

MKT 412

Case Analysis

Introduction

Case analysis is a teaching method designed to provide you with more “real world”-like applications of course material. Cases provide you with the opportunity to improve your analytical, problem solving, and decision making skills. Cases are also used as part of the interview process, in training programs, and in other business situations so the ability to perform an in-depth case analysis is also an invaluable business skill.

Case Analysis Process

In general, you will want to start your case analysis with a brief review of the case itself. Read the first and last paragraphs; look at the headings and subheadings; locate and review any charts, graphs, and financial information; and look over any questions or hints included with the case or provided by your instructor. As you perform this initial review, develop a sense of what the case is about, what the main issue might be, what information is available, etc.

Next you will have to read . . . and re-read . . . and re-read (etc., etc., you get the idea) the case. Here you will be identifying key facts and assumptions, and determining what’s relevant and what’s not. You will be looking for further refinement of the main issue, situation constraints and opportunities, available qualitative and quantitative information, information reliability and authenticity, and information relevance (business school cases are notorious for including lots of unnecessary and/or irrelevant information—just like the real world).

It’s very helpful to take notes during these subsequent readings, jotting down facts and figures that appear to be important, ideas that come to you, potential alternatives, etc. You may wish to use the IFAAR categories described below in taking your notes. Writing, especially by hand, helps you organize your thoughts, remember information, and uncover insights.

Case Schedules

Case titles and due dates appear on the syllabus. I will allow some time in class the week before the case is due to hold a brief discussion and answer any questions. It is extremely helpful if you’ve done at least your initial reading of the case prior to then as this discussion can provide information and direction on how to proceed.

IFAAR Case Analysis Format

For purposes of this class, you will be analyzing cases using the format listed below

- **Issue:** Identify the main issue or problem in the case. Look at the “Define” step in the DECIDE decision process in your text to help you do this. Remember to look at problems versus symptoms, and note that case analysis is an iterative process. You may find yourself re-defining the issue as you delve further into the case and develop a deeper understanding of the situation. What appears to be the issue or decision to be made in the initial reading may be very different once you identify and start to analyze the relevant information. Issues will generally revolve around areas like profitability, strategic direction, competitive positioning, market identification and targeting, marketing mix implementation, customer satisfaction,

etc. While the issue may be tied to the subject of the chapter the case accompanies, don't be limited to that. Consider other marketing functions and areas. Sometimes it's helpful to phrase the issue as a question—you can then check to be sure you've answered the question as you complete your analysis. Your issue also defines the rest of your analysis.

- **Factors:** Essentially a brief situation analysis, include the relevant environmental, market, competitive, internal, and any other factors that impact the issue and your alternatives and recommendations. Do not include information that's not relevant to your analysis. This section should be factual versus analytical in nature and can include both qualitative and quantitative information as appropriate.
- **Alternatives:** Develop a series of alternatives that will address the issue/solve the problem. While there is no right or wrong number of alternatives, generally you should develop at least three but no more than four or five, unless otherwise instructed. Remember you will need to analyze each of your alternatives thoroughly to be able to identify the best choice—too many alternatives will make this process more difficult. Briefly describe each alternative in your written case analysis and be clear why you feel it is appropriate, including its pros and cons. Refer to the data from your analytics (next step) as appropriate (use table numbers or some other method so it's clear where the data you're referring to is from), but do not include charts, tables, etc. in this step. Please note the following about your alternatives:
 - Be sure they are realistic, fit the situation, take into account identified factors, and can be implemented.
 - Be sure they are mutually exclusive (i.e. they can't happen at the same time).
 - "Further investigation [or information] needed" is not an acceptable alternative. The information presented in the case is adequate for class analytical and instructional purposes, and like the real world, you may have to make assumptions or extrapolate to fill in missing pieces (just be sure you identify them as such). Also like the real world, the time and/or money for additional research may not be available.
 - Doing nothing can be a viable alternative as long as it fits the case situation.
- **Analytics:** Your alternatives should be accompanied by a detailed quantitative analysis demonstrating their impact on the issue/problem. This analysis must be done on a working Excel spreadsheet, i.e. all calculations must be performed using functions and formulas in appropriate cells. No credit will be given on this section if this is not the case. In developing your analytics, first look at your alternatives and determine the type of information you will need to analyze each one. Depending on the nature of the case, this might require a different analysis for each alternative, you may be able to use a single table or spreadsheet format for them all, or you may have a mix of analytic techniques. Regardless, each alternative must have accompanying analytics—if there's no quantitative information for an alternative you've developed, maybe that's telling you it's not viable. Once you have a sense of your data requirements, examine the case information available to you and identify what's relevant to each alternative. Finally, choose the tools you feel are appropriate to analyze the data, and apply them in completing your quantitative analysis. Remember that you should be analyzing the case data in a way that leads you to conclusions about the case issue, alternatives, and recommendation; simply restating or reformatting case data does not constitute a quantitative analysis.
- **Recommendation:** Choose one of your alternatives as your recommended solution to the case issue/problem and refer to your analytics for it along with appropriate information from your "Factors" section to justify your choice. (If appropriate, include why other alternatives

would not work.) Note that your recommendation must be one of your alternatives. Your recommendation should also not be a combination of alternatives—if you feel a combination is a potential solution, then include it as a separate alternative with supporting rationale. Return to your initial issue and make sure your recommendation is a realistic and viable means to solve it. (If you rephrased your issue as a question, does the alternative answer the question?) Also be sure you have made a recommendation, and have not just further described the case situation. In-depth thinking should be obvious in your alternatives, rationale, and recommendation.

Hints

- Don't worry about finding the "right" solution. The idea behind case analysis is to apply class concepts to the case situation. There is usually more than one reasonable solution.
- Ditto, don't worry about identifying the "right" alternatives or using the "right" analytic tools. As long as your reasoning is sound and your analysis complete, there are often multiple appropriate approaches.
- Be open and flexible. As noted above, case analysis is an iterative process with each element of the IFAAR potentially changing as you analyze the case in more depth. The issue may change, an alternative may be revised or eliminated because of the case data available and your analysis of it, a new alternative may emerge as you further examine the data, what you first thought was the "right" answer may not turn out to be on closer examination. Don't jump to conclusions or assume that the first "answers" you come up with are the best.
- The case is what it is, often with incomplete, overwhelming, unnecessary, and/or a confusing amount of information. Wishing you had more or different information, or that the situation is different, will only hinder your ability to analyze the case on its merits. In addition, each case can be fully analyzed using the information; no outside research is required.
- Simply answering any questions or hints provided with the case does not constitute a case analysis for this class. While you may use them to help guide you, your case must follow the IFAAR format. There may also be other issues beyond any questions/hints you will need or want to consider.
- Be sure each element of your analysis works together, i.e. your factors should relate to your issue, your alternatives should each present possible solutions to your issue, your analytics should support your alternatives, and your recommendation should be well-thought out and consistent with everything you've developed so far.
- Do not describe the case situation or reiterate case facts in your written analysis, other than as necessary to illustrate and clarify your points. You have very limited space (see below) and this should be devoted to a concise description of your IFAAR elements, not regurgitation of case information. You can assume that I am familiar with the case.
- Allow time. Case analysis is a process that benefits from taking time between readings and analysis sessions. Often insights will come to you after (or during) some time away from the case. Doing your analysis when you're tired or under a deadline will generally not optimize the quality of your analysis. (This is good practice when you are faced with business issues as well.)

Mechanics

- Your written case analysis should consist of a cover page, no more than four double spaced pages of text in 12-point font with 1" margins (your qualitative analysis covering your issue,