

Understanding students' experience of transition from lecture mode to case-based teaching in a management school in India

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Abstract In this study, we aimed to understand experience of students about transition from lecture mode to case study pedagogy in business management courses. Indian education system is predominantly a follower of the lecture mode of teaching from the grass-root level till graduation. Hence Indian students are relatively less familiar with the case based teaching method. In recent times, the case pedagogy has been rapidly replacing the lecture mode in higher education institutes of India, especially at the business management colleges. We conducted a grounded theory based interview of 33 post graduate students enrolled in a business school (B School) in India, which incorporated a pedagogy shift from lecture to case method during academic session 2010–2011. We found that some of the major factors which facilitated the transition process of the students to this new style of learning were previous educational background, prior work experience, course evaluation methods, institute policies and proper orientation through preparatory sessions. Our findings substantiated extant studies conducted in the context of western countries. The findings also provide a systematic analysis of the various issues in incorporating such pedagogic shifts, which may help academicians to successfully troubleshoot any problems associated with commencement of case based teaching in the Indian context.

Keywords Case study · Lectures · Pedagogy · Transition · India · Management education

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Case study as a pedagogic tool

The case method of teaching has been a very popular mode of pedagogy in Business Schools (B Schools) over the years, especially in the western world where it was popularized by the Harvard Business School (Harling and Akridge 1998; Desiraju and Gopinath 2001). Other institutes have followed suit in due course, resulting in a gradual shift from the erstwhile lecture mode of teaching to the case study style (Carroll and Borge 2007). A case is defined as a 'factual account of human experience, centred on a problem or issue faced by a person, a group of persons, or an organization (Fisher 1978, p. 262). In general, the case studies describe a context specific situation, which revolves around a central issue, or a problem relating to the theme of the issue. The reader is given the task of being the central decision maker after careful analysis of the case (Harling and Akridge 1998; Antill 2007). The case method of teaching takes the aid of structured case studies to stimulate classroom discussions regarding specific contexts and for teaching business concepts. The idea is to encourage the students to take an active role in the discussion of the possible solutions for the problem at hand. From the discussion, attempt is made to reach the most comprehensive and plausible solution (Harling and Akridge 1998).

However, this unique teaching approach is not without its limitations (Argyris 1980; Dowd 1992; Chang et al. 2005). Several factors may hinder learning through case studies, including teacher and student involvement in class participation (Argyris 1980), prior work experience of the students (Chang et al. 2005), nature of subject being taught (Carlson 1999) and evaluation pressures (Pearce 2002). The authors got an opportunity to observe the transition from lecture based pedagogy to case teaching of one such management institution in India. We used this scope to probe the perceptions of students regarding such transition process. At first, we wished to know what past research says about such radical pedagogic shifts. Therefore, we conducted a brief review of previous research to have a better understanding of various barriers to effective case based learning, which is presented in the next section.

Potential issues of case study pedagogy: A brief review

Argyris (1980) pointed out that a teacher can trigger a case study discussion within a classroom in two ways, namely, the problem-solving mode with minimum student participation in the case discussion, and the discussion mode where the students take part in active analysis of the problem. If the faculty wished to keep the control button of the case discussion only to him, there was always the chance that vital issues from the student perspective remained unexplored. Another drawback of case discussion was the fact that the students may reach the optimum solution too soon during the analysis. During such situations, the faculty may try to delay the outcomes for the sake of prolonging the discussion. This could have demoralizing effect on the student's intention to solve the cases by themselves (Argyris 1980).

There are divided schools of thought on what may be the best steps of teaching and evaluating through case studies. Each has its own merits and demerits. In an

attempt to highlight the pros and cons of the different accepted paradigms of case pedagogy, Desiraju and Gopinath (2001) gave a concrete description of two of the world's most acclaimed case teaching styles—the old and tested Harvard Case Method (HCM) and the relatively recent McAleer Interactive Case Analysis (MICA). The traditional HCM method was styled like a Socratic discourse where the instructors would raise some issues and trigger a debate among the audience to foster active learning. The teacher acts as a promoter of discussions, the students have to come prepared in the class and participate actively in the class discussions. They have to be prepared to showcase their own ingenious opinions as well as to counter fellow students' arguments. Contrastingly, the MICA method of case teaching provides a fresh approach compared to the HCM. The MICA is different from HCM in the aspect that it causes less inhibition for students to open up to a discussion. It requires all the students to come prepared for the class but the instructor acts as a passive moderator of the discussion. The students themselves guide the flow of discussions and develop solutions to the problems or issues. As is evident from Desiraju and Gopinath's observation, MICA style of case teaching may be a more fruitful approach than HCM. However, there is very little concern among academicians regarding which method is more superior to the other (Desiraju and Gopinath 2001).

