion at the edge is quite remarkable.

This governing system also works well to stretch the marginally less able and to give pause to ponder to the marginally more able. For the former, there is the social pressure to keep up with the group, to think harder, to prepare more carefully, and to concentrate more fully. For the latter, there is the realization that life, especially in the social sciences, must be lived with other people; and therefore, one must learn how to communicate with and manage others—others who may not be as quick or as insightful as one's self. Both of these key insights are taught not as intellectual concepts but as a result of simply being a part of the case class and having to deal with its immediate realities.

Ongoing student feedback

Another benefit of the case method is that it allows the instructor to continuously monitor the level of understanding, awareness, and skill development in the classroom. While discussion methods also do this to some extent, they tend to give more data on the students' level of

understanding than on their skill development. In case discussions, where not only analysis but also decision making is required, the instructor can see how emotionally and intellectually prepared the students are to present their conclusions and to persuade others. Instructors will often notice students who wrestle with making a commitment to a point of view, others who struggle with finding the rationale to support their conclusions, and others who struggle with the details of plans needed to implement their decisions.

Yes, these are not real business situations but a classroom. *But,* the discussion focuses around real business situations, and it *does* involve the convincing of real people, peers trained in business techniques.

Skill development

Skill development occurs—and it occurs dramatically in case classes. When a student prepares a case, discusses it in advance of class with his study group, then presents his ideas in the larger class setting, attempting to present briefly and cogently his analysis, his decision, and his steps for implementing the decision, and then has to respond to comments, criticisms, suggestions, or sheer apathy, that student is learning to analyze, decide, persuade, muster courage, develop constancy of image among peers, become more efficient at reading, analyzing, presenting, and responding, and dealing back and forth with colleagues. When this happens over a period of two years, the development can be marked.

Disadvantages

The case method is not the answer to all teaching challenges; it has some disadvantages. One is that it can become heavily instructor-dependent. Some instructors can teach a case in a provocative and penetrating way, while others with the same material may be boring and superficial. Some of this has to do with the personality of the instructor; and some of it has to do with the relationship between the material and the instructor. The teacher who comes across as boring with one case, because of its content and focus, might be dynamite with another case that has a different focus.

Variations in class response

While there is variation in an individual's ability to deliver lectures, such differences in ability come to the fore in the case method. The case method's allowance for questions and challenges from students means that, for the case-method instructor, the direction the discussion takes is more influenced by the response of that particular class. For instructors who don't mind this, case method is fine; for those who do, it can be very threatening. These differences emerge in the case discussions, so that the discussion of a case in one section might be a very different experience from the same case in another section. This pedagogical slack in the case method makes it more challenging for course designers to ensure that students will get a more uniform experience across sections than in a lecture course. Of course, for some schools this is not much of a concern.

Time requirements

The case method also demands time. When I was at Harvard, faculty used to say that preparing a new case for a 90-minute class usually took from eight to 15 hours. Fortunately, that level of involvement does not continue as one teaches a case repeatedly. I knew instructors who could correct a student's comment about case facts by quoting data from memory, including facts, page, and location on the page. One develops a repertoire, much like a performing artist, and can readily call on certain standards in that repertoire. Critics will say that the time required to develop new teaching materials discourages the instructor from doing so, with the result that he does not keep up with the field. While this is possible, who can say that those giving lectures are not similarly susceptible to relying on well-established repertoires?

Over the years, instructors compile teaching files with teaching notes, charts, anecdotes, case maps, and other related materials that often accelerate later preparation time. Once a person has taught a case a half-dozen times, he begins to anticipate the usual routes the discussion will take, and preparation time is often shortened dramatically. The challenge then is (1) to be willing to find and utilize new and more current cases and invest the preparation time in these new repertoire additions and (2) to be open in subsequent teachings to new ways of structuring or unfolding the discussion so that one truly engages the students rather than simply attempting to lead them through a time-worn pathway that may or may not fit the current class's interest and focus.

