Group Project Work*

The Group Project

Each group is required to carry out a Case Study of a problem, issue or concern confronting a particular industry, business entity or organization. The group will design the study, collect the necessary information on the case, study the problem at hand thoroughly, and present an appropriate solution. The group is required to meet and decide on their case and then inform the College of the choice. The College will then assign appropriate faculty member to act as the advisor to the group.

Getting Started

One of the most challenging aspects of collaborative group work assignments is knowing how to get started. The first step is to make certain that you understand the assignment. The group needs to clarify the objectives and expectations that the course instructor has for the group project:

- What is the purpose of the project?
- What are you supposed to learn?
- What skills are you supposed to develop?
- How is this group work assignment related to the course content?
- What are you supposed to produce?
- What format(s) will be used for the final product?
- What criteria will be used to assess your work?
- What are the main components of the project?
- Will there be clearly defined and separate sections, or is it meant to be wholly integrated?
- Will you work co-operatively with your group members, each completing a separate piece of the project to be compiled at the end, or will you work collaboratively to produce a jointly researched and authored final product?
- What are the deadlines?

The problem-oriented method

A problem oriented project analyses a real life situation where existing problems need to be solved. It should:

- Relate the theory to a practical situation for example apply the ideas and knowledge discussed in the coursework to the practical situation at hand in the project (case study).
- Identify the problems
• Select the major problems in the case
• Suggest solutions to these major problems
• Recommend the best solution to be implemented
• Detail how this solution should be implemented

NB: A project - The case is the "real life" situation, the case study is the analysis of this situation

How to write the project - case study

There are usually eight sections in a project - case study.

Synopsis/Executive summary

• Outline the purpose of the case study
• Describe the field of research - this is usually an overview of the company
• Outline the issues and findings of the case study without the specific details
• Identify the theory that will be used.
• Here, the reader should be able to get a clear picture of the essential contents of the study.
• Note any assumptions made (you may not have all the information you'd like so some assumptions may be necessary eg: "It has been assumed that...", "Assuming that it takes half an hour to read one document...")

Findings

• Identify the problems found in the case. Each analysis of a problem should be supported by facts given in the case together with the relevant theory and course concepts. Here, it is important to search for the underlying problems for example: cross-cultural conflict may be only a symptom of the underlying problem of inadequate policies and practices within the company.
• This section is often divided into sub-sections, one for each problem.

Discussion

• Summarize the major problem/s
• Identify alternative solutions to this/these major problem/s (there is likely to be more than one solution per problem)
• Briefly outline each alternative solution and then evaluate it in terms of its advantages and disadvantages
• No need to refer to theory or coursework here.

Conclusion

• Sum up the main points from the findings and discussion

Recommendations
• Choose which of the alternative solutions should be adopted
• Briefly justify your choice explaining how it will solve the major problem/s
• This should be written in a forceful style as this section is intended to be persuasive
• Here integration of theory and coursework is appropriate

Implementation

• Explain what should be done, by whom and by when
• If appropriate include a rough estimate of costs (both financial and time).

References

• Make sure all references are cited correctly

Appendices (if any)

• Note any original data that relates to the study but which would have interrupted the flow of the main body.

Example of a project — Case Study

CASE STUDY METHOD

The use of case studies is a widely accepted means of bringing theoretical concepts and practical situations together. It is not possible to take a class into an organisation and observe the subject matter of management or organisational behaviour in real life, hence a written case study outlining a real, or realistic, situation is the best available alternative.

When reading and studying a case study, it is possible to take two different approaches. The first of these is the 'analytical' approach where a case structure is examined to try to understand what has happened, and why. In this approach, you do not identify problems or attempt to develop solutions. The second approach is the problem-oriented method. In this approach a case is analysed to identify the major problems that exist, the causes of and possible solutions to the problems, and finally, a recommendation as to the best solution to implement.

This chapter describes the problem solving case study method. As with many tasks in business, there is no 'one best way' to analyse or write up a case report. Everyone develops their own methods of sorting and sifting through the information and presenting their findings. However, in this chapter you will find a format which may be useful when
presenting your case reports. This format is outlined briefly below.

