

The Case Study Workshop Method

International Facilitator's Companion

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imaginal training

Case Study Workshop Method

This booklet is one of two which deal with case studies. In this booklet a method for preparing to lead a case study workshop is presented. The booklet called The Case Writing Method presents a method for writing a case which could be used in teaching the Case Study Workshop Method.

The Theory

Section One: The Theory

The Case Study Workshop Method is a teaching tool which was originally designed for students in Business Management and Administration. The first cases were developed at Harvard Business School in the 1950's. The method is now used widely at most universities and management training schools.

A case is usually a "story" derived from a real situation which gives a description of an actual situation faced by an organization, department or group of people. It describes how the situation developed over time and some of the problems that key persons are facing. Sometimes, charts, tables, photographs, diagrams etc. are included to illustrate the situation. A case is a sample of business life which can be studied in slow motion in a classroom setting.

What is a Case?

A case study is not merely an exercise. Exercises rehearse a specific behavioral pattern like a new skill. It is not a role play. Role plays are intended to make social behavioral patterns visible and to practice them. It is not an example because examples illustrate a point or theory. It is not a simulation, business game, problem or scenario.

One fundamental characteristic of a case is that it poses a dilemma. A dilemma is a situation that requires a choice between two or more equal, usually unpleasant alternatives. A dilemma is therefore a more or less complex, problem situation in which there is no "right" answer, which requires careful analysis to come up with alternatives. One answer or course of action may, in the real situation on which the case was created, have resulted in a positive outcome.

A case is always based on reality, and it derives its force and credibility from this. A case always contains facts but it may also include opinions, dialogue and prejudices. A case can be complex or simple. It can be from one page to 50 or more pages.

There are several kinds of Case Methods:

The Classical or “Harvard” cases

These are very detailed case reports, running to 50 or more pages with supporting charts and documents, anything that might bear on the situation including the history of the company; biographies of key persons; information about finances, marketing, production, and other functions. Much of the information is not directly related to the problem.

The Short Case Method

These cases are only a page or two. All extraneous information is removed, leaving only the information pertinent to one problem. For the purposes of this booklet we will only develop this kind of case.