Structured vs. unstructured format

On this latter point, many instructors see the less "canned" (less structured) aspects of the case method as a disadvantage. They argue that they have certain material to "cover," and open-ended sessions like case method leave them with too little control to ensure their pedagogical objectives are met. Again, the reply here is that covering material doesn't ensure learning, and if we aren't in touch with their learning, we aren't doing our jobs.

Nevertheless, it is true that case method leaves the instructor uneasy at the opening of each class and perhaps actively concerned about what direction the discussion will head and how well-equipped one might be to handle the diversions. Frankly, I find this emotion healthy and good for stimulating more careful preparation and attention to the plan for the class.

What Case Method Demands of the Instructor

Case method makes many demands on the instructor: it takes time to prepare; it requires a more personal instructor to be in the room; it requires case-writing to add to the pool of first-class materials; it requires an ability and willingness to relinquish desires for total control in the classroom; it requires an interest in the learning of the individuals in the room; and finally, it requires a willingness to admit not knowing the answers to all questions.

Case method requires careful course design that includes excellent materials (there are a lot of bad cases out there). Harvard Case Services, Western Ontario, Simmons College in

Boston, the Darden Graduate School of Business Administration at the University of Virginia, and the North American Case Research Association all have bibliographies of cases available to instructors. Sifting through these, reading the abstracts, perhaps ordering inspection copies, and reading the cases takes time, but you can begin to develop a repertoire of cases that you know and can teach.

The early career investment is heavy. This conflicts with early career research and writing demands. Again, you will have to sort that dilemma out with your preferences and with the goals of your institution. Later on, I think, you should try to find at least 10% new materials for a course each year to refresh the perspectives of the course. For a 30-session course, that means finding three new cases each year, and that is a significant investment.

Case method also demands that the instructor develop the ability to ask good questions. Perhaps no skill is so important to case teaching as this one. If one phrases a question vaguely or asks the wrong question, a class can degenerate rapidly and be very difficult to resurrect. Good questions do not have "yes" or "no" answers; but rather, they invite the respondents to describe their thinking and make a case for why others should accept it—or stimulate another solid 20 minutes of discussion. Sometimes, depending on the skill of the group and the clarity of the discussion, one needs to do no more than nod in the direction of the next speaker. Other times, a bit of introduction and background may be necessary to present a question and have it understood and connected to the rest of the discussion. Some case instructors pay too little attention to the wording and content of their questions. Some may be able to do this well off the cuff in class, but in my experience—especially early on—the better instructors think carefully about the exact questions that will open and carry a topic in class.

Ability to manage class discussion is a key set of skills, values, and abilities that case method asks of the instructor. Managing beginnings, whom to call on and when, when to talk and when to be silent, how to deal with silence, managing conflicts, interjecting instructor input and theory, and managing endings and conclusions all have significant issues for consideration.

Managing beginnings is important to successful case courses, not only the first class but the beginning of each class. The impressions one makes as soon as one enters the room either add to or detract from the learning environment. The first words spoken do the same. If one is critical, overbearing, or apologetic and disorganized, it will set a tone for the hour and perhaps for the course. Careful instructors are aware of these influences, and while they may not manage them compulsively, they will attend to them and strive to improve class after class, course after course.

Beginnings establish direction, ground rules, and acceptable or unacceptable behaviors. Beginning a case course with a lecture, for instance, confuses the group. Beginning with a case introduction to an ill-prepared group, however, can also disrupt their readiness to learn. I think very carefully about when I am going to arrive, what I'm going to do, how I'm going to dress, and what I'm going to say in the first five minutes. Instructor Tony Athos takes management of beginnings even more seriously. He mingles with students in advance to find out what they're thinking and talking about to get his mind and experience more closely aligned with theirs so he

can talk their language and, from the outset, reduce or eliminate many barriers between them and him. Throw-away phrases from some (i.e., "I didn't have much time to sort this out this morning, but we'll work through it.") can seriously erode the motivation in a class. Beginnings are important: think carefully about everything you'll say and do and consider the consequences they will have on the students. You might even videotape several beginnings to see what your observer's eye tells you about how they affect the atmosphere in the classroom.

