Writing (Decision) Cases

Professor Soo Hee Lee

Kent Business School

November 2018

Summary

- What is a case?
- Case questions
- Case selection
- Data collection
- Identifying the decision point
- Data collection methods
- Balancing qualitative and quantitative data
- Balancing primary and secondary data
- Qualitative detail
- Telling the story
- Use of exhibits
- Writing style
- Factors of a good case
- Publishing a case

What is a case?

- *"A case is a description of an actual situation, commonly involving a decision, a challenge, an opportunity, a problem or an issue faced by a person (or persons) in an organization."* (Mauffette-Leenders et al., 2007: p. 2)

- *"A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident"* (Yin, 1994: p. 13).

Essential features of a case

- An empirical portrayal of a phenomenon in a real-life context
- Illuminates a decision or set of decisions faced by real managers
- A focus on historical phenomena (a story)
- Multiple variables
- Multiple sources of evidence
- Allows you to "step into the shoes" of the decision maker, to become involved with the situation and even "feel the pressure" (Mauffette-Leenders et al., 2007)

What makes a case?

- Individual – e.g., business owners or leaders
- Organizations – longitudinal study e.g. research by Watson (2001) or Pettigrew (1985)
- Industry or cluster
- **Change processes**
- **Decision processes** – famous one is the Cuban mission crisis (Allison, 1971) where he contrasts three different models of decision-making
- **Events** – has been used to explore disaster situations e.g. launch of the Challenger shuttle

Case Study Questions

- Case studies work well where it is important to understand **how the organizational & environmental context influences/impacts on strategic decisions and performance outcomes.**
  - New or emerging processes or behaviour
  - Where focus is on 'the unusual' as opposed to 'the typical'
  - Capturing emergent & changing properties
  - Exploring informal, sensitive or secretive activities
  - Everyday practices to inform an organisational outcome or performance
  - Comparisons of different actors or stakeholders
  - Causes for failure as well as success
  - **Lends itself to the study of complex 'how' and 'why' questions and what to do**

Topics of Entrepreneurship Cases

- Opportunity Recognition
- Business Plan/ Business Model
- Building an Entrepreneurial Team
- Funding and Growing the Business
- Human Resource Management of SMEs and New Ventures
- Marketing in SMEs and Entrepreneurial Ventures
- Development of Top Management Team/ Leadership
- International Entrepreneurship
- Environment (PEST)
- Exit Strategy
- Ethics/ CSR? Sustainability
- Gender and Diversity
- Motivation, Cognition and Decision-making
- Financial and Risk Management
- Corporate Entrepreneurship
- The Launch and Development of Social Enterprises
- Technology Entrepreneurship
- Rural Entrepreneurship
- Strategic and Organisational Failures

Case Selection

- Cases should be selected according to their expected information content (**story**)
  - Extreme (unique) case – reveal more information due to unusual properties e.g. particularly problematic or good – element of "drama" about it
  - **Critical case** –strategic importance in relation to an issue which facilitates a better understanding – differentiating between extreme and critical is not always straightforward
  - Paradigmatic – cases that highlight more general characteristics of the organization in question

Case Selection

- The revelatory case – situation which may have previously been inaccessible but does not have to be

- The typical case – exemplifies a form of organization or organizational experience

- The longitudinal case – change over time

Types of teaching cases

- Critical incidents
- Descriptive illustrations
- Problem identification
- Decision-focused
- Application
- Contextual issues
- Live
- Video and media

Data Collection

- Some disagreement over whether a case study is a research design which deploys multiple methods or a research method in and of itself
- While case studies can rely on one single data collection method, more often than not multiple methods of data collection are used
- Multiple methods can include:
  - Documentation
  - Archival records
  - Interviews
  - Observation (direct and participant)
  - Physical objects
  - Critical Incident – concrete example of the behaviour the researcher is interested in – "Tell me about an incident where…..
  - Focus Groups – group interviews
  - Secondary data (annual reports, press release, industry reports, news and academic papers)

Data Collection

- Collecting data systematically
  - Overview of case organization(s)
  - Identify which individuals need to be included in research
  - Which organizational events to include
  - Which methods will be used to collect data
  - Be systematic not ad hoc
  - Identifying saturation point for data collection

Identifying the decision point / strategic issue / strategic challenge

- The immediate issue vs. the basic issues
- Basic issues are larger and more generic
- Need to define the immediate issue
- Be clear on why the immediate issue is important / critical, i.e., how is it a *strategic* challenge for the organisation?
- Availability of data: Newsworthiness of the organisation and context, and access to the organisation
- Uniqueness: Is there anything that sets this case apart?
- Timing: Be prepared to move the pointer in time (not too far back)

Data gathering methods

- Quantitative
  - Data in numerical form

- Qualitative
  - Data in non-numerical form

- Both quantitative and qualitative methods can draw on primary and secondary data

Balancing qualitative & quantitative data - Saunders et al. (2012)