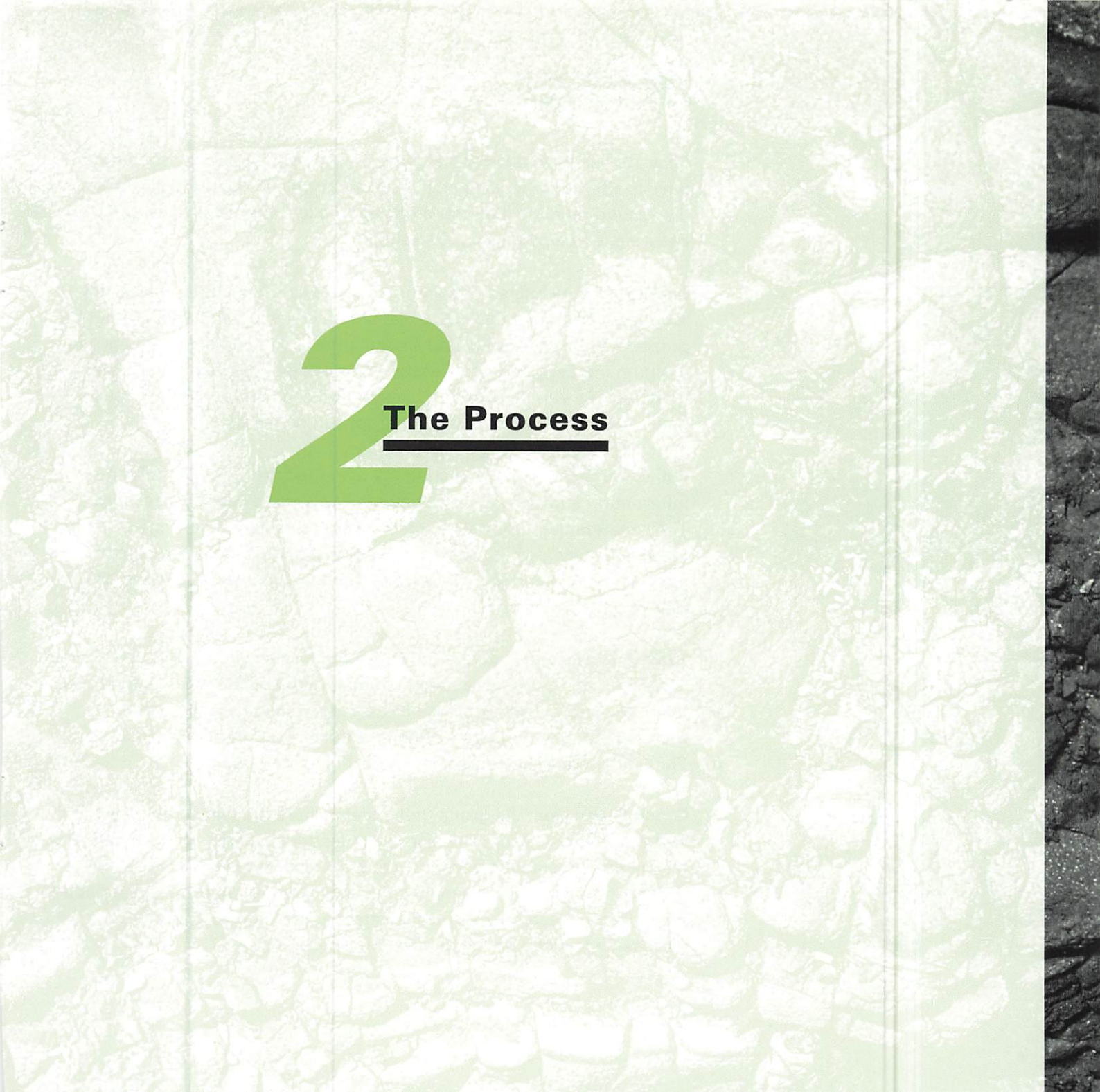
The Video or Recording Method

The use of recordings or films to present the case. This adds drama but usually lacks the background information found in the Classical case.

The Incident Process

The case comes to the group as a reported incident, for example a sharp one month decline in sales. The group then needs to ask questions until they decide they have the information they need. Individuals or teams write a solution to the case followed by a general discussion. Students with similar solutions are then sent off to iron out their differences and to select a spokesperson to argue the merits of their case in debate with other viewpoints. The leader then will report the “real life” solution.

The Case Study Workshop Method is a powerful teaching tool designed to aid the development of managers. It enables students in their thinking skills. It is participative. It broadens thinking. It is based on reality and not theory.



2

The Process

Section Two: The Process

Case studies have different learning objectives. The two most common have to do with practicing analytical and problem solving skills. Of course the second requires the first. Whatever the learning objectives, there are basic steps to a case study workshop.



Context This includes the assignment, a description of the Case Study Workshop Method if this is the first time it is used, a statement about the purpose of the case study and a description of the individual and group assignment. Each student is assigned to a team. The best groups are made up of a variety of styles, backgrounds and skills. They are then given the case to study and bibliography (if relevant).



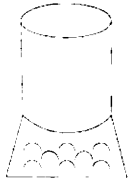
Individual Study Individual students read the case. They identify the information and techniques needed to analyze the case successfully. They analyze the information, identify the problems, determine which is the key problem, what facts are related to it and what information is missing. They come to a tentative view on the course of action to be followed by the manager.



