Writing great case studies

This chapter has been written with first-time case authors in mind but it also contains many ideas and suggestions for educators who have already produced multiple, possibly even great, and successful cases:

- If you are not yet (very) experienced with writing cases: follow this chapter step by step in the correct sequence and work on your case study and teaching note in parallel to reading.
- If you are more experienced, and just seek guidance regarding individual challenges: use the table of contents, the index or the FAQ section of the webpage for this book (include link) to navigate directly to the relevant sections of this book.

To complement this book, we have developed an accompanying workbook to support you in your case writing effort. The workbook follows the creation of a case study for teaching purposes from the very beginning to the finished and published case study and teaching note. We have developed this document over many years while working with participants in our case writing workshops run by the Case Centre. According to our experience, it is particularly helpful for inexperienced case authors – the type of users we had in mind when designing most of the sections of this workbook.

Experienced case authors might find it unnecessary to go through the entire workbook. But we have often received the feedback that even veteran case authors got a number of ideas for their next case study from the process-oriented structure of this workbook. Experienced case authors might consider using the case and teaching note review sections for their critical self-assessment, or to collect structured feedback from a peer.

You will find downloadable PDF versions of the workbook on the webpage for this book.
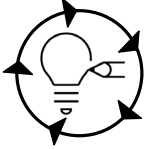
Our case writing beliefs and philosophy

There are many excellent (work)books, articles, notes, and guides on writing cases. Is there really a need for yet another case writing guide? Well, you decide for yourself – but this chapter is driven by a few convictions (shall we call them philosophies?) that we developed over many years during which we not only wrote many (some not so good, but also several award-winning and best-selling) cases ourselves but also ran case writing workshops and coached less experienced colleagues from a large number of institutions and disciplines.

On the basis of these experiences, three aspects are particularly important for us and will go a long way to dealing with the most common obstacles and problems case authors face:

1. Rapid prototyping,
2. Breaking the rules – once you master the fundamentals,
3. Focus on learning outcomes.

1.   Prototype rapidly
- Start to write immediately (e.g. opening paragraph)
- Work in fast iterations ('quick and dirty')
- Stop soon if you reach a dead-end

2.   Break the rules – once you master the fundamentals
- Write one or a few simple and rather traditional cases first
- Learn the craft through experience
- Once you know the conventions – feel free to break all rules

3.   Focus on learning outcomes
- Don't fall in love with your case lead (the story)
- Only write a case if you have already a bit of experience teaching with cases
- Ultimately a case is only a vehicle to reach a learning outcome

Figure 22: Our case writing beliefs and philosophy.

Rapid prototyping

This chapter applies the approach of agile methodologies, design thinking, etc. to case writing. Several other case writing instructions are also driven by a pragmatic philosophy but we deeply believe in the idea of working in multiple, short iterations and a 'fail fast' philosophy.

We designed this chapter so that you do not have to read it in total before starting your own case production. Rather, we invite you to embark on a journey with us. The entire chapter is designed to be read in small increments and to start and stop your reading to immediately get into action (usually marked with an 'action' icon).

Start working immediately – do not push this back or procrastinate. Some of the great cases that you might have used in your own classes are the result of enormous amounts of work, but if you follow the proposed approach of this chapter you will get quite far with only limited effort!

Get into working mode early and with a 'quick and dirty' attitude. Great cases always require multiple rounds of improvement anyway. Do not even aim for perfection from the

beginning – just get going and aim for rapid development of what startups would call prototypes or minimal viable products (MVPs). Throughout this chapter we alert you to tactics that will prevent initial activism from being futile. If you follow our approach, your early labor will almost never be useless – even if you make major changes later.

Of course, there is always a risk that your initial work will not lead to a published case study. There are many possible traps and roadblocks on the way. As you invest more and more into your case, you increase the risk of falling into the sunk-cost fallacy: you just proceed because you have already invested so much time and energy. To minimize this risk, we have included several 'fail fast pit stops.' We invite you to critically review your previous work and to consider stopping entirely or going back a few steps to avoid a late deadlock: fail fast to fail cheap!

Breaking the rules – but only after gaining experience

*'My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)' – Ludwig Wittgenstein (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, *6.54)*

Great ideas, innovations, literature, music, art, research, etc. – they all tend to break (at least some) rules and conventions. The same is probably true for case studies. Even though there are several aspects that many of the world's best case studies have in common, they will frequently be violating some if not many of the established, traditional ways of writing cases. Both of us have produced cases that deviate from the traditional case study scheme – some of them worked (extremely) well; others failed big time. As our lesson learned, we advise new case authors to first produce a few cases that follow the established patterns. Only after having produced a few conventional cases can you really get a good picture of when, why, and where you should be disruptive and innovative – only then should you move on and throw away the ladder of the conventions.

Accordingly, we invite our readers to stimulate their critical thinking while working their way through this chapter. We will present many of our recommendations apodictically – and, if you have not produced a couple of cases yet, we believe that you will be better off following them closely. But, once you have stepped up, feel free to throw away the ladder and violate any of our recommendations.

Focus on learning outcomes

Last but not least, a strong warning (that we will reiterate multiple times later on): Do not get too excited by a specific story or case opportunity. The single most common mistake we have observed with new case study authors is their missing distance to what is usually called the 'lead': a story that they picked up or a connection they happen to have. If you are anything like many people we coached over the last years, you might be obsessed with the idea of writing your own case study in combination with an almost romantic love for an individual story.

The danger of this combination: You risk losing sight of what is most important – the educational context! Make sure to always keep the intended learning outcomes in mind! When following our approach (and our 'case development funnel'; see below), you are much less likely to commit this cardinal sin of case writing newcomers.

And here comes our first fail fast pit stop: if you do not yet have at least some experience in teaching with cases, do not even try to write your first case study (at least not alone/by yourself). We have read quite a few cases that were produced by professional writers or students as sole authors. In the best case they are well-presented descriptions of interesting situations – but they will almost inevitably lack clarity regarding the educational outcome and focus on the learning process in class. If you fall into this category, try to gain case teaching experience first or at least make sure to have an experienced case teacher as coauthor, who should work with you intensively regarding the learning objective and teaching process.

Benefits of writing your own case

Why should you even consider writing your own case study? There are already thousands available; surely everything's been covered by now? So why do the work? (And make no mistake, writing a case that really works well in the classroom is hard work.)

The enormous number of existing cases would probably not have emerged if there weren't several significant benefits from writing cases. Here are a few of them:

- Teaching your own case will enhance your status with students; you will be respected as someone with expert 'inside knowledge' and connections with key figures from practice.
- Your in-depth familiarity with the subject will boost your confidence in the classroom; you will typically know much more about the situation than you write down in the case and this will reduce any insecurity, e.g., if you have only limited work experience outside of academia.
- Your passion for the subject will enthuse and inspire your students.
- You can rightfully take great pride in discussing your own case in class.
- Writing a case can be an element of or a link to your research, as you will typically investigate a real-world situation and apply academic theories, concepts, and frameworks to it.
- Writing cases might help to fulfill your individual (e.g., publications) or institutional (e.g., accreditations) targets.
- Case writing and case teaching are two complementary sides of the same coin. The insights you will gain when teaching cases will help enormously when writing cases, and vice versa. By writing case studies, you will almost automatically become a more reflective and better (case) teacher.

The case development funnel

Great cases usually (1) recount a truly interesting development, decision, or story and (2) allow the exploration or application of relevant theories, concepts, frameworks, or tools. Cases from beginners frequently lack one or the other. We have observed that many case-writing novices fail to produce great cases because they get overly excited by a story they learn about or by a connection to real-life business they happen to have – but then they often fail to turn this into a vehicle for a meaningful educational process. Inversely, but less frequently, new case authors sometimes fail because they are so driven to achieve a learning objective that they miss producing a case that is intriguing and engaging for the participants.

While mentoring and guiding colleagues through the process of producing a case study, we initially struggled to apply the frequently propagated logic of case production: some guides and textbooks on case writing (e.g., Leenders, Mauffette-Leenders, & Erskine 2010; Naumes & Naumes 2006; Roch 1989) tend to follow a more or less sequential logic, according to where one first writes (most of) the case study text and only then starts producing the corresponding teaching note. Others propose to first write the teaching note and only then write the case study (reverse engineer) (this was for example proposed by Marika Taishoff in an interview on case writing published on The Case Centre website in 2019).

> Marika Taishoff of the International University of Monaco believes that the teaching note should be drafted before the case is written. She says:
>
> *First and foremost, one should NOT start by writing the case, but by drafting the teaching note. I have found that this is the best way to articulate and structure the key learning points that you want students to come away with. It also facilitates the case writing process because the writer becomes very clear about the main messages and arguments that need to be developed in the case.* (Taishoff 2019)

However, we have concluded over time that the focus should shift (ideally in many iterations) from case to teaching note and back – minor changes to the case study can fundamentally impact the educational options and small shifts in your learning objectives might require a completely different case.

Therefore, we propose an alternative interwoven case development process, which we can illustrate through the metaphor of two-component glues: two materials that remain liquid as long as separated but become a very powerful glue as soon as they are properly mixed with one another. And the same is true for cases. To produce a truly sticky case study, you will need to combine and knead (in iterations) two ingredients to get the desired result: an interesting story with a demand for a specific educational outcome.
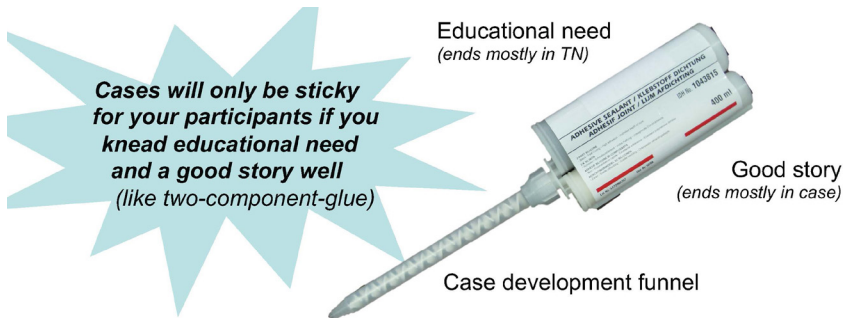
Figure 23: The two components of a sticky case: need and lead. Source: Adapted from Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2-part_silicone_adhesive_sealant .jpg; author: Cjp24; licensed as: CC-BY-SA-3.0; accessed May 18, 2024).

This idea led us to the development of our 'case development funnel' – a nine-step process through which case authors will gradually work their way toward a finished case study and teaching note, moving from the more strategic and important decisions to the more operative choices and activities:
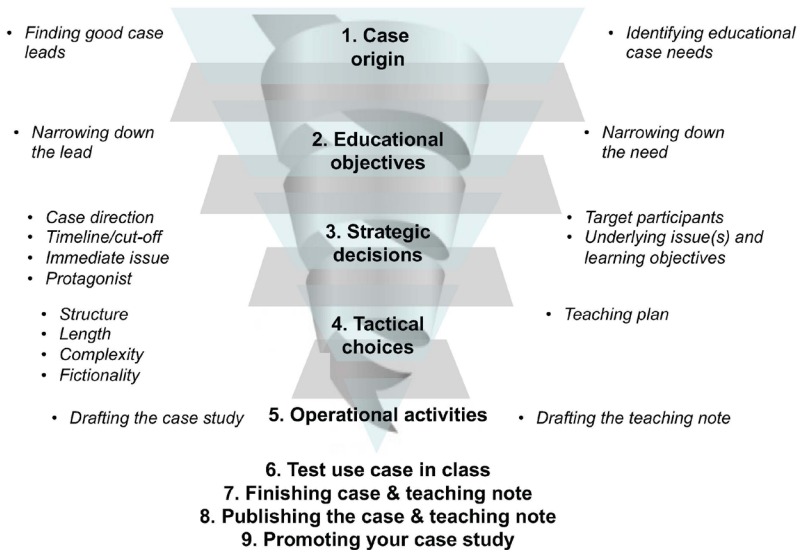
Figure 24: The case development funnel.

The remainder of this chapter follows the logic of this case development funnel. The accompanying case writing workbook can be used to work (individually, in pairs, groups or during workshops) your way through the funnel, leading to the development of a case that will make the learning really stick.

1. Case origin

'Amateurs sit and wait for inspiration, the rest of us just get up and go to work.' – Stephen King

The first step toward producing your first case study is simple and does not require a lot of time: just collect ideas, namely needs and leads for your case. Even if you are not yet sure if you really want to invest the time and effort into producing your own case, just start to collect ideas – and postpone the production of a case until you have found what you were really looking for. Borrowing the terminology of Leenders et al. (2010: 31), we call this stage of the case development funnel 'case origin.'

It is all about leads and needs

Almost all case writing guides agree: The best cases are created when you have a matching pair of an interesting 'lead' *and* a relevant 'need.' If you only have one of them, wait for the other before starting to write a case!

A *lead* is a 'story' that you want to write about, for example an interesting person, company, or development. A *need* is a learning objective that cannot (yet/fully) be met by an existing case or alternative educational method.

You can start with either but will always need both:

• A leads-based approach gives you the opportunity to leverage a real-life dilemma or challenge.
• A needs-based approach allows you to target a specific learning objective.

Be critical: you might have a great lead, but is there really a corresponding need? You should ask yourself: would my students truly benefit from discussing a case on the basis of this particular lead? And the reverse is also true: you might have a need, but no real lead; does it really make sense to write a case with an artificial or second-class lead?

However, if you have both and they are a good fit, you are in the ideal position to start work on what should result in a truly great case. Exciting!

From theory to practice with Urs

I frequently stumble upon stories that capture my interest (potential 'leads') in the news, from participants, and from my own observations. However, these leads are often initially irrelevant for my teaching because they cover a different discipline or because I already have a case (my own or from others) covering the corresponding educational need.

The opposite is also true: there are topics, concepts, theories, and frameworks I would like to discuss in class (a need), but I don't have a suitable case to match that need.

Sometimes these various leads and needs eventually match up (somehow magically) – and for that reason I find it very helpful to keep a note of relevant leads and needs, so that I can come back to them at a later point. I cultivate an electronic file with leads without needs and needs without leads. Several of my cases I then wrote, sometimes even many years later, when suddenly lead and need matched (e.g., through a change in the lead or through a new need).

To ensure that your lead truly matches your need, we propose to first step back a little bit and to reconsider all possible leads and needs first. To highlight our emphasis on the importance of a

great educational need (versus the usually dominating lead), we will always start with the needs-based perspective in the first three steps of our case development funnel.

Identifying educational needs (content or context)

How do you identify relevant and valuable educational needs? And what is a need really?

A need could, for example, be one or several topics, issues, theories, concepts, tools, frameworks, etc. that you would like to introduce, discuss, and apply in class but for which you are currently lacking an adequate case. This will be particularly true for the most recent developments in business, but also for (new) theories that are not yet sufficiently elaborate. In both situations there will probably be no (good) cases yet. Here it is the *content* of your planned session that provides the educational need for the case.

Sometimes (usually more rarely) the educational need might also result from the *context* of your teaching. There is a seemingly infinite number of cases about change management and many of them might allow you to perfectly discuss the theories, tools, and concepts that you want your participants to discuss. But maybe the context of your teaching requires a case with a female protagonist, leading a change in a small team in a finance department in a sub-Saharan family business. How likely will you be to find something that fits this need in existing case collections?

In a nutshell, there are different reasons to *need* a case. See below for an incomplete list of possible case needs:

Types of case needs

- *Educational content needs:* you need to teach a certain *content* but do not have a matching case, e.g., you need a case in order to introduce, explain, illustrate, review, apply, critically reflect, etc. theories, issues, frameworks, academic concepts, tools, etc.
- *Educational context needs:* you teach in a certain *context* and need a case that will suit this particular audience and/or program, e.g., regarding
  – geographical and/or cultural setting of the case;
  – industry or market sector;
  – firm size;
  – type/ownership structure of the organization (not-for-profit vs family business vs publicly listed vs government owned);
  – functional setting;
  – gender of the protagonist;
  – protagonist's level of seniority.

The key is to be absolutely clear about your reasons for writing the case and what you want to achieve. And, while we suggest starting to build a long list of potential needs, it is also important to be critical with your case needs early on in the process. This will ease your decisions later.

≔ Critical questions for your case need

Did you describe your potential case needs clearly enough?

- Which theories do you want to cover?
- What should be the three/four takeaways for your students?
- What should their notes say?
- How does your presentation look like?

From theory to practice with Urs and Martin

Urs:

Several years ago, a colleague of mine asked me whether I knew about a case about B2B sales in professional services contexts that would allow discussion of the need to map buying and selling centers (following Frederick E. Webster and Yoram Wind's influential paper in the *Journal of Marketing* from 1972). I did recall a few great cases about B2B sales, but no case came to my mind with this particular setting. (Using the terminology from above, the need was an educational context need rather than an educational content need.) But upon further reflection, I remembered a case from my own experience: About a year earlier, I had tried to sell an executive education program to a large company – but I failed miserably. Given my colleague's need, I quickly wrote down the main aspects of the story, but at that time the need was not my need and so I never finished the case. A few years later, my colleague Johannes Habel joined my school. Johannes is very much focused on teaching and researching sales and sales management – and, again, he needed such a case for some of his courses. It was only then that the two of us decided to try the case in class (see below section 6, on testing the case) and – given the success of the case in the classroom – finished the case and teaching note. 'ESMT's pitch to EAD Systems' was born, about nine years after the initial idea.

Martin:

When I heard about Kiva, a nonprofit organization with a mission to connect people through lending to alleviate poverty, I was immediately impressed and wanted to write a case about this amazing story. I wrote an initial version but realized that I was missing a clear teaching need: none of my classes at that time focused on nonprofit organizations and developing markets.

I had almost dismissed the idea when I stumbled across Zopa, an organization that was supporting Kiva. I realized that this was the story I was looking for in the first place: a very innovative and disruptive for-profit startup, based in the UK. I called the company and arranged to interview key people. Not only were the topics and geographical location a good fit but Zopa was at the very start of its journey and so it was a great time to get involved.

I published my first case on Zopa in 2006 and have since updated it three times so far, most recently in 2014. I have traced Zopa's story from its early beginnings to its current position as an established player in the financial service industry only eight years later.

Finding good case leads

Always be alert to potential leads – become a story collector! Anything from a casual conversation with a student to a breaking news story may lead to the creation of a prizewinning case (we like to aim high!) – or, at the very least, to a case that works well in your classroom. Just stay alert and keep a list of interesting leads. And beware: leads do not need to be very specific – and you do not have to specify the educational need immediately. Whatever you hear about can start a process of associations or reflections or initiate the search for other cases/leads that might fit your need better. Many former case writing workshop participants described how they managed to develop

a case mindset/radar over time: once you start looking for case leads, you will see them almost everywhere.

Here are just a few possibilities you can explore to identify good leads:

How to find good leads

- News stories, magazines (e.g., trade magazines) and journal articles, television/radio programs, and trending topics on social media.
- Textbooks.
- Your own (prior or current) experiences in the world of business as an employee or consultant.
- Your personal experiences with a company or organization (e.g., as customer, shareholder, or any other type of stakeholder).
- Stories and experiences shared by family, friends, and (former) colleagues.
- Client contacts and guest speakers.
- And finally: do not overlook the many ideas that might come from your students, participants, and alumni:
  – This is especially true when teaching executives who will have numerous stories to share both informally and in the classroom about their experiences.
  – Students' written work, for example, course work or thesis material, can also be a rich resource, and may even become the basis for a cowritten case.
  – Alumni frequently want to give back. Make sure to stay in touch!
- Great opportunities can also arise if a company approaches you to discuss the possibility of writing a case about some aspect of their business.

Also think back to examples and stories that you have already used in class. You chose these stories probably because they somehow fitted into whatever you were teaching! They can therefore be easily connected to an educational need.

From theory to practice with Urs and Martin

Urs:

When I was given the opportunity to teach at a business school in Portugal, I chose a novel about the Portuguese sailor Ferdinand Magellan as spare-time reading for the flight. I was immediately intrigued by the story and formed the belief that it would be possible to teach almost any subject in business administration or management based on this story about the first circumnavigation of the world. I felt it would be interesting to use the information about the expedition to teach accounting and finance, economics, strategy, or cross-cultural management. I immediately realized I had a great lead – but initially I didn't have a need!

Several years later, I was asked by a client to run a customized executive education program on business ethics. My client's observation was that the organization's middle managers showed too much obedience and didn't voice their concerns and disagreements frequently enough with top management decisions. Immediately, the story of the mutiny against Magellan (April 1520) came to my mind. I finally had a very specific educational need to my lead – and immediately wrote the case 'Magellan versus Quesada: To Mutiny or Not to Mutiny?'

Should you follow a specific lead?

Before following up on a specific lead (and before 'falling in love' with it), try to be objective and ask yourself two critical questions:

- If someone else wrote a case based on your lead, would you choose to use it?
- Will your (planned) case really meet your learning objectives better than any other case that is currently available?

If the answer to either of these questions is no: look for a different lead! Taking a critical approach to your lead early will help you avoid wasting time and energy. It is always best to anticipate and preempt the reactions of colleagues and students, who will almost certainly be very critical of any shortcomings in your case.

If you have the case writing workbook (see page xviii for where to find this), you can now take the time and use the tables provided in the first chapter to start your own list of case leads and needs. If you do not have or want to use the case writing workbook, simply start your own list on a piece of paper, in a notebook, or as an electronic document. Start your own needs and leads collection right now. It will only take a few minutes but will make all the difference!

2. Educational objectives

If you followed the advice from the last section, you should now have two (possibly long) lists with interesting case leads and educational needs. Ideally you will have identified your optimal way of keeping them for long-term usage, e.g., in an (electronic) notebook, in separate files, or in the case writing workbook.

To get started with your own case, it is time to find the magically matching pair of case lead and case need – or, in other words, to narrow down a specific set of learning objectives for your case lead or vice versa. But as you do so: constantly (or in iterations) challenge yourself regarding the quality of the lead and need as well as their fit to one another. Earlier we described three such situations when for us, sometimes after many years, a specific lead and educational need finally matched.

≣ When to write your own case

- Don't reinvent the wheel: does a good case already exist?
- Do you have a lead and need?
- Are the lead and need really a good match? Is there a better educational context for the story or possibly a better lead to make your educational point? If yes: wait and search for something else!
- Do you have a personal and ideally very specific learning objective for this case writing project?

The matching process might very well be a quick, intuitive process of seemingly divine inspiration (such as some of the situations described earlier). Maybe you already knew when writing down the long lists of needs and leads which combination could work very well. In that case: congratulations!

Sometimes, the identification of the learning objective for your case might, however, require a more systematic review (or massaging) of your needs and leads. We suggest approaching this forced matching process from both ends (needs and leads) in iterations until you find the winning formula for your learning objective.

Narrowing down your need for an own case study

We recommend starting with the case needs. As mentioned before: most cases from inexperienced case authors tend to have better leads than very clear needs, i.e., they often lack a specific learning objective. To avoid this trap, rather start by critically assessing your self-identified educational (content and context) needs – and postpone your excitement about the long list of wonderful case leads for later.

☰ How to prioritize and identify the educational need

You might want to use the following list to prioritize and identify the most pressing educational need. You will also find these questions in the case writing workbook in easy-to-use tables, but you can of course use your own notebook or electronic document. Take the time; it will pay off!

• Out of all the sessions you teach, for which session do you most urgently need your own case study? That is, where do you see:
   a) the biggest benefit for your own case, and
   b) where is the biggest gap between how you currently 'fill' this session and an ideal world?
• For this specific session:
   – What exactly are the educational content needs (i.e., what concepts, theories, issues, tools, frameworks, etc. are you not yet able to deal with in class adequately)?
   – What exactly are the educational context needs (i.e., what is the specific configuration of context factors that would need to be matched in the lead, e.g., geography, industry, gender)?
• Sketch out briefly the types of participant enrolled in this course/attending this session.
• What kind of case setting is likely to achieve the biggest learning impact (driven through their excitement or by your understanding about the most important aspects of this subject)?
• Write down the main learning objectives of this group and session.
• Identify two or three potential topics for your new case (not yet specifically related to any of your leads).
• In a nutshell: what is your need? (How will addressing this need fill a gap [content or context]? Why do you want to have this case?)

In essence, think about your target participants and check your leads for the one lead that will be most likely to help them learn – which usually means: a case that will allow them to deal with situations that they are likely to experience in their professional futures.

Remember our 'patient in the room' analogy from the spotlight chapter. Ultimately a case study is the patient in the room that should allow your participants to discover and experience new situations and apply their knowledge and intuition to gain a deeper understanding of relevant theories, concepts, and frameworks.

Narrowing down your lead for your own case study

After having prioritized and specified a need, use this particular need as a lens to revisit the long list of possible case leads. Which of your leads (if any) could be massaged to match this case need? How would you need to present the case to match the need? Think about the case lead as something like an object with many different sides: Is there a way to turn the lead around so that the side that you will show to your participants will match the need specified above? An interesting

merger and acquisition story (for which you might know a key player in the transaction) can for example be turned around in many ways: from the buying or selling side; focusing on finance, strategy, marketing, or postmerger integration; looking at the organizational hardware or rather looking at the human dimension of the deal, etc. These few aspects alone highlight that the main point of a great case is not the underlying story but the way in which you present the lead so that it really matches a meaningful learning objective.

From theory to practice with Urs

I sometimes conduct an executive education format that I call 'Retail strategy city walk.' I take a group of executives and we talk about strategy on the basis of a couple of interesting and innovative retail formats in Berlin. In this city walk, I have occasionally involved the founder of one such store format as a guest speaker after an explorative shopping exercise. I just love the idea and the founder is an inspirational person, who agreed to serve as the protagonist of a case. I believe that I have a really interesting lead. But how can I match this lead to a meaningful need?

I could present the case in many different ways, all of which would address fundamentally different educational needs, and I struggled to find the most meaningful learning objective for myself. I considered the following aspects:

– Ideation: How did he come up with the idea? How did it change early on?
– Finding seed money: How did he get the necessary financial basis to start with the format?
– Managing rapid growth: How did he cope with the enormous early success of the format?
– Cash management: How did he deal with cash in a rapidly growing organization with high investment needs?
– Dealing with copycats: The format was quickly copied by others. How did he deal with that?
– Organizational forms of growth: Should he adopt licensing and franchising models to continue his growth path – especially given the copycats?
– Dealing with setbacks/downsizing: After two years of enormous success, the organization had to close a few of their stores and started to fall behind their initial growth plans. How did he deal with this setback?
– Dealing with investors: How did he manage shareholder satisfaction despite the setbacks? How did he convince them about the need to introduce an online channel that required massive investment?
– E-commerce: How did he build up e-commerce capabilities on the basis of a store-based retail format? Can the key organizational resources and capabilities be transferred to the new business?
– David vs Goliath: Given the entry of financially much more potent new (online only) players in his domain, can he survive in a niche?

You can probably easily imagine many more possible ways to turn this complex lead into an interesting case.

After having detailed your educational need much more specifically in the last section, now review your leads. Out of all the leads, which one of them is probably easiest to present in a way that will achieve your learning objective? Pick this lead first and go through the following questions. You will also find these questions in the case writing workbook:

- My overall lead (the story I would like to cover) in a nutshell (quickly write down a few bullet points about the story).
- What are the most obvious dimensions of the lead? Think divergently! How could you turn this case? And what would be the matching learning objectives if you presented the case this way?
- Which of these different aspects of the lead is (most closely) in line with the learning objective specified above?
- How close would this dimension of your lead be to your learning objective?
- What could you do to make the fit of lead and need even greater?
- Why and how will this story be relevant to achieve the learning objectives/fit into the course?

If after reflecting on these questions you do not find a way to make your specific lead really match to your learning objective, just pick the next lead and go through the questions again. Sooner or later you will probably find that at least one of your leads can be massaged to meet your need. Alternatively, think about the lead that came closest to your need and do some research: is there a different but similar lead that you didn't initially have on your list that would meet the need better/easier? Then just pick this new lead.

If you found a matching pair, congratulations! But, before you get carried away, you need to do one more test: do you really want and need to write this case?

✋ When not to write your own case

To be clear: Sometimes it is not a good idea to write your own case. For example, do not spend time reinventing the wheel. There are thousands of great cases – and one that addresses your teaching requirements may already exist (and could be better than the one you would write yourself; it is not easy to write a great case).

Do your research carefully – and do not waste time writing your own case if someone else has already written a perfectly good one.

In addition (and contradicting to/complementing the list of benefits from teaching your own case), some teachers are more effective in the classroom when teaching cases written by another author. There are at least three known pitfalls when using own cases in class:

(1) You might be too in love with your lead and become biased (selling and preaching instead of teaching; defending a protagonist or organization in class etc.).
(2) You might know too much about the case and try to squeeze too much of that into a specific session or course. Using your own cases can sometimes tempt you to introduce aspects into the class discussion that you happen to know about and find exciting – but that are not needed to achieve the learning objective.
(3) In cases written by others, you sometimes see more options regarding the possible courses of action/decisions of the protagonist. When using cases that were written by others you are structurally closer to the position of your students when reading the case for the first time. This can make you more willing to use truly participant-centered teaching methods (instead of championing a solution that you might be excited about).

Only you can decide if any of these pitfalls are true for you and your current case idea. But please reflect on your possible biases before continuing the work on the case!

Having said that, we absolutely encourage you to write your own cases. It is an exhilarating rollercoaster journey that we cannot recommend highly enough.

3. Strategic decisions

To get a truly great (sticky) case, you must knead the lead and need together. You are done with the preparation and can now start. From now onwards, the reflections, notes, and text elements that you will perform or produce will flow into the final set of materials of your case. So, take the time to really produce text blocks as you work your way through the next sections. Later, you will be able to copy and paste almost all of these text blocks into the case study or the teaching note.

Structuring the need into a session

We will start with the educational need and now focus on how this need would work out in a specific session. Focus on one specific setting first. If the case works well in this setting, you can later explore possible additional use cases of the material in class.

Defining the target participants

It is important to write the case for one specific course/participant group first! Your case will be much more targeted to achieve your desired learning objective. Having a very specific target reader in mind will result in a case that is spot on for this target group – and will probably still be equally good for others.

Use the case writing workbook or any kind of document to answer the following questions on the target audience:

- Describe your participant group: consider aspects such as program type and position of session in program, participant age, previous education and experience, cultural background, and language.
- What is their previous knowledge regarding the topic of your course/session?
- What are they likely not to know cognitively that you want them to know?
- What skills and abilities do they possess? What are some important skills and abilities that they might be missing?
- What is their likely attitude and motivation when coming to your course/session? What will they be looking for? Which of these expectations do you consider to be legitimate and plan to meet? Which of these expectations do you intentionally (but with good reasons) plan to disappoint? How can you explain to your participants that and why you will not meet a specific expectation that they might have?

You do not need to write down a lot of text at this stage. We just recommend having a specific target audience (possibly with faces and names) in mind when working further on the material.

Defining the underlying issues and learning objectives

Great cases are characterized by an intriguing combination of underlying and immediate issue(s). Accordingly, you as a case author will need to clearly define (and conceptually separate) the two early on in the case writing process. The importance of the distinction between underlying and immediate issues is discussed in the first chapter ('The Case Method in the Spotlight').

The gradual exploration of a topic by the participants during the case discussion is the most exciting element of case-based learning and at the heart of the success of the case method. As in

a murder mystery the participants explore an academic domain through curiosity, application of critical and creative thinking, and usage of prior knowledge, research, and readings, as well as debating with others. As we all know, the thrill of the murder mystery is the successive development of the story. If we know the murderer and killing method right from the beginning, we do not have a murder mystery. And if there is no progression from one issue to another, from one topic to another during a case-based session, we do not have a case study.

Wouldn't it be great if your participants were sitting at the edge of their chairs, biting on their fingernails, their eyes wide open and following the entire session with full attention and energy? Case discussions have the potential to evoke such experiences, but only if the case study itself and the session design offer 'a voyage of discovery—and even some interesting surprises' (Abell 1997). With growing experience in case teaching and writing you can orchestrate increasingly complex flows of themes in the session. At this point of the case writing process we do not yet need to have the full or final flow. For now, it is just important to think about the main issues of the case.

We will look in greater detail at the question of the *immediate* issue a bit later as the selection of the immediate issue is closely related to the timing of the case and the protagonist(s) – aspects that we do not yet need to address. Instead we propose that the *underlying* issues need to be defined first – and this is usually the easier task anyway.

The underlying issues should be based on your educational needs, for example key topics, theories, frameworks, and knowledge that you want participants to discover and learn for themselves. These issues will usually only emerge during the case discussion and be critically important in the development of a well-substantiated response to the immediate issue. In stark contrast to the immediate issues, the underlying issues should not be obvious when reading the case.