As had been found in some studies, the degree to which students found case studies appealing also depended on the nature of the subject that was being taught through them (Antill 2007). It was observed that for Marketing and Strategy subjects, academicians were univocal about the effectiveness of case based teaching over traditional methods (Hawes 2004; Chang et al. 2005). Similarly, students too, expressed their willingness and ease of understanding of subjects such as marketing and human resource management through case studies (Pointer and Ljungdahl 1973; Carlson 1999). Pointer and Ljungdahl (1973) observed that the successful transition from classroom teaching to case based teaching was happening because the students were putting extra effort to be prepared with the concepts. Their experience showed that the effectiveness of case studies in specialist subjects depends on the students' ability to master the concepts on their own. This same rationale had been supported by Carlson (1999), who, while outlining a case method to teach statistics course to economics students, had opined that the success of such an approach depended on how well the students complemented the case method with their own understanding of the subject concepts. These studies provided indications that case based learning demanded more effort from the students to understand subject matters on their own, and that more effort was required on the student's part to learn technical subjects such as statistics and finance on their own.

Moving on from case based learning to case based evaluation, Dowd (1992) raised his concerns regarding whether the focus of case based classroom atmospheres tend to be skewed towards evaluation and grading activities, thus reducing its potential for knowledge dissemination. Pearce (2002) also highlighted this issue of the pressure of daily class evaluations which is a feature of case based pedagogy. Students taught through case based pedagogy were found to be apprehensive about their grades, which crippled them from taking an active part in the classroom based discussions. Therefore, a lot of responsibility was with the

evaluator to make it easier for the students to acclimatize to the case method of learning.

The ability of students to comprehend a case study scenario could also depend on how much exposure he/she had to real corporate work settings. In other words, the experience of working in an organization earlier could help a student to relate more readily to managerial or operational issues (Pearce 2002). This had been empirically tested by Chang et al. (2005) who conducted a survey on Chinese B School students of Business Strategy to understand their reaction towards case study method. Their study revealed that a higher level of exposure to business scenarios could influence the student's ease of understanding concepts through cases and helped the students with work experience to appreciate case studies better.

In the Indian context, the HCM is the more popular style, given the fact that Harvard is considered as the benchmark for management education (Dixit et al. 2005). Not only the top colleges such as the Indian Institutes of Managements (IIMs), even other less renowned private business schools have started to use case studies in their MBA curricula extensively in the past decade, and according to academic and industry experts, the trend is steadily on the rise (Dixit et al. 2005). The average educational background of students enrolling in such courses is graduation and most students do not have any prior work experience. Add to that, till graduation level, students are habituated with lecture based learning. Therefore, it was necessary to see how the transition process was taking place and which areas of case teaching needed to be further refined so as to make the experience a novel and rich one. We undertook this as our central research problem, which has been discussed in brief in the subsequent section.

Research problem

The transition from the lecture mode to the case mode of teaching may be very demanding on the student's part, as the latter may require more preparation and familiarization with subject matters with even less help from the faculty members. Often students may be required to do group study and extensive self-study, which they may not have done at undergraduate and graduate levels. In view of the above discussion, we wished to understand the cognitive process of student adaptation to the case style of teaching from the traditional lecture based style prevailing in the undergraduate education system of India. From the literature review we were able to identify certain discrete studies which showed that certain individual level antecedent factors such as educational background, work experience and apprehension of evaluation may have some effect on the overall perceptions of students about the case pedagogy method. However, to our best knowledge, previous research has not tried to explain the underlying factors which exercise influence on such transition processes.

In India, till the undergraduate and graduate levels of education, the chalk and board teaching style is the predominant pedagogic method (Dixit et al. 2005). Hence, students are habituated with a learning mode where the faculty simply gives lectures about the subject or dictates notes to the class. If they are abruptly subjected

to the open-house discussion environment of the case pedagogy, it may be difficult for them to adjust to such a change. It is important for academic institutions to understand the manner in which the students cope with such a transition to help facilitate in the overall adjustment process.

On a personal note, we were presented with an opportunity to be witness to such a pedagogic shift, when a private business institute, where the first author was a visiting faculty in the department of marketing and strategy, decided to change its course delivery framework from lectures to a case-based mode for the new academic session commencing in June, 2010. As part of the academic setup, the first author was able to witness this transition process personally. The first author regularly interacted with students of this institute during various stages of the session and became aware of the problems faced by the students to acclimatize with the case teaching method. The idea of the above research problem germinated during one such interaction. The second author was a research associate under the first author at the time this study was conducted, and was later inducted into the study to help in the data collection and coding process.