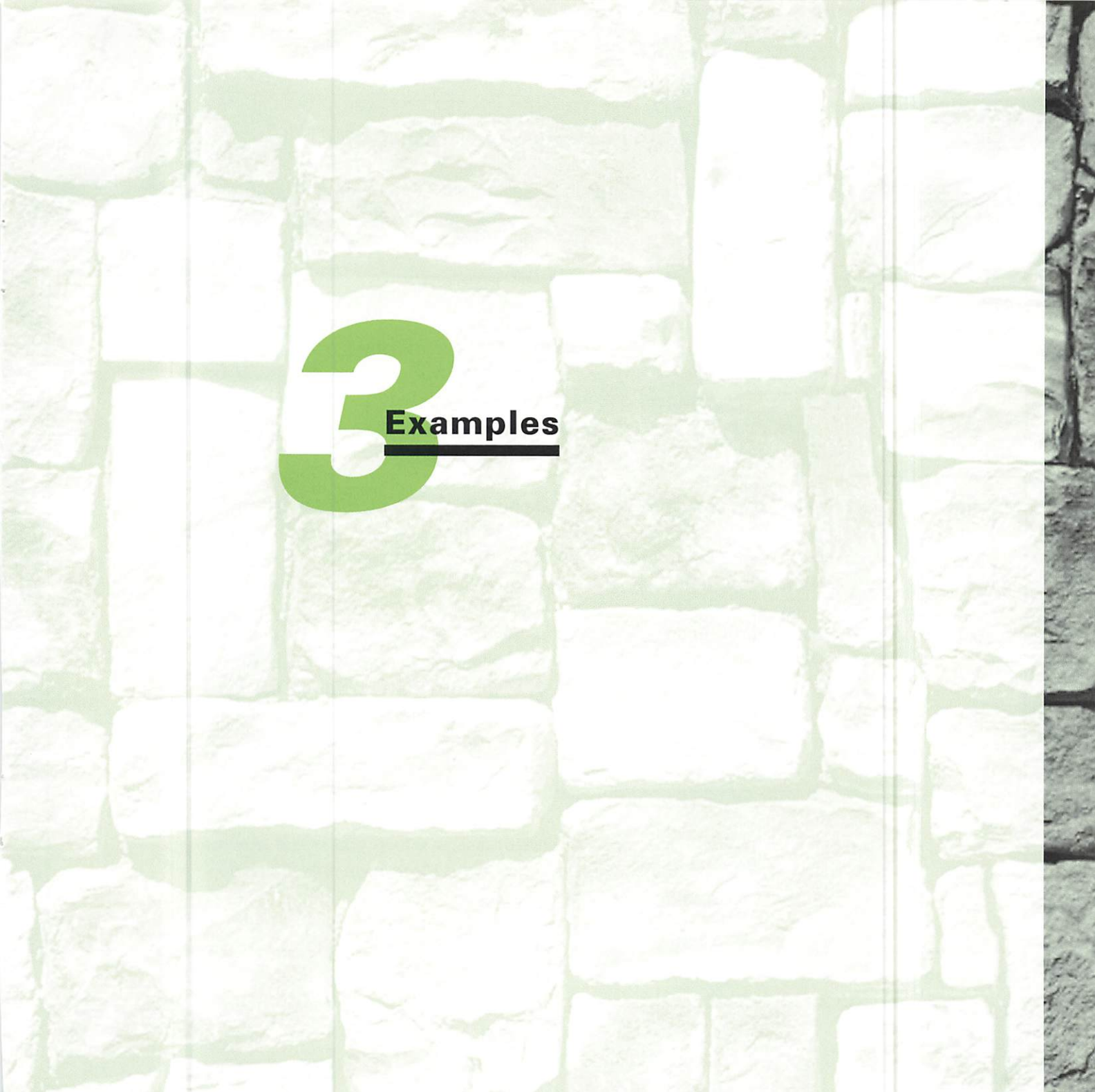
Team Analysis and Problem Solving Team discussion until an agreement is reached on the analysis and recommended solution. Each individual is forced to defend their conclusions and argue their case with other members of the team. They often modify their views in this process. The team prepares a report on the results of their work.



Group Discussion The group then meets where the teacher leads a discussion on the case. The discussion leader ensures participation from a wide range of students; ensures that all aspects of the case are fully probed; time is used efficiently; blind alleys and red herrings are avoided; students are steered away from abstract arguments by keeping the discussion focused on the details of the case.



Conclusion The trainer gives a summary of the major points of the discussion, recommendations, key arguments and supporting evidence. A description of what actually happened in the situation may be included.



3

Examples

Demonstration Workshop: Vacuum Case

Rational Objective: To learn a methodical approach to analyzing a complex business situation.