Have a look back at the sections on educational needs (see page 137) and learning objectives (see page 140). Write down those aspects from before that you chose to address with this particular case and – voila – you are already almost done! This will be particularly easy if your educational need was a content need rather than a context need; in that case, the underlying issue will probably be this particular educational content need. If necessary, add others that you find relevant to adequately deal with the lead.

Then move on to specify the general learning objectives for the usage of this case. Learning objectives should describe what kind of learning effect you intend to achieve with the case. Learning objectives might be closely linked with the underlying issue but might go significantly beyond the underlying issues, especially when your objectives are related to skills and attitudes rather than to knowledge.

Now quickly review the list of underlying issues and learning objectives. If they overlap heavily, combine them into one single list. If they are quite different, keep the lists separate and add a few sentences to highlight the reason for their difference. In either case, you can copy this description of the underlying issue and learning objective into a respective section of the teaching note later.

To maintain clarity and focus, avoid overloading your case with too many underlying issues or learning objectives. When writing the case (or using it in class for the first few times) you will probably realize that your initial draft covers many more issues than you originally planned for. But be disciplined and try to resist the temptation to include all of them in the final case. Most of the really great cases are tightly focused on one specific or only a few underlying issues and a narrow set of learning objectives. This pays dividends in the classroom. It helps to keep your learning objectives in focus and makes it less likely that your participants will go 'off topic' during the discussion. So quickly review your lists and delete individual aspects right now – as this will help you to write a more concise case later!

From theory to practice with Martin

When writing my case study 'Driving Digital Transformation at Faurecia' I was struggling with narrowing down the learning objectives as digital transformation is such a vast topic. I finally settled on the following learning objectives. This is of course just an example and maybe you have ideas to further narrow them down or to make them even more explicit.

- Understand how strategy informs the organization and management of information technology.
- Understand the drivers of digital transformation.
- Explore the elements of digital capability (business model, customer experience, operations, employee experience, digital platform).
- Shed a light on the digital transformation road map of a global automotive supplier.
- Explore the constant struggle between central and decentralized forces when driving a major change initiative.

Structuring the lead into a case

'Every block of stone has a statue inside it, and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.'
– Michelangelo

Almost every good lead provides lots of possibilities – just like Michelangelo's block of stone that could be turned into many different statues. It will be your task to determine where and how you want to form this lead into a great case study – and for that purpose it is key to never forget the learning objective. Everything that follows is a question of your choices – all of which you should take deliberately and cautiously.

In the next four sections, we will describe the four most important decisions case authors need to take about their case lead, namely (1) the case direction, (2) the timeline and cutoff points, (3) the immediate issues, and (4) the protagonist and other actors. On the basis of our experience, case authors should go through these questions in the suggested sequence, but feel free to jump to the next section as soon as you are getting stuck. Just do not forget to go back to choices that you were not ready to take earlier.

Defining the direction (prospective vs. retrospective)

Where do you want to go? Your choice of the case's narrative direction will substantially impact the type of discussions you will have in the classroom and your ability to realize the intended learning outcomes. Cases can be prospective or retrospective. Prospective cases are cases for which the in-class discussion will mostly look at developments after the point at which the case study text ends. Prospective cases most typically have a decision at their core which a protagonist needs to take. At the time of the case this is prospective, even though the relevant developments after the case might very well be in the past for you. Conversely, retrospective cases might, e.g., tell the full story of a person or organization and the subsequent discussion will try to make sense of the described developments or decisions. Both types can work very well in

classrooms – but you need to choose which type is a better match to your defined educational needs and objectives.

To make this decision, you might want to consider the below questions. Take the time to write down your answers. You will also find an easy-to-fill table in the case writing workbook.

- Does your learning objective call for a decision? This will obviously be true if the participants' ability to make choices and decisions is part of your desired learning outcome.
- For your own teaching: do you feel more comfortable with prospective or retrospective case studies?
- Considering cases authored by others and that you like particularly well: are they prospective or retrospective cases?
- Might a (possible) contact person in the organization be interested in having participants reflect on the possible future of the organization? Was this how you generated your lead in the first place, e.g., if they asked you to write a case about them?
- Given the content of the case, is there any decision involved or at stake?

After reflecting on these questions, make a choice about the direction of the case – and, if you are still ambivalent, consider the topic of the timing first and then revisit this question a bit later.

Defining the timeline and possible cutoff point(s)

It is all in the timing! Almost all great cases have a very specific date at their core – and the choice of the timing is crucial.

The ability to select the right timing for a case – the optimal point to locate the case in the time continuum – is absolutely critical, possibly even the single most impactful decision after having chosen your lead. Even slight alterations to the cutoff time (i.e., the specific time at which the case is situated), especially where you start and end the case text, can make huge differences to classroom discussions and will probably massively affect the achievement of your learning objectives.

Most good cases allow participants to 'step into the shoes' of the case protagonist – and that implies that there is a specific time to take into consideration. This is important when drafting and writing your case, as your case accordingly should only include information that was available to your protagonist at this specific point in time. Do not include information about anything that happened after the point in time at which you end your case.

From theory to practice with Martin

For example, a case may include a decision on whether or not to enter a new market. Your chosen timeline is important because it will affect the type and amount of information that can be made available in the case. So, depending on your learning objectives, the timing of the case could be:

- Six months before the decision. The main purpose of this case would be to analyze the company and discuss options. Entering a new market might be just one of these options.
- On the day of the decision. This case would focus on the need to analyze the immediate situation and decide if the company should enter the new market or not.
- After the decision was made. Sometimes, even a week can make a big difference as more information and the consequences of the decision begin to emerge.

It is a good idea to sketch out a full timeline before you start writing your case and even before making a final decision about the timing. We have had good experiences with using a large piece of paper in landscape format on which we organize the main developments of our lead over time from left to right. This timeline should include the dates and times of all the key events and turning points in the story. Try to map which underlying issues/learning objectives might be best achieved at each major event. Next to ensuring the link to your learning objectives, there are at least three additional benefits from investing effort into the timeline: (1) It will help you to ensure that you get the timing right and do not forget major developments; (2) it helps to provide a clear structure for your case (e.g., for the description of the organization's or protagonist's history); and (3) it might later be – partially – used as a timeline in a case exhibit on in additional material for other instructors. We frequently add a description of the developments after the cutoff point into a separate section of the teaching note – so, again, nothing that you do here will be a loss of time.

Below you find an example of the timeline that Urs developed for his case series (cases A to D) on IKEA ('Corruption in Russia: IKEA's Expansion to the East,' Case-Reference no. ESMT-716-0169-1 for the A case).
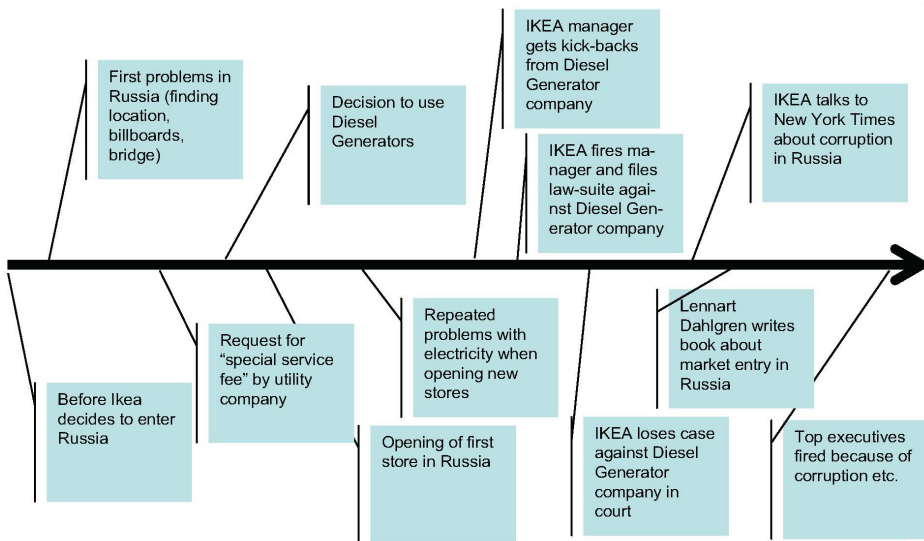
Figure 25: Example timeline with possible cut-offs for "Ikea in Russia" case study.

From theory to practice with Urs

Timing has been tricky for almost all of my cases.

A good example of this is my case 'Vodafone in Egypt: National Crises and Their Implications for Multinational Corporations (A),' cowritten with Shirish Pandit. In retrospect, I think it would benefit from different timing.

The case deals with the Egyptian government's orders (during the buildup to the Egyptian Revolution of 2011) to first shut down mobile telephone and internet services and later to send out progovernment text messages.

Initially, I was thinking about a case series where the request to shut down the services would be case A. The request to send text messages would be case B – and the outcomes would be case C. In class, however, I realized that the discussions of cases A and B in class were too similar and repetitive.

Accordingly, I merged both decisions into one case – and, although the two orders occurred a couple of days apart, in the case I deliberately left out the precise timing of the order to send text messages to enable a combined discussion of both events.

However, having taught the case many times, I now think this was a mistake.

If I were writing the case now, I would set it in the short time period between the two orders. This would have allowed a discussion about how the three cellphone operators reacted to the first order (all complied), followed by a discussion about how the cellphone operators should react to the second order (their responses varied) – i.e., instead of writing a clearly prospective case, I would have included a stronger retrospective perspective plus a prospective decision that needed to be taken.

Selecting the immediate issue(s)

The immediate issue is the 'hook' that will spark your participants' interest and (most of the time) kick-start the classroom discussion. It is usually best if the immediate issue is closely linked to the protagonist in the case, so participants can begin to imagine they are in the protagonist's shoes. For example, the immediate issue can be a key question that the protagonist explicitly asks in the opening and/or closing paragraph.

The immediate issue should be pretty clear in the case, but the 'solution' or the protagonist's actual choice should not be obvious. The immediate issue should be nonobvious, be controversial, and offer good material for debate and disagreement.

Ideally, the opening question when teaching the case should be closely related to the immediate issue. The aim is to provoke an instant reaction from participants and force them to take a position, especially when writing a classical decision case.

For example, one participant might say, 'I would do X; I would never do Y,' which then gives another participant the option to disagree and propose a different course of action. The subsequent discussion around these different perspectives of the immediate issue will reveal the critical need to understand the deeper and usually more difficult challenges that are affecting the immediate issue. These are the underlying issues.

From theory to practice with Martin

The immediate issue or 'hook' in my case 'Team WIKISPEED: Developing Hardware the Software Way' (cowritten with Linus Dahlander and Eric Morrow) is whether to cut and weld an existing axle or to develop an entire axle from scratch as part of a product development process. This immediate issue is quite easy to grasp and provides an easy transition to the underlying issues that are explored in the case: whether a waterfall or agile approach should be taken to product development.

In order to make your choice regarding the immediate issue, have a look at the timeline and ask yourself the following questions:

- Which decisions, questions, or challenges might the possible protagonists of your case have been pondering at the different possible cutoff points? Which of these decisions, questions, or challenges are nontrivial and is likely to provoke the highest level of controversy in the classroom?
- Which person would be the most natural protagonist at each of the cutoff points?
- Which of the underlying issues would need to be addressed to deal with the immediate issues at the different possible cutoff points?
- How easily could the class discussion move from the immediate issue at the various cutoff points to your real interest – the underlying issues/learning objectives?

Identifying the protagonist(s) and other actors

As already said a couple of times: Cases are educational vehicles that allow students to 'step into' the shoes of someone facing a key challenge or decision. The aim is to prepare participants for the real-life situations they will face during their careers. This is why it is so important to pay close attention to how you choose and present the protagonist of your case. The success of your case will largely depend on your protagonist. It is vital to get this right.

For most leads, several actors could possibly serve as the protagonist – and you need to choose wisely. Kassarjian and Kashani (2005: 109) suggest distinguishing between three different types of actors in cases: *drivers*, *passengers*, and *bystanders*:

Drivers
Drivers are very close to what we label as protagonist, but also other main actors closely related to the immediate issue in addition to the protagonist might be real drivers of the story/events. The opening and closing paragraphs of your case will focus on your protagonist(s) and their problem, dilemma, or challenge. Drivers are the organization's 'key decision makers' and 'own the problem or decision' your case is about.

Passengers
Passengers will often be colleagues of the protagonist(s). They offer 'additional contexts' and an 'alternative perspective,' often 'fill in the blanks,' and can provide additional 'facts and figures.'

Bystanders
Bystanders may be from within the organization but could also be any other individual related to the case (e.g., customers, consultants, or any other stakeholders). They are usually outside 'the decision-making locus of responsibility,' might 'provide 'objective' external points of view,' or offer insights that protagonists and passengers will miss.

First, we recommend making a long list of actors that are connected to the lead. This should include all actors you know to have been connected, but you should also think about actors that might possibly have been involved but that you just are not yet able to identify. For this exercise it is not yet important to know the real persons and names – unless you have them already. At this time, it might be sufficient to just list job titles, functions, or categories of actors that could

be represented in the case. You will find easy-to-use tables to complete in the case-writing workbook.

Second, we suggest using the following four questions to choose which person connected to the lead should fall into which of the three categories identified by Kassarjian and Kashani:

- Which of the players in the lead had which role for the developments (retrospective cases: for the developments *until* the cutoff time; prospective cases: for the developments *after* the cutoff time)? The different level of involvement in the decisions, developments, etc. should allow you to roughly allocate all actors to the three categories.
- If you look at the lead from the perspective of the different possible actors: which of them might be most logically connected to your choice of (or just to the most interesting) immediate issue?
- How easily can you get access to this person? How likely will this person collaborate with you?
- Can you describe this person with the required richness as a real human being? (A particularly important question when writing a case solely on the basis of public information.)

Ernest Hemingway was talking about writing novels when he said that 'a writer should create living people; people not characters. A character is a caricature' (Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*). This observation is equally applicable to case writing. No one wants to read about a caricature, much less 'step into their shoes.' In order to allow transfer and impact of the lessons learned it is essential that the participants consider the case to be realistic and the selection and portrayal of the protagonist is key for that.

Whether your protagonist is a real or fictitious person, they must come across as a living and breathing human being: someone your participants can empathize and identify with. The easier readers can identify with the case protagonist (right now or as an option for the future), the more immediately relevant the case discussion will be for them overall. Think about your target audience and ask yourself whether all or at least a part of your audience can identify with the potential protagonist. Over the duration of a whole course, do you have diverse protagonists so that everyone in your target audience might find a protagonist that they can identify with? But be careful: there might also be good reasons to have some cases that participants have a hard time identifying with. Learning to step into the shoes of someone that you cannot easily identify with can be a learning in itself.

From theory to practice with Martin

As in every good story, people come alive through their actions and words. I always try to describe the actions of my protagonists very precisely and resist the temptation to 'edit' their activities.

I also try to include as many direct quotes as possible (which means taking full and accurate notes during interviews). Direct quotes are an excellent way to capture someone's personality.

Additional background information about individuals featured in the case can also help. For example, in the case I wrote about Bosch ('Global Product Development Strategy at Bosch: Selecting a Development Site for the New Low-Cost ABS Platform') I included a paragraph about each main character based on their CVs in the exhibits of the case study.

Choosing your protagonist

You should decide early on who will be your protagonist – this is true whether you are writing a field-based case or one from published sources.

If you are writing a field-based case, it is a good idea to make your key contact at the organization (or the person from which you generated the lead) your protagonist; maybe this is even a given. By building a good relationship with them you can establish trust and mutual respect. This makes it more likely that they will open up to you and be honest about their mistakes and failures, as well as their successes. You will then have a far greater chance of writing a convincing and effective case that will excite and inspire your participants.

Working closely with your key contact in this way will also help to create goodwill within the company and make access to other key figures much more straightforward. It should also speed up the final signing-off process.

However, be prepared to change your protagonist if you discover while writing the case that the perspective and experiences of a different protagonist would work better (or if your contact leaves the organization while the issue is ongoing and still relevant). Changes in the protagonist could be needed if the immediate issue from the perspective of a different player would just be much more relevant and exciting. So, do not get hooked on your personal connection. Consider making your contact/lead generator a 'passenger' or 'bystander' if this person wants to be included in the case.

Multiple protagonists?

Some cases, whether field-based or written from published sources, work very successfully with two or more protagonists. However, be aware that this can make writing your case more challenging; you will need to incorporate various perspectives and interests, and perhaps differing levels of seniority. When writing a field-based case, bear in mind that multiple protagonists will slow the sign-off process as more people will need to be involved, and more political massaging will probably be necessary.

However, do not automatically dismiss the idea of having more than one protagonist. It can reflect the complexity of a particular scenario. Multiple protagonists also offer the opportunity for role-play and simulation exercises in the classroom. And do not be afraid to experiment and be creative (and undogmatic)! With multiple protagonists, you could write the entire case as dialogue between the protagonists, as if you were writing a theater play.

From theory to practice with Urs

A few years ago, two colleagues of mine and I were in discussions with an alumnus about writing a case. The alumnus was member of the board of a rapidly growing technology company and personally responsible for the organization's strategy. During guest talks on one of my programs, he mentioned that the organization was not sure about the future direction, especially about its future business model. Should they keep their integrated model, focus only on the high-tech hardware, move to the role of a systems integrator and rather focus on engineering and programing, or focus only on the supply of certain components?

(Continued)

When we started to discuss a possible case study, we realized that as head of strategy he was not the final decision maker. Then we also learned that there was some uncertainty and even disagreement within the board. At that time, we had an idea: How about bringing the board together to discuss the future strategic direction and to turn this dialogue into a multiple protagonist case study that would almost have been like a theater play. I still think that this would not only have been possible but possibly even a great case. Unfortunately, we could not get the board to agree to this idea.

4. Tactical choices

The identification of target participants, underlying issues, case direction, cutoff points, immediate issues, and protagonists in the last section was key to deciding the most important strategic dimensions of your case. If you make changes to any of these strategic decisions later, you will have to redo a lot of the work – both for the case study as well as for the teaching note. This is why it is important to get these decisions right. The next set of choices can be changed more easily along the way, which is why we refer to them as 'tactical choices.' They are, however, equally important for the overall success of your case.
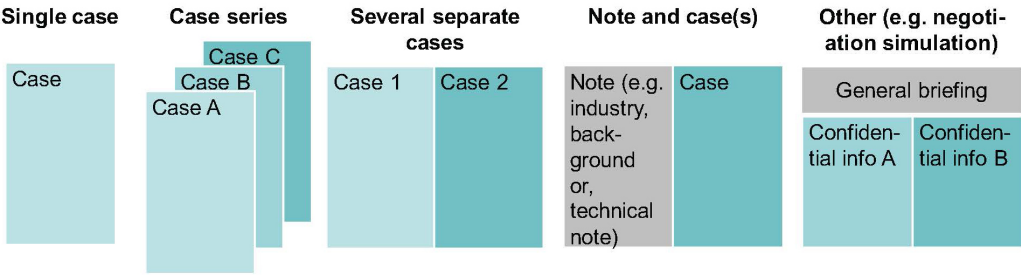
Specifying the case

In the previous three sections of this chapter we started with the educational needs aspects (which belong more in the teaching note) before looking at the lead side (which is focused on the case study itself). This can now change. After having made your strategic decisions, the educational context is already firmly embedded in your case writing project. We recommend keeping it in mind, but in this section we will first focus on five tactical choices related to your lead.

Defining the structure of the case study

First, we suggest getting back to the timeline of your case. Earlier you plotted the full series of events of your case lead. If you mapped possible cutoff points in the story with different immediate and underlying issues, you can now think about the best way to structure your material. The same story can be told in many different ways depending on your learning objectives. This is not only true for the choice of your protagonist and cutoff time but also for the type of case study you want to write. Review your timeline and ask yourself which case study structure will fit best to your learning objectives:

- a single case,
- a case series,
- several separate cases,
- one or several (connected or independent) cases plus a technical/industry note,
- simulation or role-play cases – these can include, for example, a general overview for everyone in the class plus confidential briefing material for different groups to use during the role-play or simulation exercises.

- The same/similar "story" can often be told in very different ways
- Key question: For what purpose do you want to use your case?
- Accordingly you can split your case in very different ways, e.g.:

Single case	Case series	Several separate cases	Note and case(s)	Other (e.g. negotiation simulation)
Case	Case C Case B Case A	Case 1 Case 2	Note (e.g. industry, background or, technical note) Case	General briefing Confidential info A Confidential info B

Figure 26: Possible case study structures.

Your choice will depend on your educational need and on the learning objectives you plan to address with the case. In order to make your choice, consider the following aspects:

- Traditional (decision) cases usually call for a single case. For case writing novices in particular, this is a safe bet and much easier. You can then still consider providing an update about later events in a case B – or (our advice) include this update in the teaching note.
- If your educational need requires the description of a longer series of multiple decisions or historical events, a case series might be appropriate, but see Urs's heretic view below.
- If you have established a good relationship with an interesting company and/or individual, it might make sense to write a number of separate cases. These could be totally independent of each other or deal with related issues from different perspectives. This is also an excellent way to avoid the beginner's typical mistake of attempting to kill too many birds with one stone by trying to cover too many different learning objectives in a single case. But if this is your choice: start with the one case that addresses the biggest educational need – and postpone all others.
- Technical notes (e.g., about industries, geographical settings or companies) can be used separately to bring reality into the classroom. But they can also be used to include optional background material to the case if required. This might help enormously to make the case shorter and less onerous to read.
- Specific educational needs might call for separating the case into a general introduction/ description of the situation or organization plus additional cases that only describe individual aspects/perspectives. This is, e.g., applicable when using cases for negotiation classes or if the educational need calls for role-play elements – for both of which you need to ensure informational asymmetry across the participants in the classroom.

😈 Heretic view from Urs

I made the mistake myself and have often seen others at least tempted to do it: don't plan to structure your material into a case series even though there are some really great examples of highly successful case series!

(Continued)

I wrote several cases with two parts, where case B was essentially nothing else than an update about the events after the cutoff point so that the instructors could share them (possibly with some additional detail) with the group after the session. But three of my (mostly early) cases are structured into case series of three or even more parts. And I have to admit: I increasingly only use the first part in class – if I use the case at all. And this is not only true for my own case series but also for case series from other authors. Why?

1. In practice the sheer distribution and reading of the subsequent cases just takes too much time. Distributing parts B, C, D, etc. in class usually just does not work from a logistical perspective. It could work in blocks of several sessions when you can give your participants time for reading between the sessions, but in reality the depth of the reading of the later parts will be much more superficial than for case A.

2. Great case teaching requires the orchestration of a well-thought-through line of suspense – from the original puzzle about the immediate issue toward the underlying issues and a closing segment of the session. According to my experience, it is usually much more difficult if not almost impossible to have such a line of suspense on two levels: within the discussion of each of the case parts and simultaneously across all the case parts at the same time.

3. Building up the higher-level line of suspense across all case parts is particularly difficult if it relies on additional underlying issues that you only plan to address later. In my experience you will very likely have one super-smart participant who already anticipates and raises the underlying issue that you planned so carefully to discuss with Case C. Yes, you can sometimes park such comments and come back to them later, but that is not really a participant-centered approach. And, yes, you can bury this other underlying issue so well in case A that it will be almost impossible to grasp it initially, but then again this will not feel real, as you would most likely need to eliminate at least some information that the protagonist had at the time from the earlier parts of the case series. I call such cases 'rabbit out of the hat cases' and that's what they are: a lazy trick to cheat your participants.

In a nutshell: Just don't do it – unless this is really your educational need and unless it really works very well in your test classes. Instead of cutting the series of events into multiple case parts (most of which might be prospective in nature), consider combining a longer retro spective section with a prospective ending in one single case. Like this you can still cover two different aspects but avoid the disappointment from investing time and effort into a case series that you will probably rarely use in its entirety.

If you write your first case and if your case lead/need requires the production of a case series (i.e., it really cannot be massaged into one single case): Stop here and first gain case writing experience by writing a simple, short, and more conventional case first. Only then go back to this match of lead and need. If you still want to produce a case series, then go ahead.

Defining the length of the case study

Second, you will also have to choose what length of case you want to write. Long? Short? Somewhere in between?

When deciding on length, you may first wish to consider your intended audience. For example, if the case is aimed at undergraduates, a longer case offering more context and background might be appropriate or even necessary (but bear in mind that undergraduates may be resistant to reading longer cases!).

An executive audience may also be resistant to longer cases but for different reasons; they may already understand the context and background and will probably have limited time outside of work for extra reading.

One solution for executives is to use fewer cases on a course or program, which allows more time for longer cases.

As you can see, deciding on the length of your case can be a bit of a minefield. Ultimately, have the courage of your convictions. If you need to write a longer case, write it. If you believe the case will genuinely benefit from being shorter, make it shorter.

If you stick to the following golden rules, you will not go far wrong:

1. Make your case as short as possible (most audiences will appreciate this), while still achieving your learning objective.
2. Be flexible from the start and adjust the length of your case as you write it. Make it shorter each time you revise it whenever/wherever possible, but do not hesitate to add content if something important is missing. The length of the case is probably the choice that can be changed most easily later on.

From theory to practice with Martin

You must decide how long your case needs to be. However, there is a growing trend for shorter cases.

My personal opinion is that short cases are more flexible as they can be used in a variety of settings, for example in circumstances where participants may be resistant to longer cases or where it simply is not practical to expect participants to read and prepare a very long case (e.g., due to the lead time between making the material available to the participants and the class itself).

Short cases also reduce one of the most damaging risks of case-based teaching: if participants have not prepared the case before the session, you can give students time to read a short case in class (see also the risks of doing so in our case teaching chapter, page 81).

However, longer cases are equally valid and valuable. I like to use longer cases at around mid-term, or to close a semester or program of study.

And, finally, one more argument for shorter cases: We know that many case teachers use case length as a key search and selection criterion. (The most frequent search option for cases at the Case Centre is cases shorter than 10 pages.) The shorter your case is, the more likely other educators will be to use your work. Watch out for thresholds in the listing and search functionalities of case distributors: some work with any number of pages that educators look for (e.g., The Case Centre); others work in increments of five (e.g., Harvard Business Publishing) or 10 pages (e.g., Ivey Publishing). It would just be a shame to produce a case with 10.3 pages, which is somewhat ironic given the fact that the average length of cases listed at the Case Centre is 12 pages. Then again, do not worry if 10 pages is not enough for you: the average length of the best-selling cases at the Case Centre is 18 pages.

Defining the case complexity

Third, you need to decide how complex you want your case to be. The case difficulty cube by Mauffette-Leenders, Erskine, and Leenders (2005: 12) describes three dimensions of complexity that ought to be considered (see also more detail in our chapter on types of case, page 16) and is

a great tool to think about the desirable complexity. The authors differentiate the following three dimensions along which cases can be either more or less complex:

- *Analytical dimension:* What is the problem? This dimension is usually related to the immediate issue of the case but also to the degree to which the underlying issues are hidden. Cases that are quite obvious in this dimension will explicitly state the immediate issue and possibly even present a couple of possible courses of action. For complex cases, on the other hand, not even the immediate issue is very obvious.
- *Conceptual dimension:* What kind of concepts and theories apply? This dimension relates to the concepts, tools, frameworks, and theories that will be needed to properly respond to the underlying issues. Cases that are quite easy in the conceptual dimension might, for example, deal with the criteria for recognizing something as an asset according to IFRS. Cases with higher levels of conceptual complexity might for example deal with the question of an organization's purpose.
- *Presentation dimension:* How is the case presented/written? Cases with low levels of presentation complexity will tend to be shorter, well written, easy to follow and well structured. Cases with higher levels of presentation might present the material in an undigested way – just as it was visible to the case protagonist.

Mauffette-Leenders, Erskine, and Leenders recommend defining your case complexity by specifying a numeric value of 1 (easy) to 3 (complex) for each of the three dimensions. You might not necessarily need to specify a specific value for the three dimensions but you should now make a conscious choice regarding the intended level of complexity for your case. Not surprisingly, this choice should again depend upon your learning objective and the target audience.

- The difficulty of the analytical dimension will typically increase with the participant's experience and then often stay constant at a high level.
- Conceptual difficulty will usually increase over time in courses as well as with the seniority of the participants.
- High levels of difficulty regarding the presentation will frequently be found early or in the middle of courses for rather inexperienced participants, whose ability to separate relevant from irrelevant information you plan to develop.

Our general recommendation: Make your case as uncomplex as possible! As an educator you will be able to increase conceptual and analytical complexity during the session, by asking deep questions. Do not overload your participants unnecessarily – this will just make fewer of them properly prepare for class.

👹 Heretic view from Urs

In specific situations, you might intentionally want to make a case as complex as possible!

One of my clients once asked me to prepare a customized case study for an executive education program. The target participants in this program were highly specialized finance experts of a multinational retail organization (e.g., from treasury, international tax, or financial accounting). The main objective of the overall program was to open the perspective of these finance experts so that they would see the big picture, the business behind the numbers. For that purpose, we wrote a case study (not published) about a possible international expansion of the company into a specific country. The program spanned five days and covered multiple academic disciplines. As preparation for the program, we provided the participants with a 38-page-long case that required them to take the perspective of the head of the internationalization department who had been asked to advise for or against this specific expansion.

> At the end of the five program days, the participants were asked to present their recommendations in groups, but along the way we covered various different topics such as strategy, operations, legal aspects, international taxation, and marketing – even topics such as corruption and the political context. At the end of every program day, we made additional material available to the students – typically about 20 pages with lots of numbers, data, charts, etc.
>
> Essentially, we intentionally aimed to increase the presentation and analytical dimensions of the case to an extreme. This was important to us in this specific context as the participants' ability to differentiate relevant versus irrelevant and to focus on the big picture was a key developmental objective of the overall program.

Irrespective of the case length that you chose earlier, be aware that it will be the case difficulty that will have the biggest impact on the time that your participants will need to properly prepare the case before class.

Thinking early about (preliminary) case release

It might sound premature, but now is a good time to think about case release. As we will explain below in greater detail, you will need a sign-off from the organization or protagonist for your final case as soon as the case contains even the slightest bit of information that cannot be found in the public domain. Ultimately, you (should) want to write a case about a real organization, a real challenge, and a real person. This makes cases typically much better. Accordingly, you should do your very best to get the sign-off at the end of the process. And to get the release you should now consider a couple of aspects that might influence your case writing and that will probably make it much easier for you to get the sign-off later.

We asked you earlier to evaluate the probability of getting case release when selecting your case lead. But by now you should have a much clearer perspective about the case that you are writing – and this might be a good time to (re)assess the sign-off probability and to think about ways to increase the probability.

Please take a few minutes to consider the following questions:

- Is the case describing a success or a failure? (Typically, it will be significantly harder to get release for a case study on failure. Overall, organizations tend to be very reluctant to release cases about really tough challenges and problems, as long as they cannot serve as a shining role model when presenting the outcome of the case study.)
- What is the overall attitude of the company to case studies (are there already cases on the company [check the case distributors], are they a supporter of your institution, did they reach out to you or vice versa…)?
- What is your personal relationship with the company? (How well) do you know the chosen protagonist or other drivers of the story? How senior or powerful are they in the organization?
- Who should you try to get release from? Do you know people in positions that can decide on case release? If not, ask your contact or protagonist who would need to give final release. Sometimes the protagonist is sufficient; sometimes you might need agreement from many individuals or functions, often from the organizational units covered in the case or from central functions such as legal, PR, or marketing.
- Do you have fallback contacts? Whom do you know who might support your quest for case release if, for example, your key contact leaves the organization?

- Do you have other good contacts inside or outside your institution that could help you get the politics done? Are there, for example, more senior colleagues at your school who might have even better connections to the organization?

Just make it a habit to repeatedly mention and discuss the issue of case release as often as possible whenever you talk with representatives of the organization. We have seen many great cases fail because of missing release – a massive loss of time and effort – but we have never heard that an author did not get release because she was talking about release too much.

If you realize that you are unlikely to get case release at the end, review the options of writing a case solely from public sources or to work with disguise/fiction. If neither matches with your educational needs: stop now and do not invest any further effort.

Real or fictional case?

> *'Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities;*
> *Truth isn't.' – Mark Twain*

While considering case release in the last section, you might have concluded that it will be difficult if not impossible to get a final sign-off for the case as you envisioned it so far. Relax: that does not necessarily mean that you need to start all over. There is a fifth and last tactical choice that you might want to use in such cases – or for various other reasons – namely the question of writing a real or fictional case.

As described in the first chapter (see the section in the first chapter, on the typology of cases, page 17), the question of real versus fictional is not a binary decision but rather it represents a spectrum of choices. Sometimes it is easier to get final case release if you change the case type and level of detail in the case. But for you as an educator the main guiding principle should be the following decision criterion: can you achieve your learning objectives if you modify the type of information contained in the case?

We suggest considering three main aspects at this point in the process:

- Factual basis of the case: should the case describe real or fictional events?
- Collaboration with organization or protagonist: should you plan to write the case on the basis of field research (i.e., in collaboration with people and an organization) or just from your desk?
- Level of described detail: how much detail and reality should be described in the case?

