Developing Case-Based Teaching Skills

RESOURCE PACK
This resource pack helps you deal with case-based teaching. It is designed to be read in conjunction with the 2-hour training module on case-based teaching conducted by one of the lecturers.

We welcome feedback on this resource pack and suggestions for improvement. If you have any comments, please feel free to contact us.

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This resource pack is designed to help you develop your skills as a case-based teacher. This means that you are able to conduct, coordinate, and facilitate a group discussion around a case study. Case studies are an increasingly important pedagogy in teaching. They are considered an important way to relate theories to the “real” world and they help students develop analytic as well as action-oriented skills. Typically, cases are used to help students analyse situations and to identify problems; then they develop, evaluate and discuss potential solutions. There is rarely one “right” answer and, instead, students are encouraged to consider a range of potential solutions and to evaluate their pros and cons, as well as contextualizing and tailoring generic solutions to address the specifics of a particular case study.

Case-based teaching relies on student interaction and, particularly debates among students with different opinions. Case-based teaching is, as a result, demanding; as a teacher, you have to facilitate discussion and orchestrate debate. In generating debate, you have to manage both the quiet student who does not want to participate and the dominant student who does not listen. Moreover, you have to structure the debate, which is not simply a matter of students arguing with each other but a tool to flesh out the nuances and intricacies of a particular case. Since there is not a single right answer, you have to probe, encourage, and prod students to come up with the different solutions and to identify their advantages and disadvantages. You have to move them from dealing with generalities e.g., “the manager needs a vision” or “there is a need for more communication” to addressing the specifics of the case i.e., “the vision in this might look like this…” “The CEO needs to set up the following communication mechanisms…”

A successful case-based class has its own momentum and energy. Students are all sufficiently engaged that they are doing most of the work – they are identifying problems and generating solutions. The discussion is distributed – the majority of students are participating – and interactive – students are responding to each others’ points in a constructive and polite way. The discussion is also grounded – rather than recite the textbook, students are working with the individuals in the case study and are offering concrete ideas for solutions. The teacher works largely behind the scenes – providing impetus when the discussion drags and subtly directing the discussion to illuminate the key theoretical and practical points; wrapping things up at the end of the class in terms of a range of insights that students will have derived from the case discussion rather than a single outcome or answer. The teacher is also able to work with ambiguity – the ambiguity that some students may experience in working with cases, particularly if they are not used to them; and the ambiguity that you may experience in not quite knowing where the discussion is going. Case-based teaching demands very different skills compared to traditional lecturing; investing in the acquisition of these skills is worthwhile though since almost all academic teaching positions will expect you to be able to demonstrate that you can effectively work with case-based teaching.
Teaching with Cases

All of these cases are based on **real world scenarios**. The stories have been constructed with data from real organisations collected in our research.

The cases contain **supporting data and documents**. These are real quotes, charts, and data that the students can analyse.

All of the cases we teach with have **open-ended problems**. Whilst students will be keen for the definitive answer, there are none. This is the beauty and the excitement of teaching cases, there as many answers as there are more questions.

Not only do the students see how theories apply in **real world**, they also get to see what can be ambiguous in the workplace; that not every problem is clearly defined.

This means students get to explore **multiple perspectives**, and address the impacts of different decisions.

Analysing cases requires **critical thinking**. You will be assisting students to make explicit their thinking processes – what logic and assumptions they call into play in working through a case; and should they be challenged. In addition, what are the **disadvantages** of possible solutions and recommendations – can students learn to reflect on their own thinking processes.

Finally, case based teaching allows students to **synthesize and integrate the course material**. To do this well they will be pulling in threads from previous lectures.

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**Basic Case Structure**

Our basic case structure includes:

- A scenario
- A statement of issue
- A required assignment (e.g., what would you do?)

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**Do Students like case based classes...?**

No simple answer on this one. Some students love them and the biggest challenge you will have is managing their enthusiasm so they don’t dominate the class. Some students are uncomfortable with having to interact – and this can be as simple as they are shy, or not confident in their ability to express themselves. The majority of the undergrads have also come through a system which implies there is ‘one-best-way’ or ‘a correct answer’ they need to memorise. These students can be uncomfortable with the ambiguity inherent in working through a case.
planning for cases

First things first...

You need to be prepared, you need to know the case well and be fully familiar with the facts and characters within the case. Then in walking into your class you need to be ready with a warm-up or an ice-breaker exercise/question. Something that is very broad in scope and easy for students to answer.

The tutorial plan should include the following areas:

- **Ice-breaking/preparation:** How are you going to start to get the students thinking about the key issues using the relevant theoretical concepts? For example, do you want to put them into three groups for the first 5 minutes to discuss one of the different time periods and to try and fill their particular part of the chart in? Do you want to set specific questions in the previous tutorial for students to answer by way of preparation? If so, what would those questions be?

- **Your script:** How are you going to handle the flow for the case-based discussion? What questions are you going to use to get at the issues? What questions do you need to ask students to get them to come up with the right answers? Can you prepare a broad list of questions to help you?

