



Framework for Case Analysis

Part I – Analyzing a Case

What is this document?

You will be asked throughout your Graduate experience to analyze cases. Because there are many ways to approach cases, the CM faculty has agreed upon a framework for case analysis that you will be asked to learn in MGT 650. This framework will help you throughout your Graduate experience in thinking about cases as well as in preparing written reports.

What is a case?

A case is a story---usually a true story, but not always---that illustrates business and management theories and concepts you are studying in a course and/or presents a problem or series of problems for you to solve. A case usually ends with a dilemma faced by a particular character in the case. Sometimes a case will be accompanied by a set of questions, usually theory-based, that your instructor expects you to answer. Some questions will be devoted to figuring out the problems imbedded in the case and the causes of those problems; others will ask you to determine a course of action to take in the future.

More complex cases usually contain a variety of types of information, e.g. industry and economic data, financial reports, policies and procedures, market share and pricing data, descriptions of personnel and other resources, job descriptions, individual perceptions, and dialogue. Due to their complex nature, these cases demand your careful, sustained attention; indeed, each case contains subtleties that are likely to be discerned only by several rereadings and discussions with other students.

Why do professors ask students in the Graduate Programs to analyze cases?

Through the process of analyzing cases, professors believe that Graduate students can learn the value of:[\[1\]](#)

- responding actively and constructively to the conflicts of organizational life.

- suspending judgment about personalities as well as about courses of action.
- differentiating between facts and opinions.
- graciously giving up an opinion if it is shown to be inadequate
- integrating what one learns through discussions with others in order to progress in one's own thinking
- examining the total situation rather than focusing on the most obvious or pressing elements of that situation.
- gaining multiple perspectives on a situation by using theory, concepts and research findings.
- understanding the continually evolving interrelationships among the factors in a situation.
- acknowledging what is not known or understood by the student analyst about a situation.
- explicitly assessing and acknowledging the degree of confidence the student analyst is able to have in what he/she has come to understand about the case.
- recognizing that a situation can involve many "problems" and that different stakeholders will probably experience different problems.
- setting priorities---deciding which problems deserve immediate attention.
- developing an action orientation---a willingness to take calculated risks under conditions of incomplete information, inadequate resources, and often imperfect solutions.
- appreciating the complexity of transforming proposed solutions into comprehensive, detailed plans for action.
- seeking to understand the consequences and limits of managerial actions.

Will all instructors in the Graduate Programs use cases in the same way?

The life of an Graduate student would be easier if the answer to this question were "yes." The truth, however, is that cases can be used in a variety of ways, even by a single instructor. One UMass/Boston faculty member has wisely observed that cases can be used as:

- the hook---a snappy introduction to a topic;
- the curtain raiser---a hook with conceptual implications;
- the example---an illustration of a concept, frequently predefined;
- the exercise---a test of the student's mastery of the course's conceptual material
- the rehearsal---an opportunity for the student to try out skills or behavior related to or in the context of the course material.[\[2\]](#)

When instructors use cases for the first three purposes, they almost never expect students to produce a full-fledged case analysis. Instead, the cases, if they are discussed in class at all, usually are used by instructors to engage students in thinking concretely about conceptual material presented in course readings. Indeed, such cases are usually quite brief---a paragraph or two, or a page or two, in length. However, when cases are used by instructors in the form of an "exercise" or "rehearsal," students are usually required to produce a systematic analysis in the form of an oral presentation or written paper. If you are confused about the purpose for which a

case is being used by one of your Graduate program instructors and, as a consequence, you don't know what type of analysis is expected of you, it is important that you seek clarification from your instructor.

If you are asked to analyze a case, what are the key elements your instructors might ask you to consider?

You rarely will be asked to analyze cases the same way every time, even by a particular instructor in a particular course. Nevertheless, the analysis elements described below cover most of the ground that is likely to be of interest to instructors in your Graduate courses.

In thinking through a case, you may be asked by your instructor to consider all twelve of the elements described below. Most often, however, your instructor will ask you to consider only a few of the elements. There are many possible reasons that an instructor might exclude elements from consideration: sometimes an instructor's goals for a particular class session can be met only if students are asked to concentrate on a few selected elements; sometimes elements are excluded because they are not relevant to a particular field of study; sometimes elements are excluded because they interfere with a particular instructor's carefully considered way of teaching cases.