Factual basis of the case

Many if not most of the best cases describe real events. That is unsurprising as one of the key benefits of using case studies for educational purposes is to bring reality to the classroom. Accordingly, many authors of books and articles on case writing as well as professional associations (e.g., the North American Case Research Association, NACRA) agree that a case has to be 'a description of a *real* situation' (Naumes & Naumes 2006: 9). On the other hand, we have personally had some exceptionally great experiences when using cases that do not describe real events in class (our own cases and cases from others).

So, let's not be orthodox but rather focus on the main objective of cases: to allow participants to have meaningful learning or development while reflecting and debating the description of a situation. If this learning is triggered by a fictional case, then so be it.

Overall, we think that there are benefits and drawbacks to cases written about real or fictional events. Please have a look at some of them before making your choice:

Real events case

Benefits
– Easy to relate to for your participants (and for you) – they will know that they are dealing with a real-world phenomenon and challenge.
– Familiarity of company or products – it can be much easier if your participants know the organization or product and thus can combine the case with their prior knowledge and experience (e.g., less explanation necessary).
– No need to explain the relevance/context of the case – it is a real case and thus it might happen again in a similar way in the professional future of your participants.

Drawbacks
– Getting access to the company – especially when describing any even remotely controversial behavior of the company or protagonist but also when dealing with organizational failures and tough challenges, organizations might just not respond when you try to reach out to them.
– Need to get case release – unless writing the case entirely on the basis of publicly available information you will need to get release before publishing the case (and possibly it is exactly this not-publicly-available information that makes your case lead so interesting).
– Aging of case – cases on the basis of real events get out of date more quickly, especially if you write a case about an organization that changes rapidly (just think about the possible effects of rebranding, corporate restructuring, bankruptcy, etc. on your case).

Fictional events case

Benefits
– Retaining control – when writing a case on the basis of fictional events, you can present the story the way it fits your educational needs best and you do not need to take reality into account; accordingly, you retain complete control of the setting and content.
– The case as a universe – when using a fictional case, participants need to rely on the information provided in the case (the case text forms an entire universe). They will be unable to use prior knowledge about the firm, industry, or context.
– No distraction from the 'solution' – cases fictional events do not have real-life outcomes. Accordingly, participants will not be distracted by the outcome (often mistaken as 'solution'). If they cannot google the outcome, they will probably be more open minded regarding the possible courses of action.

Drawbacks
– Fiction in the classroom – writing entirely fictional cases thwarts the objective of bringing reality to the classroom.
– Effort and creativity – making up a case from scratch without building upon real events typically requires a lot of creativity and effort.
– Case complexity – in our experience, those few great cases that describe entirely fictional events (i.e., cases that are not only disguised on the basis of real events) are almost always not complex (at least in the presentation and analytical dimension). It is doable to write an entirely fictional short case, but case complexity will almost inevitably go down as fictional cases typically lack detail and information.

As already said, this choice represents a spectrum not a dichotomy. There are what we tend to call gradations of 'fictionality.' The basic story of a case study can be more or less fictional. You could:

- write a case about a real organization and describe the situation and developments as they really occurred;
- add a bit of fiction to a real case, e.g., by changing certain details for either didactical reasons or because this is necessary to get release, but keep the real organization's and protagonist's names;
- start to write a case on the basis of a real story about a real organization with real people, but then present the case as a fictional case in order to avoid (release no longer needed) or ensure (release easy to get as organization is not identifiable) release;
- combine two or three different real situations or developments from one or several organizations into one single case in order to increase case density;
- make up a story entirely from scratch without any relation to real-world developments or situations;

Whatever you choose for your case, beware the ethical pitfalls. Some case authors consider it to be legitimate to add the description of fictional situations, developments, conversations, etc. into the case. We agree that in certain cases a higher level of 'fictionality' might help – but we recommend at least making this visible in some notes to the case or in the teaching note. We do not see that being transparent about modifications could harm the learning experience – and like this you at least do not intentionally say something you know to be wrong in order to mislead others (the classical definition of lying).

Collaboration with an organization or protagonist

As soon as you plan to base your case on real events, you will also need to decide if your case should be based on field research and collaboration with the organization and protagonist or written on the basis of desk research from previously published sources. Again, there are advantages and disadvantages to both.

**Cases written through field research in collaboration
with the organization or protagonist**

Benefits
- Case will probably be a better reflection of the world as it was – and we want to prepare our participants for the real world.
- Case will typically become much richer in detail.
- Collaboration with an organization ensures real-world connection of the case.
- Chance to discover new and original issues and learn for yourself in the process.
- Collected data might be used for (academic) research as a primary or secondary objective of the field research.
- Field research is close to research activity and process – and thus to what you know best.
- Intensification of collaboration with organization for other benefits, e.g., guest lectures, future cases.
- Work on the case might be combined with consulting for client organization, especially when case deals with an acute challenge.

(Continued)

Drawbacks
- It may be tricky or time-consuming to get case release (permission from the company to publish your case will be needed as soon as you include any information gained during your field research).
- The case content will depend on the company: their objectives, opinions, and the extent to which they share information with you.
- Interviews take time and effort to arrange, conduct, and write up.

Case written from published sources

Benefits
- You will have more control over the content of your case.
- Case release is not required; no political considerations are needed and this ensures academic independence.
- The process may be less time-consuming.
- Offers a good alternative when the company involved will not collaborate with you.

Drawbacks
- Your case may have less credibility.
- Participants will not benefit from the 'inside knowledge' of a field-based case.

Realistically, you may just not have the luxury of choosing to write a field-based case. For example, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to write field-based cases on/with:

- controversial businesses (e.g., tobacco, weapons or gambling industries);
- problematic issues and failures (e.g., accounting fraud; ethical or legal transgressions; failures of various kinds);
- highly confidential future plans (e.g., acquisitions, market entries, product developments, numbers for specific projects);
- exposure of personal information about individuals (especially for leadership cases).

But, even if your case is completely noncontroversial, it may still be difficult to get the company's permission to release it. You may receive no or a negative response when you first approach the company or – much worse – it may refuse to release the case after you have finished writing it.

From theory to practice with Urs

If you do not get wholehearted permission at the start, or if you suspect it will be tricky to get release for your finished case, writing from published sources may be your best (or only) option. If you cannot get the organization or protagonist to collaborate with you on the case early on, there are a couple of other options to consider.

You can:

- use only publicly available information and thus avoid the need for release altogether;
- partially disguise the case which may make it easier to get permission; or
- fully disguise the case so that permission will not be necessary (see below).

(Continued)

Writing (and publishing) your case solely from published sources may be the best option, especially if you have limited experience of writing cases. Two practical tips:

- We have sometimes written a first version of the case on the basis of publicly available information and only then reached out to the organization. It might be easier to get their support and collaboration once they see what you have in mind.
- Document through footnotes or endnotes the sources of your information for every single factual statement in the case – and make sure you save all your sources for later reference (e.g., screenshots/downloads of articles, links to webpages).

Level of described detail

After deciding the factual basis of your case and the required collaboration from the described organization or protagonist, you next need to decide about the level of detail and information in your case – in particular about the possible extent of disguise. As with the previous two decisions, this choice will also heavily affect the probability of getting case release.

Sometimes it might be easier to get final release when:

1. leaving out/making up certain details;
2. postponing the publication of the case to avoid giving away confidential information (some organizations might allow you to use the cases in class but not give you permission to publish the case before a certain deadline); or
3. producing a disguised case.

You should try your very best to avoid the first two options – but you might want to consider them once you hit problems as you write the case. The third option – disguise (sometimes also anonymization or sanitization) – is a frequently used tactic to get release or to ensure confidentiality of critical information. Through disguise, i.e., by changing the description of a situation or development, the author ensures that readers of the case cannot infer the underlying real case.

The *extent of the disguise* can be differentiated between:

- Full disguise: all factual details of the underlying situation or development will be changed except for information that is commonly known and not linked to any disguised organization or individual.
- Partial: certain factual details of the lead are correctly mentioned, while others are only disguised selectively (e.g., in the famous HBS case 'Rob Parson at Morgan Stanley' by M. Diane Burton, most of the information is probably describing the real events behind the case, but the names of certain individuals were changed to protect their privacy).

You should also carefully consider the *scope or object of disguise*, as disguise can affect:

- names and sociodemographic descriptions of individuals (job title, gender, age, education, nationality, professional career, etc.);
- names of organizations (case organization or other organizations, e.g., competitors, acquisition targets, customers, suppliers);
- physical locations – and cultural setting;
- industry settings (to make your life easier, consider at least staying in the larger ecosystem, e.g., by moving into supplier or customer industries as this will probably require fewer adaptations);

- functional setting (e.g., next to changing the name of the protagonist, you could just move her to a different function/department);
- numbers (e.g., certain financial numbers such as the company's WACC or IRR);
- historical setting.

Based on personal experience, we do not recommend fully or partially disguising a case – as long as you can avoid it. Disguising a case is very difficult, painstaking, and time-consuming work. Sanitizing needs a bit of 'lying' and to lie consistently is just not easy.

From theory to practice with Urs

One of my cases was supposed to deal with corruption. The organization didn't respond to any of my attempts to get in contact. So I wrote the case solely on the basis of publicly available information and submitted it. After a review, a journal accepted the case for publication, but the legal department of the editing house asked for a complete disguise so that readers wouldn't be able to make inferences about the underlying real case – I was expected to present the case as a fictional case.

Initially, I assumed this to be a quick job – just using Ctrl+H to search and replace all the names of organizations, individuals, and locations. But soon I realized that I had to change much more, e.g.:

- Changing the location required adaptations in the description of the cultural context as well as the behavior of the protagonist and other actors.
- The organization's positioning and competitive advantage was important to understand why corruption was such a threat to them – and I had to invent a new story to deal with that.
- Just changing the name of the organization was not enough; it was also important to describe the organization overall in a way that wouldn't allow the real company to be identified. And this was particularly tricky as the industry was characterized by a particularly specific competitive situation.
- The case contained a few numbers – all of which now needed to be changed. Numbers are quite easy to find online, so I had to make them up. But beware: a simple multiplication of all numbers by a certain factor will just not do the job – especially not when you include the three basic financial statements.

So, in a nutshell: unless you are absolutely convinced that you will not get release, spare yourself the effort and try to get release!

Drafting a case teaching plan

By now you have defined the learning objective of your case and taken numerous strategic decisions and tactical choices. The overall design of your case is becoming more and more clear. Now it is time to come back to the educational need for your case. At this point, this means starting to develop a plan on how you want to teach the case in class.

As explained at the beginning of this chapter, we believe that the development of the case study text and of the teaching note should not be done sequentially (neither first the case nor first the

teaching note) but that case authors should bring together their lead and need in an iterative process. And, according to our experience, now is the right time to draft a first version of the teaching plan – you will need it soon for your test-teaching anyway.

A *teaching plan* (see also above in the case teaching chapter, page 40, which you might want to read now unless you have already done so) is a structured overview of the flow of a teaching session that usually includes information about:

- building blocks/sections by content in a recommended sequence (including intended learning objectives per building block);
- questions per building block and for the transition from one block to the next;
- learning formats;
- timings; and
- insights you (or others) gained from using the case in class (this last item is not yet applicable right now, but we will come back to it later).

We do not need the full detail at this point of time (much will change in your draft teaching plan as you continue writing the case and after the first test-teachings), but you should now already form an understanding about the rough sequence and rhythm of the session. For that please first refer back to your choice of the immediate issue and of the underlying issues and learning objectives.

Roughly, you should plan to have:

- an intro block that will usually be started by asking a powerful opening question and be linked to the immediate issue of the case;
- a variable number of different discussion blocks that should be linked to the different underlying issues and/or learning objectives;
- a transfer block (ensuring transfer of knowledge/lessons learned); and
- a closure.

For all of these specify at least the approximate duration, the learning format and the main learning points. If you are more specific and detailed, this will rarely be a waste of your time as you can use it in step five when drafting the teaching note further. Even though the plan will most likely change, the individual blocks or certain aspects of the different blocks can probably be used even after the changes (we often just needed to add blocks or to change the sequence of the blocks). At the end, check if your teaching plan truly ensures:

- diversity of learning formats (change of format approximately after every 15 to 20 minutes);
- logical structure of the flow so that participants know where they are in the process and how they got there (i.e., including the method to move from one session block to the next);
- achievement of all learning objectives (please refer back to page 33 above).

You can find tables in the case writing workbook for this exercise. Feel free to use those to write down the intended flow of the session that you have in mind while writing this case.

We believe that writing a case is done best on the basis of a clear idea about the future educational process and context. In a book chapter from 2005, Kassarjian and Kashani also propose thinking early about the 'teaching strategy' (pages 113 and 114). They however suggest not only having one specific teaching plan in mind but instead recommend simultaneously having 'a number of different approaches in mind.' We think that a certain level of flexibility with respect to the final teaching flow can be helpful as it will give you more flexibility and freedom while writing the case. But for first-time authors we still recommend making a commitment to one intended flow of the case discussion. You can always make changes to your teaching plan later.

5. Operational activities for your own case study

Possibly without realizing, you should by now already have produced quite a bit of material and even some text that you can use later for the case study but even more so for the teaching note. However, there is still quite a bit of work ahead. Most of the writing will follow now. So, sharpen your pencils, clean your keyboard – it is time to produce some text!

Drafting the case study

Before you start to write: some conventions

There are some case writing conventions you should observe – and that you should have in mind right from the beginning of your text production. This will not only ensure consistency across all the cases you write but, if your case matches most or all of the conventions, it will probably be easier for others to read and use your case and will therefore maximize your case's appeal to other teachers and facilitators. Most case writing conventions relate to writing style and layout, please find below an overview of the most important aspects.

As you will see, we will present all conventions as strong rules. We really encourage you to stick to all conventions. Even though we are not orthodox about almost any aspect of case writing and case teaching, please follow these conventions – unless you really have extremely powerful counterarguments especially related to your educational needs. Yes, we know that there are great cases that violate some of the following conventions, but they are very rare.

Before jumping into the conventions, please observe that they apply not only to classical text case studies but also to video, audio, or multimedia cases. Your case production process will almost always start with the production of text anyway. Stick to the conventions when writing the script even when planning a different type of case.

Writing style

Use past tense – consistently!

Always write your case in the past tense. We know from experience that many (especially new) case authors struggle with this convention, particularly when writing about information that is current, for example companies that are still in existence, or decisions that have not yet been taken. However, there are several very good reasons for sticking rigorously and consistently to the past tense:

- Past tense is just correct as – in the words of Vega (2013: 3) – a 'case takes place in the past.' Even though the company might at the time you write the case still look similar to the organization that you describe in the case, the situation and developments described in the case will (in almost all cases) be in the past.
- Because things change quickly, your case will quickly look dated if it is written in the present tense and could easily lead to confusion. Using past tense increases the longevity of your case.
- The past tense does not result in confusion for readers, and most will not even notice it. The past tense is commonly used in literature and most readers accept it as a given; it might even make it easier for them to fully dive into the fiction of taking over the position or decision of the protagonist.

There is one exception to the past tense rule: dialogue and quotes should be used verbatim and not changed to the past tense.

Abstain from judgment

Cases should present facts – not your personal judgment.

Are you really excited about your case lead? Do you personally think that the protagonist or organization made a smart, innovative, highly successful decision? Do you like the organization, its products, or protagonist? Are you personally impressed by a turnaround of the organization? Watch out! You are very likely to commit the cardinal sin of presenting your personal opinion and not the case. This risk is particularly high if you plan to write a retrospective case about a positive development or if your case lead heavily depends upon a surprising and successful choice of the protagonist (what we call 'rabbit out of the hat cases').

In cases like these we have seen many case authors using expressions like 'spectacular success,' 'well-balanced and diversified portfolio,' 'the only way to differentiate one's self,' 'culture of under-performance,' 'impressive growth,' 'the margin was meagre,' and 'unique training programme' (all of these just taken from one single – otherwise pretty good – case that we judged for a case-writing competition). But there are many good reasons not to fall into this trap:

- Judgment frequently lacks evidence: Judgment is often just a substitute for more research. Instead of presenting a comprehensive set of data with information about the development of all players in an industry, case authors might just claim that a company was 'growing extraordinarily fast.' But was there really no other player growing even faster – possibly in a related industry? Was something really so unique? Invest the effort to provide the evidence and not your opinion.
- Judgment kills learning: We want our participants to dive into a situation and analyze it critically by using their own reasoning on the basis of the available facts. They should not feel compelled to internalize the case author's personal evaluation.
- Judgment leads to reactance: Overloading a case with judgment can easily provoke reactance, i.e., counterreactions from your participants. When people feel pushed too hard in a certain direction, they will push back for no other reason than to push back. The judgment in the case can then quickly lead to the contrary effect of what you intended.

Again, there is one – but critically important – exception to the rule of abstaining from judgment: dialogue and quotes should use the judgment and evaluation of the person quoted! If you think that some sort of judgment or evaluation is needed to put things into perspective (e.g., if you want to present your protagonist as particularly smart), present it as a statement or opinion of a character in the case (the protagonist, an industry expert, a competitor, a peer, etc.).

Write in the third person

Please write the entire case in the third person. This means you should not use 'I' or 'you' (except in direct quotes) but instead refer to people by their names or as 'him,' 'her,' or 'they.' You might be tempted to believe that cases focus on the perspective of the protagonist anyway, so why not tell the story directly from their point of view and by using their own reflection as the text of the case?

Use active sentences

Use active sentences rather than passive sentences where possible. Active sentences are a much clearer and more direct way of writing. But what is an active sentence? Look at the following two sentences:

The figures were not checked properly (by the chief accountant).

and

The chief accountant did not check the figures properly.

The first is passive, the second is active. You can see that in the active sentence the person responsible for the action is mentioned first in the sentence – and this is usually important so that the readers of the case study can understand who contributed what and how to the current situation or developments.

Formal or informal?

Your case should be easy and inviting to read. Avoid jargon, initials, acronyms, technical terms, and terminology that is specific to a company, industry, function, or culture – and that nonexpert readers will not be able to understand. Remember that participants may not be familiar with the country, business, or products your case is about. Just as an example, some Indian cases use expressions like lakh (for one hundred thousand) and crore (for 10 million). Doing so certainly adds local flavor to your case but non-Indian readers will probably either have to do research to understand the meaning or (even worse) just ignore this aspect and withdraw to a very superficial reading.

You want your readers to be challenged by the issues, not your prose style! If you really believe certain expressions or acronyms are needed (e.g., due to your target audience or to reach the learning objective) – at least explain the terms when using them the first time or consider adding a short glossary in the exhibits of the case. Never assume a reader will know what you are talking about. The only exception to this rule is if your case is solely targeted at an expert audience. If so, it is better to use their shared language and the technical terms that they will be familiar with.

Layout

It is helpful to pay attention to the layout of your case from the very beginning, as this will reduce the effort at the end significantly. The standard of the visual presentation of your case will be seen as an indication of how much effort you have put into the case itself. Even minor imperfections in the layout and visual appearance of your case will reduce the chances of other educators choosing to teach it and will also put students off and significantly reduce their interest in the case.

In our experience, it is always best to have your layout in place right from the start. You may be required to use your institution's template in which case the work has been done for you. But, if not, you should:

• Make sure each page of your case is numbered.
• Include margins that are wide enough for participants to make their own notes.
• Make your case visually appealing and easy to read with well-spaced lines and paragraphs and a suitable font size (avoid pages of dense text, which can be very off-putting – even though this might be a tempting way to reduce the number of pages). You should use at least an 11-point font size and 1.0 line spacing; more would be even better. Spacing before or after paragraphs is very helpful for readers.
• Define your sections and chapters very clearly with clear headings, for example in a different font, bold, or underlined. This will aid reading and enable the reader to quickly scan the text and return to important points more easily.
• Make sure you describe any images in their alt text to make them accessible to screen readers for participants that are visually impaired.
• Limit the use of notes and references. If necessary, add them at the end of the case. Anything important should be included in the body of the text. (Important exception: ensure proper referencing of all factual statements for cases written on the basis of desk research.)

Front page

The front page of your case should always include:

- name(s) of the author(s),
- institution(s) – possibly with a logo,
- case title,
- date of publication (and/or of revision; this will help you to keep track of the different versions),
- copyright statement (including information about where/how to acquire licenses of the case) – or information that the present version of case is only 'work in progress.'

Your institution might have standard copyright text to be used for your case. If not, feel free to word the footer of the case's first page roughly along the following typical content and wording:

This case study was written by <AUTHOR NAME>, <POSITION/TITLE> at <INSTITU-TION>. Full responsibility for the content of this case rests with the author.

This case study is not intended to illustrate or endorse effective or ineffective management behavior but is solely meant to serve as basis for class discussion in an educational context.

*This case study includes information that was provided by <PROTAGONIST/ORGANIZA-TION>, who agreed to the publication of this case study in its present form. / **OR** / This case study was written solely on the basis of publicly available information. / **OR** / This case study was disguised on the basis of a real situation – names of individuals and organizations, locations, industry, and other aspects have been modified to ensure confidentiality of the case.*

Licenses to use this case study for educational purposes can be acquired via <The Case Centre / other CASE DISTRIBUTOR>. Copying or posting of this case study without licenses is strictly prohibited.

Exhibits

Conventions regarding exhibits

Observe the following conventions regarding exhibits:

- Exhibits are included at the end of the case after the closing paragraph (or possibly even only after a page break) so that the narrative flow is not interrupted.
- Don't show tables, graphs, charts, etc. within the flow of the text – all of that should be in the exhibits section (to allow for the short cycle reading process; see above page 24).
- Always use the term 'exhibits' (not, for example, 'appendices' or 'annexes').
- Refer to all your exhibits in the body of the case and use bold font to do so, for example '(See **Exhibit 1**).'
- Don't include any exhibits that are not referred to in the case text.
- Arrange your exhibits in the same order as they are referred to in the case – and number them accordingly.

(Continued)

- For the electronic version of the case – mostly PDF but also for text-based multimedia cases – consider including hyperlinks between the references in the case study text and the exhibit and back; this will make it easier for the readers to jump back and forth.
- Give all your exhibits a clear title that summarizes the content of the exhibit.
- Present your exhibits clearly and professionally; a wonky and blurred photocopy of financial accounts, for example, will not create a good impression. A good alternative is to reproduce the data in your own table template.
- Add sources and references to your exhibits whenever possible.
- And as mentioned before: be critical with your exhibits. Are all of them really needed to achieve the desired learning objectives? If not, just skip them.

Color or black and white?

Bear in mind that some participants still print their cases in black and white. (This is particularly true in executive education, where we have observed countless participants with big folders containing all the prereadings for a program printed for them by an assistant.) However, this does not mean that you need to avoid using color (especially as an increasing number of cases are being distributed and read electronically). If you do include color, just ensure that the case (especially, for example, any photographs and charts) will print clearly in greyscale and that all data series are easily readable (this is particularly true for all exhibits).

Institutional conventions

Please check with your institution for all existing conventions and regulations for case studies. Next to the layout/template, some institutions have clear expectations about the case (or teaching note). Reach out to your school's publishing department and ask them for all the things that you will need to observe. Failing to do so early will likely result in unnecessary extra work later.

Just as an example: how do you plan to refer to the actors in your case? Do you intend to use their first or last names? Will you include their titles (if any)? We personally tend to use first names, whereas Harvard Business School cases usually use last names.

Developing a draft case title

After internalizing the conventions, get out your case study template and start to write! And we will start with the very top: the title.

The title of your case is its shop window – the first thing your readers (including possible adopting educators) will see. It will need to spark their interest and encourage them to start reading. Your title should therefore offer a brief guide to what the case is about, without giving away too much! Avoid directly mentioning the underlying issues that will be covered in the case.

Do not make the title of your case too long or complex. This can be off-putting and may make your case less appealing when listed online with other cases on similar topics.

Typical case titles include references to:

- the protagonist(s), and/or
- the company, and/or
- the immediate issue.

Even though you might consider the title to be less relevant at this stage of the process: just write down the best title that currently comes to mind. It will also make your interaction with the organization and individuals described in the case study typically much easier.

We recommend starting your case writing with a focused, more traditional single case study, but if you decide – despite our warning – to write a case series, just follow the convention of separating the different cases of the series by adding '(A)', '(B)', '(C)', etc. to the case titles.

Writing the opening paragraph

The opening paragraph (sometimes also called the '(opening) hook'; e.g., Naumes & Naumes 2006; Vega 2013) is crucial; it is the single most important text element of the final case study package. Make sure to get it right – and do not expect to be able to get it perfectly right on the first try; rather, expect to work in multiple iterations! Make sure to include the following information in your opening paragraph (if necessary, this might also be two or three paragraphs):

1. *Immediate issue:* After reading the opening paragraph, the readers need to know what this case is all about. You do not need to be very specific (especially if you want to produce a case that is high in the analytical case complexity dimension; see above page 19), but the opening paragraph should at least inform and guide the further reading of the case.
2. *Name and position of protagonist:* Great cases have a perspective, and this perspective should be clear from the very beginning by clearly specifying the protagonist. But introduce as few people as possible in the opening paragraph to avoid confusion.
3. *Organization, e.g., name, size, industry, and ownership structure:* Again, do not provide too much detail – just enough for the reader to get a feel for the company. You can include more detail later in the case but the reader needs to get an idea about the overall setting right from the beginning.
4. *Timing:* this should be the specific date and time you have chosen as a cutoff point in the timing of your case (see page 147). It is vital to get this right. Your opening paragraph should be set at a single point in time that is then used consistently throughout the case.

From theory to practice with Urs

I'm sometimes asked to review long and complex opening paragraphs by fellow case writers. I advise them to read through the text and underline each piece of information they have included in the paragraph. Then I suggest they count them up. I have come across examples of 50 pieces of information in opening paragraphs that were up to 1.5 pages long. These are extreme examples, but the point remains: you need to critically assess the content of your opening paragraph, delete all extraneous information, and decide if the information you have removed can be put to good use elsewhere in the case or should be discarded altogether.

The result will be a much crisper and clearer opening paragraph.

Please observe the following recommendations:

- Be concise: The ideal length of an opening paragraph is about 90 to 200 words (Leenders et al. 2010 suggest using no more than six sentences). Keep your sentences short, too; an average length of 15 to 20 words per sentence is ideal but fewer than 15 words is even better. (If necessary, it can be ok to spread the opening paragraph over two or four paragraphs, but: the shorter the better!)

- Make sure your opening paragraph focuses on the immediate issue in the case (see page 21) and is capable of inspiring initial debate in the classroom. Remember that the presentation of the immediate issue in your opening paragraph will shape not only the participants' reading but also the entire flow of the case discussion.
- Depending on the complexity of your case (see page 19), it may also be possible to signpost the underlying issues to be explored. (See page 21 for more information about immediate and underlying issues in case writing.)

The immediate and underlying issues of your case should be closely linked to your learning objectives. Therefore, we advise that all the content you include throughout your case should support the achievement of the learning objectives.

Having said that, we have to acknowledge that some cases can be used to teach a number of different learning objectives simply by making changes to the opening and closing paragraphs. This highlights the critical importance of introducing the immediate issue in your opening paragraph and we strongly encourage you to focus on achieving this.

- Ensure your opening paragraph creates dramatic interest and draws the reader in. Look at your opening paragraph objectively: Would it motivate you to read on? Is it intriguing? Will it pique the reader's interest and curiosity? Ask critical and honest friends or colleagues for their opinion of your opening paragraph. If they are not inspired to read on, it is unlikely that anyone else will be either.
- Adhere to the conventions listed above, especially: Write the entire opening paragraph in the third person and consistently use past tense. For example:

When Paula Brown arrived at the office on October 23, 2010, two irate colleagues were waiting for her. The two heads of IT and Supply Chain Management challenged Brown, CEO of retailing startup Droogle, regarding her recent decision to outsource the trucking division.

Not:

One beautiful day in October, two colleagues wait for me outside of my spacious office with windows on three sides. My assistant brings them into my room. They briefly greet me, just to tell me how dissatisfied they are with my decision to outsource the trucking division.

Your opening paragraph should:

- present an interesting immediate issue (the 'hook') to generate further interest in the case and spark debate in class,
- specify the protagonist, the organization, and the timing,
- be concise (approximately 90–200 words),
- use short sentences,
- use the third person,
- be written in past tense, and
- create dramatic interest and draw your reader in.

From theory to practice with Urs

Here is an example of an opening paragraph taken from my case 'Norman Nicholls at Seattle Management Consultants':

On October 26, 2004, Norman Nicholls – partner of the consulting company Seattle Management Consultants in London (UK) – received a phone call from Jesper Lind, board member of Telco-Equipment Experts. Jesper told Norman: 'If you don't change your recommendation on the outsourcing job you are doing for Damotel, our business relationship might suffer in the future.'

You can see how this ticks many of the boxes for an opening paragraph: it is short (very short at just 55 words) and written in the past tense and the third person. Despite its brevity, it still includes all the key information about the protagonist and the context necessary to understand the immediate issue. As an added bonus, the case already contains a direct quote from a key player in the case. This helps to bring the case alive and contributes to the dramatic effect. Do you want to find out more after reading this opening paragraph?

Now compare the final opening paragraph with this very first version with 169 words:

Gazing through his office-window on the river Thames, Norman Nicholls hung up the phone in despair on October 26, 2004. The senior partner of the American, but globally acting, top management consulting company Seattle Management Consultants (SMC) had just finished an unpleasant call with Jesper Lind, a senior representative of Telco Equipment Experts (TEE), one of Thomas's largest customers. Norman was responsible for the entire industry group MIHAT (Media, IT, High-Tech & Telecommunication) in Northern Europe (UK, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway) and Telco Equipment Experts was not only SMC's third-largest customer in the MIHAT industries, but also pitching for a large-scale outsourcing project for Damotel, which was supported by SMC. Jesper had made very clear that he did not like the fact that a team of SMC consultants had evaluated the offer of Iberola as better than TEE's offer. He had threatened Norman, that SMC would never again get a consulting assignment at TEE if the preference of the consulting team would not switch from Iberola to TEE.

From theory to practice with Martin

The opening paragraph can be tricky to get right. Even the most experienced case authors will frequently redraft their opening paragraphs at least two or three times before being satisfied with it. Below is a typical example of how an opening paragraph can be gradually improved with a little time and effort. This is from 'Creating Trust in a New Way of Banking: The Case of Lendahand Mesofinance,' a case I wrote with my coauthors Andre Nijhof and Maria Nikolaidou. Here is the first draft of our opening paragraph:

It was 15th of September 2008, when Peter Heijen received an urgent email from his company in which he was informed about the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, the fourth largest investment bank in the US. The message was brief:

'Dear colleagues, we would like you to be extremely cautious with your clients regarding the selection of their portfolio … The upcoming months will be very critical for the financial sector as we are expecting seismic shock and possible hemorrhaging in cash stocks after Lehman Brothers collapse …'

The same evening it was in the news that Lehman's 25,000 employees were collecting their personal belongings from their offices. Peter Heijen realized that the next morning all those people would be jobless. This was an alert for him, the successful equity analyst, that nothing would be the same anymore in the financial market.

You can see that we wanted to focus on the personal aspects of the situation and on our protagonist, Peter Heijen, to shed some light on what was important to him and what influenced him. However, there were a couple of downsides to this first version.

First, the date (September 15, 2008) is not the date of the case but the date when the story began. I often see this problem in cases: the writer 'begins at the beginning' in chronological order, usually in an effort to explain how the situation started in the first place.

In addition, although we tried to present the protagonist in an engaging way so that readers could identify with him, the paragraph did not include a concrete immediate issue. Something important had obviously happened but it wasn't clear from the first version what this meant for Heijen. The paragraph was too vague and lacked a specific immediate issue.

So, taking all of these points into consideration, we wrote a second draft:

Peter Heijen jolted awake in the middle of the night. He sat up and glanced through the window, whipping his forehead with the back of his hand. The speed of the last day's events would not allow him to fall asleep, his head was spinning. Earlier that afternoon he received a phone call from Manila, where he was informed that one of the local partners of another crowdfunding platform went belly-up. This was an extra hit to the already tense crowdfunding environment, where clients started to ask questions about the risk of crowdfunding companies going bankrupt and investors losing their invested money. While Lendahand was not working directly with the company that was affected, Peter felt like he had to do something. He thought about preparing a press release explaining the situation. Another option could be to contact all of his existing investors directly through a newsletter. Or was he exaggerating and would no reaction be the best reaction? Weighing the pros and cons in his bed, he finally fell asleep undecided.

You can see that we have removed the confusing date.

Equally important, we have introduced an immediate issue. To achieve this, it was necessary to interview Peter Heijen again so we could ask him about concrete events, actions, or decisions that were difficult for him and that kept him awake at night.