Research methodology

We used a qualitative approach to propel our investigation. To enhance the validity of our findings, we decided to use two different research techniques in our research methodology—grounded theory (Goulding 2000) and bubble diagrams (Boddy 2004). Grounded theory is a qualitative research technique, which helps researchers to develop new, less tested theories by collecting data first and then drawing the embedded theory from the data itself (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Goulding 2000). For the purpose of this study, the Straussian approach of Grounded Theory (Corbin and Strauss 1990) was adopted. The initial literature review presented in the earlier section served as the trigger for conducting this research. As emphasized by the proponents of the grounded theory, the literature survey did not help to reach any concrete hypothesis. Rather it served as a platform for beginning the enquiry and identifying the sample. This helped in conducting the study without being predisposed towards any theory. Following the grounded theory based investigation; we conducted a second enquiry to readdress our research question. We used a projective technique known as grounded theory (Boddy 2004, 2007) in this second investigation. The findings from these separate analyses helped us to delve deeper into our research problem and reach a more conclusive understanding.

Sample selection and data collection

We selected one private business school located in South India as the academic set-up to conduct our study. This business school was a part of a Deemed University and was consistently ranked as one of the top twenty B Schools in India by leading survey reports. The annual intake for each academic year was roughly 900 students per batch for the course of Masters in Business Administration (MBA). Fresh

semesters commenced in the month of June. The academic council of the above business school had an in-house case writing department which catered to the needs of external educational institutes through preparation of well-researched and high-quality teaching cases with complete teaching notes. Therefore, the academic council was well aware of the potential of the case method in imparting high quality and state-of-the-art management education. The management recognized the necessity of incorporating the same style of learning in its course structure and initiated a major restructuring of the pedagogic structure of all the courses well before the new academic session began in June 2009.

All faculty and research staff was provided necessary exposure of case delivery style through case workshops from the Harvard online case videos. Most of the senior faculty members were involved in writing specific cases for their respective subject domains in order to strengthen the already well-furnished case repository of the institute. The management also established tie-ups with international case databases such as the European Case Clearing House (ECCH) for future collaborations. In the month of June, 2009, this aforesaid B School decided to shift from the traditional lecture mode of teaching to case teaching. The first year students who enrolled for the academic year 2009–2011 were provided with a short 20 day duration preparatory orientation on case discussion. All their courses, including financial accounting and quantitative techniques were taught using case studies only. Teachers were instructed to refrain from any lecture sessions as well as to limit the use of projectors to a minimum. Our choice of this institute was therefore prompted by our central research question—observing the transition experience of MBA students to the case pedagogy. Access to the institute students was made possible through personal contacts and after requesting for proper permission from the management.

The students who were in the senior batch, however, had undertaken their previous year courses through lectures and power-point presentations. Now in their third semester, the senior students were provided with a different pedagogic pattern. Although majority of the subjects were taught through cases for them as well, a few technical topics such as marketing research and operations management subjects continued to be taught through lecture mode. It was therefore, necessary to get the viewpoint of both the first and second year students to understand whether the experience of learning technical subjects through case studies was difficult for the first year students compared to the second year students who went through such courses in a traditional lecture style.

We approached first and second year MBA students of the institute during a semester break and described the nature and purpose of our study. The students resided within the institute campus in student hostels. We personally visited the male students in their hostel rooms at a scheduled time to maintain privacy. Female students were interviewed in the faculty lounge during free periods in one-to-one sessions. We briefed them at first about the importance of understanding the student's point of view regarding case pedagogy in order to suggest important modifications for future. Participation was voluntary, and we assured them that anonymity will be maintained during the interview stage. In accordance with our assurance, we did not disclose the name of the students during any stage of the

interviewing. This was necessary to make the respondents comfortable with sharing their personal views and to maintain research ethics. A brief description of the sample demographics has been provided in Table 1.

The choice of the respondents for the above study was guided by the principle of theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is the iterative process of identifying the most suitable and potential sample for the study based on the research interest and then based on the information obtained from the initial respondents, the next set of respondents are identified for further investigation (Goulding 2000). Thus there is a simultaneous process of data collection and analysis, where the previous data gives the researcher the implication for the next source of data. Through this process of data collection and analysis, the researcher moves towards the development of an emerging theory (Goulding 2000).