Quantitative data	Qualitative data
• Based on meanings derived from numbers • Collection results in numerical and standardised data • Analysis conducted through the use of diagrams and statistics	• Based on meanings expressed through words • Collection results in non-standardised data possibly requiring classification into categories during analysis • Analysis conducted through the use of conceptualisation

Some common contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research

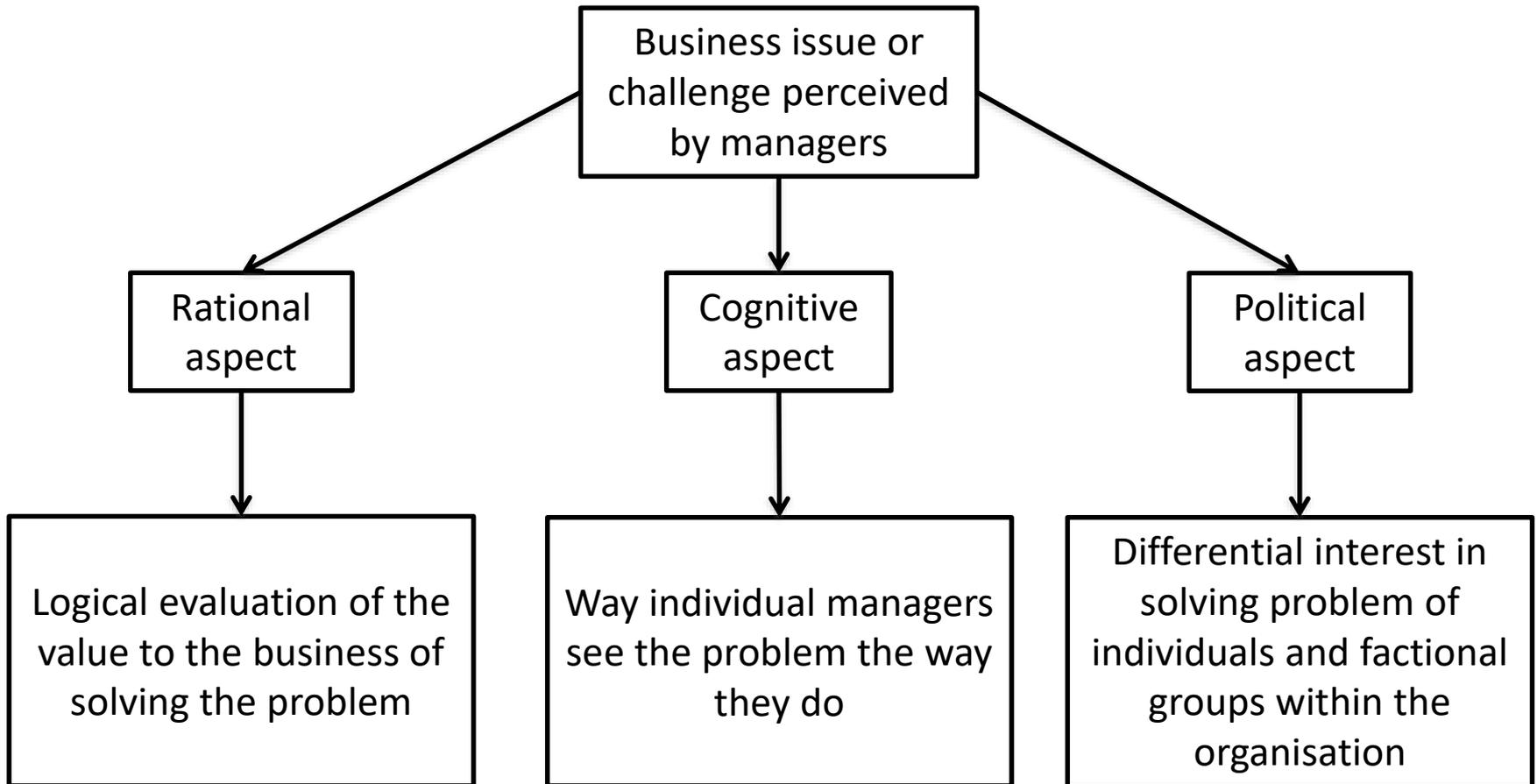| Quantitative	Qualitative
Numbers	Words
Point of view of researcher	Points of view of participants
Researcher distant	Researcher close
Theory testing	Theory emergent
Static	Process
Structured	Unstructured
Generalisation	Contextual understanding
Hard, reliable data	Rich, deep data
Macro	Micro
Behaviour	Meaning
Artificial settings	Natural settings

Bryman and Bell (2011: 410)

Balancing primary and secondary data

Data Type	Description / Examples
Primary	• **New / First-hand** • **Current** • **Raw** • Not interpreted, condensed, or evaluated • **Customisable** • Collect and analyse only what you need • **(Sometimes) Expensive** • **Slow(er)**
Secondary	• **Existing/ Second-hand** • **Historical** • **Processed** • Already interpreted, condensed, or evaluated • **Constrained** • What you see is what you get • **(Often) Cheap** • **Quick(er)**

Collecting data

- So where are you going to get your data from?