You may have spotted that a specific time is missing from this version. Here is the third and final version of our opening paragraph:

Peter Heijen jolted awake in the middle of a late October night in 2014. He sat up and glanced through the window, whipping his forehead with the back of his hand. The speed of the previous day's events would not allow him to fall asleep. Earlier that afternoon he received a phone call from Manila, where he was informed that one of the local partners from another crowdfunding platform went belly-up. This was an extra hit to the already tense crowdfunding environment, where clients started to feel insecure and asked about the risks they were facing

(Continued)

if a crowdfunding company goes bankrupt, causing the investors to lose their invested money. While Lendahand was not working directly with the broken company, Peter was wondering about what to do to prevent a possible runaway of sceptical clients in the upcoming days. He struggled with whether he should act proactively and take some necessary steps to calm down potentially frightened clients. His first thought was to send out a press release explaining the situation and differentiating the position of Lendahand from the bankrupt company. Another option was to forward a newsletter to all of his existing investors. The use of social media for informing his network regarding the situation in the crowdfunding market through regular posts was also an option he thought about. Or was he exaggerating and would no reaction be the best reaction? Weighing the pros and cons in his bed, he finally fell asleep with an even more fuzzy mind, still undecided for the next day.

We have included the specific point in time and added more detail. We aimed to dramatize more effectively and explicitly the choice between taking no action and being proactive.

Reading this introduction again after some time, I feel it can still be improved. For example, would a sentence about Lendahand, a company that is not widely known, be useful? Does Peter's role for Lendahand need to be clarified? What could be done to shorten the opening paragraph to the target length of 200 words maximum (currently 256 words)? Maybe you have ideas? How else could the immediate issue be presented, e.g., to increase the dramatic interest in the story? We welcome feedback!

Borrowing from movies (and books): cold opening, narrative hook and flashback

When writing the opening paragraph: think of movies! Many (especially older) movies start with the opening credits (names of movie and actors etc.) and then present the narrative in a chronological sequence. There are, however, techniques that are frequently used to increase tension and interest right at the beginning of the movie – and these techniques also work very well for case studies. So, think back to movies and write the opening paragraph as if this were the opening of your favorite thriller or horror movie.

The first technique you could use is called 'cold opening.' This is when the viewer is dropped immediately into the story right at the start of the film, even before the opening credits. A cold opening is opposed to traditional (lengthy) narrative expositions/introduction of characters, timing, etc. The idea is to involve the viewer straight away and vastly improve the likelihood that they will carry on watching. This is exactly the effect to aim for in the opening paragraph of your case. Present your opening paragraph so that it is not a boring introduction but that the readers find themselves immediately at the core of the developments and events!

As part of a cold opening, movies (just like novels, short stories, etc.) often present a so-called 'narrative hook.' For example, the movie *The Matrix* opens with the following (phone) conversation:

Yeah.

Is everything in place?

You weren't supposed to relieve me.

I know, but I felt like taking a shift.

You like him, don't you? You like watching him.

Don't be ridiculous.

We're gonna kill him. You understand that?

Morpheus believes he is the one.

After these 45 words we do not yet have a full understanding about the content and context of the movie – but the tension has built up. Obviously, there is some surveillance/observation going on and a possibly special person ('he is the one') might get killed or at least attempted to get murdered ('We're gonna kill him'). And, if you are anything like us, this will have stimulated your curiosity and interest in finding out (by watching the entire movie) how this story evolves further. This is the effect of the narrative hook. And the hook of a case study should ideally be your immediate issue. Revisit your immediate issue and identify the most suspenseful way to present this issue to your readers.

The opening paragraph should present the immediate issue and be written from the perspective of the cutoff date (this is especially true for what we called prospective cases; see page 17). Almost inevitably you will then need to use a third well-known technique from movies and books: 'flashback' or 'cut-back.' Just like movies, many well-written cases jump back in time instead of telling the story chronologically. After presenting the immediate issue (as present time of the case), the following case sections move back in time and describe the events and developments that lead up to the situation at the cutoff date. In the next section of this chapter, we will discuss the sequencing of the remaining content of the case – for now, just beware: avoid too many jumps in the flow of time. Too much of a back-and-forth might just overstretch the readers' ability to follow.

One reminder: James Bond movies are famous for their elaborate precredit openings. They are usually extremely well composed and sometimes even the most memorable parts of the movies. But when writing your opening paragraph you need to deviate in one crucial aspect: James Bond precredits are mostly (very) long. You should stick to the convention and limit yourselves to 90 to 200 words!

Do you have any great examples of opening paragraphs? Please share them in the forum of the website to this book (add link symbol). Feel free to also comment on these opening paragraphs and state their strengths and weaknesses.

Outlining a possible case study structure

After having developed a draft title and written the opening paragraph, do not immediately jump to producing more text. First pause and define the overall case structure. Ask yourself what information in which structure you really need to allow for the type of case discussion that you want to have (review section 'Structuring the Need into a Session' from above, page 33). These reflections should lead you to a 'case study outline' – a very important document that you can put to multiple uses.

A case study outline is a short document (ideally already in the target case study template/layout and observing all conventions listed above) specifying:

- name(s) and institution(s) of case author(s) (for easier sharing);
- the preliminary case title (see above);
- the full opening paragraph (see above);
- a complete overview of all chapters/sections of the case study, including per section:
  - a preliminary section title (start with more generic titles first; change to more literary section titles later if you wish; already format the section title as a heading to allow for easier changes in the flow as you go);
  - a bullet point list of the desired content (not many more than five to 10 bullets per section);
  - an indication about the approximate length (expected number of pages); and
  - a list of the information needed (differentiating between information you already have and information that you will [probably] need);
- a closing paragraph (see below); and
- a list of exhibits (see below).

You absolutely need a clear outline for your case before starting to write. The outline should not be set in stone but rather allow for some flexibility as you write your case and further investigate the lead. Writing a case study outline will allow you to reap multiple important benefits, namely:

1. *Focus on your educational need:* According to our experience, case authors tend to get carried away by the excitement of their case lead! We have produced quite a few cases with text sections that we found exciting at the time – but that are not touched upon during the case discussions and that are also irrelevant for achieving the desired learning outcomes! Do not make this mistake. Critically reflect on what is really necessary to achieve the learning objective first.

2. *Easy identification of what information you really need and what you do not need:* Case authors (including ourselves) sometimes display the behavior of prehistoric hunters and gatherers: We feel great when collecting as much information as possible. Especially when we do not have a clear idea of the final case, we will happily take whatever we can. But in doing so we easily overstretch the protagonist's and organization's time, effort, and goodwill (and also waste our own time). So, try to be modest and only list information in the outline that you will really need (including whom to talk to and where or from whom to get the information).

3. *Cooperation easier with coauthors/support authors:* As soon as multiple individuals are involved in the production of one case study, the case study outline is of critical importance in coordinating the work of the different contributing parties. This is not only true for cases with several coauthors. Especially when making use of supporting authors that are not usually involved in educational activities such as students or professional writers (see also below page 246), the case study outline is critically important – and allows you to legitimately claim coauthorship even though you might not produce vast amounts of text.

4. *(Preliminary) case release:* The case study outline can also be used to get early buy-in from your protagonist or the company as your case outline will give them a good understanding of what they will be signing up to. As soon as you have the case outline, share it with your protagonist and ask them if a case along this outline will get their release (see also below 'Getting Preliminary Release,' page 196).

5. *Overcoming blank page fright:* And last but not least, creating an outline can help to overcome the dreaded blank page/screen stage of writing a case as you will immediately have something in writing – a small but important first step will have been done! *Small extra tip:* Produce your case outline in the final case study layout and use this document for the case going forward. Writing the case study will now just be about 'filling' the sections according to your outline – just keep properly track of the different versions.

How to structure a case so that it matches your learning objectives? There are some commonalities in the structure of case studies. Just use these commonalities as inspiration or templates for your own case.

Here is a typical case outline as suggested by Kassarjian and Kashani (2005: 111–112) and which we map – for illustrative purposes – to the best-selling case 'Reinventing Nespresso? The Challenges of a Market Leader Under Attack' by Kamran Kashani, Dominique Turpin, and Fang Liu from 2013 (Case number IMD-5-0790):

1. *Introduction: a dilemma, a problem, an action called for*
   • This section corresponds to what we called the 'opening paragraph.' As mentioned above, the opening paragraph (most frequently not labeled as a separate section, but just the first text after the overall case title; please do not call it 'Introduction' as this will make the case much more technical and boring) will usually present a dilemma, a problem, or a decision that needs to be made (the immediate issue or hook). Use the opening

paragraph to introduce your protagonist, i.e., the specific person who has to take a deci-
sion. As already described above, the problem will usually vary between different pos-
sible actors and thus it is important to describe the protagonist and their perspective.

➢ Nespresso case: The case begins with four short opening paragraphs (with a total of
274 words, which is a bit longer than we would usually recommend) that describe on
almost one full page the organization (Nespresso), the protagonist (Nespresso CEO
Jean-Marc Duvoisin), the product (Nespresso coffee capsules), the time/cutoff (April
2013), and the immediate issue (how to react to increasing competition from copycats).
Additionally, the first page features a picture of the product and a quote from a former
Nespresso CEO.

2. *Company background*

• After the opening paragraph, you need to describe the context and provide information
to allow a discussion of the case study with the required level of depth and sophistica-
tion. The first thing is often some background about the organization. This can include
information about the product, the history of the organization, the organizational setup/
governance, the ownership structure, the management team and key people, or the cur-
rent and past (economic) performance. This information will frequently be supported
by exhibits (see below page 182) such as extracts from financial statements or organiza-
tion charts.

➢ Nespresso case: The first case section after the opening paragraphs (titled 'Success against
All the Odds') describes the history, business model and success of Nespresso starting in
1974 on two full pages. Very much in line with the comments above, this section refers
to four (out of seven) exhibits.

3. *External context: market, industry, etc.*

• This section covers the context beyond the limits of the organization. It could include
information about the industry, geographical factors, general economic climate, or
political and cultural setting. The position of this section within the overall flow can
sometimes vary upon the author's preferences or educational need (below you will find
more recommendations regarding sequencing the flow of the case outline). Occasionally
this section might be placed before the company background.

➢ Nespresso case: The second case section describes the 'competition' (which is also the
section title). For the specific purposes of the Nespresso case this competitive landscape
is exactly the relevant external context – as the immediate issue of the case is the chal-
lenge of defending the position of a market leader in a competitive industry, especially
vis-à-vis copycats that emerge as Nespresso gets more and more successful.

4. *Company context: the evolution of the case problem*

• The next section will then often contain a description of how the immediate issue(s) in
the case (i.e., the challenges for the protagonist) evolved over time within the organiza-
tion. Dependent upon the desired level of analytical complexity of the case (see above on
case complexity, page 19), this section will be more or less 'predigested.' Especially when
aiming at high conceptual complexity, it can be adequate to fairly explicitly state the key
issues (i.e., to be low on analytical complexity).

➢ Nespresso case: The description of the company context within the Nespresso case is
relatively short (a bit more than half a page). The respective (third) section of the case,
called 'Nespresso's Initial Response,' describes the initial strategies Nespresso adopted
to deal with the copycats that emerged after Nespresso's great success in the market. In
particular, this section provides quotes about the strategy from the former CEO.

5. *Drilling down: issues and actions that have a bearing on the decision*
- The last content section will typically provide an overview of the factors that need to be considered before a decision can be made. This could also include a list of the possible alternatives. Dependent upon what has been covered so far, this section might be a summary of aspects already (implicitly) discussed or introduce new aspects.
- ➢ Nespresso case: The next, fourth section, called 'Consumers,' describes consumer reactions on social media and via (blind) product tests on a bit more than one page. At the end of this section, it is getting clearer that the former CEO's initial response to rely on product quality might not fully match the consumers' perception.

6. *Conclusion: decision points*
- You will need a compelling closing to your case. This can either be done via a full, separate case section or through the closing paragraph (see below more on the closing paragraph, page 183). This part of the case serves as the springboard for the classroom discussion: What are the pressing issues that need to be addressed? What decisions need to be made? What should the protagonist do next? A carefully crafted conclusion will leave your participants fired up and ready to go.
- ➢ Nespresso case: The fifth and last section of the case is called 'Tough Choices' and summarizes all the decision points and alternatives on a bit more than two pages. The section opens with an overview about the opportunities and limits of geographical expansion, provides some more detail about the effects from copycats in Nespresso's home market, Switzerland, and closes with a list of five specific strategic options that Nespresso could adopt. Then the case closes with two paragraphs. The first shifts the focus back to the protagonist, the newly appointed CEO. The second paragraph is a closing quote from the CEO that introduces some of his personal perspectives on the possible future directions for the organization. A very elegant way to bring the protagonist to the forefront of the case, despite the fact that the case was written solely on the basis of publicly available information.
- *Exhibits* (not part of the overview by Kassarjian and Kashani but an important element of any case outline)
  - Exhibits (see also below) provide information (often data or visuals, less frequently text) that are important, but do not fit into the flow of the case study text. Think carefully about what information might be needed for having an intelligent discussion about the immediate and underlying issues of the case. Which visuals will help the participants to get the key points of the case?
  - ➢ Nespresso case: There are a total of seven exhibits (the case differentiates between six exhibits and one appendix, something that we do not recommend) on seven pages. Four of the exhibits (timeline, revenue development as chart, picture of products/system [and competitors], and overview of competitors [including prices]) are linked to the first full section, with background information about the organization.

This generic case study structure and flow is very helpful guidance as it condenses the structure of many great cases. It works well – and especially for your first case(s) you should seriously consider it as the basis for your case outline. It is, however, by no means a skeleton that you have to follow. There are probably more cases that have largely different structures than cases with this flow – even if we only look at great cases. Accordingly, you should consider Kassarjian and Kashani's structure only as a rule of thumb: in the absence of other considerations, just follow it. Whenever you have good reasons to deviate, feel free to use a different flow.

First define the building blocks in your outline. Then label the different sections (i.e., titles/ headers), sketch out the content per section (bullet points), specify the expected number of pages

for each section, and add a list of information to be included per section (with an indication of where you expect to be able to find/get the information from). Finally, consider different possible sequences (see also below), e.g., by moving the sections up and down (consider using the outline function of your word processing software) and critically evaluating the fit of the different possible flows to your learning objectives. You will find an easy-to-use table in the case writing workbook to help with this.

Never forget that you will be telling a story in your case. Be inspired by great literature and make use of tried and tested techniques that help to produce good writing:

- Make sure your story has a clear narrative structure, flows smoothly, and is easy for your reader to follow. Tension and drama should usually be highest at the beginning and end (opening and closing paragraphs). Move the more technical content to the middle of the case.
- Make good use of headings and subheadings to break the text up and help guide your reader through the case. This is not only important to allow your participants and other educators to apply the short cycle case study screening method (see above, page 24). It will also make reading easier, especially for longer cases that participants might not read in one go. (Rule of thumb: if a section is longer than two pages, consider adding subsections.)
- Ensure to provide enough space in your case to bring your characters to life as fully rounded human beings with desires, emotions, prejudices, ambitions, faults, and character traits. This can be done in a separate section or by making the protagonist reappear in many different sections. In either case, plan for that in the outline by listing where and how the protagonist will play a role.
- Cases benefit from a lively and engaging writing style, which can easily be achieved by adding quotes. Plan for possible quotes in your case outline.

Although you are telling a story, do not become too creative:

- Always keep your teaching plan in mind.
- Stick to the issues.
- Don't embroider the facts.
- Avoid being over-descriptive.

And, finally, be flexible with your case outline. It should be a living and breathing document – and not cast in stone. You will almost certainly include information in your case that you did not list in the first version of your outline, and you will also leave out information that you initially thought you would include. You will usually be able to make final decisions about what needs to be included when you come to test the case in the classroom.

Sequencing the case flow

As with any story, your case must have a clear narrative and a well-defined beginning, middle, and end (see also Vega 2013: 3), but there are many possible flows that can work well for the middle section. Earlier we presented a prototypical case structure as suggested by Kassarjian and Kashani (2005). But there are sometimes good reasons to deviate from this flow.

You will have to pay particular attention to how to organize the information in your middle section. These are some of the most commonly used options:

- broad to specific,
- chronological,
- based on a business process.

These options are not necessarily mutually exclusive but can be combined, for example, by using one for the main overall structure of your case, and another for one or two specific sections within it.

Broad to specific

One option to structure the middle of your case is to begin with some general information about the wider economic environment and then gradually drill down into the industry as a whole, followed by the particular company you are writing about, and, finally, the specific challenge(s) or problem(s) that need to be addressed. Therefore the flow would be:

- wider economic environment,
- industry as a whole,
- company,
- specific challenge or problem.

Compared to Kassarjian and Kashani's flow, in this option the section about the company is moved further toward the end. This is particularly often the case if the wider context is critically important to understanding the organization and its challenge. This might be true for cases that describe the formation of a typically less known, young, or small company that results from developments in the larger economic context or industry.

Chronological

You can also structure the middle of the case chronologically. Such a structure is particularly helpful if the case setting is not very complex, i.e., for situations in which not too many factors led to the emergence of the decision. After describing the immediate issue in the opening paragraph, you could just go back in time (as in movies or novels using a cut-back/flashback technique) and begin at the chronological beginning. Explain what triggered the situation and what took place next. Events may have occurred in several phases, so make sure your chronology is correct as you explain what happened. End your middle section by bringing the situation up to date, i.e., to the cutoff point at which a decision needs to be made. In summary:

- Explain what happens in time and date order.
- End the sequence of events at the point when a decision has to be made (which will usually be the same point described in the opening paragraph).

Review your case timeline (see the section above on 'Defining the Timeline and Possible Cutoff Points,' page 147) for the key events and developments within your case and try to bring them into line with your case outline (e.g., by using a new section for each key event). Your timeline will also help to make sure that your case does not move backward and forward in time (too much). It will also ensure that you do not include events that happen after the time at which you end your case.

Based on a business process

Sometimes, for example, in operations management cases, it can be enormously helpful to write the case based on a business process (for example, the flow of a production process).

An example for this might be the famous and best-selling 'Sport Obermeyer, Ltd.' case by Janice H. Hammond and Ananth Raman (1994). On the macro-structure the case flows from the opening paragraphs to a description of the company background. But then the structure deviates from Kassarjian and Kashani's flow and presents 'The Order Cycle' – a section that flows

from 'The Design Process,' via 'Sample Production,' 'Raw material Sourcing and Production,' 'Retailer Ordering Process,' 'Shipment to Obermeyer Warehouse,' to the 'Shipment to Retail; Retail Replenishment Orders.' The reader of the case is imaginatively walked through the entire process from the very beginning to the end.

A case study structure that follows a business process can be particularly effective if the process is complex with several elements occurring simultaneously. But bear in mind that the structure should ease the reading process – so avoid making it even more complex and only use this structure if it really helps your readers.

Exhibits

Exhibits are information of different types that complement or illustrate different aspects of the case study. They provide important and helpful additions that are usually not included in the main case because they are presented in the form of a diagram or table or are longer pieces of text or other background materials such as company documents, CVs, and emails. Exhibits are usually presented at the end of the case study text so as to not interrupt the flow of the participants' reading.

Typical exhibits include:

Text	Data	Visuals
• CV(s) of protagonist(s) • Excerpts from speeches • Excerpts from annual reports • Dialogue that is relevant but too long or detailed for inclusion in the case itself • Company history (this could e.g., be formatted as a timeline with or without illustrations) • Company documents (e.g., policies, internal reports, mission statements)	• Company financial information (often over longer periods of time) • Information about competitors, customers, markets, industries, sociodemographic data, other country level data etc. • Product descriptions (including e.g., characteristics, customer evaluations, test results)	• Organization chart • Images of protagonists, offices, factories, retail outlets etc. • Images to aid understanding of technical products (e.g., technical drawings) • Maps to flag up key countries and locations • Process charts and descriptions (e.g., of the flow of products, information, decisions)

When making your choice of exhibits, we suggest following a 'green field' approach: We have frequently observed heavy overloads of cases with plenty of unnecessary exhibits. Do not get distracted by all the material that you have already compiled. Case authors are sometimes afraid to have produced 'waste' if they do not add an exhibit (sunk-cost fallacy) or might want to include several exhibits to allow for different learning objectives and use cases of the case. Instead, follow the opposite approach. For any possible exhibit that you have produced or have in mind: Will this really substantially change the participants' understanding of the case? Can they still get the main points and have a meaningful discussion without the case? Leave out everything that does not pass this test!

To help with the accessibility of the exhibits make sure you complete detailed descriptions of images, graphs, diagrams, etc. in their alt text to ensure screen readers used by participants who are visually impaired can decode them.

Writing a closing paragraph

Your closing paragraph (s) should be written with as much care as your opening paragraph. In many ways it is a beginning more than an end – a catalyst for the participants having a passionate debate in the classroom. In the language from movies and literature, the closing paragraph is the cliffhanger at the end of the case. Your closing paragraph should:

- 'Close the loop' of the case. In other words, your final paragraph should link back to your opening paragraph.
- Restate the issues that your protagonist(s) must now address (but do not make the underlying issues too obvious; rather focus on the immediate issues).
- Resist the temptation to summarize the entire case: keep your closing paragraph short and crisp.
- Emphasize that immediate action must be taken (if applicable).
- Communicate a sense of urgency so that participants in the classroom feel compelled to take ownership of the problem.
- Present the immediate issue in a way that the response is not obvious but will instead stimulate controversy and debate.

From theory to practice with Urs

Here is an example of a closing paragraph from my case, 'Corruption in Russia: IKEA's Expansion to the East (A)':

Finally, a few weeks before the grand opening of the first IKEA in Russia in 2000, the local utility company reportedly approached the company's management and gave an ultimatum: Lennart Dahlgren, general manager of IKEA in Russia, could either pay a special service fee or proceed without electricity. Already under pressure from the previous challenges associated with the grand opening, Dahlgren had to act fast. Could IKEA afford to postpone or even completely cancel the opening in Khimki? Or should he just pay whatever was required?

In fewer than 90 words the closing paragraph reminds the reader of the immediate issue (to pay the service fee or not), the name and position of the protagonist (Lennart Dahlgren, general manager), the company (IKEA), the city (Khimki), the country (Russia), and the cutoff time (2000), as well as 'previous challenges' and the call for immediate action. At the same time – a clear weakness of the case – the paragraph reemphasizes that the case is based on secondary data (note the word 'reportedly').

Recycling the opening paragraph for the closing paragraph

The requirements for the opening and closing paragraphs overlap significantly. In some cases, it is possible to use a slightly modified version of the opening paragraph as your closing paragraph (a trick we learned from Michiel R. Leenders and Louise A. Mauffette-Leenders

in a case writing workshop many years ago). For example, for the closing paragraph of my case 'Norman Nicholls at Seattle Management Consultants' I used an only marginally modified version of the opening paragraph to reemphasize the immediate issue. Just to remind you, here is the opening paragraph again:

On October 26, 2004, Norman Nicholls – partner of the consulting company Seattle Management Consultants in London (UK) – received a phone call from Jesper Lind, board member of Telco-Equipment Experts. Jesper told Norman: 'If you don't change your recommendation on the outsourcing job you are doing for Damotel, our business relationship might suffer in the future.'

And here is the closing paragraph:

When Norman Nicholls was called by Jesper Lind, board member of TEE, on October 26, 2004, he was anticipating a discussion about the ongoing strategy project for TEE. But very soon he realized that Jesper had another objective: 'If you don't change your recommendation on the outsourcing job you are doing for Damotel, our business relationship might suffer in the future.' Then Jesper abruptly ended the call. With the telephone still in his hand, Norman Nicholls wondered what to do.

Know when to stop! Do not tell the reader too much. Leave your participants with some work to do in the classroom. Make sure your case reveals nothing more than exactly (1) what the protagonist knew at the time and date that the case is set and (2) what is needed to address the immediate and underlying issues in class. Your participants must feel as if they are stepping into the shoes of your protagonist, and this will not be possible if they have the advantage of more information or the benefit of hindsight.

Fail fast pit stop: confirming or rejecting the case outline and immediate issue

If you actually started producing a case in parallel to reading this chapter (as recommended), you will so far probably have invested much more time on reading this book than on actually writing/working on the case. The entire process of bringing case lead and need more and more together in iterations up to the first full case outline, including opening and closing paragraph, should not take much of your time. A couple of hours should have been enough to get you so far. Following the good old 'fail fast' philosophy, you should now make one more check and see if your case is really going to fly. If you stop your project at this point, you will not have wasted too much of your time and effort. The next phase of the case writing process – the information collection – will require heavy investments (mostly time, but possibly also financial resources) from you and should only be initiated if this is really a case that you will produce and publish.

We recommend the following pragmatic check: Give your entire case outline – i.e., title, opening paragraph, description of case study structure and planned content per section, the closing paragraph and a preliminary list of possible exhibits – to several people (students, colleagues, peers, etc.) and ask them the following questions:

1. Does this opening paragraph and case study outline make you interested in reading more/ the entire case? (Ask for a ranking from 1 [no interest] to 5 [very interested].)
2. How would you respond to the immediate issue (i.e., what would you do if you were in the position of the protagonist – and only on the basis of the very limited information available from the case outline)?
3. What do you think are the intended learning objectives of this case?
4. Do you have any suggestions, feedback, or recommendations regarding the case outline?

Then, first check if there is sufficient interest in your case. Would the test readers of the case outline like to read more? If no, did you get any suggestions to present the lead in a possibly more appealing way? If your test readers are not really excited and if you do not get suggestions on how to present the case in a better way, seriously consider dropping this particular case lead overall! Instead of investing more time into researching and writing the case, actively look for a better case lead instead! Go back to step 2 and revisit 'Narrowing Down Your Lead for Your Own Case Study.'

If you believe on the basis of the feedback that the case lead is overall good enough, you should then critically assess if your choice of the immediate issue is strong enough to provoke debate and controversy in the classroom. Look at the suggested responses to the immediate issue. How similar are the different responses? If all test readers suggest the same or even very similar decisions or actions, you should revisit step 3 (selecting the immediate issue). This is especially true, if the test readers' responses converge toward the decision or action that the protagonist or organization really chose. A case along this case outline would probably lead to a very boring case discussion, all would agree and there would be little surprise at the end (unless you intend to write a 'rabbit out of the hat' case, where the protagonist's or organization's action turned out to be bad). So, go back to the sections 'Defining the Timeline and Possible Cutoff Point(s)' (page 147) and 'Selecting the Immediate Issue(s)' (page 149).

Information collection

With the production of the case outline, you should have assembled a comprehensive list of information that you already have and information that you still need to finish the case. Now you need to go on the hunt! Most of the investigation and research that you will need to do for your case study will be:

1. desk research, or
2. interviews.

Much more rarely, other types of information collection might also be applicable (but usually only in specific situations).

Just by researching publicly available information and talking to the key stakeholders (especially the protagonist) of your case study, you should be able to put together most of the case.

Desk-based data collection and research

> 'Research is to see what everybody has seen and think what nobody has thought.' – *Albert Szent-Györgyi (in* Bioenergetics, *1957, modifying a quote from Arthur Schopenhauer)*

Collect as much *relevant* data as possible. You will not need to include all this information in your finished case but you should do intensive desk research first. With more background knowledge, you will then be more informed and authoritative when:

• interviewing key figures in the case,
• writing the case,
• teaching the case.

The need to do research and collect data applies to all types of case – whether you plan to write a field-based case in close collaboration with a company and individual(s), a disguised case based on a real situation, or an entirely fictional case based on general experience, sometimes called 'armchair' cases. All cases benefit from being grounded in reality.

Why do the work?

Your case must be strongly related to or based on reality. Why? Because participants in the classroom who are studying your case must be able to anticipate and analyze situations and challenges that they will come across in real life. So, after preparing your case outline, your next step should be to carry out in-depth research into the larger context of the case. This is true even if your initial lead comes from a real person. Do not immediately jump to relying on your protagonist as the sole or main source of investigation. You should instead first qualify your lead by conducting background research and data collection. As in any good research project, be critical with your data and sources of information!

   Always complete your desk-based data collection and research before interviewing key players in the case, including, most importantly, the protagonist(s).

   Researching the organization and industry before doing interviews also means you will not waste valuable interview time. (Remember: your interviewee will frequently be high-level players with very limited time to spare.) Avoid asking questions that can easily be answered via online searches. This is even true for information about the protagonist (or other actors) as a person: Look for the CVs of your protagonist(s) on social networks such as LinkedIn or on organization websites or personal blogs. Speaker biographies prepared for conferences are often a useful resource.

Finding information

Very often, especially when writing about large organizations and/or prominent and topical subjects, a wealth of information will be available in the public domain (easily accessible, especially online) or in special databases.

   Resources for your background research may include:

- Company information including websites, press releases, annual reports, environmental statements (corporate social responsibility or sustainability reports), and product brochures (*extra tip:* do not miss the investor relations sections of company websites, which often include extremely insightful presentations to investors).
- Financial analysts' and consultants' reports about the company or industry (the company's investor relations webpage will frequently list all analysts covering their shares).
- Studies, whitepapers, or databases published by different types of associations in the larger environment of the organization (e.g., industry, country, employer associations).
- News reports including print and online articles and features (check if your school has access to news databases such as LexisNexis), TV documentaries and current affairs programs, and blogs and other social media content.
- NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) or other stakeholder groups, for example: customer/consumer interest and/or protection groups; Transparency International for corruption issues (www.transparency.org); Greenpeace for environmental issues (www.greenpeace.org); the ILO, unions, and work councils; special shareholder groups; or other special interest groups such as participants in class action lawsuits.
- Academic research (this can be a good way to ensure your case will meet the educational need you have identified).
- Existing cases: check out other cases that have been written about the same company; same protagonist (this is rare!); same industry; same geographical region; and similar issues. This will also ensure you are not 'reinventing the wheel' by covering the same ground that is already explored in another case.

   For all of these sources of data, also consider researching other organizations in the ecosystem of the organization (e.g., competitors, suppliers, customers).

From theory to practice with Martin

Very often, the initial data-gathering stage of writing a case can get out of hand because of the sheer amount of material available. You may start to feel bogged down and a little panicky.

However, this is where your case outline can be put to very good use as a filter. Continuously refer back to your case outline as you do your initial research and ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the information you are reading relevant to the specific issues you want to address?
- Is the timing of the information correct? You don't need to do in-depth research about events that happened after the timeline in your case (or significantly before the time of the case).
- Is it likely that the information would (or at least could) have been available to your protagonist(s)? If not, don't spend too much time on it.
- Last but not least, will the information make a positive contribution to the class discussions?

Always be wary when doing your research. The downside of having access to so much public information is that not all of it is reliable or trustworthy – particularly online. You must use your judgment and carefully verify all the data you use in your finished case. This is also true for information you collect from the organization itself (via webpage, other material, from your protagonist, other actors): whatever you get from there might very well be biased and reflect a desirable state of affairs rather than the organizational reality. Do not write fiction just to please the organization – ensure that you stay in the position of a neutral and critical observer.

Types of data to be collected through desk research

You must be judicious when selecting information to be included in your case. Below are some typical examples of data that can be useful to include. These will often be in the form of exhibits at the end of the case, frequently provided as background information rather than as part of the case itself:

- company's financial performance (frequently over a longer period of time to show trends leading up to the case scenario);
- organization chart (often used to show the relative position of the case protagonist);
- history of the company – it can be useful to present this as a timeline (see the section above on 'Defining the Timeline and Possible Cutoff Point(s)', page 147);
- process descriptions (for example, flow of products in the production process, flow of information, and approval or control processes);
- product descriptions;
- information about competitors, markets, industries, geographical locations;
- CV of protagonist;
- maps, for example factory locations, global reach and major markets;
- images to help bring the case alive, for example protagonists, products, offices, factories, and sales outlets.

Having done your desk research, it may be possible (and usually desirable) to draft a first version of your case before carrying out interviews. Just make sure this is not 'set in stone': your case may completely change in the light of your interviews! But by immediately translating your desk research into text you are getting in the habit of filling the sections of your case outline bit by bit.

References and citations

Cases that are written in collaboration with organizations usually do not need to cite the sources. This is because the validity of the information will be testified through the case release and because most of the information contained in the final case will be gathered during your interviews.

However, you will need to provide references for certain types of information you wish to include. For example, you will need to cite the sources of all your exhibits, especially for exhibits like pictures, graphs or tables.

Be clear about the difference between cases and academic papers: Academic papers include numerous citations throughout the text, but when writing a case it is necessary to strike a balance between academic rigor and readability. The main body of your case should not be sprinkled with references and citations. However, your teaching note will benefit significantly from detailed and comprehensive references to relevant literature. If needed, move references as endnotes to the very end of the document – avoid references in the text and footnotes as these tend to interrupt the flow of reading the case.

A first case draft based on your research may offer a 'fallback' option if the organization you are working with decides to end their involvement in the case (for example, if your protagonist moves to another company while you are still working on the case). If this happens, the time you have spent on research may not have been wasted as you can now write your case based on the publicly available information you have already collected. However, make sure you keep track of all your sources from the start; this will ensure you do not include information in your case that is not publicly available.