8.1 Some general issues

In a case study, it is crucial that you integrate relevant theory from the course and evidence from the case. Failure to attempt to integrate theory will lead to severe mark reduction or failure. Referencing of all non-original material is essential. You will lose marks for poor referencing.

Check your completed work for internal consistency. For example, make sure that you attempt to solve the key issues you have identified. Do not say ‘X’ is the major problem, and then recommend a solution to ‘Y’. Try not to be overly descriptive. Remember that you are trying to identify, analyse and solve the problems of the case using the relevant theories from the course, not just repeating what the text book, or case information, has stated.

8.2 Problem solving case format

1. Title page
2. Table of contents
3. Executive summary
   This section should comprise a brief overview of the case, giving a brief background and noting any important assumptions made. (You will not have all the information you would like - so you may need to make some assumptions). As well as this, you should give a synopsis of your case report, noting very briefly the major problems identified and the recommended solutions.
4. Problem identification and analysis
   In this section, you should identify all the major problems in the case. Try to identify the underlying causes of problems, not just the symptoms. Seek advice from your tutor on the layout of this information. You should link each problem identified to relevant theory and also to actual evidence from the case.
   Remember, you MUST integrate theory and reference all non-original work.
5. Statement of major problems
   In most case studies, you will identify a number of problems. Most likely, there will be too many to actually ‘solve’ in the number of words allowed. Hence, it is crucial to state very clearly which are the major two or three problems, or key issues, that must be solved first. Therefore, this section is just a short concise statement of what problems you are going to solve in the remainder of the case.
   Half a page is adequate. Having once identified the key problems, you can continually check back to ensure that you are actually attempting to solve them, and not some other minor problems you identified. This section is crucial to a good case report.
6. Generation and evaluation of alternative solutions
   While most problems will have a very large number of possible solutions, it is your task to identify and evaluate a number of the more appropriate (at least 2-3 for each major problem identified).

   Each alternative solution should be briefly outlined and then evaluated in terms of its advantages and disadvantages (strong and weak points). Note: You must
evaluate alternatives. It is not necessary to make a statement in this section as to which alternative is considered best - this occurs in the next section. Do not integrate theory in this section and do not recommend theory. Practical solutions to the problems are required.

7. Recommendations
This section should state which of the alternative solutions (either singly or in a combination) identified in Section 6 are recommended for implementation. You should briefly justify your choice, explaining how it will solve the major problems identified in Section 6. Integration of relevant theory is essential here.

8. Implementation
In this section, you should specifically explain how you will implement the recommended solutions. Theory cannot be implemented; you must translate it into actions. This includes explaining what should be done, by whom, when, in what sequence, what will it cost (rough estimates only), and other such issues. Remember, if a recommended solution cannot be realistically implemented, then it is no solution at all.

9. Appendices (if any)
10. Reference list
This will contain an alphabetical list of all the references you have cited in the body of the report. Do not include details of any sources you have not cited. Ensure the style used is correct and consistent.

Check list for a case study

1. Executive summary
   o Summary of report and recommendations.
   o Give a brief background to the company and outline its problems, your recommendations and any assumptions noted.

2. Problem identification and analysis
   o Identification and analysis of management problems including causes.
   o Integration of theory and case evidence.

3. Statement of 'key' problems/issues
   o Clear, concise statement of major problem/s that the remainder of the case is going to solve.

4. Generation and evaluation of a range of alternative solutions
   o These potential solutions should be linked to the key problems.
   o Each alternative should be evaluated.
   o Range/Relevant/Creative/Apply Concepts.

5. Decisions/recommendations
   o Clear statement of which of the alternative/s suggested (in 4) is/are recommended, and why.
   o Should be justified using theory and/or course concepts. This solution should solve key problem/s noted.

