

Below is the description I provide on the first day of class. My plan for the session was to speak about the ease at which the student provide very interesting useful cases and then show a few of the cases. I could also break the participants up into small teams in the presentation, have them read the cases and analyze the problem suggesting some solutions.

It's a very valuable classroom assignment – the problems are real and related to the course material. I wanted to present this in case anyone else might find some value in the approach.

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APPENDIX III: Guidelines for Group Case Description (Due February 6th)

Purpose

Your group's case description should describe an organizational problem that really happened to one member of your group. Think of an event or experience that was significant or challenging for you. The paper should be a description, not an analysis or interpretation, of the events. In a later assignment, you will have the opportunity to analyze and interpret your event/experience.

Approach

Case writing is very much like telling a good story. When writing about a case in which you were involved, it usually works best to write in the first person. Describe what happened as you saw it, including your own thoughts and feelings (but make sure that your thoughts and feelings are labeled as such).

It usually is best to focus the case description around a particular experience or series of experiences, rather than trying to cover many months or years. A single critical event (or sequence of events) usually works best. Examples include the early stages of a challenging project, a critical meeting, a tough decision, or a major conflict. Like a good drama, a good case rarely arises from a situation in which everything was smooth and easy. Obstacles, conflict, or dilemmas are likely to be the ingredients that make a case interesting.

Format and Organization

This paper should be typed double-spaced, and about 3 pages in length. Following are suggestions that may be helpful. Feel free to organize the case differently if you feel that another format enables you to develop your case and tell your story more effectively.

1. Set the stage with a relatively brief description of the organizational setting and the group member's role in it. Provide the information that will help the reader understand the most important elements in the situation. (This will require selectivity: a part of the art of case writing is separating the essential facts from the mass of information that might be included.)

2. Focus on direct description of events. If there was a significant meeting, provide a description of what people actually said and did in it. (A script representing part of the conversation is very helpful in such cases.)
3. Think about the following as possible elements (1) structural issues (for example, structure, goals, technology, size); (2) “people” issues (for example, issues of management style, group process, interpersonal relations); (3) politics (Was there conflict? About what? Between whom?); (4) Symbols (think about organizational culture, symbols, myths, and rituals; were there questions about what really happened or about what it really meant?)
4. A good case often ends with a question or an unsolved problem. (For example: What should I do now? How could I solve this problem?) This unsolved problems is what you will write about in the Personal Case Analysis.
5. You may choose to disguise the identity of the organization and the individuals. Use fictitious names wherever you feel that it is appropriate. In any event, information you submit to me is confidential. Ideally, you would be able to discuss the case in the classroom, but that is not necessary if confidentiality concerns prevent it.

Guidelines for Personal Case Analysis

(Due April 3rd)

Overview

The personal case analysis asks you to analyze your group case description considering the subjects of the course.

Assignment

Rethink the event in the case in light of the course material. In other words, what could/should be done differently if the group member could relive the personal case? Why? The purposes of the paper are to (1) provide opportunities to work with and integrate the material as useful tools for diagnosis and action, (2) integrate your learning from the course and apply it to a work situation, and (3) reflect on your own professional practices.

Format

The paper should be a maximum of 10 typed, double-spaced pages, exclusive of appendices. Attach the Group Case Description to the paper.

Suggestions

Common pitfalls include the following:

1. Providing descriptions of case events (what happened rather than analysis of the events). Good analysis tells why things happened.
2. Try to discuss every single aspect of the case. It is better to write thoroughly about a few well-defined topics than superficially about many.
3. Making unclear inferences and generalizations –without providing data from the case to support the generalization, examples to help define them, or theory references to ground them. (For example, you

might state that everyone in the case wanted “involvement” and “participation” - how do you know that? What evidence do you have? What do they mean by involvement and participation?)

4. Ignoring theory and writing only about opinions. Good papers take a set of theoretical ideas and show how those ideas can be applied to some specific aspect of the case.
5. Ignoring one’s own interpretations and restating theory after theory from the readings. Good papers use theory to support insights and to cast a new light on personal experiences and observations.