From theory to practice with Urs

If you copy the insights gained from your desk research into the case study outline, you might well have a quick and dirty version of the case that you could use in (low-risk) class contexts even before conducting interviews and without getting (preliminary) release. Sometimes, I just copy the main points from the case study outline into a presentation deck and use it as a short ad hoc case (i.e., without prereading by participants) as a very early test use (see page 212 below). Remember: fail fast to fail cheap! The earlier you can use your material in a test, the better!

While doing your desk research…

– Gather as much data as possible through desk research – but only information that you will really need (use your case outline as a filter!).
– Make sure your research is relevant.
– Do your research before interviewing key contacts.
– Be wary of public information: always double-check the facts.
– Consider writing a first draft based on your desk research.
– Don't despair if your contacts pull out – you may still have enough data to write a case.

Interviews

> *'The reason why we have two ears and only one mouth is that we may listen the more and talk the less.' – Zeno of Citium as quoted by Diogenes Laertius in* Lives of Eminent Philosophers

Interviews with the key stakeholders – namely the protagonist(s), other key figures in the case, and other experts – are usually the single most important source of information. The thought of interviewing someone – especially someone in a senior position – can be a daunting prospect, particularly if you are an inexperienced interviewer. In your academic work you will probably have only a few opportunities to conduct interviews, unless you do qualitative field research. However, you will not go far wrong if you prepare thoroughly. Your ability to conduct a good interview will be of critical importance for your case – and this is why we will be quite specific and detailed about interviews (the following sections build upon Kassarjian and Kashani 2005; Leenders et al. 2010; Naumes and Naumes 2006; and Vega 2013).

Who should you interview?

First identify possible interviewees, then prioritize and categorize them. It is important to be selective and limit the number of potential interviewees as much as possible for several reasons:

- Fewer individuals from the company have to donate their time and effort.
- Lower opportunity costs for the company.
- Selected interviewees will feel good about having contributed if they are among the 'chosen few.'
- If you interview fewer individuals, you are more likely to actually use their input (and mention them) in your case.

As already mentioned, we find Kassarjian and Kashani's (2005) differentiation of case actors into protagonists/drivers, passengers, and bystanders particularly helpful. First, we recommend revisiting (and, if needed, amending or modifying) the full list of case actors as identified earlier (see the section 'Identifying the Protagonist(s) and Other Actors,' page 150). Then review the list of needed information (as identified while producing your case outline; see page 176). Finally, you should (tentatively) match the different actors to the information that you need.

It can be a very good idea to interview one or two passengers and bystanders first. You might learn some key background information that will help you ask the protagonist(s) more relevant and searching questions.

Before the interview

Prepare a list of questions that you want to ask for each of the interviews. You might find it useful to divide these into questions that you must ask (those that are critical for writing the case and to meet your learning objective) and those that are less important but would be useful to discuss or might help to add new perspectives.

Use a few easy questions to get the interview going but make sure you leave plenty of time to ask your important questions!

Do not waste your interview time with questions that can be easily answered via other channels or for which you could have done desk research! Minimize the total time you will need for the interview as much as possible. Concentrate on questions that only your interviewee will be able to answer with authority and that will provide key information for your case.

Always be clear about the date, time, and location of the interview and confirm the details with your interviewee (or, even better, with their assistants). Ideally, arrange to meet at your interviewee's office. In our experience, viewing offices (also have a look at the canteen!) and observing the real location at which a decision was taken can provide lots of additional information about an organization's culture (intangible, but helpful to know).

And, last but not least, ensure in your request for an interview that you explicitly state the context and objective of the interview and already specify the type of information that you seek and possibly also what kind of questions you plan to ask.

First impressions

Make sure you 'look the part' when turning up to interview someone. Dress smartly, smile, offer a friendly handshake and – this cannot be stressed enough – turn up on time. The people you are interviewing will be busy, perhaps only half-convinced that they want to take part in your case (the bystanders in particular will typically be less excited about the case production than the prominently featured protagonist). Do not add to their doubts. For the same reason, never overrun your allotted interview time – unless your interviewee specifically invites you to do so. Overall, make sure every aspect of the way you present yourself is professional.

Starting the interview

Concentrate on making your interviewee relaxed and willing to share information – do not forget, they may also be nervous. Concentrating on the other person will help your nerves too.

It is good to start the interview by (again) explaining your learning objectives and the purpose of a case.

Bear in mind that many if not most of the people you interview will not be familiar with case studies or case teaching. You might need to explain to them what a case study for educational purposes is and is not. Take a few minutes to explain that cases are purely pedagogical tools. They are used as a basis for classroom discussion about a specific business or management situation to help management students and executives apply theoretical knowledge in a real-life context. You can invite your interviewee to see the finished case being taught, and even take part and interact with students if they wish. It might be helpful to take a few sample cases with you to show your interviewee.

It is also important to manage the interviewee's expectations. Explain that a case concentrates on a specific problem or challenge; it does not aim to analyze the current state of the whole company or offer 'best solutions'; and it is not a marketing tool solely aiming at promoting the company or at presenting the individuals in the case as management heroes.

If possible, highlight the positive outcomes that writing and publishing the case might result in for the company (but be clear that these are not the main focus and may not be achieved). Some possible benefits that you might highlight could include:

• free input, advice, and insights from a management expert (share testimonials if appropriate);
• free publicity for the company;
• raising awareness among top-flight management students who may be potential employees.

You will be on a much stronger footing if your interviewees understand that they may benefit as much as you, if not more, from taking part in the case.

Explain the sign-off and release process. Be clear that the case will not be published without the company's written permission. This will help to put your interviewee at ease as they will feel

more in control of the process. (But do not tell them that every single interviewee will need to give release! One release needs to be enough.)

Never forget that many interviewees will feel anxious at the sight of someone taking down notes as they speak; it is up to you to do all you can to put them at ease.

During the interview

Always be flexible with your questions. You do not have to stick with your original list and flow if your interviewee's responses provoke a different and more interesting line of inquiry. It is important to be able to think on your feet when interviewing.

Having said that, it can be easy to allow the interviewee to take over the interview so that all the time is spent discussing interesting topics that are nevertheless irrelevant to your case! Gently lead your interviewee back to the matter in hand. You can say, for example, 'I'd really like to come back to that point, but you hadn't quite finished explaining X, Y and Z to me.'

Be mindful during the interview that you will be hearing a mix of fact, opinion, and emotional responses. Make your notes as detailed as possible to record and reflect this (see also below on 'triangulation' in the section 'After the Interview,' page 193).

Bear in mind that a seemingly unimportant remark may take on more significance later; this is another good reason for taking plenty of notes throughout the interview (or if agreed upon even record the interview).

Note down what the interviewee says in their own words rather than your interpretation of their responses. This will ensure your record of the interview is as accurate as possible. It also means you will be able to use direct quotes in your case, helping to bring your protagonist(s) and other actors alive on the page.

Making a record of your interviews

Unless you are proficient at shorthand, taking full and accurate notes during an interview is an undeniably tricky business. However, it is a vital skill to develop. There are a few different options to explore:

- Take written notes.
- Use a note-taker.
- Take notes on a laptop, tablet, cellphone, or similar.
- Record the interview as audio or video.

There is no perfect solution, and the option you choose will depend on the individual circumstances and your preferences. However, beware of the following benefits and disadvantages of each of the options.

Taking written notes

It can be very difficult to conduct a conversation and take notes at the same time.

Do not forget to maintain eye contact as much as possible. Body language is very important. Ideally, your interviewee will be doing most of the talking and you will be doing most of the listening. But it is very off-putting to be speaking to someone who is permanently bent over a notepad, writing down every single word you say. You must strike a balance. You must engage with your interviewee and demonstrate that you are listening carefully with appropriate responses such as nodding, humming, echoing, or smiling.

Bringing a note-taker with you

This may seem like a luxury option but can also have its drawbacks. For example, you will need to be sure that you can trust your note-taker to record all the information you need, and in a format that you will be able to understand. Make sure that your note-taker clearly understands your educational need, the purpose and content of the intended case (see case outline, page 176), and what you hope to get from the interview.

Also, your interviewee, who may already be wary and nervous, might be intimidated by the presence of a silent note-taker, and it may be more difficult to build up trust and a good rapport.

When writing a case together with coauthor(s), you could split the roles of interviewer and note-taker either within one or across multiple different interviews.

Taking notes on a laptop, tablet, or mobile phone

Make sure your interviewee understands that you are taking notes and not replying to emails or surfing the net while they are speaking! Also, check that your equipment is in good working order and that your battery is not about to go flat. Always take a pen and notepad as backup.

Recording the interview

Making an audio or video recording of the interview can be a great idea. You will not have to worry about taking notes and you can concentrate on the interview. Plus, audio and video material can become excellent supplementary teaching materials (see also the section below on 'Additional Material for Facilitators,' page 233). However, bear in mind that some interviewees will not take kindly to being recorded or filmed. Always ask for permission in advance; do not just turn up with the equipment and expect everything to be fine.

Always get permission from your interviewees before using audio or video recordings in the classroom when teaching your finished case.

Small practical tip: When planning to use an audio or video recording also as supplementary material (or when producing a video case), ask your interviewee to respond to questions in full sentences that do not depend upon the question. For example, to the question 'How many years have you been with this organization?' they should not simply respond 'Seven years' but rather 'I've worked for ABC for seven years.' This will make the usage of the video quotes much easier, e.g., as a video supplement or when producing a video or multimedia case study.

Combined approach

You may sometimes find it useful to use two or more interviewing methods. For example, you may choose to take written notes while also making an audio-recording of the interviewee. This can be a good way of capturing key points while having the luxury of knowing that everything else is also being recorded for later reference.

Having a written note of key points will also make it easier to select the best sequences from your audio/video material for use in the classroom. (Practical tip: especially when conducting longer interviews, occasionally write down the time on your notepad, this will make finding the corresponding video or audio sequence much easier without the need to do a full transcript.)

Ending the interview

Save a few minutes toward the end of the time to give your interviewee an opportunity to add information by asking a couple of very open questions, for example 'Is there anything else you would like to add?' 'Which questions did I forget to ask?' or 'Is there anything we didn't address?'

As already mentioned, make sure you do not overrun your allotted time. If necessary, ask for a second meeting rather than go over time. Ask if you can contact your interviewee at a later date, for example via email, if you want to have additional information or need to clarify anything said in the interview (make sure you have their contact details, especially when the interviews of passengers and bystanders were arranged by your protagonist). Clarify the next steps with this particular interviewee, e.g., regarding follow-up interview or meeting (already try to fix dates and times) or regarding additional information/documents the interviewee promised to provide you during the interview. Then explain clearly what will happen next. For example, your next step might be:

- a further meeting with your current interviewee,
- interviews with other people in the company or stakeholders,
- site visits,
- additional background research, or
- continue to work on the case.

Being open and transparent about your activities will help to develop trust and good working relationships.

Reassure them that anything they said in confidence will not be divulged and that no information from the interview will be published unless the company has given its written permission.

At the very end, thank your interviewee – and highlight a few of the things that you learned during the interview – this will demonstrate that you listened but (more importantly) that the interview was a valuable investment of the interviewee's time.

After the interview

Make sure you write up your thoughts and notes in detail as soon as possible after the interview. You will be amazed at how incomprehensible they can become if you leave them for a week or two before going through them again. There is nothing worse than going back to your interview notes a while after the interview and realizing that you cannot decipher your own writing or make sense of your 'e-notes.'

Practical tip: use files with the exact same layout as your case outline to capture your notes electronically; this will make your life easier when later copying material to your case.

As already said, the insights you collect during an interview are likely to be a mix of fact, opinion, and emotional responses. Your interviewees might provide incorrect or misleading information because they might miss information, because they want to present themselves as heroes, for political reasons etc. – or you might just have misunderstood them. This is why the so-called 'triangulation' (see also Naumes & Naumes 2006) is of critical importance. Use later interviews to confirm or disconfirm the validity of information that you collected during earlier interviews. Do so by adding questions that will help you to check both information that you suspect to be not entirely factual but also selectively for information that you believe to be true.

▤ Interview checklist

Interview checklist: prepare – and be professional

- Decide (and carefully select) who you need to interview on the basis of the information deemed necessary in your case outline.
- Prepare your questions (but be flexible during the interview).

(Continued)

- Decide how you will take notes during the interview.
- Ask in advance for permission to do an audio or video recording (if necessary).
- Make a professional impression and do not be late or overrun.
- Put your interviewee at ease and explain the benefits of taking part.
- Explain the release process.
- At the end of the interview tell your interviewee what will happen next.
- Write up your notes as soon as possible after the interview.
- Use collected information to refine questions for other interviews ('triangulation').

Other types of research

Desk-based data collection plus interviews with key players will usually provide all the information you need to write an excellent case. However, be aware that other types of research are also possible and can occasionally be used to enhance the content of your case and/or teaching note if appropriate. This might, e.g., include:

- Direct personal observations, for example of customer behavior and product use, or the timing of company processes.
- Questionnaires and surveys (e.g., of company employees or customers. These could be carried out by the company or organized by you).
- Workshops or focus groups with any type of stakeholder groups.

After the information collection: does your case still fly?

At any time doing the information collection (most likely during the interviews), you might realize that the intended immediate issue or flow of the case (according to your case outline) is not really adequate anymore. The immediate issue might be too small compared to other (more pressing) issues at the organization. The way in which your contact/protagonist might have described the situation might differ too much from the perspectives of other interviewees. During the analysis of collected data, you might find massive inconsistencies, or the organization (which previously you considered to be a shining star) might be close to bankruptcy. Things like these happen! Instead of just rolling on, you should now jump back to your strategic decisions (see above page 144) or to your tactical choices. Do not try to bend the original idea to fit to the new reality too much. Critically reflect on whether pursuing your lead and writing the case along your earlier plans is really worth it. Of course, you can revise any of your earlier decisions, but will this really lead to a great case? Consider dropping the lead all together, before investing even more time and energy into a case that you will not really fit your educational needs.

Merging your research results into the case outline

The next challenge will be to transform your desk research and interview notes into the first draft of your case study text. You might be overwhelmed by the plethora of insights and information – and feel lost. But, thanks to the attention we previously paid to the learning objectives, translating the information into text does not need to be difficult. The key element to do so without a lot of effort will be the case outline!

We recommend using the following approach to merge your research results into your case outline:

- After having conducted your desk research, all interviews and possibly other types of research: write up your notes in electronic format.

- – Use one or several separate file(s) to capture your research insights and use headers and sections to divide between the different interviews or sources of information.
  - – Include insightful quotes from your interviewees (especially when having made audio or video recordings).
  - – Also include tables, visualizations, etc. that could later be used for exhibits.
  - – Use the same template as for your case study text (i.e., the template/layout you hopefully already used for your case outline).
- Review all your material and search for inconsistencies and gaps.
- If needed, conduct follow-up research and interviews or ask for clarification.
- Amend your notes, if necessary, after doing more research.
- Then, reconsider the overall case outline and structure:
  - – Does the intended case structure and flow reflect the real development or structure of the issues?
  - – Did you find a possibly more interesting or exciting immediate issue, protagonist perspective, or cutoff point?
  - – If necessary, add, delete or move sections; possibly revisit earlier steps of the case writing process. Jump back to the earliest process step for which you now decided to take a different route.
- Finally, go through your notes and copy bits and pieces into the respective sections of the case.
- Transform your notes successively and as needed into text.
- Fill in the blanks between the pieces of information within all sections of the case. Start from the beginning of the case and work your way to the end – like this it will be easier to ensure a clear narrative and flow in the text.

After having copied your notes into the outline and amending the text per section, you should now have the first draft of your case study. Congratulations!

Referencing and observing intellectual property rights

While copying the results of your research into your case study outline, you will need to pay close attention to proper referencing and avoiding infringements of intellectual property rights.

Important checks regarding intellectual property rights

Did you make sure to:

- observe all licenses and copyrights for material used in the case (this is especially important for visualizations in the exhibits; try to limit your search from the beginning to material in the public domain or with respective licenses [e.g., Creative Commons] – *practical tip:* Google image search offers filters by usage rights; most information from Wikimedia Commons can be used when following proper attribution);
- ensure to avoid self-plagiarism (also applicable to teaching note!);
- properly reference quotes and information from literature or other sources;
- keep copies of all sources that you use, especially when writing a case about a real organization/person solely on the basis of publicly available information?

Getting preliminary case release

There is really only one way to proceed from a case study draft to a great final case study: You need to test it in class (see page 212 below)! However, to use a case in class you need to give it to your participants for their reading and reflection. As this will make your case (semi)public, it requires at least a preliminary release. Even though you will probably only need to get the signed release form later (when publishing the case), you should aim to get preliminary case release on the basis of the current case draft.

By now, you should have already had multiple discussions about release with your protagonist or the organization. They should therefore know what is expected from them and what they are entitled to. The best way of getting final release is to seek a preliminary case release along the journey! Use your current case draft (the version that you would like to share with participants for your test-teaching or with colleagues to get their feedback) and send it to the protagonist or organization. Then ask them to confirm in writing (e.g., in a short email) that they intend to give you final release as long as the case will broadly follow the provided material and that they are ok with using the current version in class or showing it to a limited number of people.

For that purpose, consider the following questions:

- Whom do you plan to ask for preliminary release?
- How do you get their buy-in (e.g., consider involving this individual during the test use of the case)?
- Is this person in a position to also give you final release – or do you need to (additionally) involve anybody else?
- Worst case: can you still finish and make meaningful use of the case (possibly also for the test use) without getting (preliminary or final) release (i.e., can you either write the case solely on the basis of public information or disguise the case if even preliminary release is not granted)?

Drafting the teaching note

'I touch the future. I teach.' – Christa McAuliffe

Your teaching note is at least as important as your case because it distills the learning objectives – the entire reason to write a case in the first place! Great cases have great teaching notes, and we believe you cannot have one without the other. So, make sure your teaching note is as carefully crafted as your case.

What is a teaching note?

The teaching note (sometimes also called 'instructor's manual'; e.g., Naumes & Naumes 2006; Vega 2013) is a document that describes the author's suggestions (and experiences) on why, when, and how to use the case study in the classroom. The teaching note is a document that targets other educators and should never be shared with participants. As well as the learning objective(s), it will (next to other aspects) include at least:

- a teaching plan;
- a thorough analysis of the issues of the case;
- explicit references to the theories, tools, frameworks and concepts that can or should be applied to achieve the desired learning outcome.

But, as you will see below, it will usually include additional items.

There are many good reasons to produce a teaching note:

- *Service to your colleagues:* The primary objective of the teaching note is to enable other faculty to teach your case successfully and to achieve the intended learning objectives. Writing a good teaching note can help them tremendously. Think back: Have you ever used a case without a teaching note? Designing a session using a case written by someone else without a teaching note is usually very difficult.
- *Increased demand:* Your case will have a much greater chance of being selected for use by other educators if it has a great teaching note. Without a teaching note it is sometimes really hard to know which learning objectives the author might have had in mind and thus how to use the case in class.
- *Formal requirements:* Most of the case distributors, such as Harvard Business Publishing, Ivey Publishing, and the Case Centre, will not accept cases into their collections unless a teaching note is included. The same is also true for most of the case study journals (they sometimes might not publish the teaching note but they expect you to have produced one). And, finally, at many schools, colleges, and universities the existence of a teaching note is a prerequisite for its acceptance and publication (and/or toward counting as a publication for your personal targets).
- *Improvement of own teaching:* Probably most importantly, writing a teaching note will also be of great benefit to you personally as it will help to clarify its educational use in your own classes. Through this process of reflection you will improve not only the respective sessions for this particular case but probably also your case teaching in general.

Take the time needed to produce a great teaching note!

At their most traditional, teaching notes are written documents that accompany a case. While these remain extremely effective if done well, it is important to realize that teaching notes are increasingly available in different and exciting formats that have been made possible by new technology. The following are just two examples:

- Two case writers, Senior Lecturer Ruth Gilleran and Associate Professor Erik Noyes, of Babson College, US, developed *video teaching notes* as a great way to engage faculty (see Gilleran & Noyes 2013; Reference no. BAB706VTN).
- Pierre Chandon, L'Oréal chaired professor of marketing, innovation and creativity at INSEAD, is the driving force behind his school's innovative use of *case websites*, designed to offer a wide range of additional information and materials about individual cases to case teachers. These may typically include an enhanced teaching note; video clips of the case protagonists or company advertisements; marketing or financial materials relating to the company; and even a video of the author teaching their case.

But do not be intimidated by these examples, especially if you are a fairly new case writer. A traditional, written teaching note, if done well, remains invaluable. And, once you have mastered the skill of writing a solid, well-structured teaching note, you will be perfectly placed to follow in the footsteps of these teaching note pioneers should you wish to do so.

Writing style of teaching note

Be careful with the writing style. The style in which you present your teaching note should be different from your case. The case will usually be written in a literary style. However, a teaching note is very different. A teaching note is targeted at educators and researchers and the style and content should more closely resemble academic publications. Your teaching note should be written in a very clear, factual, and straightforward way; feel free to use technical terms and jargon specific to your discipline. And, when providing background information about theory that is relevant to the case learning objectives, you will also need to reference and possibly quote relevant research in the field as in your other research activities.

Always remember that the teaching note is a peer publication in the sense that it will be read solely by other educators and researchers. Make sure your teaching note provides sufficient depth and background on the theories, concepts, and tools that underpin the learning objectives of the case.

Work in iterations and learn by doing

Possibly without noticing, you will already have done some work on three aspects of your teaching note: identification of target participants (see page 144), description of underlying issues and learning objectives (see page 144), and the teaching plan (see page 164). Alongside our case development funnel, we will not only revisit these three aspects but also work on some additional parts. Several additional aspects and the finishing touches of the teaching note will follow later – after test-teaching the case (see the section 'Finishing the teaching note,' page 225).

It is important to remember that you will not be able to finish a truly effective teaching note until your case has been tested in the classroom several times. Ideally, this process will include at least one session where you are able to observe your case being taught by someone else.

> We heavily recommend starting with certain elements of the teaching note even before test-using the case! However, a quick way to produce a big chunk of your teaching note might be to ask a colleague (or assistant) to observe and take notes during one or more of your case testing sessions. Alternatively, you could make a video or audio-recording of your session. Then you can use the overall flow and – much more importantly – your best questions from the session as building blocks for your teaching plan. If you followed our suggested process and have already drafted a teaching plan (see above page 164), you might want to use the notes or the recording as a basis for the further refinement of the teaching plan or analysis.

Whichever way you proceed and structure your work, be aware that your teaching note should be understood as a living document that is worked on in iterations and that only needs to be of publishable quality just before the publication. For now, feel free to leave many blanks, to work with bullet points (as opposed to full text), to use notes and comments, to have contradictions, etc. Right now, it is only important to get an increasingly clear idea on how to use the case in class, so if you see fit just pick some of the teaching note sections that we recommend below and leave the others blank for now, only coming back to them later during step 7 of the case development funnel: 'Finishing the Case and Teaching Note' (see page 218).

Structure

There is no consensus about how you should structure your teaching note. Just look at some sample teaching notes available from any of the large case distributors and you will immediately see that different case authors use different structures successfully. You can decide for yourself how you wish to structure your teaching note. However, despite differences in the specific structures and in the nomenclature, there are significant overlaps in what is typically covered in a teaching note. Have a look at the following list – either to use this structure or just for your inspiration:

⊟ **Teaching note structure**

The final teaching note could comprise the following content or sections (as distilled from many of great and best-selling cases as well as from other case writing guides, especially from Austin 1993, Heath 2015 [pages 92–93], Leenders et al. 2010 [page 140], Naumes and Naumes 2006 [page 86], Vega 2013 [page 83], and Weatherford 1995 [page 2]):

1. Case summary (sometimes also called synopsis, abstract, or overview).
2. Keywords.
3. Learning objectives and key issues.
4. Target participants and course context (should also contain information about prerequisite knowledge or skills of the participants).
5. Suggested participant assignments.
6. Analysis (can be included in the teaching plan and could come before or after the teaching plan).
7. Teaching plan (including discussion questions and suggested timings).
8. Board plan (can also be included in the teaching plan).
9. Teaching suggestions for online/hybrid teaching.
10. Recommended additional material for participants.
11. Sources and additional material for facilitators.
12. Other:
    a. Outcome of the case (sometimes also called: Epilogue).
    b. Alternative teaching plans.
    c. Examination and grading.
    d. Exhibits.

You do not need to use these exact categories or headings in your teaching note but make sure you include all of the content (e.g., by merging or adding sections). Feel free to change the sequence if necessary.

Check whether your institution or the specific distributor or journal that plans to publish your case has additional or different requirements regarding the content or structure of the teaching note.

For now: create a new document in the desired final layout/template for your teaching note. Then copy the 11 (+4) section titles listed above into this document; feel free to merge, add, or omit as you see fit for your case. In the following sections, we will briefly introduce those sections that you should work on now. The other sections (which are less relevant for your own test use) will only be dealt with later. The following table lists again the 11 (+4) sections with an indication of the point at which you should work on them:

Teaching note section	When to work on	See more on pages
1. Case summary	Now: copy opening paragraph from case development funnel step 5; refine if needed in step 7	225
2. Keywords	Case development funnel step 7	226
3. Learning objectives and key issues	Now: copy from step 3 and refine in iterations if needed in step 7	227

Teaching note section	When to work on	See more on pages
4. Target participants and course context	Now: copy from case development funnel step 3 and refine in iterations if needed in step 7	229
5. Suggested participant assignments	Now	230
6. Analysis	Now	230
7. Teaching plan	Now: copy from case development funnel step 4 and refine now and after every test use in iterations	231
8. Teaching suggestions for online/hybrid	Now	232
9. Board plan	Now	233
10. Recommended additional material for participants	Case development funnel step 7	233
11. Sources and additional material for educators	Case development funnel step 7	233
12. Other		234
a. Outcome of the case	Case development funnel step 7	234
b. Alternative teaching plan	Case development funnel step 7	235
c. Examination and grading	Case development funnel step 7	237
d. Exhibits	Case development funnel step 7	237

1. Case summary

The case summary is a particularly important element of your teaching note as other instructors will use this to quickly decide if your case is a potential candidate for use in their courses. A poorly written case summary will drastically reduce the probability of other educators choosing your case. As well as being used in your teaching note, the summary should be provided to case distributors as part of your case's accompanying metadata.

Your opening paragraph already contains most of the important information that other educators need when considering whether to use your case: the immediate issue, the name and position of the protagonist, the organization (name, size, industry, etc.), and the timing of the case. When done well, you can now use the opening paragraph as the nucleus of your case summary (as creatively recommended by Leenders et al. 2010: 117).

Fill out the first section of your teaching note, by copying the opening paragraph into the case summary section. Then consider adding more information (e.g., about the context, the outcome, the underlying issues, or the overall learning objectives) as necessary for other educators.

> **From theory to practice with Urs**
>
> This is an example of a teaching note case summary for one of my cases (coauthored with Johannes Habel) in which I 'recycled' the opening paragraph of the case study text and added a bit of context:
>
> *Around 6:00 p.m. on May 31, 2007, Urs Mueller and Christoph Burger from ESMT European School of Management and Technology were preparing for the presentation. In about an hour they would present their proposal for an executive education programme to the CEO of Energie*

aus Deutschland Systems (EAD Systems) and two of his senior HR managers. Sitting in the lobby of a hotel in western Germany next to the main entrance of EAD Systems' headquarters, Urs scrolled through his notes and recalled the pitching process.

ESMT's pitch to EAD Systems describes the efforts of ESMT European School of Management and Technology to acquire EAD Systems as a client for an executive education programme. The case study comprises two parts, A and B, which allow a comprehensive review of sales management in a professional services firm.

We strongly encourage all potential users of the case study to carefully study this teaching note. The case has been written from the perspective of the case protagonist, who—as you will see in the analytical parts of the teaching plan—misses quite a few points.

The appendix to this teaching note provides an overview of the case's main actors and the timeline.

The first paragraph is just copied and pasted from the opening paragraph. The three following paragraphs provide more information and guidance for possible other instructors.

2. Keywords

Do not worry about the keywords and leave this section empty for now – we will get back to it in step 7 (see page 218). But, if you already have a few keywords in mind, just write them down without investing a lot of time yet.

3. Learning objectives and key issues

The teaching note should summarize the learning objectives and describe the immediate and underlying issues of the case.

Revisit your earlier work (from step 3 'Defining the Underlying Issues and Learning Objectives'; see page 144) and copy it into this section of your teaching note. Unless you have changed them while working on your case, just leave them as they are right now. We will come back to them in step 7 (see page 218).

4. Target participants and course context

As mentioned above, we recommend that you prepare your case for a specific course context (see the sections above on 'Narrowing Down Your Need For Your Own Case Study,' page 141) and with a specific audience (see the section 'Defining the Target Participants,' page 144) in mind. This will ensure that you really need the case yourself. For the description of the target participants and course context in the teaching note, you will need to revisit these earlier decisions. But this can wait. For now: just copy and paste your earlier decisions and descriptions into this section of the teaching note. In step 7 you can then rewrite them in a broader way.

5. Suggested participant assignments

The overall purpose of providing assignments for participants is to create curiosity, suspense and anticipation, and to help participants focus on specific aspects of the case as they read and reflect on it. Participant assignments can help the participants to:

• better identify and understand the immediate issue (less so the underlying issues);
• anticipate the topics to be discussed in class;

• go through the 'short cycle case study screening' (see page 24); and
• prepare their own contributions for class (this is especially important for more introverted participants and for nonnative speakers who might need a bit more lead time).

Every teacher uses cases slightly differently. Some ask students to prepare the case before coming to class while others do not hand out the case until the start of the session. If your preferred teaching style is to hand out cases at the start of a class or jump immediately into the discussion without any prior guidance, you should still include suggested student assignments in your teaching note for those teachers who like their students to prepare before class. Teachers can then decide which approach they wish to take and will also have the option of adapting the assignments to their specific needs.

Importantly, the assignment questions should only be included in the teaching note, not within the case itself. This gives other instructors the flexibility to choose which questions to use with their own classes.

We recommend that you use participant assignments (especially questions) for your test-teaching. Accordingly, you should start working on this section now.

Guiding questions

Many educators like to give their participants a list of guiding questions to support their presession reading of the case (these questions will frequently be part of a course syllabus). These help students focus on certain aspects of the case and will point them in the right direction. We therefore strongly encourage you in every teaching note to provide a few questions that can be given to the participants together with the case. Most great teaching notes/cases have about three to six guiding questions.

Usually, the list of guiding questions starts with questions that address the context or the immediate issue. Then there will frequently be questions that transcend the immediate issue and point toward the underlying issue – usually without giving it away directly.

Consider sequencing the assignment questions roughly along the planned flow of the session (e.g., one question per building block of your teaching plan). The following sections of the teaching note, 'Analysis' and 'Teaching Plan,' can follow the same logic – resulting in an overall coherent structure and flow of your teaching note.

From theory to practice with Martin

These are the assignment questions I included in the teaching note for my Bosch case:

a) As Stefan Tammler, would you bring the development of the new ABS system for the low-price vehicle segment to Yokohama or to Suzhou?
b) How would you assess the overall performance of the Suzhou development site and how would you characterize its role within the Bosch global product development strategy?

You will notice that the first question is a closed question: the answer is either Yokohama or Suzhou. This can be useful if the teacher wishes to take a poll at the start of the session to gauge opinion. There is, of course, also an implied expectation that the student will have thought about the reasons for their response!

Other participant preclass assignments

In addition to assignment questions, you also might want to include other types of assignment in your teaching note. Other preclass assignments are a good way to ensure that participants prepare properly in advance for the case session. Participants could be asked to:

- write an answer to a specific set of questions;
- prepare a case write-up;
- conduct additional research (e.g., about the organization, an industry etc.);
- view (online) videos;
- read additional material in connection with the case study (e.g., academic articles, textbook chapters, notes, news);
- perform certain analyses (especially applicable for highly quantitative case studies);
- create a PowerPoint presentation for the company's next board meeting;
- post comments and replies in an online forum;
- discuss the case with others in small groups; or
- prepare a role-play between case protagonists.

Particularly when writing a case in a rather quantitative domain, you might want to specify which analysis or calculations the participants are required to perform before coming to class.

6. Analysis

Cases that are complex in the analytical dimension (see the section 'Defining the case complexity' page 18) especially require guidance for other instructors. In the analysis part of your teaching note, you should perform a sample analysis on your own case that other instructors can then use as a springboard for their own use of the case in class.

Your analysis should provide comprehensive answers to both the immediate and underlying issues explored in the case. Remember: this does not necessarily mean either single right/wrong answers or the 'solution' that the protagonist/company finally chose.

