



Introduction

The case study method: a powerful teaching tool in sports marketing education

Carlos Martí Sanchis

Centre for Sport Business Management
IESE Business School, Camino del Cerro,
del Águila 3, 28023 Madrid, Spain
Tel: +34 91 211 3000
Fax: +34 91 357 2913

Since Harvard Business School (and many other of the world's most prominent business schools that have followed Harvard's example) began using the case study method for teaching, early in the last century, the case study method has become a firmly established educational tool in many business management training institutions.

Today, business schools use the case study method in all their programmes – from the most academic and theoretical courses (MBA or PhD) to executive training for professionals seeking to improve their everyday management skills. Much has been written on the case study method, its effectiveness and its use as a teaching tool. However, the question remains: what exactly is a case study and what does the case study method involve?

The aim of a case study is to describe a real situation experienced by an organisation at a particular moment. This clear and concise definition encapsulates a teaching methodology that has transformed traditional models of management training. It is an active teaching method, constituting a real and effective way for enabling the trainee manager to assume a key role in a business decision-making process. Essential to the case study method is the fact that the main training is dependent upon a participant's own work – trainees are required to place themselves in the shoes of a manager who has to

address a specific issue raised in the case by using the information provided.

It is important to distinguish between cases that are used for research purposes and those employed for teaching. The latter may be classified as those used to illustrate particular concepts or knowledge (e.g. manual cases) and those used in the classroom, but which reflect a real situation in which the student manager is required to play an active role (by analysing, diagnosing and proposing an action or decision). Sports marketing has benefited a great deal from this last type of case study because of its focus on generating new ideas and its stimulation of creativity and innovation.

Cases for research vs cases for teaching

When presented with a case we have to make an initial distinction between cases for research and cases for teaching. Scientific research in any field (medicine, biology, law, sociology, business management, sports marketing etc.) makes extensive use of the case study as a qualitative research methodology: cases are used for illustrating particular phenomena. In the fields of training and education in any discipline (including sports marketing), cases are also used for practical and participatory learning.



Research cases published in academic journals are one of the most commonly found research methods in the field of business management. A review of the specialised academic literature in the field of sports marketing shows us that here too case studies are also increasingly used as a methodology (Shannon, 1999). We can identify two main areas: the marketing of sport (marketing sporting events and equipment to spectators and participants) and the use of sport for marketing purposes (promotion of non sport-related products at sporting events and use of athletes to endorse non sport-related products).

A research case study is associated with in-depth examination, a response to a research strategy and its main goal, and is oriented towards exploration of empirical evidence. Such case studies are by nature theoretical and need to present rigorous and fair empirical data. The three most popular types of research case studies are explanatory or causal case studies, descriptive case studies and exploratory case studies (Yin 2003).

For teaching purposes, a case study need not contain complete or accurate information relating to the circumstances under review. Rather its purpose is to provide a framework for discussion and debate in relation to a particular organisational phenomenon. The criteria for developing good cases for teaching – usually single-case rather than multiple-case) – are different from those for case study research (Yin, 2003). “The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result” (Schramm, 1971).

The main goal for teaching cases is to present a situation that requires a decision-making process to address one or more challenges, where the cases try to get as close as possible to real life. The information given is presented in a haphazard manner in order to force the student to identify key elements, diagnose the problem and make a decision within the same or similar constraints experienced by real managers in their daily tasks and duties.

Case study method as a teaching tool

I would also like to characterise the cases found in the numerous handbooks and academic books whose aim is to illustrate a specific concept within a classroom setting, and those which offer wider information, describe a business situation characterised by an overlapping of interdependent variables, and which require accurate analysis of the situation, systemisation of the information and the defining of an action appropriate to the management function.

There are two main goals in employing the case study method in this setting: one is the communication of knowledge, generic or specific, and its application to different types of situation. The other goal is the development of management skills. In this context, the essence of the case study method is therefore to promote individual study, team work and group discussion, which is guided by a teacher.

For the individual study of the case the following steps are taken in this order:

- analysis of the most relevant facts
- identification and definition of the symptoms or problems
- analysis of the causes
- devising and assessing alternatives
- decision-making and the creation of an action plan.

The main skills brought to bear in improving this process are:

- analysis and synthesis of information
- discerning relevant from irrelevant information
- diagnosing a problem
- differentiating between genuine and apparent problems
- determining alternative courses of action
- taking decisions.

The use of case studies for training includes a teamwork element in which team members give their points of view, enabling people to share and contrast



different proposals and opinions. Teamwork encourages participation of all members and brings into play skills that can be shared among all the team members, enriching debate through the sharing of different perspectives, generating open discussion and encouraging joint decision-making.

The last phase, the general discussion, is led by a teacher who acts as mediator and guides the debate. The case study method breaks with the traditional dogmatic approach to lessons, emphasising dialogue and participation (Llano, 1998). The many management skills acquired and used in the general discussion include: duplicating reality by analysing given situations, decision-making, problem-solving, defining alternative courses of action, communication, prudence, adaptation to reality, listening, and advisory skills. All of these presuppose consideration for others and an acceptance of different points of view.

Sports marketing cases

It is time that marketing as a discipline became aware of the size, importance and potential of the sports marketing industry: sponsorship, events management, the economic impact of sport, sports marketing education, facility management, servicescapes, internationalisation, licensing, market segmentation, relationship marketing, broadcasting media and technology, advertising/promotion and consumer behaviour are just some of the topics most frequently addressed, and new ones are always emerging.

In a fast-changing, highly competitive sector, the demands upon sports organisations, and on their managers, are growing and challenging traditional ways of doing things. The case study method provides the opportunity to study the latest and most innovative practices and models of sports marketing in a way that is kept permanently up to date. Drucker once stated “you don’t need to know much, but you

need to know how to make it real”. The best manager training is through experience and teaching. Teaching through the case study method carries the advantage of allowing the student to learn from others’ mistakes, to emulate their successes (more commonly known as ‘benchmarking’) or simply to draw upon the experiences of others. The implicit risk in this method is that the student may imitate – “We’re going to handle this just like Manchester United or Real Madrid”; “We’ll do it like that because Nike or Adidas does it like that”; “From now on our competition model will be the US NFL”. That said, the case study method places the student at the core of the action, where book formulae do not work, and where he/she is forced to employ marketing management concepts. More than providing the tools, the case study method wants students to discover tools for themselves. This explains why the most useful interpersonal skill-building cases are often described as a “slice of life” (bringing the real world to the classroom). Every science and discipline needs its own sources for teaching and learning, and there are many reasons for considering that in business management, and particularly in sports marketing, the ideal method can be a head-on confrontation with real situations.

Biography

Carlos Martí Sanchis is an Associate Researcher at the Centre for Sport Business Management, IESE Business School, and Associate Professor in the Law Faculty, University of Navarra. He is a PhD candidate in Strategies in Communication Enterprises at Universidad Complutense, Madrid, and has consultancy experience as a partner of Key International Sport.

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