- **Closure:** How do you want to wrap up the case? What are the key concepts/ideas that you want them to take away? What are the main points of your final ‘presentation’? Can you prepare a wrap-up handout for the students to take away?

- **Process:** What process do you have in mind for running the tutorial? What are the different components of the process? Can you provide an outline your process and attach a time-line to it? How you are going to play out your coaching role to make this process work?

- **Your Safety Net:** What questions do you anticipate (what questions did you have/what issues did you have when you first read the case)? Have you prepared written answers/notes for anything you are not completely sure of?

- **Props:** What aids would be useful or interesting for the students e.g., web pages, pictures of the different computer models, follow-up information, etc.? (BEARING IN MIND YOU ONLY HAVE 45 MINUTES!)

Case study plans

The following is an example of a case study plan developed by the tutors of a second year economics and commerce subject. The case study is about power and politics. It is important that you do plan and structure your class – this is one example of how to do so.
SESSION 11: AUTOMAKERS OF AUSTRALIA CASE

Pre-work

- This segment is to be presented in the last five minutes of previous week, Session 10.
- Objectives: to bridge between the topic of Sessions 10 and 11 (culture/communication and power), and to provide students with instructions for pre-work, which will allow students to go straight into the discussion for Session 11.

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<th>SEGMENT</th>
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| Introduction of the case; linking with previous topic | (Wrap up previous week) 
(Bridge to Automakers case) Next week, will be looking at another case called Automakers of Australia. In this case you will see another type of organizational culture. You will read about a manufacturing plant characterized by a culture which is decidedly 'macho', aggressive, and competitive. So one important dimension of this case is the significant role that power plays. 
(Introduce power) During the next lecture, you will hear more about power and you will find that there are different levels at which power can be exercised in an organization. |       |
| Instructions for next tutorial | During the next lecture, you may want to pay close attention to these different dimensions of power, and to bear them in mind when you read the case. 
Between now and next week’s tutorial, there are a couple of things that you can do to prepare for this case (show instructions) | Small instruction sheet with the following: 
1. Read the case 
2. Answer the following questions: (a) How would you describe, in your own words, the culture at automakers, and why was it hard to change? 
(b) How were the three dimensions of power used to change the culture? Be prepared to share at least two specific examples for each dimension. |

Introduction/ Icebreaker:

- First 15 minutes of Session 11.
- Objectives:
  - To review organizational culture.
  - To review the dimensions of power in a general sense (generic examples).
  - To set up triads within which students will discuss the case.
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<tr>
<td>Plenary Discussion</td>
<td>■ What are some types of corporate culture you have come across? &lt;br&gt; ■ Is it possible for an organization not to have one? &lt;br&gt; ■ How can you change corporate culture?</td>
<td>■ Invite two or three students to respond. &lt;br&gt; ■ Show slide after discussion.</td>
<td>OHT: Automaker's Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group work:</td>
<td>(Lead into power) We can see from day-to-day life at Automakers, for example the 2x4 management style, that power plays a significant role in this organization. &lt;br&gt; During the lecture the instructor discussed that power can be exercised at different levels…</td>
<td>■ Divide students into groups of three. &lt;br&gt; ■ Give the groups 5 minutes and ask each group to define their allocated dimension of power and come up with examples of how that dimension of power is used. &lt;br&gt; ■ Ask each group to feedback their answers. &lt;br&gt; ■ Ask the rest of the students if they understand the definition and examples and let them ask clarifying questions. You may need to ask clarifying questions (what does that mean? what is a Dimension of Power? etc.) to ensure that everyone understands the dimensions and how they are used. &lt;br&gt; ■ As you clarify put the responses on the board in the form of a matrix. &lt;br&gt; ■ Wrap-up the ice breaker by pointing out that organizations are systems of political activity and that it is important to understand how power and politics play out in organizations and how these can be used to bring about positive change. Highlight the fact that power and politics in organizations is not always a bad thing and that power can be used to bring about positive outcomes.</td>
<td>OHT with definitions of Dimensions of Power</td>
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<td>Instructions for group work (triad)</td>
<td>■ We can use these dimensions of power as lenses to examine the Automakers’ case. &lt;br&gt; ■ For each dimension of power, come up with at least 3 specific examples from the case that are indicators of power at work at different levels. Also, discuss what role each dimension played in the change process. &lt;br&gt; ■ Assign a reporter for your group. &lt;br&gt; ■ (Halfway through the discussion?) I will circulate and let you know which dimension you will ‘report’ on. For the ‘dimension’ assigned to you, write down your bullet points on the strips provided to you. &lt;br&gt; ■ Post your answers on the butcher paper.</td>
<td>■ Delivery of instructions by tutor to class.</td>
<td>OHT with instructions &lt;br&gt; Butcher paper, one per dimension. &lt;br&gt; Strips for bullet points, one colour per group. &lt;br&gt; Sticky tape &lt;br&gt; Markers</td>
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1. **Group Work:**

- 15 minutes.
- Objectives: To allow students to discuss concrete examples of how power is played out on each dimension, in the context of triads.
- As students discuss, the tutor (a) sets up butcher paper and sticky tape; (b) circulates among groups and assigns dimensions that each triad is to report on while distributing coloured strips of paper and markers; and (c) clarifies any questions the group may have on power.

