

HARVARD | BUSINESS | SCHOOL



## Developing a Teaching Case

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## HBS Mission

**Educating leaders who make a difference in the world.**

## HBS background

### 1. MBA program

- Two year full-time program
- 900 students in each year
- General management focus
- Virtually 100% completion rate

### 2. Doctoral program

- DBA w/ ~20 new students/yr
- Joint degree programs w/ Harvard University

### 3. Executive Education

- General management, focused programs, custom programs
- 45+ programs, ~200 program weeks/yr

### 4. Harvard Business School Press (HBSP)

- Harvard Business Review
- Books
- Cases (~8 million HBS cases sold/yr)

## Agribusiness at HBS

### 1. Ray Goldberg's leadership and legacy

- Agriculture and Business program with John Davis in the 1950s
- Davis and Goldberg, *A Concept of Agribusiness*, 1957
- Commodity system approach

### 2. Annual Agribusiness Seminar in Boston

- 50 year old "focused" program
- 3.5 day case-based, intensive residence course
- 200+ participants, 40 countries, many repeats, extensive waitlist
- Mix of participants by industry, company size, geography
- 11-12 new cases every year

### 3. Agribusiness "Offsite" Seminar

- Targeted at first time participants
- Paris (2006), Buenos Aires (2007), Shanghai (2008), Mumbai (May 2009)

### 4. Agribusiness MBA course

- 2<sup>nd</sup> year elective
- 30 session case-based course
- 60-70 students

## Cases are the cornerstone

1. **“Participant-centered learning”**
  - Inductive learning process
  - Students actively engage in practical business situations
  - Forced to emotionally commit to a decision
  - Learn from each other
  - Generalizable lessons
2. **Over 80% of MBA content**
  - Used in all classes
  - Supplemented w/ lectures, simulations, fieldwork, etc
  - 500 cases in two years
3. **Class participation 50% grade**
  - No right answers
  - “How much did you help us move the discussion forward today?”

## What is a teaching case?

- Detailed account of a real life business situation
- Describes the dilemma of a protagonist who is confronted with a significant (but sometimes not obvious) ISSUE
- Complete with “NOISE” (extraneous, incomplete, and sometimes conflicting information) and UNSTATED information that must be inferred
- Often presented in a non-linear structure
- Contains no stated conclusions
- 10-15 pages text, 5-15 pages supporting exhibits

## Elements of a good teaching case

- ❑ **Distinct decision point**
  - Specific options may be included
- ❑ **Room for analysis**
- ❑ **No simple solution**
- ❑ **Engenders debate**
- ❑ **Protagonist that students can relate to**
- ❑ **May be historic or current**

## The case in the HBS classroom

1. **80-minutes class session**
  - Traditional 'cold call' to begin ("Mr. Nielsen, would you get us started today?")
  - Opener lays out context AND commits to a decision
  - Implications emerge through discussion and debate
  - Faculty wrap-up: short, NO answer, generalizations, perhaps an update
  - Possible visit by case protagonist / other guest
2. **Faculty as 'choreographer'**
  - Primarily asks questions: What would you do? Why would you do that?
  - Push students to take a stand
  - Strive for student-to-student debate
  - CLASSROOM only thing under faculty control
    - Moving in and out of discussion arena
    - Boards used to provide structure

## The case in the HBS classroom – cont.

### 1. Student preparation

- Prepare the night before
- Average 2 hrs/case
- Case information as basis for analysis (outside research not required)
- Case questions as guide (but often ignored)
- Take protagonist point of view
- Specific recommendations about the main decision point (hypothesis, proof, action, alternatives)
- No written submissions
- Study group to reinforce, deepen analysis

### 2. Faculty preparation

- 3-4 hrs case preparation
- 1-2 hrs process preparation
  - Themes
  - How they relate
  - Flow
  - Possible questions to encourage greater depth and focus
  - Teaching Note for suggestions

## HBS case development

### 1. 350 new cases every year

- About 15% of the curriculum

### 2. Predominantly field cases

- < 15% 'library' cases
- Direct company involvement and company 'release' before publication
- Funded out of HBS research budget

### 3. Cases written by

- HBS faculty first author
- Research assistants
- Global Research Group
- Field research offices (Europe, Latin America, Japan, India, China)

## The case writing process

1. Objectives of the case
2. Company selection
3. Background research
4. Site visit
5. Telling the story
  - First section
  - Body
  - Exhibits
6. Revisions and approvals
7. Teaching note

## HBS Agribusiness Cases 2008-2010

- > Nestlé in 2008 + TN
- > Olam International + TN
- > GlobalGAP
- > Taylor Farms
- > JBS
- > COFCO Xinjiang Tunhe + TN
- > COFCO
- > Arcadia Biosciences
- > Syngenta Tropical Sugar Beets
- > Vinibrazil
- > Marks & Spencer: Plan A
- > AGRA
- > Monsanto in 2009
- > Rabobank in 2009
- > Diamond Foods
- > Hungerit
- > Cosan
- > Development in Brazil's Sao Francisco Valley
- > GTC Therapeutics

## Case writing and teaching resources

- [Developing a Teaching Case \(900-001\)](#)
- [Case Method Teaching \(581-058\)](#)
- [Hints for Case Teaching \(585-012\)](#)
- [Choreographing a Case Class \(595-074\)](#)
- [Learning by the Case Method \(376-241\)](#)
- [Because Wisdom Can't Be Told \(451-005\)](#)
- [The Use of Cases in Management Education \(376-240\)](#)

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