

## ***How To Analyze A Case***

In a case study there is no right or wrong answer. The following suggestions will help you to analyze case studies more effectively:

**Read the case:** The first step to a successful case solution is to read the case, carefully and with an eye for detail – more than once. Don't rush through it. Look for the smallest of details. That is the only correct way to read intelligent conclusions. Look for case attachments and accompanying tables and numbers if available. Do not reach conclusions until all facts are considered. Your best defense against surprise is to read the case thoroughly.

**Take notes:** Unlike textbooks which are written in chapter, essay or reprint form, case studies might be arranged in chronological order. While textbooks may proceed in logical fashion, this is not necessarily so in case studies. At times, they may seem chaotic with many events happening at once – order and discipline may be missing and key issues are not always evident. Case studies may also contain substantial amounts of information in tabular form. To know what such data means you will have to read the tables and apply what you have learned. Your notes should focus on the details you will need to identify the business problems involved in the case, the issues critical to solving those problems, as well as resources available to the managers in the case. Those notes will be helpful in producing a case solution.

**Look for (business) problem(s):** Do not just rephrase the obvious problems stated in the case, but try to identify the real problems faced by the organization. In each case, at least one fundamental problem is present.

**Specify an objective for the managers involved:** Once you have identified one or more business problems present in the case, think about the outcome(s) you would most hope to see for the company and people you have read about. If you were asked to consult on this company's problems – and that is the role most public relations students are playing as they read a case study – what results would you hope for? Don't limit your thinking to what the company should do, but what the most successful outcome would look like. Be specific about how the company will know if it succeeded. Quantify the desired results whenever you can.

**Identify alternatives:** After identifying the problem, start thinking about the various alternatives available to the organization. There are usually more than two alternatives. Once you identify the alternatives, list the pros and cons of each alternative. This will help you revise the alternatives later in the decision-making process.

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**Define the crucial or critical Issues:** The crucial issues are those conditions, which affect the feasibility of the various alternatives. They serve as organizing points around which facts can be grouped and deductions drawn.

**Identify and rank the critical issues:** These issues are at the heart of the case. If you miss a critical issue, you may not be able to solve the case to the satisfaction of your professor (or the client).

**Consider relevant information and underlying assumptions:** Accept the fact that much of the information contained in the case will not be useful to your analysis. You should also accept the fact that you will never know all that you would like in order to produce a solution. Life is like that. So are case studies.

**List possible solutions:** Every problem lends itself to more than one solution. Keep looking for good ideas – even when you have already thought of one that will solve the problem. Listing possible solutions is a form of brainstorming that will later permit you to assign values or weights to those ideas: is one solution less expensive than another? Will one be more effective than another? Will one idea work more quickly than another? Will one of these ideas have a more lasting effect?

**Select a (your recommended) solution: (Decide how to implement the best solution; explain how to communicate the solution)** Indicate which of the alternative paths of actions the organization should follow. Your conclusion should weigh the importance of each alternative. You need to make sure the recommendations flow from the analysis and involve managerial decision-making. Further, your best alternative should include a strategic implementation. Also make sure that you state any assumptions you make.

**Write it up:** Provide your professor (client) with your best thinking and be as detailed as you think you can within the page limits you have been given.