Whom to call on is a big question. Does one call on the person obviously prepared (who may have even come up before class to volunteer to begin the discussion), pick randomly on someone who may be struggling with the material, or on the individual who seems unprepared? Students' backgrounds and orientations may also influence this decision. Does one call on students with extensive experience in the industry highlighted in the case or someone who doesn't know it and might bring a fresh perspective? What about balance in calling on men and women, majorities and minorities, and—one that you might not even think about—the left side of the room versus the right side of the room? If you are right-handed, you may naturally turn clockwise from the board to face the class, meaning that you will face the left side of the room first. If you tend to call on the first hand you see, you'll find an inordinate number of hands on the left and very few, backed up by frustrated faces on the right.

Whom to call on is a pedagogical question, not just a get-it-out-fast question. Sometimes it is better for the learning of the group to call on a person who is struggling with the material, because as you work with that person, he or she becomes a surrogate for the rest of the class—the embodiment of their questions and concerns about the material. Working with such a person provides a means for the majority of the class to come along and is a superior approach to calling on the bright or experienced one who can sail through that particular analysis.

Sometimes you may wish to ask, "Who disagrees with the last point of view?" simply to identify those who don't hold the same opinion and so to engender some healthy debate. In fact, if everyone seems to be agreeing, one begins to worry about groupthink and the subsequent shutting down of the learning process.

When to talk and when to be silent is another issue of case class management. If the instructor speaks too much or attempts to solve disagreements too soon, the class will soon learn to wait and listen to the instructor for the "right" answer. Allowing the students to explore an issue until they've exhausted their resources and then having the wisdom and insight to recognize that point and to step in with some new ideas to spur their discussion takes courage and is a skill developed over time by case instructors.

I keep track of each class's discussion with a relatively simple spreadsheet. I mark each student with a numbering system and then calculate at the end of any day how many students have talked that day or overall over the length of the course. This gives me a good indication of how much I'm talking versus the students and of how many students are getting into the discussion. Some experienced case teachers believe that no more than 10 to 15 students should talk in a class since any more is an indication of shallowness, the collection of so-called "chip shots." In my experience, students will talk as long as they need to, and their classmates will tend

to censure them from wasting the group's time. In that kind of environment, I find as many as 30 to 40 students talking in an 80-minute class, and they are working at a substantive level.

The question of remembering what happens after the class is over is not as difficult as it sounds to many new case teachers. If you have a stack of registration cards with photos and basic background information, you can learn the students' names and faces within two or three classes. Some instructors will make the effort to learn the names and faces and backgrounds, essentially memorizing the cards, before the first class. There is a certain impression of awe lent when an instructor can call a student by name, mention their alma mater and work experience, and then ask them how that education and work history bears on the case.

Sometimes, what seems like a lengthy toleration of silence is exactly what the group needs to think about the issue, to formulate arguments, and to reflect on the previous comment. Yet most of us are uneasy with silence, particularly in an educational setting. It somehow seems that to allow silence is to renege on one's responsibility either as a conversationalist or as an instructor. Yet the opposite can be true. Silence can punctuate emotions, important points, or poignant questions. Pressing for premature answers may yield immature thinking. A good case teacher is comfortable with silence and knows how to use it to the advantage of the group.

In any setting that encourages discussion there will be disagreement. How that disagreement is dealt with can make a big difference in the openness of the group and in its learning. In cases, one often tries to foment moderate conflict by seeking those with differing opinions and calling on them to lay out their rationales. If one is skilled and a little lucky, one can also get emotions connected to the various viewpoints, which can heighten the learning possibilities for the class. When one is emotionally as well as intellectually engaged, the memory is more highly activated and intensity of concentration is raised. Conditions that lead one to examine personally held values, methods of analysis, or goals for business, can be enormously helpful in the educational process.