In total, 16 first year students were interviewed who had just finished one semester at the B School. All the subjects including accounting and statistics were taught during the semester mainly through case studies. Interviews were recorded using a portable tape recorder with prior consent from the students. The average length of interview was between 20 and 25 min. Previous studies have shown that perceptions of students towards case studies may be influenced by several factors such as student’s educational background and prior work experience (Carlson 1999; Chang et al. 2005). Taking cue from these studies, the initial interview was started with general questions about prior work experience and the educational background of the candidates. Care was taken to choose a sample with as diverse an educational background as possible ranging from commerce to science to engineering to arts background students. A sufficient number of students with previous work experience were included in both the samples of junior and the senior student respondents to study the effect of industry experience on the students’ perceptions about case studies. Gradually, as new questions emerged from the discussions, they were incorporated in the future interviews.

Qs. Please tell me about your educational background?

Ans: “I am a B. Com student with Accounting Honors. Then I have also done

M. Com and presently I am also doing CA in correspondence.”

Table 1 Sample demographics

Respondents	Sample Size	Sample demographics						
		Mean age (years)	Work experience (years)	Gender		Educational background		
				M	F	Commerce	Science and Engg.	Others
1. First year MBA students in their second semester	16	22	5	11	5	5	7	4
2. Second year MBA students in their fourth semester	17	23	7	9	8	6	8	3

As and when new perceptions emerged, they were incorporated in the next interviews. As the emerging pattern suggested, it was felt necessary to reconfirm the theory from the perspective of the senior batch students who have not been taught through case studies in their first year i.e., 2009. The senior year students were given limited exposure to the case method with case studies featuring only in certain courses like business strategy. 17 senior batch students were therefore interviewed in addition to the 16 junior batch students. In total, 33 interviews were conducted which extended to a combined recording time of over 11 h.

The recorded data was simultaneously transcribed verbatim by the first and second author and memos were written down at the same time. The initial wave of interview helped in refining our next iteration of enquiry, thus helping us to probe the perceptions of students in depth. Constant comparison of the data collected revealed some commonly shared virtues and vices of the case method in the students' perception, which were categorized into open and axial codes. In the subsequent sections, these emerging themes are being discussed.

For the second stage of the study, six bubble diagrams were created following guidelines by Boddy (2004). After a few days of completing the GT interview, we approached our respondents and arranged for one-to-one meeting in the faculty lounge where we briefed them individually that we needed to gather some additional insights to our earlier findings. We told them about the nature of the data collection method and showed them sample bubble drawings to make them understand how to give their responses. We provided them with copies of the bubble diagrams and explained to them that they only needed to imagine themselves in the hypothetical scenario described and approximate their responses and thoughts in such situations. Like before, anonymity of respondents was maintained in this second investigation as well. We provided our respondents on an average of 15–20 min to assess the situation and fill up the speech and thought bubbles. On final completion of the responses, we proceeded to the data analysis stage.

Data analysis and findings

Stage 1: Grounded theory investigation

The data generated from the GT interviews were recorded in a portable recording device and properly catalogued under appropriate headings-interview of junior batch and interview of senior batch. The data was then carefully transcribed verbatim sentence-to-sentence manually in text format. Two coders collected and coded the data independently to ensure that there was inter-rater reliability in the data collected, which was determined using the percent-agreement method (Lombard, Snyder-Dutch and Bracken 2002). The inter-coder agreement in our analysis was 91 %, or 0.91, indicating high agreement between coders regarding the emerging themes. The first coder interviewed ten first year and nine second year students, while the second coder interviewed six first year and eight second year students. Data collection was stopped after 33 interviews have been conducted, as

no more fresh themes were emerging from the interviews. The first and second author mutually agreed on data saturation and stopped the data collection process.

The first coder did the final core categorization from the open coding of the data. Owing to space restrictions, a complete description of the data is not possible. Selective sections of the Interviews have been provided as and when possible. Our initial activity was focused towards arranging the diverse array of responses into meaningful discrete codes through the process of open coding.

Open coding is the process of disseminating, conceptualizing and assigning meaning to the vast body of accumulated data obtained from the interviews (Rodon and Pastor 2007). The interviews that were conducted led to the generation of five distinct open code categories influencing students' acclimatization to the case study method.

Open code category 1: Role of academic background

As for the role of the educational background in preparing the students for the transition, we found in accordance with the existing literature that students with technical backgrounds such as Commerce and Accounting were more comfortable with the case pedagogy than those who majored with other specializations such as Engineering, Science and Arts to learn accounting for management and financial management. All the Arts students, whom we interviewed, replied unanimously that they were facing a huge pressure to cope with self-studying the concepts. Science and Engineering students also expressed their disapproval of learning accounting and finance through case studies. As expected, Commerce students were pretty comfortable in the class, and were actively participating in the class discussion. Similar were the inhibitions regarding learning Information Systems (IS) and Quantitative Techniques (QT), where the science and engineering students were at advantage, thanks to their prior knowledge of computers and mathematics.

Qs. Do you find learning technical subjects like accounting and statistics through cases difficult?

