Cases as a time consuming way of covering theory

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Abstract

Case studies are real-life stories of business practices that can be used at universities when teaching theory. In later years the case study have become more popular but the drawbacks of it is that it lacks theory. Therefore the cases can be seen as a time consuming way of covering theory. This paper provides an account of how case studies can be effectively used with the time limit taken in mind.

Key words: case method, problem-based learning

Introduction

Harvard was the first business school to initiate the case study method. They used true stories of business practices in the lectures that students analysed and then discussed with the professors (Herriede, 2011). In recent years the case-method has be come quite popular at universities. One of the case study method drawbacks is the limitation of theory (Volpe, 2015).

In course literature case studies a common content. It often appears in the end of the chapter obtaining a couple of questions. The intentions with the cases is that they should work as a tool for the memory and help the reader to understand the theory when compared and applied to examples in real life (Solberg Soilen & Huber, 2006). It also prepares the student for the working life (Allard, 2001). But many cases lacks theory and therefore cases can be a time consuming way of covering theory (Lundberg & Joan, 2005).

Problem: Cases are time consuming
**Method**

When searching for the articles I took help from Halmstad University’s library called Summon. I also used articles from Web of Science, Google Scholar and Scopus, using key words as case method, problem-based learning. I have written my references with the help of Google Scholar that has a direct link to APA that shows how you should write your references. I also used the *Smått och Gott* by Mattson & Örtenblad (2008). The scientific articles are peer-reviewed, which means that they are reviewed by experts in its field (Rieber, 2006). The layout of this scientific paper is based on the article *Optimal ways for companies to use Facebook as a marketing channel* by Hansson, Wrangmo, & Solberg Søilen, (2013). The article is published in the Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society.

**Theory**

**About case studies**

*Definition of case studies:* systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest (Yin, 1984).

Case study is a valuable method of research, with distinctive characteristics that make it ideal for many types of investigations (Winston, 1997). As cited from Cavaye (1996):

“Case research can be carried out taking a positivist or an interpretive stance, can take a deductive or an inductive approach, can use qualitative and quantitative methods, can investigate one or multiple cases. Case research can be highly structured, positivist, deductive investigation of multiple cases; it can also be an unstructured, interpretive, inductive investigation of one case; lastly, it can be anything in between these two extremes in almost any combination.”

Case studies give the organization advantages to speak generally about problems that come up within the company (Solberg Søilen & Huber, 2006). You can divide case studies into different groups. One is to look at the content and form of the case study.
There are six different groups of cases. Illustrative, Exploratory, critical instance, program implementation, result based, and cumulative. Illustrative cases describes a determined problem area but with a goal to draw general conclusions. Illustrative case studies are considered being time consuming, because its focus is to go on the deep to get the information (Solberg Søilen & Huber, 2006).

Qualitative resource methods often take more time than quantitative. Qualitative produces large amounts of textual data in forms of field notes and transcripts. The preparation and analysis of the data is time consuming and demands much labour (Jacobsen, 2002).

Selection cases are an important aspect of building theory from case studies (Eisenhart, 1989). Yin (1981) explains that case studies can be done by using quantitative or qualitative evidence. It can come from fieldwork, archival records verbal reports observations and/or combinations of these. The most challenging aspect of fieldwork case study field research, is to pick out the data that is relevant and dismiss irrelevant parts from the study, which for a investigator can be hard and time consuming if not properly trained in the subject. Because of the amount of data that the investigator must collect, it is reasonable to make a protocol that helps in the matter. It is also important that the investigator is taught and has good knowledge in social matters as face-to-face interviews so that the process of collecting data goes efficiently. Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information (Tellis, 1997). To get a full covered it rarely is enough with only one person being interviewed, sometimes it necessary to ask fifteen people. In some cases it can require a large team just to come up with the questions to choose, which can be done by doing workshops (Datta & Roy, 2011). Writing cases requires recourses and therefore becomes highly costly (Cinneide, 2006).

The length of case studies differs. The majority are between 5-15 pages. And it is important that cases are not to long because then it would loose its intention. A case study should not take to much time to read and direct lead to a qualified discussion (Solberg Søilen & Huber, 2006). Stake (1995) says that choosing a case for covering theory is difficult and that the literature recommended that the selection offers the opportunity to maximize what can be learned, knowing that time is limited.
The use of case studies at universities

In course literature case studies are a common content. It often appears in the end of the chapter obtaining a couple of questions. The intentions with the cases is that they should work as a tool for the memory and help the reader to understand the theory when compared and applied to examples in real life (Solberg Søilen & Huber, 2006). It also prepares the student for the working life (Allard, 2001), which becomes more clearly when Dobson (1999) says:

“The intention of case study research is generally proposed as to gain an “in-depth” understanding of the concerned phenomena in a “real-life” setting.”

When using case studies as a teaching method it also teaches the student about critical thinking (Popil, 2011). It is also argued that when instructors use cases studies the attendance gets higher (Yadav, Shaver & Meckl, 2010).

Herreid (2011) says that there are different methods of using cases. Lecture method where the instructor takes on the role of storyteller. Discussion method, hole classroom discussion is the classical case teaching method. Small group methods, which is especially effective in promoting diversity of opinion and respect for divergent views and for improving the expression of ideas. Individual cases, works efficiently for teachers of anatomy and physiology, where a premium is placed on the transfer of information. Computer simulation cases, works when teaching doctors and nurses, here students can diagnose based on information given. Clicker cases, works in large classes, for example introductory classes. The case study approach frees instructors to be creative, unfettered by rules of presentation. But it has also led to difficulties in evaluation because so many diverse methods are often lumped together as case studies (Herriede, 2011). Instructors are advised to and often uses teaching notes, when the case lacks theory. Lundberg & Winn (2005) says that without the guidance that a note provides, a case could easily be used inappropriately in the wrong course, or with important topics and relevant theory overlooked.