When the emotions tip over into the irrationally-held but-not-open-for-discussion zone, then the conflict is likely to become divisive and unproductive. Out of fear for the latter, many instructors actively avoid emotional encounters in the classroom. My belief is that one can learn to handle such settings productively. Goals for these situations might include making sure that there is a balance of strength between individuals or points of view, perhaps even lending some strength to one side of the argument or the other to keep things balanced.

Another goal for me is to encourage people to reason out their positions publicly so that they can learn (1) whether they are really committed to their viewpoint or not and (2) what it will take to make a rational, convincing argument for their position among peers. I also try to make certain that discussants focus on the issues and the situation in the case rather than attacking each other personally. One cannot always avoid that. In that situation, one has to remember that these are more or less adults, who are able if not always willing, to take responsibility for their own actions. It is not my responsibility to protect everyone in the class—either from the attacks of others or from the backlash to their own behavior. It is my goal to help the people in the room

gain some experience with those kinds of situations among professional peers in a setting where we can talk about the result and perhaps learn from it.

Most case classes for me have or develop a structure. There are some common structures that we can identify: the problem first, the answer first, and the free form are perhaps the most common. In the problem-first structure, the classes are usually divided into three sections: problem identification, analysis, and action plan. Most of my classes follow this three-part structure because I believe it is hard to work on the solutions until one has a clear idea of what the problems are. I usually spend about 20%, 40%, and 40%, respectively, on these three sections, which varies depending on the needs of the class. Earlier classes in a course may focus more on problem identification while later classes may emphasize more action planning, but each class has some of these three elements in it. The analysis period is when we bring theory and conceptual frameworks to bear: How did we get into this mess? What are the dynamics of this situation? How do you make sense of this situation? What are the causal links here? and so on.

In the answer-first structure, instructors begin the class not with "What are the problems if any here?" but with "What would *you do*?" Their rationale is that the students' preparations have led them up to this point and they have immediate energy for letting that out. In this structure, instructors will flesh out several alternative action plans and then go back into the analysis and problem identification. It is an effective technique when done well, but it can also be demoralizing if one person is so compelling that the rest feel they have nothing to add. Further, if a student develops a rigorous action plan that does not address what some feel are the main issues, it can be used to highlight the point that we need to know what we're working on before we charge off with solutions. Near the end of a course, this approach can be powerful and efficient when students steeped in problem identification and analysis will be able and willing to incorporate into their answers the rationales for why this solution and not that one, thereby covering the problem and analysis sections as well.

The free-form structure allows the students to set the agenda. This may be done explicitly by asking them at the outset to set their agenda for the day (i.e., "What questions do you think we should answer [or work on] today?" or by simply asking someone "to begin.") That approach assures the instructor that the class is where the students are—and can be a good way, two-thirds of the way through a course, of doing an exam preview. Without structuring their discussion, the instructor can find out what they know and how they think. This has been a humbling experience for me in the past and highlighted again how often the gap between what I think they know and what they actually got is too large. If the class ignores the conceptual frameworks already introduced and practiced, I might conclude that, although if I *asked* them to regurgitate the framework they could do it, they have not yet learned how to use the framework or accepted its utility in similar situations.

Interjecting theory, as I have mentioned, is an important part of case discussions. I often compare the case class to a hole of golf. If lecturing were the only technique we could use, it would be like playing a hole of golf with only one club. But if one has several clubs at one's disposal, then one can pick and choose when to play which club and under what circumstances. Knowing when to play a 7 iron or a sand wedge requires both skill with clubs and experience and judgment. Knowing when to interrupt the discussion with a short lecture requires some skill at

making the lecture, at the interruption, and at building the bridge back to the class so that they can pick it up again. Poor interruptions leave a class flat and with no enthusiasm or sense of direction. In a way, it's like picking up a running child and redirecting it. If you hold the child up too long, her energy will die out, so that when you put her down again, she won't run off. If you pick her up just long enough to redirect and whisper, "There, that way, now go to it!" the child will take off as soon as you set her down. As you practice the various teaching techniques introduced here, you'll find some you feel more comfortable with than others. If you allow yourself to use only a few, your breadth of skills will diminish, and you'll be playing the golf course of andragogy with but one or two clubs in your bag.