You will need to perform a critical analysis of the issues at hand before being able to test-use your case in class anyway. We do not yet need a literary masterpiece (right now we are only producing the analysis for ourselves) but take your time right now and fill out this section. Make sure your analysis is detailed and thorough – at least to the standard of what you would expect from your very best students. And one final word of advice: before starting to write down text (even if only high-level notes), you should decide whether to present your analysis in a separate section or to weave it into the description of the teaching plan.

Separate or integrated analysis and teaching plan?

You can integrate your analysis of the case into the teaching plan section or present it as a separate section. We frequently merge these two aspects into one combined section, but there are sometimes good reasons to keep them separate:

- Writing a separate 'analysis' section might be particularly useful if the analysis of the case is complex and extensive. In such cases a lengthy presentation of the analysis as part of the teaching plan would disrupt the flow of the teaching description. Especially for highly quantitative cases it will often be more convenient to present the analysis first and then provide a quite short teaching plan, focusing on flow, timings, and key questions only. In such cases the teaching plan can sometimes be reduced to a single, short, and simple table.

- On the other hand, your teaching note may be easier to read and use if you manage to integrate the case analysis into the teaching plan if the analytical effort is not too high or if the analysis follows the journey from the immediate to the underlying issues.

If you opt to separate the (extensive) analysis and the (brief) teaching plan, use the suggested student assignment questions to structure your analysis section. Sequence the assignment questions along the anticipated flow of the session of your initial teaching plan. Then you will probably not need a lot of additional work on the teaching plan that you already developed.

Frameworks, concepts, and theories

The critical benefit of including the case analysis in your teaching note is to highlight the frameworks, concepts, and theories that are relevant for your case. This is an important part of your teaching note to get right.

If understanding a particular (especially abstract) management tool is one of your learning objectives, you must include references to it in your teaching note. The same applies if your case is designed as an exercise/application of theories, concepts, and tools that have already been introduced before the session (for example, during previous sessions or through prereadings).

List all the applicable frameworks, concepts, or theories with a brief explanation and proper references to the relevant academic or managerial literature. Clearly explain why each is relevant and which aspects of the case demonstrate its potential application in practice. If combined with a teaching plan you might also want to include comments on how to distill (or apply) the concepts, tools, or frameworks successively out of the case discussion.

Quantitative analysis

If your case includes quantitative data, you should suggest ways in which this information can best be used. You should also include details of any quantitative analysis you have carried out. This analysis could then be shown in even greater detail in supplementary material to your case (e.g., spreadsheets) or in the exhibits to the teaching note.

Be nice to other facilitators. We have seen numerous colleagues who have struggled to follow the quantitative analysis provided in teaching notes. Make sure that the data is complete and correct. Be detailed and specific in the description of the analysis to allow others to follow even if they are not deeply similarly familiar with the case, its setting, or the underlying tools, frameworks, concepts, and theories, e.g., consider using Microsoft Excel's comment function to explain certain formulas or the overall logic of the spreadsheet. Also consider asking a colleague or expert to perform the necessary calculations from scratch without having seen yours.

7. Teaching plan

The teaching plan will explain your suggested approach for teaching the case and how to orchestrate the classroom discussion. You already developed a first draft of the teaching plan for your case (see the section 'Drafting a Case Teaching Plan,' page 164).

As a starting point: Just copy and paste your initial teaching plan (the table with the main building blocks of the session) into this section of your draft teaching note. Then consider the following recommendations and suggestions to improve the original teaching plan in iterations, especially when moving beyond the presentation of the teaching plan as a table. Consider producing text with a particular focus on questions, sequencing, and transitioning. Try to be quite detailed and specific. Every minute that you invest into improving your teaching plan right now will likely improve the effectiveness of your test use of the case.

> :≡ **Teaching plan should include**
>
> The teaching plan of your teaching note should include:
>
> - building blocks/sections by content in a recommended sequence (including intended learning objectives per building block);
> - questions per building block and for the transition from one block to the next;
> - learning formats;
> - timings; and
> - insights you (or others) gained from using the case in class.

Building blocks/sections by content in a recommended sequence

The most important part of the teaching plan is a breakdown of the session into smaller building blocks. There is no (and should not be a) standard structure. The building blocks and their sequence will vary from case to case and heavily depend on the overall learning objectives. Also, think about it from the participants' perspective: How much would you be interested in attending an entire program or course with multiple case study discussions, all of which have a similar or even the same structure? It is key to compose a structure of building blocks that is truly right for your individual case and the learning objectives you are trying to achieve.

You will need to specify the type, number, and flow of building blocks as well as the intended learning objectives per block for your teaching plan by yourself and there is only limited guidance that we can provide:

- *Type of building blocks:* On a very generic level, successful case-based sessions will usually have a beginning, middle, and end:

  - Beginning: The opening of the case discussion could be done in one or spread over several blocks. The beginning is usually oriented around the immediate issue but could also (usually first) link to the context of the case setting or of the overall course context. Typical activities in opening blocks could include (see also the section 'Opening the Case Discussion' in the case teaching chapter, page 54):

    - votes or discussions around the immediate issue;
    - reflections about larger context (e.g., about industry, country);
    - references to the personal experience of participants (with similar issues, the organization, etc.);
    - provision of additional material (e.g., lectures, videos); or
    - discussions around the larger context of the case.

  - Middle: The middle section will usually try to go deep! This is when you will engage the participants in activities that target the underlying issues and learning objectives more directly.
  - End: The closing blocks of the case discussion should aim to reinforce/anchor the learning and, especially in cases for executive education, allow for a transfer to the participants' reality. This can be done within the session or beyond, e.g., by including reflection or transfer activities after the case session (see also phase 4 of the 'four stage learning process,' page 42). If applicable, there will probably also be one short block toward the end to inform the participants about the outcome of the case, e.g., through the distribution of a follow-up case, via a short lecture, or a video.

- *Number of building blocks:* How many building blocks should you plan to have? There is no clear answer but, as mentioned in the case teaching chapter (see the section 'The Teaching Plan,' page 40), we recommend changing the learning format about every 15 to 20 minutes. As changing a learning format is most easily done when changing from one block to another, you might want to consider having *at least* four to six building blocks (plus possibly intro, transfer/debrief, and closure) for sessions of 60 to 90 minutes.
- *Flow of the building blocks:* The flow of the building blocks will very much depend upon the content of the case. But there are a few things to be considered in general:

  – *Immediate to underlying issue:* Most typically the flow of the blocks will move the discussion from the immediate issue in the opening blocks to the underlying issues in the middle or end blocks.
  – *Convergent to divergent discussions:* Very frequently you will start with building blocks of a more convergent nature (e.g., how to respond to a specific set of options regarding the immediate issue) and then move to more divergent blocks, i.e., to blocks in which participants can develop broader sets of possible actions addressing the underlying issues. Toward the end you might (if suitable for the subject and learning objectives) then come back to more convergent blocks toward the end.
  – *Case series:* When writing a case series or a case for use in multiple sessions, you will need to consider where and how to move from one case part or from one session to the next. This decision will usually be influenced by the lengths of the follow-up cases: if they are short, you can distribute (or summarize them orally) in class. If they are longer, you will probably need to synchronize the split between the sessions with the split between the case parts.
  – *Variable sequences:* Case teaching is supposed to be participant-centered. Accordingly, you cannot (and should not) fully predict and define the flow of the entire session. To leave sufficient flexibility while at the same time staying focused on the learning objectives, you can specify which building blocks should be followed in a fixed sequence and which could follow the participants' comments.

- *Content and intended learning outcome of building blocks:* Make sure to clearly state the content and clarify the intended learning outcomes per building block.

  – For each building block, state the content you want to cover (e.g., which issues, tools, concepts, frameworks, theories should be dealt with in this particular building block).
  – Mention the learning objectives that should be achieved in this block before moving on.

From theory to practice with Urs

The teaching note for my case 'Anna Frisch at Aesch AG' (together with Ulf Schäfer) might serve as an example for the required session blocks including a variable sequence in the middle sections:

We typically assign the case with assignment questions as pre-reading, allowing the instructor to comprehensively cover the case in a 90-miniute classroom session. The session contains four major building blocks, with the core discussion (phase 2) allowing an in-depth discussion of important aspects in more detail:

1. Emerging into the case: Is Anna's change initiative justified? (10 minutes)
2. Analysis of reasons for failure (60 minutes for all 4 aspects and summary)
   – A. Anna's management of stakeholders and her understanding of the political context of her change initiative (20 minutes)

> – *B. Anna's personality and influencing preferences (10 minutes)*
> – *C. Anna's communication (10 minutes)*
> – *D. Anna's vision, strategy and a plan forward (10 minutes)*
> – *E. Summary of failures (10 minutes)*
> *3. Outlook discussion on what Anna should do next (10 minutes)*
> *4. Update, summary and closure (10 minutes)*

Questions for each building block and for the transition from one block to the next
Many of the best teaching notes are little more than a list of great questions. And, in keeping with the participant-centered philosophy behind the case method, it is really helpful to include a number of questions that will help other facilitators to:

- kick-start the debate;
- keep the discussion moving forward (especially to ensure a smooth transition from one building block to another);
- prevent the session from going off topic; and
- bring the session to a meaningful close.

How to come up with good questions? Please refer back to the section 'Asking Great Questions' in the chapter on teaching a case-based session (see page 61) for some inspiration on types of questions you could use for the teaching plan in your teaching note – and of course also for your test-teaching. Then develop a few questions for each building block – and pay particular attention to creating questions that will help you to transition (secretly or at least smoothly) from one block to the next.

Later, when test-teaching the case, observe (1) which questions worked well, (2) which might not have had the desired effect, and (3) which questions you came up with spontaneously that worked well. Then refine the questions on the basis of your practical experiences with the case in class.

Learning formats

It will usually be difficult if not even impossible to maintain tension, interest, and attention over 60 or even 90 minutes by just conducting one long full-class case discussion (particularly when dealing with large classes). Yes, there are a few world-class case teachers who can succeed like this but, if you are anything like us, you should plan to include changes in learning formats after approximately 15 to 20 minutes to be successful.

How do you do that? Review our section on 'Learning Formats' in the case teaching chapter (page 83) to get some inspiration about possible learning formats and their advantages and disadvantages. Then come back to the overview of building blocks. For each block try to find matches. Which learning formats will allow you to best (most effectively or most efficiently) achieve the desired learning outcomes? Just as a reminder, you have plenty of choice, e.g., class discussion, role-play, group work, student assignments in the session, or formats for consolidating the learning.

Timing

Last but not least, the teaching plan should include approximate timings for each of the building blocks. This is extremely helpful and important: When an instructor teaches a case written by someone else for the first time, it is usually quite difficult to plan the timings well. Before using a case in class, we just do not yet know how long a certain exercise will need, how long participants will need for a small-group assignment in class, or how quickly they will come up with certain ideas.

Of course, your suggested timings cannot be exact and will probably not be followed diligently, but rough timings will help other instructors using your case for the first time, especially with respect to emphasizing the different facets of your case: The timing that you allocate to the different building blocks should generally reflect the importance that you assign to the various learning objectives. More important learning objectives should be given more time – and do not forget to reserve sufficient time for reflections and transfer.

Approximate timings will also enable the educator to make informed choices about which parts of the case discussion to skip if time is limited, e.g., due to different session durations, other activities that they might want to include in the session, or on the fly as soon as they realize that they need more time than anticipated for a specific building block.

Practical considerations

You might also want to consider the two following aspects when writing your teaching plan:

- Do any of the suggested learning formats require special material (e.g., spreadsheets for calculations), technology (e.g., computer, printer, sound, etc.), or a particular room setup (e.g., group tables)? If yes, specify and highlight them so that you are well prepared for your test-teaching, but also so that other instructors are warned.
- How much time will students need to spend studying the case and related material? How much time will they need to do the participant assignments before coming to class? Sometimes this is useful additional information. You will know when to send out preassignments and readings for your test-teaching. And other instructors might want to use the expected preparation time as a criterion for their case selection.

8. Teaching suggestions for online/hybrid learning

Online learning is an integral part of business education. And cases as a very versatile educational method have proven to work very well in an online setting. Cases are being used in a vast number of online learning formats like (this list is most likely not exhaustive):

- pure online or hybrid formats;
- for entire programs and courses – or just for individual sessions;
- for synchronous and asynchronous session formats;
- for interactive and noninteractive formats;
- using hand-made e-learning solutions or highly sophisticated platforms; and
- with a few or many participants.

Given this diversity, it will probably be impossible to create a single, suggested section in your teaching note to cover all these different use options. However, you can still make your teaching note 'online learning friendly' by adding some or all of the following:

- Explicitly mentioning the use of online collaboration tools like Miro, Mural, Google Sheets, or tools that are integrated into Zoom, MS Teams, Google Meet or the like (on the general use of boards and how to describe their use in the teaching note, see the next point, 'Board Plan').
- Description of a possible online forum/discussion board structure including questions to stimulate the discussion (suitable for use with or without a synchronous online session).
- Description of possible small-group assignments that participants can work on synchronously or asynchronously, face to face or online in preparation for a distance learning session.
- Description of possible asynchronous elements before or after a synchronous case discussion session (and when/how to split these from the synchronous discussion).

- Description of (and adaptation of your case for) learning formats that can easily be used in distance learning with cases such as:
  – online polls/votes,
  – online (quantitative) exercises,
  – individual work assignments,
  – online role-plays (per video or via chats),
  – online tests/exams (e.g., knowledge tests before, during or after case session),
  – word clouds, or
  – discussions in pairs (just to name a few).
- Description of possible mini-lectures (e.g., video clips of you as the case author or by other facilitators teaching the case) that could be made available publicly (e.g., YouTube) or uploaded to an LMS/e-learning platform.
- Description of possible peer evaluation and feedback formats for asynchronous learning (specially to ease grading of online classes with large number of participants).
- Description of questions that are suitable for different types of online learning, for example:
  – Open questions for asynchronous formats (e.g., discussion boards/forums) or for sessions with only a few participants or hybrid settings.
  – Closed questions for synchronous formats with many participants as this is a good way to help manage time.

From theory to practice with Martin

In the teaching note for my case 'Driving Digital Transformation at Faurecia' (together with Joe Peppard) I added a section called 'Ideas for online teaching.' This section had two main parts. In the first part I made general comments on using case studies in an online setting. In the second part I gave specific examples on teaching the case study online. Below are some examples of suggestions that we gave:

– The first discussion can be led in exactly the same way as with an in-classroom session. We recommend not sharing any slides and to have the gallery view to see as many participants as possible (perhaps consider having a second screen). The instructor should take some notes on a second device like a laptop or tablet computer where we advise using a simple table (three columns like the board layout in the exhibits), either in a MS PowerPoint or MS Word document.

– To kick-start the discussion of the second question, the instructor can announce that they want every participant to share one specific initiative (and only one) in the chat. One fun way to do this is to say that the participants have one minute to think and chose their favorite initiative. Nobody is allowed to write in the chat yet. After one minute you ask everybody to type in their choice but not hit the enter button yet. By counting down from three, you ask everybody to hit the enter button at zero and all answers will appear at the same time. The instructor can then quickly check if everybody has participated and potentially encourage those who have not. After this the instructor can pick different initiatives and ask the participant who submitted it to quickly explain the initiative and why they think that it was important.

– To change the format again, we suggest having a quick group discussion in randomized breakout groups of four participants. The task should be: How do the initiatives launched by René at Faurecia match with the capabilities framework of Bonnet/Westerman? And this question should be discussed in these breakout groups.

Please feel free to share with us innovative approaches of using case studies online with us for future editions of this book.

9. Board plan

The board (blackboard, whiteboard, flipchart, metaplan, electronic note board, screen on which you can write, and of course also the many available online boards like Miro, Mural, and Google Sheets) is a simple yet extremely powerful tool in the classroom. The board can:

- bring structure to the discussion;
- be used to distill the underlying frameworks, concepts, theories or tools out of the individual contributions of the participants;
- serve as acknowledgment of the participants' contribution;
- offer a reminder to the teacher as they move the discussion along; and
- provide a basis for a permanent record (e.g., if students wish to take pictures at the end of the session or if you can send them notes from electronic boards).

Accordingly, your teaching note should include hints and tips on how best to use the board when teaching your case. You should start drawing your board plans now. This way you can use them for the teaching note, and as preparation for your first test use of the case.

The board plan section of your teaching note will usually be little more than a graphical representation of how you recommend using the board. But you can also add a bit of descriptive text that, for example, mentions which parts of the discussion you typically capture or do not capture on the board and why.

It is also helpful to explain how to fill the overall board plan structure. You might want to specify not only what to capture where but also how: Do linear lists work best at some points during the discussion? Or simple notes to capture the main thoughts and ideas? How do you organize and present two sides of an argument? Or the pros and cons of different alternatives?

From theory to practice with Martin

Below is a very simple example of my suggested use of the blackboard for initial classroom discussions when using my Bosch case ('Global Product Development Strategy at Bosch: Selecting a Development Site for the New Low-Cost ABS Platform'). This summarizes the pros and cons of each potential development location:

Suzhou	Yokohama
• Close to the target market, customer insight	• Proven track record (development of motorcycle ABS platform)
• Engineering capabilities (low-cost engineering, low-cost mindset)	• Strong technical expertise
• Highly motivated team	• Size of the development site (300 engineers compared to about 70 engineers in Suzhou)
• Li Chen (native-born Chinese, deep product knowledge, good access to Chinese customers)	• Robert Hellwach (head of engineering), German-born, long tenure within Bosch, good networks to lead development
• Labor costs (the average cost of an engineer in China in 2008 was 40% of the average cost of an engineer in Japan)	

From theory to practice with Urs

I just love to use the board to distil the intended learning outcome of participant comments. Whenever using certain frameworks, theories, or tools that have a visual representation, I frequently write down participant comments alongside the anticipated concept. Later, I can then introduce the concepts or ask the participants to make sense of my notes. Here is an example of a quite complex board plan from the teaching note of my case study 'Magellan versus Quesada: To Mutiny or Not to Mutiny?'
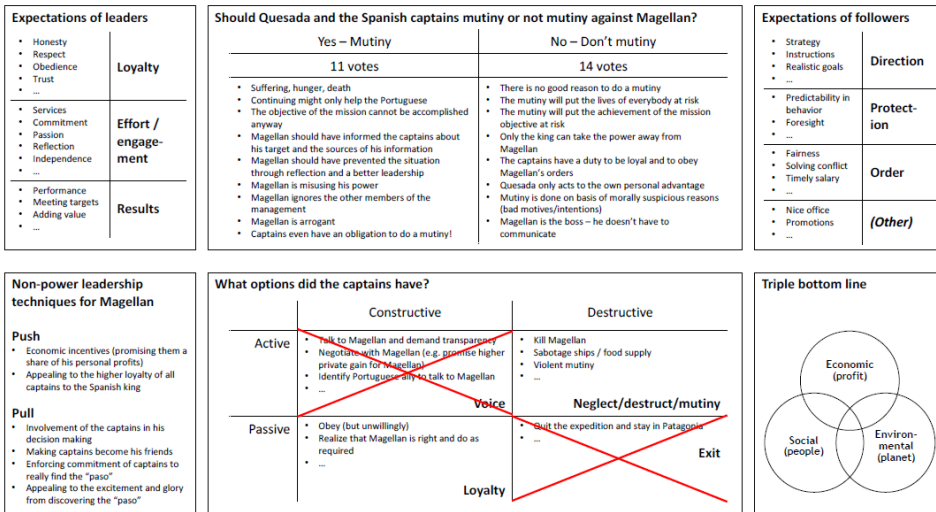

Figure 27: Example for board plan.

You can include your board plan either as part of the main teaching plan, or as a separate section. Some case authors also just refer to the board plan in the teaching plan and then add a graphical representation of the board plan to the exhibits in the teaching note. Just make sure to include some ideas about visualization and note-taking – many case teachers make heavy use of board plans found in teaching notes, so do not disappoint them.

All the other sections ('Recommended Additional Material for Participants'; 'Sources and Additional Materials for Educators'; 'Other') will be dealt with later in step 7 of the case development funnel. You do not need to invest a lot of time on this right now.

The teaching note: a checklist

– Start early: write your teaching note and case in parallel.
– Have a clear structure to ensure you include everything.
– Work in iterations and fill out the different teaching note sections as you go.
– Write in 'teaching note style' (remember: your audience is usually fellow academics and educators).
– Grab photos of whiteboards and flipcharts after test sessions (consider video- or audio-recording the entire sessions as the basis for great questions in the teaching plan section).

(Continued)

> – List all the management tools, frameworks, concepts, and theories that relate to your case.
> – Include extras such as an update about the outcome of the case, exhibits, or notes for online teaching and exams.
> – Check back regularly to ensure references and links are up to date when publishing your case.

6. Test-use case in class

'We all need people who will give us feedback. That's how we improve.' – Bill Gates

Congratulations! You now have a draft case study and teaching note. But please observe that we are still using the term 'draft.' This is because your case cannot be considered finished until it has been thoroughly tested in the classroom, formally released by the protagonist/organization, and published in a journal or via case distributors together with a teaching note.

Your case may look brilliant but there is no way of knowing how it will work in the classroom without the practice test. You may find it only needs a few tweaks or you may need to rewrite key passages. Possibly you might need to do bigger modifications, like changing the cutoff time, immediate issue, or protagonist. Either way, it is a great learning experience and one that is guaranteed to vastly improve your finished case.

Also, do not forget that you will need to finish your teaching note. Classroom testing offers invaluable insights that will help enormously with this task.

Many leading business schools and individual authors use the Case Centre's (www.thecase centre.org) global sales and distribution services to ensure their materials are available worldwide. The Case Centre specifies that cases must be comprehensively tested in the classroom before submission. Our suggestion: start as early as possible with your testing; you might not have many opportunities to use your case in class and we do not want this to delay your publication unnecessarily.

Select a safe environment to test your case

Alongside our rapid prototyping philosophy, we highly recommend that you start testing your case as early as possible, but, on the other hand, cases that are not yet finished obviously increase the risk of failure. You should therefore actively search for the earliest possible low-risk opportunity to use your case. But what exactly is a low-risk opportunity or safe environment?

At most schools you will be able to identify teaching opportunities that have less visibility and thus lower risk for your professional standing and reputation. These could include:

- alumni meetings (alumni usually come back to their schools with a positive attitude and mood; they might even know you personally and thus be more open to serve as guinea pigs; also, they probably did not pay for the meeting and might therefore have no/lower expectations);
- extra-curricular sessions for regular students on a voluntary basis (e.g., as evening session);
- replacement sessions (i.e., sessions where you jump in for a colleague with short notice);
- sales events (e.g., MBA fairs – especially events for less experienced students/participants);
- events for the general public (e.g., open house days);
- mandatory courses for less experienced students; or

- in the middle of well-running programs (most educators or course directors try to ensure teaching excellence especially at the beginning, to get into the right mood and flow, and at the end of a program or course, to make sure the last impression is positive; in-between it is less harmful if a session does not absolutely rock);
- teaching at other institutions (ask colleagues in the same domain to allow you to take over one of their sessions); or
- pro bono teaching (e.g., to NGOs, smaller executive education customers).

Use any of these to test early ideas of your case as often as possible!

An important consideration when using any such opportunity will be whether or not to tell your participants that you are using them as guinea pigs. In our opinion it is better not to mention this explicitly so that the participants focus on the learning and class dynamic and are not distracted by meta-considerations about the case. However, especially when only using a slide deck version of the case (as a very early test and without prereading), we have occasionally told our participants that we were considering turning it into a new case study – and this never led to a negative experience. You might also want to consider only informing your students about the test use after the case discussion at the end of the session. Either way, your students will probably infer that this particular case is not yet finished, e.g., because your case text might be marked as 'work in progress' or just because it slightly deviates from other cases they have read (e.g., no full copyright text, very recent date, no case number). We have never experienced any adverse reactions from students with either approach.

How to test your case draft

By now we have hopefully convinced you of the importance of testing your case draft as early and as often as possible. But how can you actually do this? Over the years we have tested our own case drafts in a number of ways, and we have also learned from workshop participants how they have tested their drafts. Here is a nonexhaustive list and we are of course interested in learning about more possibilities:

- Letting participants explore the story themselves (flipped classroom),
- Using source material (newspaper article, video, blog…),
- Short presentation,
- Case outline/mini-caselet.

Letting participants explore the story themselves (flipped classroom)

The earliest way to test your case draft or idea is to let students explore the case idea themselves by actively searching for information themselves before coming to the next class session. When the session starts, you can then test your opening question, how controversial the topic is, and in general the flow of the session.

Using source material (newspaper article, video, blog…)

Another possibility for testing your case draft is to use an existing, publicly available source, such as a newspaper article, a short video or documentary, a blog entry, or the like. Think back to where you got the initial idea for the case study. There might be a quick way to use the original source material that triggered the idea for a test. For example, the idea for the case study '"Do You Really Think We Are So Stupid?" A Letter to the CEO of Deutsche Telekom' (Korotov, Müller, & Schäfer 2009) resulted from an article quoting the entire letter; a quick test of this article in the class environment confirmed the controversy of the material and the interest of participants.

Short presentation

With a little more work, a short (PowerPoint) presentation, that is, a few slides, could be generated. Instead of using the original sources, a very short presentation (in our experience, this does not need to be longer than four or five sides) could be created that presents the key fact of the story, already structured in a way that will help in starting and moderating a discussion. This short presentation (as opposed to just an article, etc.) allows the instructor to make use of visual materials (pictures, organizational charts, tables with data, process presentations, etc.) – various elements to be considered as possible exhibits for a final case study. The case outline that you have already produced can be the blueprint for the presentation, with one slide dedicated to the problem, one to the background of the company, to the industry or wider context, and one final slide to present options or to serve as a kind of wrap-up. Depending on the topic, more details on numbers and background can be offered. This creates a level playing field for the discussion and you can shape the presentation to fit your learning objectives.

Mini-caselets

Another format to test case ideas in the classroom is to use the case outline as it is, or to turn it into a so-called mini-caselet. Mini-caselets focus on the problem description and just offer some basic background information. The level of detail is quite high, and authors do not provide a lot of data or exhibits. Again, the idea is to just deliver the basics to ensure an informed discussion, but things such as quotes, various perspectives, and detailed figures are not added.

From theory to practice with Urs

As rapid prototyping is part of our case writing philosophy, I have often even used several of formats for one single case idea over time. For the case 'Deutsche Bahn AG: The Heartless Train Conductor' (Schäfer & Müller 2015) I conducted a first test-using the original newspaper article. For the next teaching opportunity, with a bit of additional background information, I transformed the article into a short presentation and then finally drafted the first mini-caselet. This way, I could test the idea several times in different formats to gain insights into how students reacted and engaged with the material.

Who should test-teach the case?

This is a matter of personal preference. You may prefer to personally 'test-drive' your case in the classroom, or you may find it more useful to observe someone else teaching it. Our recommendation is to use the case first by yourself. But please find below a few considerations to help with your choice. Pick whichever method works best for you.

Advantages of test-teaching yourself

- Personal experience of the touch and feel when using the case as educator.
- Increased familiarity with the case itself might help to improve the class session, e.g., through spontaneous explanations or additions if you only realize during the session that some information is missing in the case.
- No need to explain the planned flow of the session to a colleague when the teaching note is still a very rough draft.

Advantages of test-teaching by others

- Increased ability to take notes (especially regarding questions and responses).
- Mental switch from case author to participant of a case class.
- Additional input for the finishing touches of your teaching note: what was clear to your colleague from reading your draft teaching note; what was unclear/needs additional explanation.

How many times should I test the case in the classroom?

Cases are a bit like expensive business shoes – the more you wear them the more comfortable they get. And the more often you have used (and refined) a case the better the final product will be. But, on the other hand, who wants to walk around with worn-out shoes that have holes in the sole? Make sure to let go of your case at some point and just publish it. If necessary, you can still submit a revised version later on.

Sometimes great leads are picked up by several case authors simultaneously. Make sure you are the first to publish the case, but test your case at least three or, better, five times before giving the case and teaching note its final polishing! But, when you have time, you will probably still be able to improve the case and teaching note even after having tested it many more times.

Overall, make it a habit to refine your case and teaching note drafts immediately after every test-teaching. This has two main benefits:

1. You capture the necessary changes with a fresh memory of the improvement needs.
2. You will frequently only invest a little bit of time and effort per iteration, which helps you to cut the overall effort into small chunks and also helps avoid too much work for a case that might finally never get published.

What to look out for

When testing your case in the classroom, make as many notes as you can during (e.g., while engaging participants in group assignments or buzz groups) and after the session. Pay particular attention to the following aspects:

- Is key information missing from the case?
- Does it need to be longer or shorter?
- Is the structure or timing in the case confusing or misleading?
- Is there too much information, e.g., information that you don't use in class or information that might make the case too 'easy'?
- Have you chosen the right protagonist?
- Can participants identify with the protagonist?
- Does the case need another character's perspective?
- Does your opening paragraph work well (immediate issue vs. underlying issue)?
- Are participants keen to start the discussion?
- Are the issues controversial, interesting and relevant? Is there sufficient controversy and debate in the class?
- Is the case accessible for people of all backgrounds and cultures?
- Does the case take too long or too short a time to teach?
- Would the case work better as a case series?

From theory to practice with Urs

A fun example of what you can learn when test-using your case in class:

As already mentioned, I wrote a case about the Portuguese sailor and explorer Ferdinand Magellan. A Portuguese MBA student (in an extremely international program) once complained that I had used the English version of the name, Ferdinand Magellan, instead of the Portuguese, Fernão de Magalhães. When confronted with this comment, I initially belittled it in my mind and didn't even remotely consider any change to my case.

About half a year later, I then again used the case in a program in Brazil. All participants were Brazilian and I taught in English. Only one of the approximately 20 students used a simultaneous translation. The class went well – and I was happy, until before the next session one of the 19 students without translation complained: 'Why didn't you tell us that the case was about Fernão de Magalhães?' Only the student with translation really knew about whom we had been talking for 90 minutes. I finally accepted my first student's suggestion and added the Portuguese name at the first mention of Magellan in the final version of the case.

Actively invite your participants to give you feedback. You are likely to get hints about typos, language issues, inconsistencies, misunderstandings, missing information, cultural specificities, etc. You might even consider involving smart students who gave you valuable feedback in the further work on the case as coauthors. At least be open to any criticism your case receives and do not take it personally. Use the feedback as a gift that will likely make your case even better!

Learning from test use for the teaching note

When actively collecting feedback from participants you are likely to significantly improve the case study itself. However, most of the learning from the test use will flow into the teaching note. The test use is mainly a practice test for your teaching plan and the validity/reachability of your learning objectives.

Immediately after every test use consider the following:

- Overall evaluation
  - Did the case discussion fulfill the learning objectives? Did the participants take away something meaningful?
  - Did the case match your expectations in terms of excitement, engagement and learning outcomes?
  - Did the discussion allow for the discovery, application, critical review of the expected theories/concepts/frameworks?
- Timing
  - Was the timing realistic (globally but also looking at the timing of individual building blocks)?
  - Which building blocks took longer? Which building blocks were done faster? Which building blocks did you have to skip due to lack of time?
  - Was the timing in class better or worse than planned?
- Content
  - Was there too much content, was there too little content, or was the quantity just about right?
  - Unpack next time if needed (i.e., if you did not cover all content) and just leave out some topics.

     – Write down topics that came up unexpectedly and should be added to the teaching note.
- Questions (and responses)
  - Which questions worked well by advancing the discussions, which didn't?
  - Write down great additional questions that came to your mind while teaching or afterwards.
  - Also note down some of the most remarkable, unexpected responses.
- Flow and sequence
  - Did the flow from one section to another feel natural or did you need a heavy transition?
  - Could rearranging the flow of building blocks help to ease the transitions?
- Participation
  - Did many different students contribute to the case discussion?
  - Were they engaged and excited?
- Learning formats
  - Which of the learning formats (e.g., votes, group work, role-play, full-class discussion) worked well and for which part of the session? Which did not work well?
  - What other learning formats could be used?
- Materials
  - Did the material add value to the discussion?
  - Did your note-taking on the board make sense (when you look at it critically)?

As already mentioned before, it is a good idea to grab a photographic record of all the notes made on a board during your case testing sessions. These will be a good aide-memoire and can provide an excellent basis for your teaching note. Additionally, you might want to consider asking someone else (a coauthor, assistant, colleague, etc.) to sit in and take notes or to just video-record the entire session to properly review the strength and weaknesses of the case, the case discussion and your teaching style.

Did the case really result in the type of discussion and achieve its intended learning outcome?

By now you will have probably invested quite some effort into your case and teaching note. But the good old 20/80 rule also applies to cases: with only 20% of the effort, you will have achieved an 80% result. (Do not pin us down on the numbers; you will likely have invested more than 20% of the effort at this point, but you will get the idea.) During the next steps, you will still need to do a lot of work – but the final product will change less visibly. So, this is a good time for a final 'fail fast pit stop': If through critical reflection you realize that this is not going to end in a final product that you will be proud of and that you will (frequently) use in your own classes, stop now! But, once you have successfully tested your class a few times, you should also go the last mile and ensure you get it published.