Existential Aim: To struggle with the need to deal with all the complexity of the business in making a key decision.

Step	Procedure	Notes
Context	<i>This session we want to look at an example of a case study workshop. We'll be using a case which was written in The Netherlands. It's a description of a company. We've changed a few things to make it fit into this situation better. We'll do that now. You will work in groups this morning to discuss the case together.</i>	
Movements	<i>1 Please first read the case individually. As you read, please list on a sheet of paper all the issues faced by this company in its survival. We'll take 20 minutes to do that. Then we'll meet to start the workshop. After 15 minutes, check and if necessary give 10 minutes more.</i> <i>2 Divide the group into teams. Now we are going to work in teams to prepare our initial analysis of the problems the company faces. Each team needs a leader for this next step. He/she will write on the flip chart. Please choose the youngest person as your leader for this work.</i> <i>3 In the teams we will identify all of the problems the owner / manager faces and analyze them. At the end of the workshop we want to come up with our own recommendation on the business's best course of action.</i> <i>4 In your teams first look at the list of issues which you wrote down individually and mark with an asterisk the three problems that you think are most important for this company right now.</i>	
Conclusion	See below	

Demonstration Workshop: Vacuum Case

Rational Objective: See above

Existential Aim: See above

Step	Procedure	Notes
Context	See above	
Movements	5 <i>Each team does four steps.</i> ■ <i>First, create a list of all of the problems facing the business for its survival. Go around the group and have each person suggest one. Keep going around until all of the problems are listed.</i> ■ <i>Then analyze which of these problems can be influenced by the company director and which are external factors that can't be influenced. This can be done by ranking each problem 1 to 10 with 1 being without any influence and 10 being total influence.</i> ■ <i>Describe the problems the director can influence.</i> ■ <i>Lastly define the probable trends in these external factors.</i> 6 <i>Please take 30 minutes for this step. Give the leader in each team the instruction sheet. When we meet back, each team needs to have a flip chart and one person should give a presentation on the findings of your team.</i> When the teams meet back <i>Now we have an idea of the problems we need to solve as a business. In the next part of the workshop we'll identify the key dilemmas this business faces.</i>	
Conclusion	See below	

Demonstration Workshop: Vacuum Case

Rational Objective: See above

Existential Aim: See above

Step	Procedure	Notes
Context	See above	
Movements	Reflecting on analysis Objective: 7 <i>Now we will hear from each group in turn what problems the businessman is facing.</i> Invite the first team to put up its flip chart and make a brief presentation of the findings. 5 minutes 8 After the presentation: <i>Are there any questions of clarity?</i> If discussion arises on the content say that the group will discuss this once all presentations are finished. 9 Continue with each presentation, doing these steps till finished 3 x 5 min.. 10 <i>Let's now reflect on these reports.</i> Reflective: 11 <i>What are the similarities between the reports?</i> 12 <i>What are the differences?</i> 13 <i>What things surprised you in these reports?</i> 14 <i>Where did you think, I want to know more?</i>	
Conclusion	See below	

Demonstration Workshop: Vacuum Case

Rational Objective: See above

Existential Aim: See above

Step	Procedure	Notes
Context	See above	
Movements	Interpretive: 15 <i>Let's make a list of the central or key factors that we can do something about as a manager. What is one such important problem we can influence? Another?</i> Write them up on the left side of the board. 16 <i>What are problems we cannot affect at all?</i> Write them up on the right side of the board. There may be some discussion on whether factors are influenceable. Decisional: Fixing the dilemma and course of action 17 <i>What is one of the dilemmas that the business faces?</i> Write it down on the board, with arrows left and right-facing behind which you write the course of action. Ask: <i>A dilemma has two more or less equally-balanced courses of action: what is one? What is the other?</i> Write answers on board. 18 <i>Make two columns on each side of the board, marked + and -. Start with one side of the dilemma and ask: What are the advantages of doing [.....]? Write up the advantages in the appropriate column. Ask: what are the disadvantages?</i> Write up.	
Conclusion	See below	