No matter which elements you are asked to use, make careful notes as you conduct your analysis. You will need to bring to class well-organized and detailed references to the evidence of the case if you are to participate effectively in class discussions.

Elements of Analysis

1. Develop a detailed chronology of events---both major events and those that seem, on first reading, relatively minor. In doing so, pay careful attention to how certain you can be about each event.

2. Describe the key economic and policy issues and trends in the country(ies) where the firm is operating.

3. Describe the industry in which the firm is operating---perhaps including such information as competitors, new entrants, substitute products, suppliers, and the end-use and intermediary buyers.

4. Identify the relevant cast of characters (often called stakeholders).

a. Acknowledge to yourself whether you like some of these stakeholders better than others. Have you tended to jump to conclusions about what kind of people they are (e.g. he can't be trusted; she's the perfect boss; that procurement department is full of obstructionists)?

b. Look carefully for evidence that might contradict, in any way, your first impressions.

5. Describe each stakeholder's problems, goals (or demands), and concerns.

a. For each stakeholder, look for evidence that something has happened in the case that the stakeholder finds troublesome and seems to consider a problem.

b. Identify the assumptions being made by each stakeholder, and any apparent biases of each stakeholder.

c. Identify the goals (sometimes stated as explicit demands) of each stakeholder.

d. Then, as best you can, identify the concerns underlying these demands. In other words, what does the behavior (words, actions) of the stakeholder suggest to you about why that person (or group) wants what he/she seems to want?

6. Evaluate the quantitative information that you have available in the case.

a. Identify assumptions underlying the data.

b. Examine consistency among units.

c. Determine the quality of data, e.g. completeness, accuracy, possible biases, consistency among multiple sources.

d. Use estimation to gauge whether results "seem right."

e. Identify ways in which the data may oversimplify an issue or situation.

f. Summarize the quantitative information.

g. Be prepared to express the summary in a variety of forms: in words, in visual/graphical displays, in tables of numerical results, in analytical formulations.

h. Look for patterns among the results that help you gain insight into the issues of the case.

7. Use theory, concepts, models, and research findings that you have been studying in your class to enrich your view of the case and help you to identify problems.

Sometimes your instructor will give you questions that ask you to use a particular theory, model or concept. Here are some typical questions: "Use the cultural perspective to understand the problems facing the new Executive Vice President for Customer Operations at Dyna-Corp." "What are the economic characteristics of the golf equipment industry?" "What is the size and rate of growth of this firm's market segment?" "Based on your analyses so far, what are the pros and cons of the Snapple acquisition?"

Even if your instructor has not given you a list of conceptually-grounded questions to frame your search for problems, you can develop your own questions using the ideas, theories and models you have been studying. To do so, use the following format: How does _____ (theory/model/concept) help me understand _____?

Using a variety of different concepts, theories and models to organize your investigation will allow you to gain multiple perspectives on the issues of the case. As you complete your various inquiries, you will find that some have enabled you to gain important new insights about the case, while others told you little of significance. In your written report, of course, you should write about those inquiries that were most meaningful.

The steps below describe a process that you may follow to answer a conceptually-grounded question:

- a. Define the concept (theory, model). Be prepared, if your instructor asks you, to quote it from the text or relevant readings; this will ensure that you are working with the appropriate conceptual material and that you have a framework for organizing evidence from the case.
- b. Look in the case for evidence that seems relevant to all or some portion of the definition that you quoted in (a). Be prepared, if your instructor asks you, to quote that evidence, also noting where it is located in the case and identifying what is happening at that moment in the case.
- c. Next, express in your own words how the piece of evidence you quoted in (b) fits all or some part of the definition you quoted in (a).
- d. Repeat (a) and (b) as many times as necessary:
 - to search for evidence concerning all elements of the concept, theory or model, not just the ones for which evidence is easy to find; and
 - to locate all relevant evidence from the case, not just an obvious example or two.

Sometimes you will be unable to find evidence relevant to a particular part of the definition. If this happens, be sure to acknowledge explicitly that you were unable to locate evidence.

- e. When you have finished your analysis of the evidence, express in your own words how you would answer the question posed about the case. Be sure to:
 - describe how confident you are about your conclusion, given the amount of evidence you have found; and
 - describe how your conclusion is affected by the direction of the evidence (e.g. the evidence all points in one direction, is evenly divided, or is mixed but slightly weighted in one direction).

