

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The case study method is most appropriate as a group learning process conducted over an extended period of time in a classroom. The writer, however, has seen the method used with postgraduate distance-learning students where individual learning was required. The method adopted in these circumstances was to require the student first to develop a case study derived from his own experience and then to analyse a series of cases. The success of such an activity rests on three premises:

1. The maturity and experience of the students. In the instance referred to all were postgraduate students with several years of experience as administrators in universities and colleges.
2. Access to and appreciation of the literature relating both to the writing of case studies and the procedures for analysis. Books listed in the bibliography would provide an adequate basis.
3. Ready and constant access to a tutor or mentor with regular correspondence or communication between them on the issues arising from the case.

The procedure is slow and this endangers both momentum and enthusiasm but the programme witnessed by the writer drew enthusiastic responses from the students.

### Case Writing

This book is not concerned with case writing as such though a salutary exercise for new students is for them to write a case or case report in the process of which they identify the elements of a case. They need to identify the intended use of the case; to decide what type of case it is to be; to locate the sources of information necessary to develop the case; to determine what elements obtained from the data should be included in the case; to structure the case so that those analysing it are able to achieve maximum benefit from its study.

### Case Methods in the Classroom

There is no preferred procedure for dealing with cases in the classroom situation though what follows has been used with success in workshops initiated by the Institute for Higher Education in the University of New England, Australia.

Prior to the first group meeting, the leader or instructor will distribute a case study together with background reading. In a workshop, where over a period of days a succession of cases is considered, all the cases may be handed to participants before the initial meeting - a necessity with a bound book of this kind - or, quite frequently, a work-under-pressure effect is created, by following a tight cycle of dealing with a case and immediately presenting materials for the next case session. Several cases might thus be analysed in a few days.

The next step is one of individual reading and analysis. Sometimes this is followed by small group sessions involving two or three participants where they again examine the material and discuss what they regard as relevant issues.

During the group session, the leader or instructor first resolves questions from the group arising from the assigned background readings. He then leads the class in discussion of the case, probing for further information or comment, supplying additional comments and relating observations to pertinent theories or insights from the literature on administration. Often a recorder is appointed to list the points arising from the debate. Overall, the instructor's task is to ensure maximum exploration of the material of the case; the task of the students being to raise issues, discuss their implications and evaluate their own ideas against those arising from the group.

The post-class activity for both instructor and participants is one of evaluation. The student reviews the results of the exercise and notes the major concepts learnt; the instructor evaluates both the quality of student participation and the effectiveness of the case and related materials in achieving the objectives he sought.

#### Procedures for dealing with a Case

Here again, there is no set format for dealing with cases. **Erskine** and associates(5) have however suggested eight steps which form a convenient problem solving model.

- What is the problem?
- What is the relevant information?
- What are the alternatives?
- What are the decision criteria?
- What is the most appropriate decision?
- What is the plan for implementation?
- When and how does implementation happen?
- What is the overall evaluation?

Many variants of the above are possible. Thus, a useful analytical tool in some cases is a force field analysis where one isolates the driving and restraining forces in a given situation, plotting possible steps to enhance or reduce the strengths of such forces and arriving at appropriate decisions or courses of action.

## METHODOLOGY

A word of caution to the instructor and the student is that participants must stay with the materials which are before the group. There is often a tendency on the part of either a leader or participants to refer to anecdotal experiences which too readily detract from the force of the case in question.

### Conclusion

Case studies are training tools. They are valuable for their flexibility. Different groups of participants working with the same case study will arrive at different conclusions. An interesting closure to a case study programme is often made in business schools by having a representative of the firm about which the case was written explain to the class the actual decision and outcomes determined by the company. Whether the company might have fared better or worse by drawing on the services of a case study group before making the decision is a matter for conjecture. What has been an outcome of our experience in the University of New England is the very positive reaction of student groups who have used the method and the conviction held by both leader and group that participants became more adept at analysis of cases and reports and that they gained a better appreciation of concepts about policy and administration.

### The Cases

The nine cases presented in Part II have been written by university administrators from five Third World countries. Necessarily, most of those that have been selected concern national and institution-wide issues and revolve around questions of policy. As issues become more specific they tend to lose their general relevance beyond their own institution or country; though the one case about the restructuring of an academic department is a notable exception to this rule, since the case reflects what is not unfamiliar in any university.

Four of the cases deal directly with government-university relationships and explore the delicate balance which has to be achieved if universities and governments are going to be mutually supportive parties in national development. Two cases relate to staff development and address particularly the question of localisation of academic and administrative staffs. Another explores what is probably unique to developing countries, because of social factors of distance, geography and economics and, at times, dissemination, the problem of providing access to education for groups who have been traditionally shut off from such access.

It is suggested that the case studies are used in the order in which they are presented. It will be found that neighbouring case studies can conveniently be looked at together.