- **Remember:**

  - **Secondary data** = data already produced by another party e.g. company filings, articles, industry reports, national / international statistics etc.

  - **Primary data** = data that you collect from your own original endeavours e.g. interviews, focus groups etc.

The facets of a case

```
              ┌─────────────────────┐
              │   Business issue or │
              │  challenge perceived│
              │     by managers     │
              └─────────────────────┘
         ↙              ↓              ↘
┌──────────┐     ┌──────────┐     ┌──────────┐
│ Rational │     │ Cognitive│     │ Political│
│  aspect  │     │  aspect  │     │  aspect  │
└──────────┘     └──────────┘     └──────────┘
     ↓                ↓                ↓
```

Rational aspect	Cognitive aspect	Political aspect
Logical evaluation of the value to the business of solving the problem	Way individual managers see the problem the way they do	Differential interest in solving problem of individuals and factional groups within the organisation

Cases are usually highly qualitative

- Sensitive enough to allow the detailed analysis of change
  - what processes were involved
  - why change occurred
  - can encompass situational dynamics

- Strong on context
  - context and behaviour dependent
  - how is the organisation embedded within the context
  - what salient features of the context matter?

Conducting interviews

- <u>People</u> oriented – people and emotions
- <u>Action</u> oriented – impatient, tend to 2nd guess
- <u>Content</u> oriented – issues and arguments
- <u>Time</u> oriented – in a rush

- Not mutually exclusive

Active listening

Active listening is a [communication](#) technique used in [counseling](#), training, and [conflict resolution](#). It requires that the listener fully concentrate, understand, respond and then remember what is being said.[1] This is opposed to [reflective listening](#) where the listener repeats back to the speaker what they have just heard to confirm understanding of both parties.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_listening

Putting pen to paper: telling the story over time

- Cases are organisational stories
- History matters – path dependency
- Learning from past events to guide future decisions
- Only relevant data needs to be included
- Use a timeline (table or figure) in an exhibit if it will help the reader
- Put yourself in the position of the reader – how to captivate them and make it interesting for them

Use of exhibits

- "A picture is worth a thousand words"
- A summary or illustration of key data
- A table can summarise data in a structured way (e.g., financial outcomes or ratios, key competitors, top team characteristics)
- Choose wisely – can't be too many!
- Should aid in the ultimate analysis
- Properly referenced
- Obtain permissions where appropriate
- Referred to in the text of the case

Writing style

- Clear, business writing
- Write in past tense
- Don't put in any analysis
- Don't put in any value judgements or opinions
- Summary of data (e.g., in tables) is useful
- Consistency (e.g., in use of acronyms, currencies, dates, decimals, etc.)
- Every sentence needs to present a new factual piece of information
- Sections and paragraphs should contain related information

Ethical considerations

- Non-disclosure of case organisation
- Anonymity for respondents (e.g., interviewees)
- Self-plagiarism (e.g., prior MBA summatives)
- Referencing (many) secondary data sources

Factors of a good teaching case

- Reality
- Significance
- Comprehensiveness
- Alternative perspective
- Evidence
- Reasonable complexity
- Emotional richness
- Engagement

Publishing teaching cases

- Case Houses (e.g., HBS, Darden, INSEAD, IMD)
- Asian Cases (Ivey Publishing, CEIBS)
- European Case Clearing House
- Case Journals
- Textbooks and Case Books
- Trade Magazines
- A detailed teaching note is necessary!
- Teaching cases could be rewritten for an academic journal article.

Seminar discussion

- Identify a case story and frame it into a teaching case.

- Develop a title and an abstract/ summary (150 words), explaining who did what, how, why and so what happened.

- Give a short presentation (5 minutes)

References

- Beal, B., MacMillan, K., Woodwark, M. Schnarr, K. (2016) The case project guide: How to write a great business case as a class project, Ivey Publishing (product number: IM1051)

- Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2011, 3rd edition) *Business research methods*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

- Corey, E.R., 1998. *Writing cases and teaching notes*. Harvard Business School Pub.

- Linder, J.C., 1990. *Writing Cases, Tips and Pointers*. Pub. Division, Harvard Business School.

- Leenders, M.R., Mauffette-Leenders, L.A. and Erskine, J.A., 2001. *Writing cases*. Ivey Publishing, Richard Ivey School of Business.

- Mauffette-Leenders, L.A., Erskine, J.A., Leenders, M.R. and University of Western Ontario. Richard Ivey School of Business (London, Ont.), 2007, *Learning with cases*. Ontario: Ivey.

- Saunders, M. et al. (2012, 6th edition) *Research methods for business students*, London, Prentice-Hall