From theory to practice with Urs

I once needed to design a new session about ethical issues and digitalization for an alumni meeting composed of senior executive education participants. Just a few weeks before, I had come across a story (in a newspaper) that intrigued me: An e-book publisher was criticized for having published a thriller from a serial rapist and murderer, who somehow managed to smuggle the book text out of prison. With a few weeks of delay, this led to a big public outcry, and many people called for boycotts of the publisher. This lead would allow me – I thought – to discuss the ethical implications of value chain reconfigurations with the elimination of intermediaries (as also relevant for organizations such as Uber or Airbnb.) I had a need and a lead.

I reached out to the organization through various channels to get information from someone who was involved in their final decision to delist the book, despite the fact that they continued to sell many other controversial books, such as Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. But I never got a response.

Given my pressing need, the low-risk context of the session, and my intellectual excitement about a truly puzzling issue, I decided to quickly produce a PowerPoint presentation, roughly at the level of detail of what we described as a case outline earlier – and used it as an ad hoc case in class. Overall, the class went extremely well and I got lots of new ideas for how to refine the case.

After the first test use, I reached out to several colleagues who – I hoped – could open the door into the organization for me. One of them strongly advised me not to pursue the lead, given the extremely violent back story and cultural sensitivities. I nevertheless gave the case another try in a very different setting: younger participants (regular students) and a much higher ratio of females in the room. Even though the discussion still went ok, I now realized that the case was probably just too drastic for a wide use and finally decided to bury it in a special folder on my hard drive called 'Dead cases.'

Testing your case in class

Checklist: Testing your case in class
– Choose a 'safe environment' to test your case.
– Test your case at least three times – ideally with different types of classes.
– Be positive about negative feedback: do not take it personally.
– Make lots of notes about the test use immediately after the session.
– Grab a photographic record of whiteboard and flipchart notes.
– Make quick changes to your case study and teaching note drafts – always only with as little effort as needed for a next, improved test use.
– If you face pushback or if the case just does not fly, stop here.

7. Finishing the case and teaching note

'I'd made it this far and refused to give up because all my life I had always finished the race.'
— Louis Zamperini, Devil at My Heels

You are getting closer to the finishing line of this long-distance run! Block a day or two in your calendar to get the prize for all the work you have invested so far. You now just need to wrap up by giving all documents the final touch.

Finishing the case study

'Begin at the beginning,' the King said, very gravely, 'and go on till you come to the end: then stop.'
– Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

Word of advice: do not get lost in endless iterations of improvement. At some point you need to let go – and remember: Your case study is first and foremost a vehicle for class discussion and learning. Your test-teaching proved that your case could achieve the intended learning objectives and this already makes it good enough.

But to be legitimately proud about your work and get the case published you should now:

- Make your case short!
- Check your timings.
- Get the title right.
- Conduct a final step-by-step review.
- Perform (or ask someone to perform) a final copyedit.
- Get final case release.

Make it short!

We strongly recommend you make your case as short as possible. This can take repeat editing – and it can be difficult to cut away sections of text that you may have spent a long time researching and writing. But the end result will be worth it – a diamond does not sparkle until it is cut.

And do not forget – none of the work you do while writing your case will be a waste of time. Information you leave out may be useful for the teaching note, as background information when you teach the case, or as a basis for a separate case or teaching note supplement.

Ensure that you do not cut out key information when editing your case to make it shorter. Include everything necessary for an informed and intelligent class discussion. If you have left out important information, this should become clear when you test your case in the classroom. Participants may point out information that they feel is missing from the case – but only add it to your final version if you are absolutely sure it is necessary.

After all, making decisions in business without knowing all the facts is a common and often necessary occurrence. These can be facts that the manager knows exist but cannot obtain, as well as facts that the manager is totally unaware of. This can be an important lesson for participants. The missing information can become part of the class discussion with questions such as: Is there any information that would help you make up your mind or change your opinions? How could the protagonist have collected this information?

Check your timings

Go through your case with a fine toothcomb and eliminate all information that:

- relates to events that occur after the point at which your case ends, and/or
- the protagonist will not have had access to at the time of the case.

We frequently observe problems with timing, especially in relation to information included in the exhibits. Many case authors try to use the most recent information in their exhibits, for example the latest financial statements. However, be aware that the timing of your case may mean that you need to use earlier financial statements, for example if your case is set before the end of the financial year or the publication of the annual report. Do not allow the credibility of your case to be undermined with timing errors of this kind.

Get the title right

Review the working title of your case. It is amazing how hard it can be to get just a few words right! You can start by asking yourself the following questions:

- Is it too long or complex?
- Does it give away too much, for example potential solutions?
- Is it subjective or judgmental?
- Does it create immediate interest?
- Is there just enough information to make participants want to read more?

- Will educators be intrigued and want to know more?
- Does it clarify the general direction the case discussion should take?
- Does it include other relevant information to create interest, for example the country, company name, industry, or protagonist?

Typical case titles that work well include reference to the protagonist, company, and/or immediate issue. Here are some good examples of case titles from several best-selling case studies (note how the colon punctuation mark improves the clarity and visual appearance of these titles):

- IKEA's Global Sourcing Challenge: Indian Rugs and Child Labor
- Amore Frozen Foods (A): Macaroni and Cheese Fill Targets
- BP: Putting Profits Before Safety?
- Thomas Green: Power, Office Politics and a Career in Crisis
- GE's Two-Decade Transformation: Jack Welch's Leadership
- Michelin Fleet Solutions: From Selling Tires to Selling Kilometers

Use these – and others that you came across and liked – as sources of inspiration. Then decide upon your final case title.

Final step-by-step review (by yourself and others)

Great case studies have a 'light' and easy appearance but are nevertheless not only the result of a great amount of effort (which should not become visible) but also simultaneously fulfill multiple, sometimes seemingly contradictory requirements. For that reason, we have compiled a list of criteria that you might want to use to perform yet another check. In this way you will be able to ensure you have not left out any vital elements.

Consider each of the following items carefully (building upon Abell 2003 and assessment criteria that are frequently used in different case writing competitions). You should be able to respond positively to many of them, even if a wholehearted 'yes' is not always possible. However, if you end up with a low overall level of compliance, your case may need a little more work.

☰ Step-by-step review

1. Is it really a case and not just a story? Typically, a story can be characterized as one-dimensional; the aim is to simplify and offer a clear message. However, a case should offer different perspectives, have a certain level of complexity, and be a catalyst for rich discussion in the classroom.
2. Does the case tackle a relevant, important and current issue? This applies to both the immediate and the underlying issue(s). Both can quickly become out of date – but your case needs to be current and relevant. Consider shifting the timing of the case if the immediate issue has lost its current relevance. More drastic measures may be needed if your underlying issue has become outdated. You should consider writing a totally different case, although you may still be able to focus on the same organization and protagonist, which would allow you to possibly recycle substantial amounts of text and research effort.
3. Does the case have a strong opening paragraph? Is the opening paragraph strong enough to draw the reader in? Does it contain the necessary information about the setting and the immediate issue?

(Continued)

4. Does the case have a clear decision focus? Does it call participants to action?

5. Does it provide a voyage of discovery – and even some surprises along the way? Does it allow movement from a more obvious immediate issue to one or several truly interesting underlying issues?

6. Does the text of the case study have a clear beginning, middle, and end? Is there a narrative structure that is easy to follow and has a logical flow?

7. Is it controversial and likely to prompt participants to come to different conclusions? Does it at least offer multiple perspectives that can be validly argued?

8. Does it contain contrasts and comparisons? Does it, for example, show different types of behaviors, contexts, and strategies to allow participants to weigh the pros and cons of each?

9. Does it provide currently useful generalizations? In other words, while a case should be about a specific issue or issues, it should also offer the opportunity to learn some wider lessons, for example insights that can be applied to (ideally several) other situations, companies, or industries.

10. Does it have all the data required to tackle the problem? Not too much or too little? This should have become clear after testing the case in class.

11. Does it have a personal touch? Will readers be able to relate to the protagonist and 'step into their shoes'? Have you selected the right protagonist and provided enough background information to make them believable?

12. Is it well structured and easy to read? This includes various aspects such as the meaningful use of sections and headers, the layout, and the (usually almost literary) language.

13. Is it short? (By now it should be; see above!)

14. Is it innovative in terms of content (company, industry, subject area, issues)? What is really new about your case?

15. Does it use formats other than just text? Does the final pack (i.e., including cases B, C, D…, teaching note supplements, exhibits, etc.) include material in other formats such as video clips, visualizations, or interactive elements?

16. Is the information included in the case accurate, consistent, and based on reliable research? Did you check all data thoroughly?

17. Does the case have longevity? Will it be useful for a long period of time? (Unless your case is specifically designed to be used for a limited number of teaching sessions.)

18. Does the case allow the achievement of a well-defined learning objective? Is the learning objective realistic with this material? Is the case all over the place and not sufficiently focused with respect to the learning objective?

19. Is the timing of the case well chosen to maximize learning and provide the most interesting immediate issue? If a case series, is the overall story split at appropriate points in time?

20. Will it be enjoyable for yourself but also for other educators to use this case in class?

When you are satisfied with your case after going through the entire checklist, you should then get it reviewed by others. In some organizations and for some possible journals/distributors this will be a required step in the process. But, even if you do not need to get a review for formal reasons, we encourage you to actively seek it, as we have almost always experienced how significantly such a review has enhanced our own case studies.

Why not ask some trusted friends or colleagues to carry out this step-by-step review for you? Give them the case and the checklist from above and ask for their feedback. They will have a fresh pair of eyes and will be more objective. Make a point of asking them if they would like to use the case in their own classes. If the answer is no, ask them what you need to do to make them change

their minds. Do not be disheartened: this is an invaluable opportunity to improve your case writing skills.

Finding the right reviewer is not an easy task. It is important to link up with someone who shares your passion for teaching and more specifically, for the case method. Ideally, find someone who uses cases regularly in their classes. Your reviewer should also be deeply knowledgeable about the topics covered in your case. And, of course, you should feel comfortable working with them. Another option is to split the task between two or more colleagues, asking each to focus on a different aspect of your case.

Final copyediting

You will need to give your case a final polish. Our opinion is that professional copyediting is invaluable. This is particularly important for the two of us as English is not our first language, and if English is not your native language we strongly recommend professional copyediting.

Even native English speakers will benefit from this. Not everyone is a great writer, and an objective professional editor can make a huge difference to the readability and appeal of your completed case. As well as style, spelling, grammar, and punctuation, they can ensure that the flow of information is logical and that even a nonexpert can easily understand your case. Ideally, they should also look out for inconsistencies in the formatting and layout (e.g., usage of currencies).

Check with your institution: usually there are a few internal or external copyeditors within every school's network. Your marketing, press, or publications departments may be able to point you in the right direction. If not, ask some trusted colleagues from other institutions who have written cases and might be able to recommend a good copyeditor. And you can always try searching online for professional copyeditors.

Finalizing your case

- Make it short!
- Check the timings in your case.
- Get the title right.
- Carry out a step-by-step review – or ask friends or colleagues to do it for you.
- Give your case a final polish – seriously consider using a professional copyeditor.

Getting final case release

By now your case is ready for publication – but still subject to the final release from the protagonist or organization. You should already have had multiple respective conversations and ideally already obtained preliminary release. But getting final release is sometimes still a big hurdle – a hurdle at which even many experienced case authors (including ourselves) occasionally fail. Make it easy for the organization to say 'yes' by submitting the final version only after copyediting, proper formatting etc. Like this the organization knows it is being represented in a professional context.

We cannot stress this enough: if your case is based on field research, the company you are working with must formally release the finished case (and possibly any other documents) as soon as it contains any information that is not publicly available.

Case release means that someone with appropriate authority in the company (possibly, but not necessarily, your protagonist) must give their signed permission for the case to be published and distributed. Their permission will need to cover all elements of the case package that are not already in the public domain, including items such as video material and supplementary

information. You do not need (and should not ask for) release for your teaching note unless it contains additional, nonpublic information that is not already included in your case. More on the teaching note below.

We have touched upon the importance of getting case release at various points in the book. Alongside the case writing development funnel, getting case release is not a single point or moment in time but rather an iterative approach, and different activities that will ultimately lead to getting release should be done at different steps. Nevertheless, we will now give you the complete list of golden rules for getting case release, although you should have done some of them by now. This will make it easier for you to come back here to see all the activities from the different chapters in one place.

☰ A few golden rules

There are a few golden rules to follow to increase the probability of getting release:

- Find out who has the necessary authority to give their signed approval for case release as early as possible (ideally already at the start of the case writing process). Remember that this may or may not be your protagonist.
- Bear in mind that your main case release contact may no longer be available when your case is finished, so always aim to establish a second (or even third) case release contact as 'backup.'
- Discuss the process with your case release contact as soon as possible. You can show them a copy of the case release document that they will need to sign when the case is finished (see page 224 for a case release template). Explaining the process and showing the document has an additional advantage: it reaffirms to your contact person that nothing will be published without their approval.
- Obtain initial approval from your case release contact to research and write the case. This is particularly important if your case release contact is not your protagonist but a gatekeeper to the people you plan to interview.
- You may need to explain the purpose of writing the case and the potential benefits for the company (see page 190).
- Once you have written your opening paragraph and an outline of the case, show it to your case release contact to make sure they are still happy to proceed. Keeping them in the loop throughout the case writing process will make it much more likely that they will quickly agree to release the case when it is finished. They will have agreed to different stages of the case, making it much more difficult for them to say 'no' at the end.
- Always be open to criticism and ask for input when double-checking facts and figures. This will help to build trust and smooth the way for case release.
- Once you have completed your research and interviews with key players, write the case as quickly as possible. Bear in mind that your case release contact may leave the company, or a restructure may mean they no longer have the necessary authority to release the case. The faster you can get their sign-off the better!
- If you feel that case release might be a problem, mark all those parts in the case that are based on interviews or insights you got from the company. If then you run into problems regarding the case release, you can check if the case is still strong enough without those parts (typically mostly direct quotes and exhibits). If it is strong enough you could consider publishing the case based on secondary and published sources.

> ### ☰ Case release made easier
>
> – Identify your case release contact (not necessarily your protagonist) plus one or two backups.
> – Discuss the case release process with them as early as possible.
> – Explain the purpose of the case and potential benefits for the company.
> – Show them a copy of the case release document at the beginning.
> – Get initial approval to research and write the case.
> – Show your case release contact the opening paragraph and outline.
> – Get preliminary release for the case version you will use for test-teaching.
> – Ask for input when double-checking facts and figures.
> – Finish your case and request final case release as quickly as possible.

Reminder: Try to avoid the need for release of the teaching note

You do not need case release for your teaching note unless it contains additional, nonpublic information that is not already included in your case. We even think that you should not reveal the teaching note to your contact or the company. Remember, the teaching note is only addressed to your peers and is part of your academic work and freedom.

It is best to avoid the need to get case release for your teaching note. Write a 'case B' or some sort of case or teaching note supplement instead! If you feel that recent developments, an update, or additional information are really important for others using the case and this information needs a release, think about producing a separate document for which you then ask for release.

Case release template

You can use the template below to request case release.

Check with your school or institution – it may have its own case release template.

> I [add the name and title of your case release contact, and the name of the organization] authorize [add the name of your school or institution] to use the case [add the name of your case; mention other materials if necessary, e.g., supplements such as videos or texts] for:
>
> • educational purposes
> • distribution to other educational institutions and/or individuals (including via third-party providers)
> • publication.
>
> The case is a fair and accurate description of the situation.
>
> I acknowledge that the case and all accompanying materials will remain the copyright of [add the name of the respective copyright holder, which might be you or your institution] and may not be reproduced without prior written consent.
>
> [*Signature of case release contact, plus name, date, location*]

If you do not get case release…

Do not despair if at the last minute, and despite your best efforts, the company refuses to release your case. It has happened to almost all case authors – and it might quite likely happen to you. It is possible, though, to grab victory from the jaws of defeat by (1) converting your case into one

written from published sources or by (2) disguising your case. So all that preinterview research will not have been a complete waste of time!

If you have to *convert* your field-researched case into one written from published sources, you must be scrupulous in removing all the information you gained via interviews with company personnel or through documents that were given to you in confidence. Double-check that all the information that you use is publicly available.

Another potential solution could be to *disguise* the case. In the worst of all situations, i.e., if the confidential information cannot just be removed while still achieving your learning objective, keep the confidential information but change everything so that it is impossible to identify the organization and/or any of the individuals in the case.

Please remember that it is usually tricky to disguise a case (see the section 'Level of Described Detail,' page 163). You might initially think that this is little work but you will soon realize that, while it might be easy to 'lie,' it is difficult to 'lie' consistently and coherently. It will often not be sufficient to just change a few names; you will likely also need to modify many other aspects to ensure that the individuals and the organization can no longer be identified.

Finishing the teaching note

In step 5 we described the overall structure and main content of a good teaching note. If you followed our case development funnel, you should have already done a substantial part of the work. We did, however, advise you to only work on or finish several of the teaching note sections after having test-used your case in class. Now it is time to finish this important document. We will walk you through the necessary steps.

1. Case summary

In step 5 you already 'recycled' (and possibly enriched) your opening paragraph into a case summary. Now it is time to give it the finishing touches.

All major case distributors and journals require a case summary (or 'abstract' or 'synopsis') that will be used to describe your case in their catalogue. Always follow the instructions of distributors when writing your case summary – otherwise you might be forced to write it multiple times, one for the teaching note and several others for the case distributors or journals. For example, the Case Centre advises a maximum of about 200 words written in one continuous paragraph with no line breaks or bullet points. It then allows the addition of separate information such as learning objectives, topics, and settings. Look for the most restrictive requirements from all the distributors or journals that you target with your case. Then make sure that the case summary for the teaching note stays within the requested word limits.

The summary should include a brief description of your case and its context and should allow readers to get a quick overall idea of what your case is all about.

From theory to practice with Martin

Below is an example of a case summary. It is taken from my case 'Global Product Development Strategy at Bosch – Selecting a Development Site for the New Low-Cost ABS Platform.'

The case is set in February 2008. Stefan Tammler, head of the chassis systems control division (CC) of the German technology (and specifically automotive) supplier Robert Bosch GmbH (Bosch), has to make a decision about the location for the development of the new anti-lock braking system (ABS) for the low-price vehicle segment (LPV).

(Continued)

The case begins with a short introduction outlining the situation. It gives a detailed background on Bosch, especially the chassis systems control division. The main part of the case focuses on the global product development strategy, highlighting especially the two development sites in Suzhou, China; and Yokohama, Japan. Furthermore, the Chinese car market is described in detail, with special emphasis on the LPV segment.

The case concludes with Stefan Tammler having to decide where to develop the new ABS system for the LPV segment.

The case concludes with Stefan Tammler having to decide where to develop the new ABS system for the LPV segment.

Why is this a good case summary? It includes in a clear and concise format:

• the date when the case is set,
• the name and job title of the protagonist,
• the decision to be taken by the protagonist,
• the name of the company plus type of industry and geographical locations, and
• a summary of what is included in the case.

2. Keywords

Keywords are very important as they will help people to find your case, particularly when searching online collections such as those held by the Case Centre or other distributors. Despite the fact that they are more important for the final listing in the databases of the distributors or journals, many case authors also add them into a separate section in the teaching note. This is good practice as it allows other educators to quickly get an overall idea about the case and the resulting sessions.

Typical keywords include

Typical keywords will include:

• the (academic) discipline (e.g., accounting, finance, strategy),
• specific topics within this discipline (e.g., pricing, supply chain management, competitive strategy),
• more specific information about topics, tools, concepts, theories, or frameworks underlying the case (e.g., skimming, strategic alliances, corporate social responsibility),
• the industry,
• the geographic region, or
• the type of organization (multinational corporation, family business).

Aim to have three to 10 keywords (the Case Centre accepts a maximum of 15 keywords, which they call 'topics') for your case and do not only add them to the description of your case in case catalogues (distributors or journals) but also as a separate section within your teaching note.

Some of the major case distributors require case authors to select keywords from set lists or might have limitations with respect to the maximum number of keywords that can be used. Familiarize yourself with these requirements to avoid extra or wasted work. Example: Harvard Business Publishing (currently) uses the Synaptica Taxonomy for keywords and topics (clustered into discipline/subject, geography, and industry). If you plan to publish your case via Harvard Business Publishing (usually only possible if your institution has an agreement with

HBP), you should try to use this taxonomy as the basis for your keywords right from the beginning to avoid extra work.

From theory to practice with Martin

A good way to come up with keywords is to think about how I would search for a suitable teaching case that has the same learning objectives and course setting as my case.

Typically, I look for a case that fits into a specific course that I teach (discipline) and for a specific session. I will often look for a certain industry (because I know which industries I have already covered in the other sessions), and a specific region as I aim to have at least one or two cases that are based in the country that I'm teaching in.

Accordingly, you should include all those keywords that others might use in situations when they could well use your case.

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3. Learning objectives and key issues

In step 3 of the case development funnel you specified your learning objectives and issues. In step 5 you copied them into the respective section of your teaching note, without much further work. But, after having used the case multiple times in class, you will now have gained a much better understanding about what can really be achieved or not achieved when using the case. You might also have discovered that there were issues and possible learning outcomes that you did not anticipate when starting the case (e.g., through great student comments or by reading more literature about the specific field of interest). It is therefore time to revisit and finish this section.

You can integrate the description of learning objectives and key issues in one single section (as recommended by us) or separate them into two (or even three) different sections (as suggested by Leenders et al. 2010 or Naumes & Naumes 2006). We believe that these are two sides of the same coin and accordingly find it easier to combine them into one section of the teaching note to avoid redundancy and overlap.

From theory to practice with Urs

Why do we believe that the description of the learning objectives and the immediate and underlying issues should be combined? Let me present an example: In the teaching note for my case study 'Norman Nicholls at Seattle Management Consultants' I differentiate between 'teaching objectives,' 'immediate issues,' and 'basic issues.' But, even though I tried to draw a fine line between these three sections, the overlap between them is so large that I would now instead merge all of them into one single section of the teaching note as 'Learning objectives and key issues.'

Under 'Teaching Objectives' I list, e.g.:
• *Make students/participants aware of ethical dilemmas in business,*
• *Offer an opportunity to discuss corruption and blackmailing in business settings.*

Under 'Immediate issues' I list, e.g.:
• *How should Norman Nicholls respond to Jesper Lind's call, asking him to change the supplier evaluation in the outsourcing tender of Damotel?*

(Continued)

And under 'Basic issues' I list, e.g.:
- *Dealing with ethics in business in general,*
- *Dealing with corruption and blackmailing attempts in business.*

Are these bullet points so different that they merit separate sections? I do not think so anymore.

Review your descriptions of the learning objectives and the underlying issues and of the immediate issues. How much overlap do you see? If you see a value added from separating them into different sections of your teaching note, just do so. If not, follow our recommendation and merge them into one section.

Other educators (the main audience for your teaching note) will be looking for cases that match their educational needs. A proper description of the learning objectives in your teaching note will make it much easier for them to decide whether your case fits their needs or not. Accordingly, we believe that the learning objectives are the most important aspect in this section of your teaching note – and this is why we will start with them.

The description of the learning objectives should be as specific as possible. A typical list of learning objectives will usually include desired outcomes on at least two different levels: knowledge and skills. However, whether the emphasis is on knowledge or skills will inevitably vary according to the educational need that led you to write the case in the first place. An example of knowledge might be something specific such as 'learning about the pros and cons of diversification,' or your knowledge objectives may relate to:

- theories,
- concepts,
- industries,
- geographical regions,
- types of companies (family, smaller companies, multinationals, etc.).

From theory to practice with Martin

The Bosch case previously mentioned focuses more on the 'knowledge' dimension of learning. Here are the learning objectives:

- to examine the role of low-cost markets for high-tech companies;
- to illustrate the growing importance of low-cost segments, not only in developing countries (especially the so-called BRIC countries) but also in developed markets like Europe and the United States;
- to explore the challenges of organizing R&D on a global scale;
- to discuss the different roles of home-base-exploiting and home-base-augmenting R&D sites;
- to examine the linkage between business strategy and technology strategy and how this is managed on a global scale.

Your learning objectives can (and possibly should) also cover the specific skills that your case will help to develop. These may include, for example, analysis, persuasion, judgment, presentation, public speaking, creativity, and critical thinking.

In addition to this rather broad-stroke differentiation between knowledge and skills, you might also want to (implicitly or explicitly) refer to the elaborate taxonomy of learning teaching and assessing, following Benjamin Bloom, as for example proposed in Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), who differentiate between six levels (see also section 'Question types by learning objectives' page 64):

1. Remember
2. Understand
3. Apply
4. Analyze
5. Evaluate
6. Create

For many courses you might have to state the 'assurance of learnings' criteria as part of your institution's ongoing monitoring of standards (often in the context of obligations resulting from accreditations). These could provide a good basis for the description of your learning objectives – and, if you need to use specific terminology, other possible users of your case might also need the same language. Standardized terminology can make their lives much easier.

From theory to practice with Urs

As I teach and write cases mostly in the field of business ethics, many of my cases focus on skills (although there are of course important knowledge aspects). Let's take my case 'Axel Springer and the Quest for the Boundaries of Corporate Responsibility,' written together with Anna Hofman and CB Bhattacharya as an example of learning objectives that instead focus on skills:

The case exposes students to a complex situation that requires crucial decisions that might have the potential to severely backfire: Should Axel Springer feel responsible for the tainted resources used in electronic devices (especially electronic reading devices) that are needed to display Axel Springer's news digitally? Should they get involved in the issue of conflict minerals or not, and if so, how? Would Axel Springer's self-made association with conflict minerals cause the public to wonder about the actual linkage between Axel Springer and conflict minerals? To what extent would such an engagement have a negative impact on Axel Springer's digitization success?

Dealing with these questions and those below, the case is designed to enhance students' ability to:

- *weigh the pros and cons of engaging in a highly disputable situation and argue for or against action,*
- *identify and analyze stakeholders,*
- *put themselves into other stakeholders' shoes,*
- *assess and sketch scopes of responsibility,*
- *develop strategies going forward, and*
- *measure the success of CR activities.*

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4. Target participants and course context

If you test-used the case in several different settings (e.g., with respect to different levels of experience/seniority of participants, in different countries/cultural settings, in different courses, or with

different group sizes) you will have developed a much better judgment about the setting in which the case works best. Now it is therefore the right time to get back to this section of the teaching note and to rework the definition of the target participants and course context.

In this section of the teaching note, explain who your case is aimed at in relation to:

1. Experience/seniority of participants (e.g., undergraduates, graduates, MBA students, executives, or a combination of these).
2. Field of study/domain (e.g., business administration, economics, healthcare management, international policymaking).
3. Course context, including information about:
   • the general type of program (e.g., generalist or specialist programs);
   • the type of course (e.g., mandatory/core course or elective);
   • the relative position of the course within the program (e.g., beginning, middle, or end);
   • the relative position of the respective session within the course (again: beginning, middle or end).
   Examples: 'introductory case study for first session in core course on sales management,' 'summary case for elective course on mergers and acquisitions.'
4. Prerequisites in terms of knowledge and skills (e.g., ability to read financial statements and to perform ratio analysis)

This section could also include comments about your experiences gained during test-use of the case with any of the target audiences. If you observed relevant differences with different contexts and audiences, describe how the context influenced the flow and outcome of your sessions, and when and how other facilitators might need to adjust the flow of their session.

5. Suggested participant assignments

Questions regarding participant assignments

We recommend that you get back to your initial student assignments and update if necessary.

Ask yourself:

• Are the assignments still applicable if you changed the case, e.g., the learning objectives, the immediate issue, the cutoff point, the protagonist, or the level of detail in the case?
• Which questions worked well in class? Which didn't?
• Which other effective questions did you come up with in class that could also be given as assignment/guiding questions?
• Is there a need to perform analysis or extra research before being able to discuss the case meaningfully in class?

Then edit your assignments as necessary.

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6. Analysis

Please review your analysis section (or the relevant passages of a merged analysis and teaching plan section) critically and modify if necessary. Consider especially the following aspects:

• changes to the case (different numbers, different level of detail);
• insights during the test-use (e.g., surprising discoveries by your participants);

- ease of understanding (can other educators easily follow your analysis and understand the link to the relevant concepts, tools, theories, and frameworks?);
- language and style: while it was sufficient to use acronyms, bullet point lists, etc. while drafting the first version of this section, you should now polish the language.

7. Teaching plan

Before finishing the teaching plan section of your teaching note, revisit your notes and refresh your memories from test-using the case. Then carefully review this section – changing or adding content as needed. Pay special attention to:

- timing and number of building blocks,
- general usability of teaching plan/building blocks,
- passing on experience.

Timing and number of building blocks

As for almost all of the previous sections of your teaching note, please revisit the suggested timings after having taught your case a couple of times. You will probably observe a need to modify some of the timings as certain blocks will have taken more or less time than anticipated.

Especially when realizing that you planned too many building blocks, you might want to decide to eliminate certain blocks. But that does not necessarily need to be a loss of work or ideas: you should instead consider moving these building blocks to a different section of the teaching note, namely to the 'alternative teaching plans' (see page 235).

General usability of teaching plan/building blocks

While you can (and should) be very creative and open with respect to learning formats that you use in your own classes (also for your own cases), you will – unfortunately – be more limited in the selection and description of the learning formats in the teaching note. Sometimes the way in which you teach your own case might be drastically different from the teaching plan in the teaching note. So far, the work on the teaching plan has focused on your own use of the case – legitimately so. But before the publication you should now critically reflect possible changes that are necessary when other educators want to use your case.

From theory to practice with Urs

Let me share a few examples of learning formats that I use from my own cases that will typically be difficult to reproduce for others and that are therefore not reflected in the teaching notes of these cases:

- Visits: Do you plan to include visits to a special place in the usage of your own case? This will probably be impossible for others.
  - Example: I coauthored a case study about a snack stand in Berlin (Müller & Etzold 2012, 'Waltraud Ziervogel at Konnopke's Imbiss: Re-inventing a Berlin icon'). When teaching the case myself (and in Berlin), I tend to start on campus with a group exercise before going to the location of the case study. After enjoying their product, I then debrief the

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(Continued)

case on site. This requires a fundamentally different teaching approach (noise, no black-board, bystanders, etc.). The teaching note therefore describes a session flow that is structured around specific frameworks/concepts/tools and is much more convergent than the explorative learning formats that I use myself when using the case.

- Guests: Closing a session by bringing in a guest, ideally the protagonist, is usually a great idea – but most likely impossible for others.
  – Example: I once cowrote a case (Müller & Habel 2015, 'ESMT's Pitch to EAD Systems') in which I am the protagonist myself. Accordingly, I'm usually easily available to bring the protagonist's perspective into the class and to update the participants about the fur-ther developments. Obviously, this will be different for other instructors – including for my coauthor. To bring the protagonist's perspective into the classroom we therefore conducted a video interview which is now available as supplementary material.
- Samples/artifacts: Sometimes it is a great idea to take products, samples, or other artifacts in order to bring the case to life in the classroom, but it might be difficult for other instruc-tors to obtain these things, especially whenever they are located in different countries.
  – Example: I have a physical share of the German football club BVB including the cou-pons. Whenever teaching my case 'Defining the Purpose for Borussia Dortmund GmbH & Co. KGaA' (coauthored with Ulrich Linnhoff and Bernhard Pellens), I circulate the share and use this to quickly discuss the logic of shares in general before moving to my core learning objectives. It will probably be difficult (or too costly) for other instructors to use this learning format if anybody else chooses my case for their class.

Therefore, you should critically reflect on all of your proposed learning formats to deter-mine which will really work for others – and not only for your own usage of the case.

Passing on your experience

The final revision of your teaching plan is also your chance to share in greater detail your own experiences with teaching the case. Obviously, this is something you can only do well once you have taught the case a couple of times. But by now you have done so and might want to include a few descriptions of your own experiences with the case. This may include, for example:

- typical reactions from participants (helpful to prepare other instructors about what type of responses they should expect);
- potential areas of misunderstanding or difficulty (e.g., where did some participants simply get something wrong?);
- questions teachers should probably avoid (e.g., because they tend to lead in 'wrong' directions);
- how to tease out more obscure comments and remarks; or
- points where the discussion tends to go off topic and how to remedy this.

8. Teaching plan for online/hybrid

Similar to the teaching plan just above, you can now, after having potentially test-taught the case draft online, revise this section. You can also go into more detail and elaborate on topics like:

- What kind of technical setup did you choose?
- Did you experience any technical difficulties that you can share so that others can avoid them?
- Which specific online tools worked well, which worked not so well?
- Was the case teaching embedded into a learning management system?

9. Board plan

If you followed our recommendation and took pictures of your boards after every test use of the case, you should by now have a nice collection of pictures. Use these to improve the first version of your board plan from step 5.

