

The Use of Business Case Studies in Management Education

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Outline

- Introduction
- WBS Case Centre and the History of the Case Method
- How we research cases
- Discussion of 3 typical cases
- Where does Business History and Business Cases Meet?



The WBS Case Centre

- Been in existence for more than 12 years
- Have a collection of about 150 cases
- All subject areas
- Wide range of organisations
- Staffed by three full-time writers and two freelancers
- Cases available through our website or www.ecch.com



What is a case study?

A case is a description of an actual business situation, commonly involving a decision, an opportunity, a problem or an issue facing a person or persons in an organisation. It is written to specific teaching objectives and requires the reader to step figuratively into the position of a particular decision-maker

(Adapted from: M Leenders, L Mauffette-Leenders and J Erskine (2001) *Writing Cases* (4th Ed) Ivey Publishing, Ontario, p 3)



History of the case method

- Introduced to business education in 1925 by Harvard Business School faculty
- No appropriate text books, so faculty interviewed business people in-depth about what they did
- It is now the cornerstone of the HBS approach and used at business schools worldwide



Why do we use cases?

- They bring real-world business challenges into the classroom
- They facilitate participant-centred learning, where students can learn from each other.
- They allow students to apply the latest theory in solving practical business problems.
- They create the space for students to exercise analytical and decision-making skills.
- They encourage students to respect differing opinions, challenge their own thinking and question conventional wisdom.



Components of a case

- Dilemma
- General context – social, political, industry, regulatory, etc.
- Organisation background
- The case story so far
- Exhibits



How we research them

- All detail real-life situations
- All set in real organisations
- Most based on primary research – interviews and desk research



Case study examples

- Woolworths – how company responded to the trend towards sustainability
- Game – an SA firm learns how to do business in Africa
- Barclays – Going big in Africa or going home? or Colonial bank adapting to post colonial Africa.
- See complete list of abstracts attached



Where do Business History and Business Cases Meet?

- I'm not sure they do, but they could!
- Business History is more embedded in the theory of the firm and the economic system, whilst Business Cases are implicitly embedded in the functional management theory that is being teased out e.g. strategy, operations management, marketing etc.
- A 'weakness' of the Business Cases is that they are not explicit about theory but that may be true for Business History in SA too?



ERSA Conference: July 2010

Would like to see more ambitious cases which allow for collaboration between the two e.g. How have SA companies changed their strategy over time as a result of changing external environment? Our cases do this at a point in time rather than over time. SA interesting case because of changing relationship between capitalism and apartheid. This would include functional area and the broader theory of the firm/eco system. How have firms responded over the twentieth century to changing labour or government relations in SA; or a changing global economy; or Afrikaner nationalism or BEE? e.g. how has BEE affected family owned businesses? How did sanctions affect SA companies' strategies and then post apartheid global integration; changing relationship between govt, bus and society; impact of stronger competition authorities on company strategies from late 90s; integration into Africa (is what I'm doing Business History?)