Ans: (student with commerce background): For me, understanding accounting and finance through cases is not very difficult because I already knew the concepts at undergraduate level. Case studies are very good for me to understand real life business scenarios, I am happy with the method....

Qs. What about quantitative techniques? Do you understand what you faculty teaches you in QT class?

Ans: QT is the only subject where I do not find any benefit of the case teaching. All the faculty does is to give us one statistics problem in the disguise of a case and then make us solve it without going through the theories at all. It becomes very difficult to follow.... Most of my peers are also facing this difficulty; they should go back to the lecture mode for QT....

Students also replied that the case method was more tuned to shaping the management skills of individuals which were felt to be more important than concept development to make them more employable in the job market.

Open code category 2: Role of work experience

As found by Chang et al. (2005), we also found that students who joined the MBA program after working in the industry were more appreciative of the case method, having been a part of real business and corporate environments. The experienced students were also more participative in the class, often sharing their experiences with the rest of the class to facilitate the discussions. Students who did not have any work experience shared their discomfort with the case method during the initial few classes. However, majority of the fresh graduates also acknowledged that the difficulty to relate to real world corporate problems eased out gradually with practice and through self studying. Students were in general positive about the benefits of studying the management concepts through cases, since it was effective in bringing out decision making skills of students.

Qs. Do you think having work experience is necessary to understand case studies better?

Ans: (Student with 3 year work experience): Yes it definitely helps. Having worked in the insurance sector, I have dealt with various management issues—from client negotiation to supervisor interaction to sales promotion. Now that I am encountering similar issues in case studies, I can relate to these problems well....

Ans: (Student having no work experience): For the initial classes, it was making a difference. I was having a little difficulty to understand the big picture through cases initially. That's where my colleagues with work experience were at an advantage.... After a few classes I was able to catch up with my friends with work ex....

A recurring theme of responses that we came across was that students of the first year had started informal study groups for knowledge sharing and for developing interdisciplinary subject understanding. The students made these groups by themselves, generally close acquaintances or friends, in groups of 5 or 6. The group members interacted at their hostel common rooms or in the campus cafeterias to discuss the cases and their possible solutions as well as for discussing background concepts.

Qs. How do you prepare yourself for the case studies on technical subjects?

Ans: We have a small informal group of sorts, one is a finance guy, two are engineers and I, myself am a math graduate. So it's good that we complement each other. That's how we do it. Alone it is very difficult, I have very little clue about balance sheets and P & L statements....

This showed that the case method helped in bringing out the proactive nature among the students and they themselves expressed that they had never been involved with such activities in their earlier academic lives.

Open code category 3: Evaluation techniques

We received a much more varied and animated response from our respondents when we asked them questions related with their perceptions about their instructor's

evaluation and grading techniques. It appeared that different faculty members were using their own styles of evaluations-ranging from sophisticated methods such as maintaining spreadsheets, or using recording technologies such as audio-visual equipments to simpler methods such as memory recall of post-class performance, taking the aid of faculty associates and through conducting weekly assignments. Students raised their concern over the lack of transparency in the grading system, as the standard practice in the institute was to withhold the grades till a stipulated time, after which the grades were uploaded in an intranet website known as ‘Campus Net’.

Qs. What do you think about the evaluation process through participation in case study analysis?

Ans: “I am not sure about all the teachers. Some teachers did not let us know how the evaluation process works. So we had no clue. More often, we saw that the teachers give more weight to quantity rather than quality. This I felt is not a fair way of evaluation.”

Most of our respondents felt that the grades did not reflect the true performance of the students. We received several feedbacks where the students indicated that there were instances of impression management from certain students’ part to secure better grades, although no names were disclosed. More often than not, students felt that they were afraid to raise counter-arguments in fear that their comments may offend their instructors. We asked the students to share with us more about their thought about the grading process. Due to the sensitive nature of this query, most of our respondents did not wish to comment. However, we did receive some indications that favoritism was prevalent among the faculty members when it came to grading the students. However, the responses did not provide any hint of gender discrimination during evaluation.

The findings at this point relied heavily on how the students felt about the grading process. However, the teachers were also a part of the evaluation process and hence it was necessary to get their opinion about the same. Therefore, we wished to verify this issue from the faculty members and approached a few close acquaintances at the institute. This inquiry was conducted separately by the authors to substantiate the findings from our principal investigation. One faculty member expressed that the problem was not with favoritism, since that can also be prevalent in a lecture based classroom. Rather, the root of all discontent with the evaluation process was the lack of transparency in the process.