10. Recommended additional material for participants

The more prepared participants are for the case discussion, the better their learning experience and the higher quality the case discussion will be. Therefore, it is important to provide a list of additional material that might improve participants' understanding of the case context and the issues at stake. This will be of use to your intended audience and will also enable facilitators to use your case with a wider audience who may be less familiar with some aspects such as the industry, geography, or legal context. The extra materials you recommend in your teaching note should help participants fully understand the case, its context, and the underlying theories and concepts.

Your recommended list of additional material for participants could differentiate between:

- additional material for (1) the preparation of the class or (2) for follow-up study after the session, and
- (1) optional material and (2) required material.

Typical additional material to be listed in your teaching note may include (not an exhaustive list):

- textbooks (chapters),
- academic or managerial articles,
- press articles (online, newspapers, magazines, etc.),
- company commercials,
- videos (e.g., YouTube),
- publicly available interviews with key players in the case, or
- company and trade reports.

It is important to get the balance right. In reality, it is often difficult to persuade participants to just read the case in advance of the session, so do not expect them to read a lot of additional material as well. However, easy-to-digest items such as short video clips (whether created by you or publicly available) are a good way to create even more interest.

11. Sources and additional material for facilitators

Make your teaching note as useful as possible for educators. A list of additional background information is an important part of this. This section should include a list with proper references of various kinds of material that will help other educators. Think about your own teaching: When using cases from others for our own teaching, don't we occasionally run into the same issue? We pick a case on the basis of key words, learning objectives, excitement about the immediate issue, etc., but realize during the preparation that, e.g.,

- there are individual concepts, theories, tools, or frameworks that we have never heard so far;
- we are missing knowledge about the (cultural, historical, industry-specific) context/setting of the case;
- we are afraid that our participants (especially when using a case in executive education) might know more about the case than us.

Help your colleagues to deal with such challenges, by including references to additional material! This section can potentially include a wide variety of materials, for example:

- relevant academic or managerial literature,
- textbooks (focus on the most commonly used),
- other books,
- background material to understand the context of the case (including reports, presentations, webpages, etc.),
- journal and newspaper articles,
- a case website (if you plan to set one up), or
- video clips.

From theory to practice with Urs

I wrote a case study about a (possible) mutiny against the Portuguese sailor and explorer Ferdinand Magellan that happened in 1520 ('Magellan versus Quesada: To Mutiny or Not to Mutiny?'). This is obviously a rather special context and other educators might not know much about the overall story of the expedition or might be afraid of having history geeks in their class. At the same time, the case invites for the discussion, the application or introduction of many different concepts, theories, and frameworks from multiple different domains. It is therefore unlikely that other educators can simply use the case following my teaching note. Accordingly, the teaching note has almost four pages of lists of novels, books about expeditions, academic and managerial articles, webpages, etc. to help fill knowledge gaps of other educators should they wish to do so.

Make sure you include clear, traceable and proper references and links to all the additional material you are recommending in your teaching note. It is vital to check back every so often to ensure that all the references and links in your teaching note are still up to date and working. For example, a book may have gone into a new edition or be out of print, and website links may be broken or the pages no longer available.

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12. Other

There are a number of other sections that you could include in your teaching note, for example to cover the outcome of the case and/or alternative ways to use the case. All of them aim at increasing the variability of using the case – and thus will ultimately increase the probability of other educators using your case in their classes.

a. Outcome of the case

Participants frequently want to know what happened in 'real life' – what the outcome of the case was. But our fundamental belief is that the discussion and reasoning that takes place in the classroom is far more relevant than the actual outcome or developments after the cutoff time.

And, because participants sometimes mistakenly believe that the actual decision taken by the protagonist was the 'right' or 'best' solution, we sometimes choose not to reveal what happened (of course, we are aware that the information may be available online).

However, each facilitator who uses your case must be able to decide if they wish to reveal the real-life outcome, and so we believe this information should be included in the teaching note (or, alternatively, in a separate case B [which would require the purchase of licenses for use by others] or in a separate teaching note supplement [which you could then offer free of charge to other educators through the educator log-ins of the various case distributors]).

Remember that you can only add an update to your teaching note if the information is publicly available. If your case is field-researched and it includes information from the company that is not included in the case itself, you will have to get release for the teaching note as well! This is best avoided – because the protagonist or company might want to have a say about the analysis. This, however, is part of your academic work and should not be subject to third-party consent. Instead, it may be worth using any supplementary information you have from the company to write a case (B) or a separate teaching note supplement (see below).

b. Alternative teaching plans

Throughout this entire chapter, we have encouraged you to produce your case mainly to address your own needs. Hopefully, this will result in a case that works very well in your courses and classes and that achieves the desired learning objectives. Your teaching note, however, targets other instructors who might want to use your case in their class. And for them your teaching plan might just not fit exactly. Probably you have had similar experiences when teaching cases from others: In order to successfully use existing cases from case repositories, there is usually a need for some sort of adaptation and modification in teaching the case compared to the described teaching plan in the teaching note. This is usually due to one or both of the two possible drivers of changes:

- alternative timings (especially session durations etc.),
- alternative learning objectives (which can be driven by different settings or audiences).

To make the lives of other instructors easier, we invite you to quickly sketch out alternative teaching plans in your teaching note.

Your teaching note is an excellent marketing tool. And providing more than one teaching plan is a great way to maximize the appeal of your case. This demonstrates how it can be easily adapted, enabling other educators to use it for their own purposes with minimal effort.

Timings

The length, number, frequency, etc. of class sessions varies widely across academic institutions. It is helpful to sketch out how your case can be used in different settings. Many schools have standard session durations between 60 and 90 minutes. You will probably have used your institution's standard for the timing in the teaching plan. Now think about different settings and describe possible modifications, when using your case:

- in sessions of different lengths (longer or shorter), or
- over different numbers of sessions.

When reviewing other authors' cases for potential use in our own sessions, we frequently struggle with adapting the suggested timings. That is why we strongly recommend you suggest alternative timings for various scenarios. For example, offer a teaching plan for a single 90-minute session, and two alternative suggestions:

- one for teaching it over two sessions, and
- one suitable for a single 60-minute session.

The alternative two-session plan can include suggestions for making meaningful use of the extra time, for example by deepening the investigation of certain topics through additional learning activities such as group work, role-play, and presentations.

The 60-minute plan could suggest which of the building blocks are most easily shortened or omitted.

Learning objectives

As already mentioned, the overall purpose of the teaching note is to enable other faculty to teach your case successfully and achieve the intended learning objectives. However, always bear in mind that their intended learning objectives might be slightly different from yours. Because they will use your case in a different setting (different types of participants, different country, different course context, different position of session in course, different accompanying material, etc.), other instructors will probably have different learning objectives in mind.

To deal with this, you could provide alternative teaching plans, each highlighting a different learning objective. Alternatively, you just might want to point out what other learning objectives could be achieved when using the case and how this would affect the teaching plan.

From theory to practice with Urs

An example of providing alternative teaching plans to accommodate different learning objectives might be the teaching note I created with Ulf Schäfer for the case 'Who's Responsible for the Drawbridge Drama?'

The teaching note offers different ways in which the case can be used to achieve no fewer than up to nine different learning objectives:

The case discussion may address one or several different issues and of course depends heavily on the learning objectives and time available. Out of the broad range of possible topics, we will focus on the following six aspects:

1. The role of ambiguity in leadership contexts
2. The effect of reference frames
3. Working with cases/learning from case discussions
4. The psychological need to personalize responsibility
5. The idea of responsibility in business
6. The seemingly limited power of reason in moral debates

If time allows (for example, if the case is used in the context of an extended programme or a session on business ethics or responsible leadership) the debriefing may go significantly beyond the scope of the case by introducing helpful terminology and models that might become more relevant in subsequent sessions. In Appendix 1 we will briefly present three alternative or additional debriefing options:

7. Two types of ethical reasoning (deontological vs. consequentialist)
8. The 7 Cs (by Derek Abell) to avoid ethical dilemmas
9. Katz's debrief of the case in the context of anti-racism training

The teaching note to this case then describes (in the appendix) didactical approaches for each of these additional objectives.

b. Examination and grading

In case-based courses, case studies are sometimes also used as the basis for exams. It can therefore be very useful to include some suggestions in your teaching note about using your case in an exam, and about how the exam should be graded. It has to be admitted, however, that this is not a standard element of most teaching notes; i.e., consider adding this section especially if you used your case for an exam yourself. (See page 123 for more on grading case-based courses.)

Instructions on how to use your case for exams and grading in the teaching note could include:

- instructions about when to read the case (before the exam; during the exam);
- allowed materials;
- closed questions that can be used to validate comprehension of the case (possibly including multiple-choice responses);
- closed questions to test the understanding of specific tools, theories, and concepts illustrated in the case (you could include sample responses);
- open questions to set an essay-type exam to assess analytical capabilities (you could include sample responses and the draft of an exam evaluation rubric);
- suggested total time for the entire exam and/or for individual questions;
- a grading/scoring rubric, i.e., information about:
  – expected/sample answers,
  – relative weights for the different questions and answers.

Make sure your suggested exam questions are not just duplicates of the assignment questions you have suggested as part of the coursework, for at least two reasons:

1. If your case is quite long and participants need to read it before the exam, the participants might just google the assignment questions and standard responses.
2. The suggested participant assignment questions should be written with the class interaction in mind. They will frequently be very open-ended, whereas good questions for exams should include some closed questions to ease the grading process.

c. Exhibits

As in case studies, teaching notes can (and frequently do) include exhibits. As with the exhibits in the case study, follow the conventions, i.e., call them 'Exhibits,' number and present them in the sequence in which they are referenced in the teaching note, present them at the end of the teaching note, and do not forget to include sources and references whenever applicable.

☰ Examples of typical teaching note exhibits

Examples of typical teaching note exhibits include:

- tables, data, results from exemplary analysis (especially for quantitative cases);
- (visual) frameworks filled with information from case (analysis) (e.g., five forces or SWOT analysis);
- process flow diagrams;
- decision trees; or
- information (quantitative or qualitative) that is expected to be collected by participants as part of an assigned background.

d. Teaching note (or case) supplements

Finally, you might want to consider adding teaching note (or case) supplements. These are additional but separate documents that accompany your teaching note. There are multiple possible types of teaching note supplements, most of which we discuss at other places (mostly below), e.g.:

- presentation slide decks for use by other instructors in class,
- separate updates about the outcomes of the case,
- any other type of text document,
- videos.

When/why and how should separate teaching note supplements be used? Simply to help other educators, e.g., by providing more information. There is, however, also another reason: The use of cases from others usually requires the purchase of a license. These license fees are most frequently collected by the large distributors on a per participant and document basis. If you just write one single case study, other educators will just need to buy this one license multiplied by the number of participants on the course. Sometimes a case pack might include multiple documents (e.g., case plus update about case outcome, or – as frequently for negotiation or role-play case studies – case plus confidential information for multiple parties). In such situations, the cost of using your case increases drastically – and this might make other instructors less likely to use your case just because of cost considerations.

Digital instructor materials (teaching notes, teaching note supplements, etc.) are provided free to registered educators by case distributors. In this situation, a teaching note supplement (or sometimes also offered as case supplement) might be a possible solution: produce one main case (for which licenses need to be acquired) and move everything else to case or teaching note supplements that can be downloaded free of charge through the educator log-in of the large case distributors.

An added benefit of moving the outcome of the case into a separate teaching note supplement: You will not need to get release for your teaching note (as it now does not contain confidential information). And, given that the teaching note should be considered part of your academic work, this is how it should be!

8. Publishing the case and teaching note

Congratulations, you have finished your case study and the accompanying teaching note. Well done! This was the main purpose of the case writing section of this book. But we have two more optional steps left in the case development funnel: publishing and promoting your case study.

Some of you might only want to use their own case study and do not care about publishing it. But we suspect that, for most of you, once the bulk of the work is done, it makes a lot of sense to invest just a little bit more energy to publish the case and teaching note. And we promise, compared to the time and energy that you have already invested, this almost final step is not very time-intense and complicated, especially if you have followed our case development funnel along the way.

There are fundamentally three ways to publish your case, and these are not exclusive and can potentially be mixed:

- in your school's case collection,
- with a case distributor (the Case Centre, CPMA, Ivey Publishing, Harvard Business Publishing, etc.),
- in a journal (*Case Folio, Global Journal of Business Pedagogy, IMA Educational Case Journal, The CASE Journal, International Journal of Teaching and Case Studies*, etc.).

There are pros and cons for each of those and the requirements might be very different not only for each of these categories but even between the different options within a category. The only way to find out is to identify potential outlets and then go to the respective websites and check the requirements.

Here we will describe the process for publication with the Case Centre as one example. But even this might change over time, and it is best to check on www.thecasecentre.org/submissionrequirements for the most up-to-date information.

The Case Centre offers an online submission process. The following information/documents must be submitted:

- the case study as a PDF document,
- the teaching as a PDF document,
- data source (e.g., field research, published sources, generalized experience),
- subject category (e.g., entrepreneurship, marketing),
- topics (at least one, no more than 15),
- learning objectives (at least one, no more than five),
- abstract (it suggests around 200 words),
- author and copyright ownership information.

Important requirements:

- A signed case release form has to be supplied for all field-based cases.
- Case, teaching note, and all metadata must be provided in English. Additionally, translations can also be submitted.
- The case has to have been tested at least twice in the classroom (you will need to give full details of course title on which the material was taught, name of the institution at which it was taught, details of the educator who taught it, date when it was taught, and number of students in the class).

When the online submission process is complete the case will be available worldwide! It will also be listed in the monthly email update service. Congratulations!

9. Promoting your case study

'Publicity can be terrible. But only if you don't have any.' – Jane Russell

Your case is ready to be unleashed into the world! It has been edited, tested, polished, perfected, and published. So, what is next? How can you make your case stand out from the crowd?

We know many case writers who are happy to simply use their case with their own students. However, we would argue that, having put in the considerable time and effort to write an effective case, it would be a shame not to get more mileage out of it. We believe you deserve it! So, what can you do?

Spread the news

Here are a few suggestions and recommendations to spread the fame of your new masterpiece:

- Start with the basics: Spread the news about your case within your institution. Tell your colleagues about it and invite them to see you teaching it in the classroom.
- Do you have a blog, personal website, or official online profile? If so, do not forget to add details about your case.

- Are you on Twitter, LinkedIn, or any other social media site? Again, share news about the launch of your case. If your case has been published, make sure you tag the case distributor – they will often amplify your news through their channels.
- Does your institution maintain a database of faculty expertise? Make sure your profile includes details of your case-writing activities and related company/industry in-depth knowledge.
- Be sure to tell your institution's PR and marketing teams about your new case. They may be able to promote it on your behalf and will also bear you in mind when contacted by journalists looking for an expert in your field.
- Proactively contact newspapers, magazines, and journals that cover cases.
- The Case Centre regularly features a number of cases in its online newsletter (www .thecasecentre.org/connect), which goes to thousands of subscribers worldwide. Suggestions for inclusion are always welcome, so be sure to submit yours for consideration.

Give it a try: case competitions can greatly enhance your case's visibility

There are many case competitions held every year and a full list can be found at www.thecase centre.org/casewritingcompetitions. If successful (and you will not know unless you try – we recommend entering as many competitions as possible), you will gain credibility in the classroom and among your peers, raise your profile (often internationally), and get some great publicity for your case and school. Most case writing competitions offer a financial reward to the winners – a great added bonus!

Enhance the appeal of your case

As well as actively promoting your case as outlined above, you can also take steps to make your case more immediately appealing to colleagues and educators at other institutions worldwide. One sure way to achieve this is to enrich your case with supplementary material.

Cases that include additional elements, such as slides, software simulations, video clips, extra tools such as frameworks and questionnaires, and dedicated case websites, are always far more appealing to educators than a simple standalone text-only case. Supplementary materials give potential users of your case more confidence as they will be armed with additional background information and a variety of materials to use in the classroom.

Most case distributors are pleased to distribute supplementary material alongside your case and teaching note.

Broaden your potential audience: translate your case into other languages

Many programs that are not run in English are now increasingly frequently using case studies. Consider publishing your case in other languages than just English. This can be for your own needs or to reach additional audiences. But be aware that the translation might need to specify content that is context-specific (e.g., currency, political situation, geography, company background, etc.). And, last but not least, do not add new information that would require you to get a new case release.

☰ **Promoting your case**

– Spread the news: Do not keep your new case to yourself!
– Share the news online via your blog, website and social media.

(Continued)

–Tell your marketing and PR people.
–Proactively submit your case to newspapers, journals and newsletters.
–Enter case competitions.
–Enhance the appeal of your case with supplementary material.

Developing alternative format case studies

'Technology is anything that wasn't around when you were born.' – Alan Kay

Why a plain case might not be enough

As we have already discussed, the main purpose of a case is to create interest, foster curiosity, and stimulate thought and discussion in the classroom. Or, to put it another way, a good case offers the opportunity to embark on a journey of discovery.

This can, of course, be successfully achieved with a traditional text case study. However, we now have many other options available that can enhance or even replace traditional case formats. These options include various media that are commonly available such as audio, video, blogs, websites, online quizzes, games, and simulations.

From the inclusion of a basic video or website link to, at the other end of the spectrum, 'virtual world' cases created and taught online, technology is a fundamental component of many cases now being created.

However, in our view, technology should be the means and not the end. Always ask yourself whether the use of technology genuinely enhances your case and whether it would really be poorer without it. Do not add lots of multimedia 'bells and whistles' to your case just because you think you should or because you hope it will impress your students.

Also, be aware that technology changes quickly. For example, using or making reference to websites or other online resources might mean that you will have to revise your case much more frequently.

There are also challenges associated with distributing alternative format cases to a wider audience. You will need to discuss possible options with each case distributor.

Reasons to incorporate new technologies/media

Your target audience

In the section about 'leads and needs' in case writing we explained the necessity of having a clear target audience in mind for your case. In addition, you should also reflect on which media your target audience uses, how it is used, and whether there is easy access to it. You do not want to alienate your target audience: the aim is to further increase engagement among participants by using popular and familiar technology.

It is important to note that technology can also 'level the playing field' in the classroom by accommodating students with different learning styles, and by offering less confident students nontraditional forums in which to participate and have their say. For example, online voting tools offer all participants an equal opportunity to have their say in a less visible forum than the classroom. And asynchronous online discussions give participants more time for individual reflection before making their contribution, instead of being overwhelmed by the speed of a classroom discussion.

The topic

Your case may be an ideal candidate for the inclusion of multimedia if the topic is relevant, for example if the learning objectives include references to digital transformation, digital media, or social media.

From theory to practice with Martin and Urs

In 2014, we wanted to write a case about the digital transformation of the big German media company Axel Springer. While discussing the learning objectives, we immediately decided that the case itself should also be an example of digital transformation and not only incorporate new technologies but potentially be completely based on new technology.

As a result, we initially decided to create the case as an 'app.' However, although this was a great idea, we unfortunately never finished the project for a number of reasons. The situation at Axel Springer was moving very quickly, and we were not quite comfortable with using an app format. Nevertheless, we have included this story because we feel it illustrates the huge potential that multimedia has. The app idea was exciting and inspiring and would have been perfect for the case we planned to create – it just wasn't right for us at that time.

Personal choice

Your approach to case writing should always reflect your personality and you should feel comfortable with the technologies that you want to use to produce the case. If you are not comfortable and confident using multimedia in the classroom and ultimately multimedia to produce the case, then it will not work for you or your participants.

It is good practice to build up a broad portfolio of cases that you can teach in your area of expertise. This may be a mix of your own cases and those of other authors, and you may wish to make sure that you have at least one or two multimedia cases in your portfolio. But they do not have to be your own.

Advantages of using technology

Using technology enables you to seamlessly incorporate different media formats such as audio and video into your case. This can be as simple as including links to online materials in your case or at the other extreme may involve creating a dedicated website for your case where students can find additional information and materials.

Dedicated websites (or potentially even apps) might also offer an additional advantage. While a traditional paper- or PDF-based case leads the reader through the story, online formats can break with this linear approach: participants can decide for themselves how to browse and explore the information and in what order, going back and forth much more easily and naturally than when dealing with traditional text.

Finally, technology can increase the complexity of the case, especially in its presentation. In a more traditional case, the participants are more likely to see all the relevant information after going through it from start to finish. With an online multimedia case this might be more difficult and challenging as content is linked and embedded differently.

Ways to incorporate technology and different media

Adding on

The easiest and most obvious way to use different media in your case is to keep the traditional format as a base and add multimedia materials as a valuable enhancement. There are a few different ways to do this:

- provide URLs in the text of the case;
- incorporate hyperlinks or QR codes;
- list online resources at the end of the case;
- provide your own video (or audio) material (for example interviews or site visits) digitally or make the material available online (you could create your own YouTube channel);
- provide links to additional online material such as commercials, video material aimed at employees, publicly available media interviews or company promotions.

Participants can also be invited to create and upload their own videos as part of the mix, perhaps making a short presentation 'in character' as the case protagonist, or to simply share their views about the issues to be discussed in class. This is one way to encourage students who are less confident in class to participate.

Fully embracing new technology

Instead of simply adding different media to your case, you could dispense with the traditional written component altogether and create a wholly online case. There are many ways to do this, including:

- video case,
- case in the form of a website,
- case as an app,
- a simulation,
- a virtual/augmented reality case.

The case method's effortless embrace of technology and multimedia in all its forms is testament to its flexibility and adaptability.

However, when considering creating a fully multimedia case it is important to think about the additional resources (technical, financial, etc.) that you will need. Some schools are well set up to support case writers who wish to explore this option and you should speak to the learning designers and technical team at your institution. It is also key to give thought to the support that may be needed to use the case in class – for example, will you need members of your IT team to be on call?

Using multimedia

- – Make technology the means, not the end.
- – Use multimedia to enhance your case, not to impress.
- – Always keep your audience in mind.
- – Remember: multimedia aspects of your case may need frequent updates.

Typical mistakes in case developments

'You must learn from the mistakes of others. You can't possibly live long enough to make them all yourself.' – Sam Levenson

Of course, there are any number of mistakes that you can make when writing a case and we cannot possibly list them all here. However, we can cover some of the most common errors that are very easy to fall into. Even experienced case writers are not immune. We are often too close to our own work to spot its weaknesses, and that is why it is very important to get independent feedback from a trusted colleague. Equally vital is the process of testing your case in the classroom, as we have already discussed.

Here are the main pitfalls to be aware of as you draft and refine your case:

- overloading your case with facts, figures and detail;
- including too many issues;
- being biased toward or against your protagonist and company;
- preaching instead of teaching;
- giving away too much;
- using too much jargon and industry-specific language.

Overloading your case with facts, figures and detail

Whether your case is based on field research, published sources, or a mix of both, you will have spent a lot of time and effort gathering all the information you need. We can pretty much guarantee (from personal experience) what happens next:

- You are unwilling to leave out any of the information because it was such hard work to get it in the first place.
- You do not know what to leave out and what to keep in.
- You are tempted to leave too much in rather than make the mistake of taking too much out. Kassarjian and Kashani (2005: 110) put it very nicely: 'You must resist the temptation to find ways to include everything you found: you are not trying to prove your diligence at data collection, but trying to compose a learning script, one that has clear focus and can hold interest of the reader.'

This is where the discipline of case writing kicks in. First of all, it is very useful to remember that none of your research will be wasted. The information you leave out will serve as great background detail when teaching the case and will enhance your status as an authority on the topic. Also, some of the material you exclude from the case will be very useful for your teaching note.

Your case should include only the information that is directly relevant to the issue or issues you want to discuss and the learning objectives you want to achieve.

Spare a thought for your reader: They do not want to wade through pages and pages of research that may or may not have a bearing on the key issues in general or on your session in particular. Your aim is to engage, excite, and inspire in your classroom discussion. You must be objective and ask yourself: is this interesting and relevant, or just interesting? Everything you include must be both interesting and relevant.

However, this does not mean that you must strip your case to the bare bones. This is particularly important when one of the learning objectives for participants is to discriminate between which information is relevant and which is not (see the analytical dimension of the case difficulty cube, page 19). As an additional challenge, this may even involve the inclusion of contradictory information.

You can see there is a fine balance to strike when deciding which information to include in your case. To help you decide, it is vital to keep your learning objectives in mind.

Including too many issues

During your research, a number of issues may arise that you feel should be included. However, do not be tempted to squeeze them all into a single case. A case with multiple issues will be impossible to teach effectively and it will be very difficult to focus on specific learning objectives.

A good solution is to write a case series if the issues are linked, or separate cases if the issues are not related in any meaningful way.

From theory to practice with Martin

For executive education programs we are sometimes asked to write a single, topic-heavy case covering multiple issues. The idea is that participants will cover each topic in turn as they move through the course.

However, in our experience, the results are rarely satisfactory. This is because it is difficult to prevent participants from discussing more than one topic from the case without looking as though we are trying to control the class discussion too much. This is demotivating for participants, and they start to disengage.

A far better solution is to write a case series or separate cases about the same company with each case covering a discrete topic and featuring different protagonists.

Being biased toward or against your protagonist and company

As you research and write your case, you will inevitably form opinions about the course of events and the people involved. However, you must guard against allowing your personal viewpoint to color the way you present the issues.

It is essential to ensure that your account of the situation is balanced and neutral. Never include your personal opinions or commentary in your case. It is also necessary to guard against more subtle forms of bias, such as giving one character more 'airtime' than another or selecting information that puts one person or company in a good light and another in a bad light.

The following representative extract is a type of bias we very often see:

The company made an excellent choice when it acquired …

The word 'excellent' needs to be removed as this reveals the writer's approval of what took place. It is simple to make this information neutral, with the added benefit that you also make it shorter:

The company acquired …

'Excellent' is, of course, an adjective. The use of adjectives is a warning sign that subjectivity may have crept into your case; be very careful when using them.

Writing to convince instead of writing to engage

There is no point in using your case to 'prove' your theories or share your in-depth diagnosis of a situation. If you do, we can almost guarantee that this will lead to resistance and participants will probably go to great lengths to prove you wrong. A case should not be used to prove something but should act as an invitation to discuss and explore the issues – always keep this in mind when writing your case.

Your aim is to encourage debate and discussion and to guide others toward a plausible solution in the circumstances, not to present your solution at the start and wait for everyone's agreement.

To help with this, refer to the case difficulty cube (page 19). Do not make your case too easy from an analytical or conceptual perspective. Participants will then be empowered to make discoveries for themselves.

Giving away too much

We like to say that writing a case is like telling a story. However, perhaps we need to be more precise: you should tell a story but leave it unfinished. Do not give too much away or there will be no work left to do in the classroom. Follow the example of typical TV dramas – they always leave you guessing at the end of each episode to ensure you return for the next one.

Write a story but end with a cliffhanger. The reader should always be left with the question 'what happens next?' And, more importantly, you will be in the position to ask your participants: 'what should happen next?'

Using too much jargon and industry-specific language

If you are familiar with an industry or market sector, it is very easy to forget that others may not understand the acronyms and jargon that are part of your everyday vocabulary. This can be very alienating and may reduce the wider appeal of your case.

Always try to use everyday language in your case, avoiding technical expressions and specialist terminology. This will help to ensure that your case reaches as wide an audience as possible.

Avoiding common mistakes

– Ask a trusted colleague for feedback.
– Always test your case in the classroom.
– Don't dump your data.
– Focus on a specific issue.
– Stay neutral.
– Teach, don't preach.
– Don't give away too much.
– Avoid jargon and specialist vocabulary.

Resourcing: getting support for your case development

> *'Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.'* – Helen Keller

Writing a good case and teaching note is a lot of work, although there are a number of steps you can take to reduce the work involved. But to be clear from the start: There are some aspects of

writing a case that cannot (or at least should not) be delegated. Only you (together with your coauthor(s) if you are collaborating) can:

- write your case outline (see page 176). This is a vital stage of case writing and your sole responsibility,
- test the case in class, or
- write the teaching note.

However, there are many ways you can lighten your workload and save time by calling on the help of others. This works best when it becomes a mutually beneficial process. For example, by asking a student to draft all or part of your case, you will save time and benefit from a fresh perspective, while your student will gain knowledge and fresh insights as well as honing their writing skills. This is a win–win situation (and makes your case a great learning tool in more ways than one!).

Never lose sight of the fact that this is your case, and you need to stay in overall control of every aspect of the writing process, including the final editing/review stage. Irrespective of the type and level of support, as an author you are responsible for the final product, and you need to ensure adequate representation of the contribution of others.

Who can help?

There are several people who may be able to help in various ways with your case. Where this involves financial outlay, you will need to decide if you can justify the cost within the overall budget you have set aside for writing your case. Here are a few key people and resources you may be able to call on:

- students,
- research and teaching assistants,
- the publishing department at your institution,
- the company your case is about,
- professional writers and copyeditors,
- consultants working in the business or industry you wish to write about.

What can they do?

Their support activities may include:

- sharing expertise and/or key contacts,
- supplementary desk-based research,
- researching relevant literature,
- number-crunching and analytics,
- transcribing interviews,
- drafting the text of all or part of your case,
- proofreading and copyediting,
- observing and taking notes when you test your case in class (these notes can be invaluable when creating the teaching and blackboard plans for your case, particularly relating to the questions you ask and the responses that can be expected).

In addition, human resource, communications, or investor relations departments at the company you are working with should be able to provide key information such as a company history, CVs for your key personnel, and descriptions of processes and policies.

Financial resources

How much money will you need to write your case? You need to think about this in advance and create a realistic budget. Be clear about how you will finance various aspects of your case. Here are a few of the main costs you may need to factor in:

- travel expenses in relation to interviewing or site visits;
- professional copywriting, editing, and proofreading fees;
- translation fees (for both the case itself and all the related materials);
- creation of multimedia materials (for example, videos, dedicated web pages);
- general administrative and office costs.

Some institutions set aside budgets specifically for case writing, but this is fairly rare. It is good practice to reduce costs by combining your other professional (and even leisure) activities with case writing. For example, if you are traveling to a conference or to teach at another institution, take the opportunity to carry out interviews or make site visits. Similarly, the development and preparation of a teaching program can often be combined with case writing activities.

One of the best ways to control your financial costs is to stick to your case writing schedule. If you allow the case writing process to drag on, your costs will inevitably increase.

☰ Support and resources

– Even if you get support, if you are the (co)author you need to be in control and are responsible!
– You must at least write the case outline and develop the teaching plan by yourself.
– You must test the case in class.
– Stay in control from start to finish.
– Decide who can help with what.
– Make workload sharing a win–win situation.
– Create a realistic budget.
– Control costs by sticking to your schedule.

Structured approach to developing your own case studies

Writing your first case and developing a case portfolio

We hope you become a keen case writer and eventually build up your own collection of cases. As a regular case writer, you will need to find some way to keep tabs on everything; you may have a mix of published cases, cases in progress, and cases out for approval. Your cases may also cover different topics and subject areas. It can be a good idea to create a framework that offers an instant visual summary of the status of all your cases.


From theory to practice with Urs

Case framework

I like to use a Venn diagram to organize all my cases. You can see that this simple layout provides a lot of information in a single glance, including:

- the current status of cases (color-coded to denote published, in progress, out for review or unable to publish);

(Continued)

- which topics they cover (one, two or all three of my main subject areas);
- if they are competition winners or best-sellers;
- the order in which they were written (as numbered).
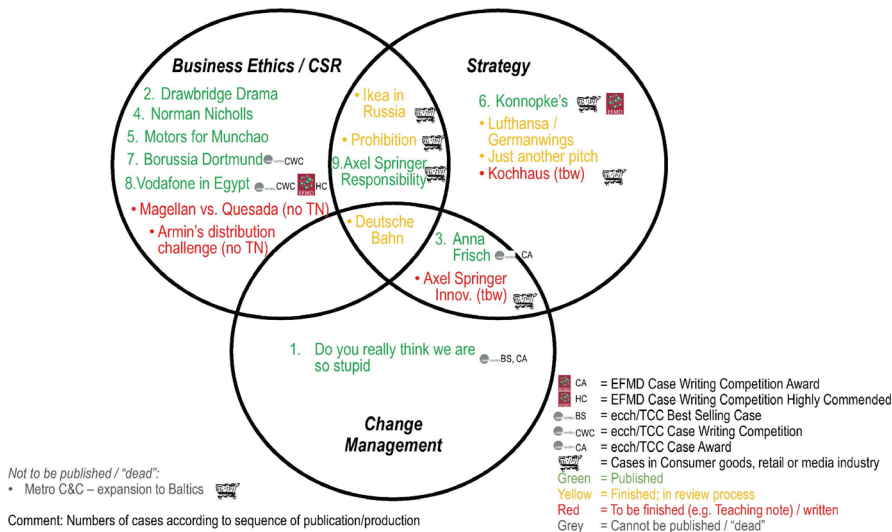
Figure 28: Sample framework for production of cases.

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