Demonstration Workshop: Vacuum Case

Rational Objective: See above

Existential Aim: See above

Step	Procedure	Notes
Context	See above	
Movements	19 Move to the other side of the dilemma and do step 2 again. 20 Summarize the dilemma and the advantages/disadvantages. <i>What would you choose? Why? What criteria are you using to decide this?</i> 21 Continue with another dilemma, until all dilemmas identified by groups have been discussed. 22 <i>If you focused attention on solving just one of the dilemmas immediately, which would you choose to solve? Why?</i> 23 <i>If we look at these dilemmas there is no single right course of action. What would you decide to do now if it was your own business? Take many responses.</i>	
Conclusion	<i>I would like to finish this workshop by walking through what we have done. The trainer can summarize these questions or have the group do it.</i> 1 <i>What were the major problems we came up with?</i> 2 <i>What evidence did we offer as proof for the problem?</i> 3 <i>What solutions were suggested?</i> 4 <i>What were the arguments for the solutions? Against the solutions?</i> What really happened is the manager sold off all of the goods at the top end of the market and stopped selling these items.	

1 The company

Vacuum, which specializes in selling domestic appliances (washing machines, vacuum cleaners, automatic coffee-makers, etc.) has its own service division and is well-known in the area for its better than excellent service. *Vacuum* firmly subscribes to the old saying “the customer is always right.” Although the company has only been going for three years it got off to a good start, and already has a staff of ten, and two service vehicles. The company could expand further if trained personnel could be found to fill the positions. After a dynamic start, however, several entrepreneurial problems are cropping up. While the annual returns have always been positive, they have been lower each year, and this is causing the managing director some concern.

2 Products and services

The policy formulated as part of the company’s business plan aims at making *Vacuum*’s selection of domestic appliances as broad and deep as possible. Thus the customer looking for household products has a large variety of types and price categories from which to choose. Saying no to a customer must be avoided at all costs. The aim is to stock at least one extra sample of every product.

Vacuum’s own maintenance contract is unique in the business. Under this contract *Vacuum* undertakes to carry out all necessary repairs free of charge at the customer’s own home during the first two years. Only if an appliance cannot be repaired at home it will be taken away to *Vacuum*’s workshops. After this two-year period, the company’s contractual obligations decrease with the age of the appliance. These maintenance and repair operations are contractual, but anyone can make use of *Vacuum*’s service division, even without a contract. Then, however, the customer must pay for labor and parts, and a call-out charge.

Parts are needed for all repairs, and *Vacuum* has enough parts in stock to ensure that maintenance and repair are carried out as quickly as possible. This is because there is a 2-month waiting period between order and delivery. This long delivery period is the main reason the company is not keen about selling separate parts, although it will do so at the customer's request.

3 The market

The local town (40,000 inhabitants) forms *Vacuum's* potential market. There are three competitors in the town now, dealing in both domestic and industrial appliances with reasonable success. Given the market volume and the number of competitors, the town has room for one more outlet for domestic appliances. The competition has a distribution network one and a half times the size of *Vacuum's*, but they have not yet discovered the lucrative aspects of the maintenance and repair contract. The sales are replacement sales. The shortage of goods means that the customer makes few demands as to type, color, shape, etc.; the goods are only required to be "of Western manufacture and at a low price" (a consumer purchasing problem).

4 Purchasing and selling

Articles are purchased from one of our neighboring countries, there is a 2-week delivery period, and payment should be cash on delivery. This last requirement is increasingly creating difficulties. Then too, several local manufacturers are producing better-quality goods at lower prices, but consumer demand is unfortunately limited to Western products. The purchase of parts takes considerably longer - usually about two months between order and delivery.

Products in the lower price categories move particularly rapidly, with a turnover rate of five days being the rule rather than the exception. Direct payment for purchases means that *Vacuum* cannot reserve too much stock. None of the goods in this group have yet proved to be dead

stock. The average gross profit per article is about 10% in this segment of the market.

The customers' limited purchasing power means that sales at the more expensive end of the market are a long way below the managing director's expectations. The turnover rate is about two months. These expectations were based in essence on a substantial economic recovery, and thus an increase in consumer purchasing power. The fact that sales have not increased means that businesses have been left with a large stock of this class of goods on their hands. This stock represents a considerable proportion of the invested capital. The average gross profit per article in this segment of the market is about 30%.