8. Identify additional information that you need to fully analyze this case.

In analyzing a case, you often find that you must make certain assumptions because essential information has not been included by the case writer. In real life, too, key pieces of information often are missing, or cannot be obtained because the collection of the information would take too long or be too costly. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that relevant pieces of information are missing and that your conclusions, therefore, might be flawed.

9. Identify the basic issues that you must confront and the relationships among them.

- a. Considering everything that you have learned in the steps above, identify the key problems that must be solved. Sometimes, one problem cannot be solved without first making at least some progress on the solution of another---so be attentive to how problems overlap or interrelate.
- b. Also, identify problems that are less central but still deserving of attention.
- c. Then, identify problems that can safely be ignored for the foreseeable future.
- d. Before considering additional analysis elements, be sure that you have fully described the existing situation, or what in quantitative modeling might be called the “base case.”

10. Keeping in mind the whole array of problems that must be solved, create as at least two different courses of action, each of which seems likely to solve these problems. Be specific and practical.

- a. In creating courses of action, you should carefully consider at what level (e.g. individual, team, department, organization) action must be taken.
- b. In creating courses of action, you also must think carefully about how much specificity is required. In a manufacturing case, for example, you will have to decide whether to model each step in the production process separately, or to treat the production process as a “black box” with raw materials as inputs and finished products as outputs.

11. For each possible course of action, think through the consequences. Almost every action has negative as well as positive consequences. Think carefully about:

- a. how each course of action will be perceived by each stakeholder.
- b. how each course of action will affect other problems that must be resolved.
- c. the difficulties you will encounter in actually implementing the course of action under consideration.
- d. how implementing the course of action you propose may create new problems.

e. how uncertainties in your evidence and assumptions you have made during your analysis might affect the courses of action that you are considering. Consider what you can do to prepare for the possibility that the assumptions you made might prove to be wrong.

12. Decide on a set of recommendations.

a. Prepare a rationale for your recommendations, based on other elements of your analysis, that anticipates challenges and counter-arguments that are likely to be made by others.

b. Create a plan for implementing your recommendations.

c. Establish criteria for assessing how well the implementation plan is working.

FRAMEWORK FOR CASE ANALYSIS

Part II – Writing About Your Case Analysis

If you are asked to produce a written report about your case analysis, what format should you use?

There is no “one best way” to write a report about your case analysis. The following pages outline five options, one of which will usually provide a suitable outline to follow in preparing the assignment you have been given by your instructor. If, however, your assignment does not seem to fit any of the five options, you should seek additional guidance from your instructor.

Option A: Use this option if your instructor has given you several conceptually-based questions to use to analyze the case and has instructed you to write a paper answering these questions.

Sometimes your instructor will give you questions that ask you to use a particular theory, model or concept. Refer to Element 7 in Part I of the framework for examples of typical questions. A paper that addresses a set of conceptually-based questions may be organized in the following manner.

A. Introduction

- in a few sentences describe the case
- in a sentence or two, tell the reader how your paper will be organized, i.e. what the major sections will be and the order in which they will be presented.

B. Body (should include a section for each question; use headings)

Within each heading, identify the question that you are seeking to answer. Then:

1. Define the concept (theory, model) on which the question is based. If your instructor asks you to do so, quote the definition from the text or relevant readings; this will ensure that you are working with the appropriate conceptual material and that you have a framework for organizing evidence from the case.

2. Present evidence that seems relevant to all or some portion of the definition that you quoted in (1). If your instructor asks you to do so, quote that evidence; you often will wish to tell your reader where this evidence is located in the events of the case by identifying what is happening at that moment in the case. For each piece of evidence presented, also be sure to tell your reader in your own words how the piece of evidence you just quoted fits all or some part of the definition you quoted in (1).

3. Repeat (1) and (2) as many times as necessary:

- to search for evidence concerning all elements of the concept, theory or model, not just the ones for which evidence is easy to find; and
- to locate all relevant evidence from the case, not just an obvious example or two.

Note: Sometimes you will be unable to find evidence relevant to a particular part of the definition. When this happens, be sure to acknowledge explicitly that you were unable to locate evidence.

4. When you have finished your presentation of the evidence, express in your own words how you would answer the question posed about the case. Be sure to:

- describe how confident you are about your conclusion, given the amount of evidence you have found; and
- describe how your conclusion is affected by the direction of the evidence (e.g. the evidence all points in one direction, is evenly divided, or is mixed but slightly weighted in one direction).

C. Conclusion

- Briefly explain what you have learned about this case, given your answers to the array of assigned questions.

