Case studies, technology and pedagogy: Delivering cases through multiple platforms

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INTRODUCTION
The Case method is a powerful student-centered teaching tool that brings real-life situations into the classroom. This teaching module highlights pedagogic goals that emerge from the experiences in teaching cases using diverse online and in-class available technologies. Cases can impart pedagogic outcomes such as critical thinking, communication, and interpersonal skills in addition to depth and multidisciplinary breadth of content. Having students work through complex, ambiguous, real-world problems engages students with the course material, encouraging them to see it within its specific context “from an action perspective, rather than analyze it from a distance” (Angelo & Boehler).

The case method serves to bridge the gap between theory and practice, extending to research and the evaluation of multiple sources of data, and thereby fostering the development of information literacy skills.

Technology-enhanced Approaches to the Case Method
Cases can be enhanced through the use of technology such as Echo 360, Wimba Classroom and Blackboard leading to two approaches:

A: HYBRID (in-class and online) approach
- Hybrid Approach integrates the traditional classroom case approach with advantages of direct interaction, while facilitating use of technology in coordinating teamwork.

B: ONLINE ONLY using online synchronous and asynchronous technologies
- Online Approach increases dependency on technology, which limits the interactivity in synchronous case presentation. This can be offset by increased focus on other skill sets, particularly research and technology usage that increases research skills and increased depth of knowledge.

Pedagogic goals and objectives
These different approaches support learning experiences that may be fashioned to emphasize one of more of the following pedagogic goals:
- Critical thinking skills
- Teamwork
- Communication: written and oral
- Research skills
- In-depth disciplinary knowledge
- Multidisciplinary knowledge

THE HYBRID APPROACH

Online research for increased depth
Case Preparation and Case Submission
Online research for increased depth
Case Preparation and Case Submission

THE ONLINE APPROACH

Online research for increased depth
Case Preparation and Case Submission
Online research for increased depth
Case Preparation and Case Submission

IMPLEMENTATION
The basic sequence would be similar in both approaches, except the optional activities to integrate online communications segment (as in Hybrid A), and the online critique segment (Hybrid B using Echo 360). The main activities would consist of:
1. Group Assignment: Groups chosen and assigned questions with focus on interests and strengths.
2. Research readings assigned for depth of coverage; may include other online research, particularly for real companies.
3. Asynchronous group preparations and case submission: allows for setting up separate online forums for teams, with topical threads.
4. Redirection of case to Critiquing group for critiquing initiating group's case summary.
5. Case Discussion – in-class or online synchronous - Presenting group consolidates the cases and presents it followed by overall discussions (other approaches possible)

ONLINE INTERACTIONS
Synchronous:
- closely replicating face-to-face meetings, but participants in different physical locations
- occur between participants at the same time from remote locations using "live" chat tools (e.g., Wimba Live Classroom)
- the case discussion usually has a clearly defined time frame or class period, as does a case discussion in a classroom-based course.

Asynchronous:
Interactions occur between different participants at different times and can use such tools as discussion boards, emails, assignment tools.

Skills:
- Teamwork: Both approaches can use teamwork, though online approach increases the asynchronous group activity and hence, the opportunity for individual assessment of online group participation.
- Communication: Both written and oral communication applicable to both approaches. Increases remote teleconferencing skills, and online presentation skills. Further extensions to online cases (contingent on class size) could include critiquing of communication skills, and assessing individual perception of the outcome of the presentation that helps increase self-awareness, leading to more conscious efforts to improve communication.
- Critical thinking: Cases allow the development of critical thinking skills in both approaches through creative use of technology.

Advantages/Disadvantages
In-class cases have flexibility; greater opportunity to address questions interactively, draw inferences from nuances and expressions, increases interactive group work.
Online cases provide more online group work and increased use of online resources; Real cases that facilitate online research are particularly advantageous for online classes. Online cases depict the nature of global workplace; key disadvantage – participation is limited given the anonymous nature of the class.
Finally, in either approach, the key factor is the ability to use information and make judgments. Use of modern technology by students will give tomorrow’s leaders the advantage of having learned in the same environment in which they will work.

Some Differences:
1. More reciprocity and a dialectical approach in in-class discussions cannot be fully replicated in online environment, therefore, leading to an emphasis on reflective and contemplative communication skills
2. Online environment facilitates wider access and more diverse group settings (regional and global) that may reflect the larger global workplace and enhance the learning experience
3. Improves online research skills (particularly for real life cases) and virtual team competencies