

LEARNING BY USING CASE STUDIES: A SHORT INTRODUCTION

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I. WHAT IS A CASE STUDY?

A case study is a story that illustrates theoretical principles and concepts in an applied setting. Case studies are routinely used in business schools, law schools, and public policy schools. Case studies are designed to help students become more active in the learning process, and allows them to see how the gap between theory and practice is bridged.

Case studies may be as brief as a short newspaper clipping or an entire book.

II. HOW SHOULD YOU APPROACH CASE STUDIES?

The following is a short list of reminders and pointers on how you might approach case studies.

- Read the case study carefully. Ask yourself: What is the problem? Who are the key actors and decision-makers? What happened when, and what was the effect of different actions or events? What actions proved effective towards resolving the problem?
- Take time to discuss the case informally with your colleagues or with the instructor. Clarify points that seem unclear.
- If the case involves a certain country or an industry, you might want to talk to people who are familiar with the country or industry to get their insights on how accurate the case study is.
- Simulate the case study in your mind or in discussions with friends and colleagues. Pretend to take a role of one of the lead players in the case. What would you have done differently, and what might the outcomes be? Would they be starkly different from what actually happened in the case?
- What are the most important factors that led to the outcomes in the case study?
- What are the main lessons of the case study? Can you apply those lessons in your organization, profession, or country? What are the limits of “copying” lessons from the case study?
- Be prepared to share your insights on a case in front of your colleagues/classmates.