Option B: Use this option if your instructor has given you several conceptually-based questions to use to analyze the case and has instructed you to write a paper: (1) answering these questions, (2) identifying the most important problems of the case based on your answers to the questions, and (3) recommending a course of action, given the problems that you have identified.

Sometimes your instructor will ask you to answer a set of questions use theories, models or concept that you have been studying. (Refer to Element 7 in Part I of the framework for examples of typical questions.) Your instructor may also ask you to identify problems and recommend solutions. This type of paper may be organized in the following manner.

A. Introduction

- in a few sentences describe the case
- in a sentence or two, tell the reader how your paper will be organized, i.e. what the major sections will be and the order in which they will be presented.

B. Body (should include three major sections: analysis of questions, with a sub-heading for each question; identification of problems; recommended solutions)

Analysis of Questions

Within each sub-heading, identify the question that you are seeking to answer. Then:

1. Define the concept (theory, model) on which the question is based. If your instructor asks you to do so, quote the definition from the text or relevant readings; this will ensure that you are working with the appropriate conceptual material and that you have a framework for organizing evidence from the case.
2. Present evidence that seems relevant to all or some portion of the definition that you quoted in (1). If your instructor asks you to do so, quote that evidence; you often will wish to tell your reader where this evidence it is located in the events of the case by identifying what is happening at that moment in the case. For each piece of evidence presented, also be sure to tell your reader in your own words how the piece of evidence you just quoted fits all or some part of the definition you quoted in (1).
3. Repeat (1) and (2) as many times as necessary:
 - to search for evidence concerning all elements of the concept, theory or model, not just the ones for which evidence is easy to find; and
 - to locate all relevant evidence from the case, not just an obvious example or two.

Note: Sometimes you will be unable to find evidence relevant to a particular part of the definition. When this happens, be sure to acknowledge explicitly that you were unable to locate evidence.

4. When you have finished your presentation of the evidence, express in your own words how you would answer the question posed about the case. Be sure to:

- describe how confident you are about your conclusion, given the amount of evidence you have found; and
- describe how your conclusion is affected by the direction of the evidence (e.g. the evidence all points in one direction, is evenly divided, or is mixed but slightly weighted in one direction).

Identification of Problems

1. Identify the key problems that must be solved. Explain with reference to your analysis of the questions above.
2. Also, identify problems that are less central but still deserving of attention as well as problems that can safely be ignored for the foreseeable future.

Recommended Solutions

Present detailed recommendations addressing the problems identified above. Present a rationale for your recommendation that anticipates challenges and counter-arguments. Your rationale should address at least the following issues:

- how the recommended course of action will be perceived by each stakeholder.
- how the recommended course of action will affect other problems that must be resolved.
- how you plan to implement the recommended course of action
- the difficulties you expect to encounter in actually implementing the course of action under consideration.
- how implementing the course of action you propose may create new problems.
- how uncertainties in your evidence and assumptions you have made during your analysis might affect the courses of action that you are considering.

C. Conclusion

- Briefly summarize the essential difficulties posed in this case and the relevance of your recommended solutions.

Option C: Use this option if your instructor has instructed you to “analyze this case.”

A. Introduction

- in a few sentences describe the case
- in a sentence or two, tell the reader how your paper will be organized, i.e. what the major sections will be and the order in which they will be presented.

B. Body (should include four major sections: identification of major stakeholders and their problems, goals and concerns; identification of problems; analysis of alternative solutions; recommended solutions)

Identification of Stakeholder's Problems, Goals, and Concerns

1. For each stakeholder, identify events in the case that that stakeholder finds troublesome and would consider a problem; in doing so, quote the case.
2. Identify the assumptions being made by each stakeholder, and the apparent biases of each stakeholder; in doing so, quote the case.
3. Identify the goals (sometimes stated as explicit demands) of each stakeholder; in doing so, quote the case.
4. Then, as best you can based on the evidence of the case, identify the concerns underlying these demands; again, quote the case.

Identification of Problems

1. Identify the key problems that must be solved. Explain with reference to appropriate concepts, theories, models, and/or research findings---and the evidence of the case. Quote evidence to justify your assertions. (Note: this is likely to be a lengthy part of your analysis.)
2. Also, identify problems that are less central but still deserving of attention, as well as problems that can safely be ignored for the foreseeable future.