6. Implementation
   o Action steps involved in actually introducing the recommended solutions.
     Who/When/How/Cost

Copyright © 2007 Monash University ABN 12 377 614 012
Group - Good Dynamics

It is important to build a good working relationship early in the project. Take some time to get to know the members of your group at the first meeting, but try to keep the personal disclosures relevant to the work of the group. For example:

- Create a master list of names and contact information and distribute it to members.
- Find out the semester levels and degree programs of the group members.
- Find common goals and expectations.
- Share information and insights on objectives and work styles.
- Share your understanding of the project objectives and requirements. Try to identify common ground with other group members and have a group member write down the consensus position. This can serve as a rudimentary mission statement for the group and will be useful in keeping your project on track.
- Have each team member voice one concern and one hope for working with the group or brainstorm characteristics of best and worst group experiences. The outcome of this conversation can be used to establish more formal ground rules for group interactions.
- Decide if people are going to work according to their strengths or use this as an opportunity to stretch themselves in a supportive environment.
- Take turns identifying strengths and weaknesses in academic skills relevant to the design of your project.
- Identify preferences for which roles each group member would like to take on and negotiate responsibilities.
- Determine the quantity, length, and protocol of all group meetings. Then establish a regular meeting time.

Scheduling Problems

Occasionally, group members are so busy that it seems impossible to find a time when every group member can attend all of the meetings. Absences can slow or stop work and can make it very difficult to coordinate the development of the project. It is important to know, as far in advance as possible, which meetings individual group members will be unable to attend so that the other group members will be able to work effectively in their absence. Here is some advice for lessening the difficulties associated with missed meetings:

- Find out what the course instructor expects for participation in group meetings. You will have to accommodate these requirements or negotiate a different arrangement with the course instructor.
- Set clear, mutually agreeable guidelines for attendance at meetings to encourage accountability.
- Encourage group members to be as flexible as possible in establishing meeting times. Make sure that family, work, extra-curricular commitments, and not mere preferences, are the cause of missed meetings. Keep accurate records of attendance at meetings.
- Figure out what happens if a meeting is wholly or partially missed and establish procedures for how a group member would get caught up.
- There are alternatives to meeting face to face. Keep in touch over the phone or via e-mail.
Dealing with Conflict

Some tension or internal struggle within groups is not unusual. Most students have spent years of their education working independently in a competitive, rather than collaborative, learning environment and are simply unfamiliar with the unique demands of group work. The diplomacy, cooperation, and tolerance of different perspectives and approaches required by group work are skills that take time and effort to cultivate.

- Set ground rules for appropriate group interactions. For example, jointly author a code of conduct for meetings.
- Clearly establish separate and equitable roles and responsibilities for group members at the outset of the project, but check on how the process is working for everyone and be prepared to renegotiate these jobs if necessary.
- Watch for the warning signs of trouble and deal with conflict proactively.
- Remember that patience and inclusive communication are essential to good group dynamics.
- Be familiar with human rights and equity policies.
- Recognize that negotiating differences and accommodating unique work habits in pursuit of a common goal is part of the value of participating in collaborative group projects.
- Try to make collective decisions professionally and democratically.
- Socialize with one another and have fun together outside of group meetings.
- Make sure that your course instructor is aware of difficulties as they occur and get help when you need it.

Working Efficiently

Time is a precious commodity. Group work can conjure up fears of long, unproductive meetings spent doing something collaboratively that you are confident you could do much more efficiently on your own. Try some of the following strategies to use your group time effectively and to make the opportunity to work with others more enjoyable:

- Ensure that group members know in advance what role they are to play during each meeting (i.e. leader, note-taker, trouble-shooter, detail person, big picture person, creative input, progress-chaser, reviewer).
- Run efficient meetings - start and end on time.
- Set clear objectives for each meeting, arrive prepared, and keep to a schedule.
- Place reasonable limits on planning and brainstorming activities.
- Break large tasks down into logical chunks and check progress frequently.