We went back to our responses and found evidence of this statement in the feedback of the respondents regarding the evaluation process followed by their course instructors. It seemed there was no standard process which was followed. Faculty members had their own ways of evaluating the students. Some chose to take notes of the discussions, some used audio-visual recorders to capture the responses while one faculty relied on class tests and project assignments for grading the students.

Qs. Did you find any subjectivity involved in the evaluation? Did the faculty do anything different to enhance objective grading?

Ans: Well, there was this marketing faculty who used to write down everything spoken in the class on a given day. In case of any grievances from students, he would open his notebook and show what he/she has spoken on that day and why they have received their grades based on their performances.

Hence it was natural that the students felt ambiguity in their class evaluation. Such inhibitions were demotivating for some of them, who shared their reluctance to participate in the class discussions. This was one area where we found the institute management could develop a clear and objective grading system to keep students content about their evaluation.

Open code category 4: Management policies

This category was closely related with the previous category of the teacher's evaluation, but we decided to make a separate category for the responses which centered on suggestions for modifying the evaluation structure of the institute. The system of daily grading and class evaluation in the B School was cited as a major concern by all the students. The students felt that the academic management could modify the grading system to a weekly or at least monthly basis, to facilitate healthy discussion and debate in class. Most respondents felt that due to the pressure of earning grades in each class, often the case discussions were not being discussed in depth. As a consequence, quite a few concepts pertaining to one particular chapter in a subject do not get discussed at all.

Qs. What do you think about the grading system and the evaluation structure?

Ans: I think the source of all problems is the compulsory nature of the grading of our performance... even if you have scored well or given a good answer, you can still end up getting a 'C' grade... 40 % must get C... the management should change its policy and let merit decide which grade one should get, not the system....

These issues remained overlooked by faculty and management alike till the end of the session when the term end examination approaches. This had led to students being faced with difficulties in their written tests.

Open code category 5: Preparatory sessions

This last category emerged primarily from the response of the first year students since the second year students did not receive any preparatory course on case teaching. A 2-week duration non-mandatory preparatory session was offered by the institute before the commencement of the new academic year in the end of May, 2010. This was a crash course aimed to give students a brief orientation about some technical concepts in management such as basic statistics, basics of accounting and finance etc. Students were also given practice cases to make them familiar with how the classes were to be conducted once the sessions began. We received several responses with respect to the preparatory sessions, the duration of which most students felt was not enough. Students suggested that such courses could be

extended to a month before starting the regular classes, in order to help bring the students on an equal platform to participate in and appreciate the case discussions.

Qs. Please suggest a way to help students better acclimatize to the case method.

Ans (First year student): One thing that could have been done, which I felt is at the start of our sessions, there was a short preparatory session to help us in concept clearing... the duration was very short, it was difficult to learn all the concepts in such short time... should be conducted at least for 2 months....

Ans (Second year student): For us, there was also a preparatory class when we joined, and it was a good supplement for our main coursework to follow. I can not comment on the experience of the first year students, but I feel without any theoretical background learning technical subjects can be difficult through cases....

However, students also expressed their view that since there was tough competition among the students to secure good grade point averages (GPAs), the management may actually encourage such an orientation to the case method—thus advocating a situation of survival of the fittest. The central theme of responses was directed towards criticizing this policy, which created undue advantage for certain students to compete in the class. Most felt that by providing adequate time for all the new students to the technical concepts before introducing to case based teaching, their learning could attain a higher level of understanding and knowledge sharing (Table 2).

Memoing

At every step of the open coding process, memos were maintained to facilitate in data categorization (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Rodon and Pastor 2007). The memos were developed from the actual responses with the interviewees. These memos helped the coders to identify the inter-linkages between open codes, for further classification into axial codes (Table 3).

After analyzing the open codes and the corresponding memos, we were able to conglomerate the related themes into inter-dependent categories. This broader classification led to development of three principal axial codes—‘initiation’, ‘acclimatization’, and ‘feedback’ (Fig. 1).

Axial code 1: Initiation

The Initiation phase encompasses the open code categories of educational background and work experience. The comfort level of students with case study method was found to be directly related to their familiarity with the concepts. For commerce background students, solving accounting and finance cases was not a big problem, but most of them faced difficulty to tackle the Information Technology (IT) and statistics related cases. For engineering or science background students, it was vice versa. Now if we look back at the work of Pointer and Ljungdahl (1973), we can see that their findings did not reflect the true picture. The researchers