Analysis of Alternative Solutions

1. Keeping in mind the whole array of problems that must be solved, describe two or three alternatives courses of action that might be taken to resolve these problems. Be specific and practical.
2. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of each course of action, with reference to the following:
 - how the course of action is expected to resolve the key problems presented.
 - how the recommended course of action will affect other remaining problems.
 - how the recommended course of action will be perceived by each stakeholder.
 - the difficulties you will encounter in actually implementing the course of action under consideration.
 - how implementing the proposed course of action may create new problems.

- how uncertainties in your evidence and assumptions you have made during your analysis might affect the courses of action that you are considering.

Recommended Solutions

Present a detailed recommendation, based on your analysis of alternative solutions:

- Present a rationale for your recommendation that anticipates challenges and counter-arguments.
- Describe a plan for implementing your recommendations.
- Describe the criteria that could be used to assess how well that implementation plan is working.

C. Conclusion

- Briefly summarize the essential difficulties posed in this case and the relevance of recommended solutions.

Option D: Use this option if your instructor has asked you to “take the role” of a particular character in the case and to prepare a written response to a memo received from another character. Present your analysis in the form of a memo.

To: John Doe, Senior Vice President, Marketing
Pharmacia & Upjohn, Inc.

From: Student(s)
Product Manager, Rogaine Hair Regrowth Treatment

Date: November 30, 1998

Re: Revised Forecast and Marketing Plan

Begin the body of your memo by briefly explaining to John Doe why you are writing this memo and telling him how the memo will be organized. You may wish to organize your memo as outlined below, keeping in mind that you must be sure to answer John Doe’s questions and respond to his explicit requests for information:

Problems

· Identify the key problems that must be solved. Explain with reference to the evidence of the case and any analyses of that evidence that you have prepared.

· Also, identify problems that are less central but still deserving of attention, as well as problems that can safely be ignored for the foreseeable future.

Recommended Solutions

Present detailed recommendations about a course of action that seems likely to solve the array of problems identified above. Present a rationale for your recommendations that anticipates challenges and counter-arguments. Your rationale should address at least the following issues:

- how the course of action is expected to resolve the key problems presented.
- how the recommended course of action will affect other remaining problems.
- how the recommended course of action will be perceived by each stakeholder.
- how uncertainties in your evidence and assumptions you have made during your analysis might affect the courses of action that you are considering.

Implementation

· Describe how you plan to implement the recommended course of action

· Describe the difficulties you expect to encounter in actually implementing the course of action under consideration, including how implementing the course of action you propose may create new problems.

· Describe criteria that could be used to assess how well the implementation plan is working.

Option E: Use this option if your instructor has given you a list of questions that can be answered without reference to conceptual material, such as theories and models.

Sometimes an instructor will give you a list of questions and will want your answers written in direct response to these questions, rather than in the form of a paper with an introduction and conclusion.

In this situation, your answers should sequentially match the format of the questions addressed to you (e.g. if the questions are labeled 1, 2, 3, ..., your answers should be labeled 1, 2, 3,...). In composing your response to any given question, you usually need not restate word-for-word the question you were asked; your response, however, should make clear to the reader what subject is being discussed. For example, “No” would not be a sufficient response, while “No, I would not recommend hiring Mr. Smith at this time” might be. You also must be certain to answer each question in complete sentences, and, when necessary, in fully formed paragraphs.

In giving you a writing assignment of this type, your instructor will often have one of the following purposes in mind:

- To check that you have found and understood the relevant evidence in the case. Therefore, you should simply reply to the question with a clear, concise statement of the facts of the case.
- To direct your thinking to a particular point in the case. Therefore, you should:
 1. present relevant information from the case that addresses the question
 2. present any additional information you are using to answer the question
 3. explain how you interpret the evidence in the context of the case
- To encourage you to formulate and state a conclusion. If the question asks you to “explain” or “state your reasoning,” you should follow the three steps above, and then state your conclusion.

[1] We are indebted for some ideas in this section to: C. Roland Christensen, *Teaching By the Case Method*. Cambridge: Harvard Business School Press, 1981, pp. 12-14; Pearson Hunt, “The Case Method of Instruction,” *Harvard Educational Review*, XXI, 3 (Summer 1951): 186.

[2] Mark Schlesinger, “One of Those If or Maybe Things...Case Analysis Reconsidered.” Proposal for a Presentation/Paper, 7th Nat’l Conference on Intellectual Skills Development, Nov. 11-12, 1988. Grand Rapids, MI.