The maintenance and repair contract is a first-rate earner: About 75% of customers enter a *Vacuum* contract when they buy a large appliance (washing machine, or refrigerator). Customer claims make up about 60% of the contract price; thus, the net return is 40%.

Non-contractual services remain far below expectations. This has not yet been looked into, but the managing director believes that the following factors are involved:

- unfamiliarity with *Vacuum* name (estimated at 40%)
- unfamiliarity with the services offered
- too expensive (not yet investigated).

5 Financial situation

The financial situation does not look particularly bright. Everything is self-financed, but this is not a bottomless well, and the bottom is now coming into sight. Borrowing is always a possibility, given the value of the stock (ample security is available); set against this, however, is the 60% interest rate.

6 Strategy and the future

The outlook is still for a strengthened economy and an increase in consumer purchasing power. When that happens, the managing director expects an enormous demand for products from the more expensive end of the market, with increased customer discrimination regarding products in the lower price categories. The competition is not focusing on the upper end of the market, so *Vacuum* has the chance to take up a favorable position. It is also rumored that another two competitors may be considering setting up in the town.

The decline in returns, the build-up of stock in the more expensive products, the continuing stagnation of economic growth, and the gradual deterioration in the liquid assets position all combine to make the managing director take a gloomy view of the future. However, he must now give the situation thorough consideration and take action where necessary to prevent his brainchild from going under. A number of options are open to him...

What are the key problems the managing director faces?



4

When Appropriate

Section Four: When Appropriate

Cases generally do not teach theory or best practices. They are best used in developing the capacity of participants to use analytical and problem solving skills within the context of a theory of business. They develop general management skills like team work and communication skills.

Case Study Workshops have several uses:

- To apply newly learned theory,
- To stimulate research into special areas,
- To improve problem analysing skills,
- To practice decision making skills, and
- To enable the group to appraise their own attitudes.

Advantages of the Case Study Workshop Method

The Case Study Workshop Method is quite useful for management training, because it draws on a number of typical management skills which are very difficult to teach.

Analytical Skills

Cases provide a lot of data, which is meaningless unless interpreted. Students learn how to classify and organize the data, and to evaluate its meaning. In problem solving cases, students must be able to find problems, discern their relationships and determine underlying causes. In this analytical process, students develop their capacity to build conceptual models.

Application Skills

Students learn how to apply a concept or technique, which may help in the analytical process. They are required to select techniques which are useful for the situation described in the case.

Creative Skills

Often cases can not be solved by logical processes alone. Creativity is a vital part of a good case study. This is particularly important for developing alternative solutions once the problem analysis has been done. This develops the capacity for lateral thinking. Creativity is an important part of predicting the outcome of a course of action. Creativity is also required in defending solutions before the rest of the students.

Decision Making Skills

Case studies require students to make decisions. Judgement is exercised. Choices are made. Cases involve skilled reasoning and understanding of values and how they affect choices. The cognitive and emotional process involved in making choices are also an important part of the process.

Self-Analysis Skills

Frequently disagreements occur in case discussions over value judgements rather than analytical judgements. Cases provide a useful forum for students to analyse their own values. Cases which involve firing people or giving bribes raise ethical questions and participants can learn more about their own values.

Attitudes

Case studies have great potential for forming or changing attitudes, because cases are complex and actively involve students. They encourage trust in team work and comfort with the idea of many possible solutions to problems.