Table 2 Open coding of student perspective of factors case pedagogy

Factors affecting student perceptions	Open codes
Educational background	Commerce (advantage in Accounting and Finance cases); science/engineers (advantage in IT cases); other background (difficulty in technical subjects); Technical subjects (Accounting, Finance and Statistics)—case studies not good, lecture sessions required); on-technical subjects (OB, HR and Marketing)—case studies better than lecture method
Work experience	Having work experience (easy to relate, helping the rest of class with own experience) Fresh graduates (having difficulty initially, catching up later, adopting themselves)
Evaluation process	No fair justification for marks obtained in class participation, mostly first day impressions count; faculty remaining reserved about the evaluation procedure; students with poor communication skills not able to open up; subjective evaluation; fear of confrontation with the faculty; more quantity than quality discussion; motivating to come prepared in the class; active participation rather than passive observation; evaluation by multiple evaluators; taking notes of student responses
Management policies	The 40 % class participation ruins the fun; it is always playing on our minds to score a better grade; management needs to revise its policy of forced grading; it makes the evaluation unfair sometimes; I worked so hard on Finance and even scored reasonably well, still I got a C grade, it is disheartening; If it is already decided that we will lose, what is he point in trying? I do not feel like participating anymore; it is all relative, nothing absolute
Prior preparation	Preparatory sessions not adequate to make understand all the necessary concepts; informal group work facilitates class participation; faculty taking care to discuss concept first and then start discussion

concluded in their study that students can adapt to technical subjects such as Accounting and Finance through case pedagogy with relative ease. On the contrary, our results showed that students can be vulnerable to case based lessons in conceptual subjects such as Accounting and Finance depending on their quality.

Therefore, it is important to select the right cases for discussion at class, and if required, some topics may be taught using lecture seminars to help clarify the technical concepts. As found by Chang et al. (2005), work experience did not play a huge role in hampering learning through case method, though having such experience did make the acclimatization easier for those with earlier working stints.

Axial code 2: Acclimatization

This was the stage where students were trying to cope with the case teaching style in their own ways. We found that students were learning the importance of team work and group study and developing close peer networks to facilitate inter-subject knowledge transfer. Students met with their informal friend circle after class hour to

Table 3 Selective description of memos

Factors affecting student perceptions	Memos
Educational background	The academic background of the students have helped them to adapt better to the case method of teaching, especially during the accounting and finance sessions as compared to the non commerce students
Work experience	Students having work experience may have got an extra edge over the fresh graduates in the initial classes, but later everybody has been on the same platform
Evaluation process	Huge dissatisfaction among students regarding the ambiguous evaluation process, regarding the teacher’s inability to control the class and too much unfruitful discussion. Biasness has also been perceived by many
Nature of subject	For technical subjects like accounting, finance and statistics, there is an equivocal need for lecture based sessions in parallel with case studies. For general subjects like HR and OB, case method is in fact making the sessions interesting
Prior preparation	Restructuring of the preparatory classes required to make the non-commerce students more familiar with the concepts of accounting and finance Faculties require balancing their sessions with some more concepts clearing sessions than focusing entirely on case studies

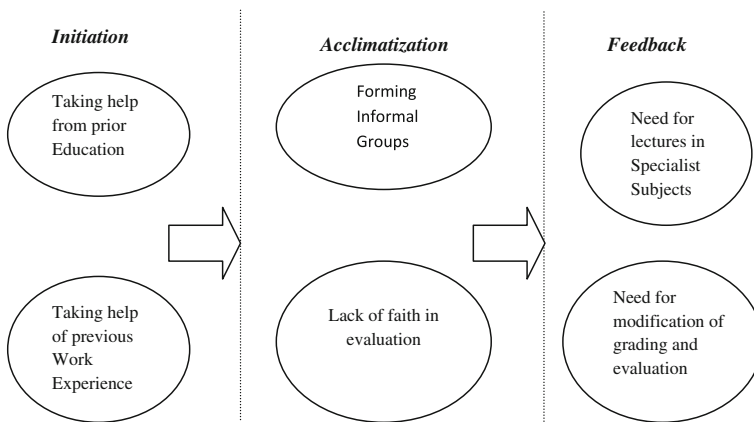


Fig. 1 Stages of formation of students’ perceptions about case study

discuss concepts. Informal group work was important for students to cope better with the class assignments.

Axial code 3: Feedback on modifications and drawbacks

Finally, the feedback phase consisted of different modifications suggested by the students to improve the overall learning experience through case studies. For example, majority of our respondents were of the opinion that in future, a course with a mix of case studies and lectures for at least the technical subjects. Following

the 100 % case based HCM model to the core may be a poor option for educating Indian MBA students. Instead, Indian B Schools wishing to shift to case based teaching should use cases judiciously according to the subject demand and keeping in mind the heterogeneous educational background of students who come to enroll in MBA colleges.

