

The Case Method of Teaching

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Ever since Harvard first introduced case discussions, more and more B Schools have been using cases in the classroom. In India, IIM Ahmedabad was one of the first institutes to do this. But unfortunately, barring a few other B Schools, case discussions have not caught on in India, as they should have. This is a pity, because in the real world of business, intuition, lateral thinking and the ability to take decisions without sufficient information, are the critical success factors. And there is little doubt that cases go a long way in developing such skills. There are various reasons why very few cases are discussed in our B Schools. For one, we do not have enough trained faculty. We are also severely handicapped by a shortage of cases. Few B Schools have really invested time, effort and money in developing cases that are relevant to the Indian context. Even a pioneer like IIM Ahmedabad, has not been very active in case development in recent times. The third reason why case discussions are not very widely used is that they call for a different mindset and a degree of discipline that is not associated with the traditional lecture mode of teaching. Drawing from my experience of having developed over 100 cases and conducted more than 150 case discussions, I shall address these issues in this article and suggest practical means to deal with them. How can B Schools develop faculty skills in handling cases? To start with, faculty should be given clear directives that a good number of contact hours should be devoted to case discussions. Subjects like Marketing, Organizational behaviour and Business Strategy should be taught only through cases, as there is very little 'theory' involved. Those like Operations and Finance can be taught through a judicious mix of lectures (to explain concepts) and cases (to bring a strong application orientation). Technical subjects such as Programming Languages may be taught through lectures, but even here, there is scope for discussing journal articles, if not full-fledged cases. To the extent possible, B Schools should employ only in-house faculty to handle cases. Visiting faculty are difficult to train, as they often have a short term orientation which may act as an impediment to learning. They also often fail to do the required amount of homework before a case discussion.