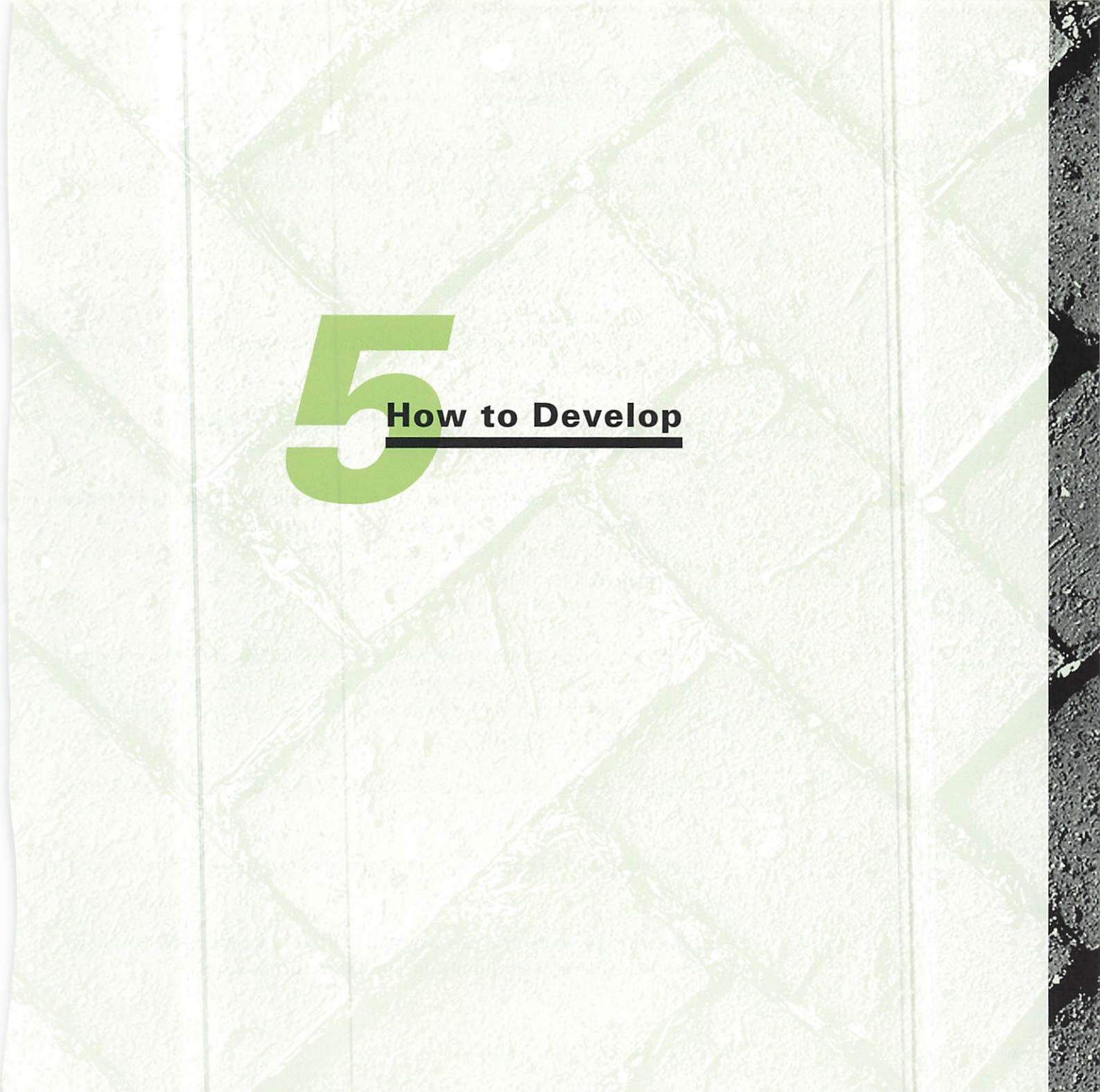
Disadvantages of the Case Study Workshop Method

Group discussion does not actually simulate what happens within the organization. Students have no responsibility in case simulations for implementing their decisions. Case study workshops are not effective ways of teaching and learning substantive knowledge.

Both students and trainers may feel uncomfortable with the uncertainties which are implicit in the method. Students when first introduced to the method may feel a bit lost and wonder what they are supposed to do. They are not told what the problem is. They have to define what they are going to do and how they are going to do it. Students who expect logical, linear "correct" solutions can be ill at ease with these multiple, rather intuitive, non-rational processes.

Case studies have drawbacks for trainers as well. They make heavy demands on the trainer's time for preparation. The longer forms of cases can take months of preparation time and a great deal of interaction with the organization the case is based on. A new, prepared case can also require a great deal of preparation time to get "inside" the case, understand the dynamics of the case and to develop potential solutions.