Problem Members

Group work functions best when everyone participates actively in the development of the project; however, it is not unusual for a group to have one or more members who are occasionally or
chronically unproductive. Here are some suggestions for encouraging such group members to become more active participants:

- Find out why the group member is not participating or producing. The solution will depend on the reason for their withdrawal, so begin by determining the cause.
- Encourage shy individuals to contribute by soliciting their input on a topic that you are confident that they know something about. You may find that they just need an invitation and a positive experience before they will become more involved in discussions.
- Disinterested learners may need some assistance in uncovering their motivation for contributing to the group project.
- Check to see if the group member is stuck and needs some advice and direction in order to move forward.
- If a group member is very busy, try to accommodate the person internally within reason. Do not allow him/her to abdicate his/her responsibility to contribute to the group project.
- Have a progress-checker. Some people simply need to be held accountable and reminded to meet deadlines or conform to expectations.
- Let your instructor know what is happening.

Domineering Members

Some learners, whether they are highly goal-directed, self-confident, or extroverted, simply prefer to monopolize conversations or direct and delegate the work of the group. Strong leadership skills are excellent to have, but not all leadership skills are conducive to collaborative group work. Try the following techniques to prevent an individual group member from overpowering the efforts of the larger group:

- Indicate that this is an issue of concern by addressing it in the ground rules for conducting group meetings.
- Deliberately take turns presenting ideas or updates. Limit the amount of time each person has to talk and discourage any interruption during the presentations.
- First try to discourage domination by using indirect, blanket statements regarding the nature of collaborative work, or by making humorous, but not critical, comments to the overly talkative or dictatorial group member.
- Designate a willing group member to have a private conversation with the individual who is monopolizing the group’s meetings or dictating group direction.

Getting Help

Go to your supervisor for help with:

- Understanding the learning objectives and requirements of the group project.
- If you need feedback or direction on process or content issues.
- For direction or advice on the use of resource materials.
Go to the reference librarians for help with:

- Individual reference and instructional assistance (e.g. advice on how to do a search, sources to consult, how to use electronic resources at GIMPA and other resources such as journal indexes, and style manuals or guides relevant to your assignment).

Go to Student advisor at Greenhill College:

- If you are having difficulties with group dynamics that you cannot resolve independently.
- Problems with deadlines, extensions etc.
- Other administrative issues

What will the project look like?

There are two different approaches to case studies:

Your project might adopt an analytic or problem-oriented approach. The analytical approach examines a case in order to try and understand what has happened and why. It is not necessary to identify problems or suggest solutions. The problem-oriented method analyzes a case to identify the major problems that exist and to suggest solutions to these problems. Our experience is that most undergraduate projects are of the problem-oriented type.

**The problem-oriented method**

A successful case study analyses a real life situation where existing problems need to be solved. It should:

- Relate the theory to a practical situation for example apply the ideas and knowledge discussed in the coursework to the practical situation at hand in the case study.
- Identify the problems
- Select the major problems in the case
- Suggest solutions to these major problems
- Recommend the best solution to be implemented
- Detail how this solution should be implemented

Finally, a word of caution about plagiarism:

**What is plagiarism?**

Plagiarism occurs when writers claim ownership of written words or ideas which are not their own. It is 'stealing' the intellectual property of other writers and is not allowed in the university. If you copy texts without acknowledging the source of information, disciplinary action may result and you could be excluded from the university. It is important to point out that simply copying slabs of
information or sentences from texts, even if the source of the information is referenced, is not a proper way of writing essays or reports and is not acceptable. You must cite the views expressed in books and articles, but these must also be in your own words and the structure of the piece of writing must also be your own.

Examples of plagiarism include:

- copying another person's work. This includes copying from a book, a journal article, a web site or another student's assignment/s;

- paraphrasing another person's work with minor changes, but keeping the meaning, flow of argument or ideas the same as the original;

- cutting and pasting another person's work into a new document and passing it off as your own;

- submitting an assignment which has already been submitted for assessment in another unit;

- presenting an assignment as independent work when it has been produced in collusion with other students (where this was not specified as a group project).

It is important to note that plagiarism also relates to students copying or basing their written work on that of other students. Of course, students often work together in order to clarify understandings and test out their ideas before they establish their individual responses to topics; this is acceptable practice. If you are not clear about how collaborative work should be presented, talk to your lecturer or tutor. However, unless indicated otherwise in the unit outline, the piece of work submitted for assessment must be your own response and must be your own work.