2. **Reporting to Plenary: 15 minutes.**
   (2 triads will end up discussing one dimension of power)

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<td>Dimension 1 (Go one dimension at a time) For groups doing Dimension 1…</td>
<td>■ Review again for the class - what ways can we see the first dimension of power being exercised?  ■ What specific examples did you identify from the case? (phrases will be up on butcher paper but ask the group to elaborate or, if necessary, substantiate using case details)  ■ For each item that the group identifies: What specific resource is being mobilized? How has access to resources changed (who has more, who has less)? What specific reward/sanction is being offered? What makes it effective? What problem does it solve?</td>
<td>Group reporting</td>
<td>‘Filled out’ butcher paper. If necessary strips can be moved around between sheets if a misclassification is deemed to have occurred.</td>
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<td>Dimension 2</td>
<td>■ In what way does the process encourage more participation? Who gets more voice? Who gets less voice? In what ways are these advantageous/disadvantageous for the plant operations?</td>
<td>Group reporting</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dimension 3</td>
<td>■ What concepts/meanings/beliefs were changed? How were these changes mobilized (e.g., myths unmasked? Old symbols exchanged for new symbols?)</td>
<td>Group reporting</td>
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3. **Optional segment: 5 minutes.**

- Objective: If there is enough time, a five-minute segment can be used to discuss the Automakers ‘Before’ scenario provided in the tutorial pack.
  Needed: OHTs: Automakers Initial Failure and Success.
4. **Wrap-up: 5 minutes.**

- Ask students to reflect on the effectiveness of using all the three dimensions of power and the limits of using each dimension by itself. OHT: Exercising Power for Cultural Change.

## the communicative challenge of case based teaching

The main challenge for case based teaching is in encouraging the right type of classroom discussion. In an ideal world, all students will have thoroughly prepared for the class and feel confident about voicing their opinions and engaging with the case material. However, often your classroom is far from ideal! Here your observation skills are critical to be able to identify the personality and cultural attributes that may prevent a full and robust debate about the issues. You will require all of your diplomatic skills and supportive communication to manage some of the interactions and acknowledge the different points of view. Because of the ambiguity of the cases – for instance, because there may be more than one answer, you need to respond to your students in such a way that you preserve their dignity and respect. Some students will be very nervous about speaking out against the status quo, so encouragement is paramount. Your classroom needs to be peppered with affirming speech such as ‘thank you for that thought’ ‘wow, what an interesting insight’, ‘I really like where you are going with this – can you tell me more?’.

Some of the specific difficulties revolve around lack of preparation and students who take on roles that are difficult to manage such as the ‘know-it-all’. Let’s look at some ways to manage these.

### No one has read the case

Probably the toughest challenge, if only because you then have to mask or manage your resentment at your class. Your job just became a lot more difficult! So if this happens, some of the things you can do are:

- Split the class into small teams and set concrete tasks to do with sections of the case. Bring back to a class discussion.
- Make tangential links to a similar context that the students know.

### The dominator

In this circumstance you have a student who is dominating the discussion, possibly because they are so enthusiastic about the topic. Channel that enthusiasm into a specific role. ‘Geoffrey – would you assist me by noting down the suggestions from the class and then reporting back to the class at the end what you see are the common themes. You can also gently say ‘Geoffrey, yet
again another great contribution. Can you just hold onto your thoughts for a little while, while we see what others think?’

The know-it-all
The know-it-all is difficult, not just because of what they say, but the way they say it (usually with a patronising and condensing voice to the tutor). What you don’t want to do is engage in a turf war with the student. The other students will be picking up on this – so smile at their contributions, thank them for their contributions and offer their perspective to the rest of the class ‘so does anybody have a different perspective to Mallory?’ If you take a facilitative tone, rather than an authoritative tone you will find that know-it-alls diminish.

Students are not confident in contributing
Sometimes a statement at the beginning of the class like ‘I find this case fascinating as it raises more questions for me than answers’ is reassuring to students and encourages them to speak up. Start with what they understand, rather than what they don’t understand well so that you can encourage confidence in speaking out. Use your physical space to your advantage e.g., squat down to the students eye-level if they are sitting at communal tables, makes you less physically intimidating, and means you are not towering on high!

summary
This section has introduced you to the idea of tutor as case based teacher. After first reviewing what makes a good case teacher, and the importance of planning for cases, we have just covered some of the communicative difficulties of case based teaching. We hope that this resource pack empowers you in your teaching and you have fun with your role as both tutor and case teacher.

reference material