They expose the weaknesses of poor teachers more than formal lectures do. Cases also require a great deal of group facilitation skill. The discussion leader ensures participation from a wide range of students. All aspects of the case need to be fully probed. Time needs to be used efficiently. Discussions that lead in futile directions need to be avoided. Students should be steered away from abstract arguments by keeping the discussion focused on the details of the case.



5

How to Develop

Section Five: How to Develop

The preparation of a good case requires a ready knowledge of the situation the case is based on, clear teaching objectives and the use of facilitation skills.

The basic steps of a case study workshop are: context, individual work, team work, group discussion and conclusion.

There are other ways of doing the workshop; it may be modified to meet specific needs.

Three factors determine the value of the session. The quality of the case, the use of time and the form of the group discussion.

In a four hour session you will only have 2.5 to 3 hours for the case study workshop. Half of this time needs to be in movement III, the group discussion. Probably 1/4 of the time needs to be in team discussions. The last quarter of the time must be divided between individual preparation, context and conclusion.

Look at the workshop forms. There are two, the Workshop Form and the Movement Form. The Workshop Form is used to create an overview of the whole process and the Movement Form is to write out in detail the procedures of the workshop.

Select one of the cases you want to use. Put the name of the case in the Title of the Workshop box on the form.

Write the rational objective and existential aim of the workshop using the first form.

For each of 5 sections of the workshop fill in the steps you want to have the group take. There should be 3 or 4 steps per section.

Make five copies of the Movement Form, one for the context, each of the three movements and the conclusion.

On the Movement Form for the context write out how you are going to start the workshop. What are you going to say in the context? What is the case about? Do participants need some explanation about case studies? How much time is going to be spent in each part of the workshop?

On the Movement Form for the individual work write out the instructions for the individual. How much time will they have? Are questions going to be answered?

On the Movement Form for the team work write out the instructions to the teams. How are the teams divided? How much time should they take?

In the discussion, what questions are you going to ask and what comments are you going to make? What is the sequence of the questions? How are you going to summarize the work of the group? Is there any thing else that has to be said at the end? Write these on the form.

A good form of the discussion is a **Basic Conversation**. So the general dynamics of the discussion are: **Objective**: Each of the teams reports on their analysis. Get clarity on what they are saying. Are any important facts not included? **Reflective**: What are the similarities and differences between the analyses and solutions of the teams? **Interpretive**: What values are being held in each of the analyses and solutions? What are the important aspects of the problem for each of the groups? **Decisional**: What are the implications of the solutions? Which solution seems most effective now? While the discussion is going on, the important points should be put ont the board to be used in the summary. (See the Basic Conversation Booklet.)

On the form for the conclusion, write out how the summary will be done (the content of this, of course, will come from the discussion). How is the workshop going to end?

Determine how much time will be required by each of the sections of the workshop and write the time in the notes column of the worksheet.



6

Worksheets

Workshop Worksheet
Title of Workshop _____

Rational Objective:		Existential Aim:	
Step		Procedure	Notes
Context			
Move- ments	I		
	II		
	III		
Conclusion			

Movement Worksheet
Movement _____

Step	Procedure	Notes



Tips for Developing and Using

Section Seven: Tips for Developing and Using

The problems in case study teaching are poor material, lack of student preparation and poor discussion management by the trainer. Watch out as the trainer for your own desire to show off your knowledge of the subject.

Check if the written case is clear and whether all of the information necessary to understand and solve the problems is included. Study the case enough to be able to respond to questions or solutions that you have not considered.

Most case study workshops require pre-workshop training before the workshop is done. This training needs to be done well enough that the students can actually use it.

Spending time on the discussion part of the workshop is important. Not only should questions be formulated beforehand, but also possible suggestions and comments. Whenever possible, ask questions rather than make comments. For example if a team comes to a conclusion that is not founded on evidence in the case they can be asked, "Where in the case do you find evidence to justify your conclusion?"

8

References

Section Eight: **References**

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Notes