Managing endings and conclusions is also critical to case teaching. In classic case method there may be no ending, just the recognition that the time is up and that people should leave. In a more controlled approach, instructors may attempt to give the "right" answer at the end of the period. This can be equally deflating to the students since it undermines their desire to study the next day. ("Why study if he/she is just going to give us the right answer at the end anyway?") In between, there is the ability to occasionally let the discussion hang, to occasionally report what happened in the real case and discuss whether or not that was a *good* decision, or to build a bridge from this class to the next one, including the next preparation to give the students a sense of the overarching framework into which the sequence of cases fits.

I find that class-to-class bridges are much more important to short-term (three days to three weeks) executive programs where one has less time to build a conceptual mountain range than with MBAs over the course of an entire term. Practicing managers have less tolerance for rediscovery, although I am convinced that similar principles of learning apply equally to them. Consequently, I tend to build more explicit bridges between classes, building the near-shore span at the end of class and the far-shore span at the beginning of the next class (e.g., "Remember that in our last class, Sturdivant Electric, we talked about how to manage interpersonal conflict and how to deal with limited resources under conditions of pressure? We build on that theme in today's class by examining a broader context: how conflict develops and can be managed in work teams and under less stressful conditions.")

What Case Method Demands of the Student

Case method makes some significant demands on the students as well as the instructors. Students have to be willing to prepare in advance, to come to class, to speak their opinions, to show some courage in conversing with their classmates, and to respond to instruction from all sides. Students must be willing to prepare in advance of each class and express their opinions in the classroom setting. If they won't prepare or talk, it is difficult to hold a case discussion. Sometimes getting these two elements is a matter of expectation and training. In some institutions, students are not generally expected to behave in this way, and they may not until otherwise encouraged or coached. Having a large proportion of one's grade dependent on class participation helps.

Having a large proportion of one's grade dependent on class participation takes care of the attendance issue pretty well, too. While both institutions where I have taught (Harvard and Darden) have strict attendance rules, I find that a system that allows students some absences but penalizes them for those absences, allows the students to manage their own destinies. If a student misses a couple of classes and hasn't had the courtesy to get advance release, I give them a negative mark. Thus, their behavior detracts from the scores they've earned already. Being there but not participating earns one a 0, but not being there detracts from the class and robs the others of the opportunity to draw from that student's experience and insights, so it's a negative. One can make this up of course, by speaking more frequently thereafter, but that is no guarantee of excellent marks on what one does say. If one is merely wasting air time with shallow comments, that can earn negative marks as well.

The case method asks students to have the courage to make decisions and have them examined among their peers. Although some people don't like to do that, it is an excellent refining fire and helps students to more quickly sort out the chaff from the wheat. Students who, for whatever reason, refuse to take a position and defend it are likely to find the case method threatening and overwhelming. But consider what kinds of settings they will find in business. Does not business demand that one make decisions and defend them and act on them? In fact, recent criticism of business schools points up the unwillingness of many graduates to take risks and to accept responsibility for their behavior. In that connection, the case method is excellent skill training for later career activities.

Conclusion

Case method is a powerful teaching tool. Some shy away from it because it demands time and talent from both student and instructor alike, but these concerns ought to be considered in the broader view of learning. Do we want students to develop the ability to use course concepts or are we just concerned with how much material we cover in class? Instructors planning to use cases ought to look at the various elements in our basic educational model to assess the ways in which an institution's history and culture, the objectives of a particular degree program, the materials that one might use, the expectations of the students, the skills of the instructor, and the setting of the course all contribute to or detract from the probable success of a case course. I've seen cases work in a variety of settings with a variety of student types and am convinced that they can be very effective in a many settings. Again, I'm biased by my training and experience. Consequently, anyone contemplating using case method should include others' views on case method as well.