Clicker cases

Clicker cases are used at some universities when the classes are too large to handle with ordinary discussion techniques. According to Morgan (2008) Clickers (electronic
response systems) are widely popular in college classrooms and proponents have argued clickers can increase student engagement, active learning, and, perhaps most importantly, student comprehension. Clickers may decrease students anxiety about participating verbally in class (Trees & Jackson, 2007). Anxiety about participating can be related to the first stage of the FIRO theory, which is called inclusion. In the first stage the students are uncertain about their role in the group and they are searching for acceptance. Clickers, with its immediate feedback, provides vital information on where the lectures have missed their targets and where the students level of knowledge stands (Morse, Ruggieri & Whelan-Berry, 2010).

Clickers allow the students, who are all provided with a clicker, to answer directly to the power point. Dr. Bruff (2011) says that you can run the lecture and the multiple choice questions by using a remote control connected to the power point. Students who don’t have clickers can buy a license to a program so that they can answers trough their laptops. Chasteen (2013) argues that working with cases clickers will increase the number of questions to discuss because you can do it faster.

In the case study (Solberg Soilen & Huber, 2006) Waltergroup looks at their school as a company and sees the students as clients instead of students. The working environment is open and the teachers are free to bring ideas and form the courses. In the future the school are planning to work more closely with companies in the region to create a bigger network, and a relation between the students and the organizations in the real world.

To use case studies as teaching material is a stimulating way to learn. Cases are of secondary interest. They play a supportive role, supporting our understanding of something else (Dobson 1999). Cases attribute of storytelling is making the learning of knowledge more inevitable for the intended audience (Craib 1992) but it is not used as frequently in Swedish intuitions. There are not that many case studies made on Swedish companies and therefore not many to use in a classroom (Solberg Soilen & Huber, 2006). It is important to choose a case that you also can apply theory on and use relevant models. The case *Mercatus AB teaching note* (Solberg Soilen & Huber, 2006) argues that it is important to set educational goals, to with certainty see that the case are useful. According to Morling et al (2008) using clickers will result in small
improvements in the test results. The majority of the student thinks that the advantages overrule the disadvantages with clickers. But Morling et al (2008) could not find any evidence that the clickers would get the students more engaged.

The case method allows the students to create mental structures and frameworks of a particular situation and a feeling of the context under which decisions are to be taken, which is valuable for example when teaching about management (Jakka & Mantha, 2012).

Analysis

Cases are popular amongst both student and instructors. The professor gets to speak freely and cover theory in a more storytelling form (Herreid, 2011) and the student are more willing to engage in class as well as it remembers the topic better after (Craib, 1992). Tellis (1997) argues that case studies prepare the student for real life. When the time is limited it is important to look closer to what is put into the course and how the material is relevant (Stake, 1995). For Swedish universities this can be hard because of lack of Swedish business case (Solberg Søilen & Huber, 2006). Why they are so few made can be explained with a couple of factors. It takes a lot of time to create a case, the interviews and research that have to be made can be time consuming (Datta & Roy, 2011). It often also demands lot of recourses and labour work (Cinneide, 2006). Depending on which kind of research you do, it will be more or less time consuming. Generally qualitative research will take more time than quantitative (Jacobsen, 2002). Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information, which also demands a lot of time (Tellis, 1997).

A case study should be efficient, and therefore not longer than 5-15 pages. Case studies can be in different forms, illustrative cases can are considered being time consuming and therefore should be avoided when time is short (Solberg Søilen & Huber, 2006). Stake (1995) says that you only should choose case studies that will lead to a relevant discussion. It is wisely to consider this factors when choosing a case to integrate in the lectures. It is also a good idea to set educational goes so that the case can be reviewed and that relevant theory can be linked to the case (Solberg Søilen & Huber, 2006). Today the use of teaching notes as support for the instructor is
very common at universities. This is as result of the lack of theory in the cases, which Lundberg & Joan (2005) says can be fixed by more cases that include more theory.

A new technique called clicker helps the professors to manage larger classes and still get response on the cases (Morgan, 2008). Clickers are good because they can decrease students anxiety about participating verbally in class (Trees & Jackson, 2007), which according to the FIRO theory is something that occurs in the first stage of entering and new group of people (Solberg Søilen & Huber, 2006). The clickers provide vital, direct feedback, which traditionally lectures, does not. It also tests the students knowledge of the subject (Morse et al., 2010).

**Conclusion & Implications**

Case studies are a good teaching tool for theory, but sometimes hard to collaborate in the classroom because of the time limit. By setting educational goals and then carefully choose cases that fits the theory will help the case method to effectiveness. With technique development comes better teaching methods, as click cases. Click cases are effective in large classes, and more theory can be covered in less time. If universities choose to use click cases more frequently the implication can be higher attendance, better test results and also increase student engagement.

When the amount of case studies will rise the more material will be available for the universities to use. The universities need more cases that include practical examples but also theory and models.

**Future studies**

Future studies could test whether adding clickers to well documented teaching methods will increase students learning. It can also include how theory should be incorporated in the cases.
References

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