The evaluation system, especially the 40 % grading allocation for class participation was another area which the students felt was a considerable portion of the overall grades. This was creating extra pressure on the students to compete in the class participations in a healthy manner. Another disconcerting factor was the forced distribution of the letter grade system which required each faculty to give 15 % of the students an 'A' grade and 40 % of the class population a 'C' grade, irrespective of their performances. In fact, the online grade updating system had restrictions on how many students can be awarded any particular grade, with at least 15 % of class population to be awarded 'A' grade and at least 40 % to be graded 'C' irrespective of their performances. Such a forced grading system was considered unfair by most of the students whom we interviewed. This meant that often less deserving students ended up getting an 'A' grade and more often than not, undeserving candidates got 'C' grade. At Harvard, the class participation accounts for 50 % of the grades. However, the distribution of the grades allows a teacher to grade on merit and only 10–15 % of the class is graded 'C' (www.harvard.edu). This forced grading was found to be one major reason for students' lack of content over the evaluation. Add to that, we also detected that such forced grading was demotivating for most of the students to come prepared in the class after the first one or two class evaluation results have been declared. The lack of transparency in the current methods of class evaluations was indeed in need for some major modifications. All these issues prompted us to urge the students to suggest necessary modifications which could help make the experience of learning through case method more effective and the enriching. Some changes suggested by the students were—need for lecture based sessions in parallel with case studies for technical subjects, need for more transparent evaluation, reduction of participation grade to 25–30 % which will reduce the burden of grades to certain extent, and help students to focus on the discussion more actively, and last but not the least, strengthening of the preparatory course structure for better orientation to technical subjects.

As one of the respondents remarked—case study was a hundred percent good method but curriculum should not be designed based on hundred percent case studies. The above three categories were later clubbed under one central theme—“Student Perception about Transition to Case Pedagogy”.

Stage 2: Triangulation of stage 1 data using bubble diagram analysis

To strengthen the validity of the above findings, we decided to explore the phenomenon at hand using a different method of data collection; in this case, a projective technique called Bubble Diagrams (Boddy 2004). Bubble drawings are pictorial representations of scenarios requiring participants to give both their verbal and mental responses about some situations (Boddy 2004, 2007). The advantage of using this kind of technique lies in the assumption that people tend to reveal their

latent thoughts if they are asked indirectly about them. In this study, the choice of bubble method for triangulation was prompted by the fact that this was a similar research setting like Boddy's (2004) where the agenda was to get the inner perspective of the students regarding a curricular change.

A lot of sensitive issues were addressed during our grounded theory interview process such as biasness of evaluation and teacher's competency. There was a possibility that the responses to such controversial questions may have been guarded. Bubble diagrams were used to check how close the earlier expressed responses of the students were with their latent thoughts while responding to such sensitive issues. In total, five bubble drawings were given to the same set of students who had earlier participated in the first stage of data collection and they were initially briefed about what they need to fill in the respective spaces. They were given a time of half an hour to think about the scenario and were asked to write the possible responses to the questions describing both their speech and thoughts about the responses. These five bubble diagrams were drawn to depict each of the five categories found in the earlier axial coding stage and had questions regarding—work experience, educational background, preparatory classes and evaluation process. The respondents were told to imagine themselves in the place of the student shown in the diagram, and to write down the most likely answer that they might have given in response to the interviewer's questions inside the speech bubble. Simultaneously, they were told to jot down their thoughts in the thought bubble, which were most likely to come to their minds if such a question was asked to them in reality. An example of a scenario was the interviewer asking a respondent about a faculty's fairness of evaluation (Fig. 2).

Our respondents were shown the above diagram, where the hypothetical researcher asks a student about perception of fairness in the evaluation style of a faculty. We asked our respondents to imagine themselves as the student in the diagram. There were two boxes provided for the respondents to fill up—the speech box/bubble and the thought box/bubble. The respondents were told to fill up their speech and thought responses to the pertaining question as they would have given if asked in real life in the corresponding boxes. In a similar manner, other responses were elicited from the respondents regarding their perception about the grading system, the importance of having work experience, the need for informal groups and more preparatory sessions. Some more pictorial presentation of the bubble drawing findings is reported in Fig. 3.

Out of the 33 students from the GT interview, twenty returned complete responses of the bubble drawings. Three responses were incomplete, which left 17 usable drawing sets. In total, 17 sets (85 bubble diagrams) of drawings were received. The feedbacks showed that the responses in the thought bubbles almost always matched the speech bubble responses which indicated high consistency of the feedback. For example, when asked whether work experience helped to understand case study better or not, most respondents said that it was good to have work experience but it did not really make too much of a difference. In the corresponding thought bubbles too, they gave similar statements. It was assumed that the thought bubbles are the more reflective and latent representation of the answer (Boddy 2004). Only in response to the question pertaining with the teaching

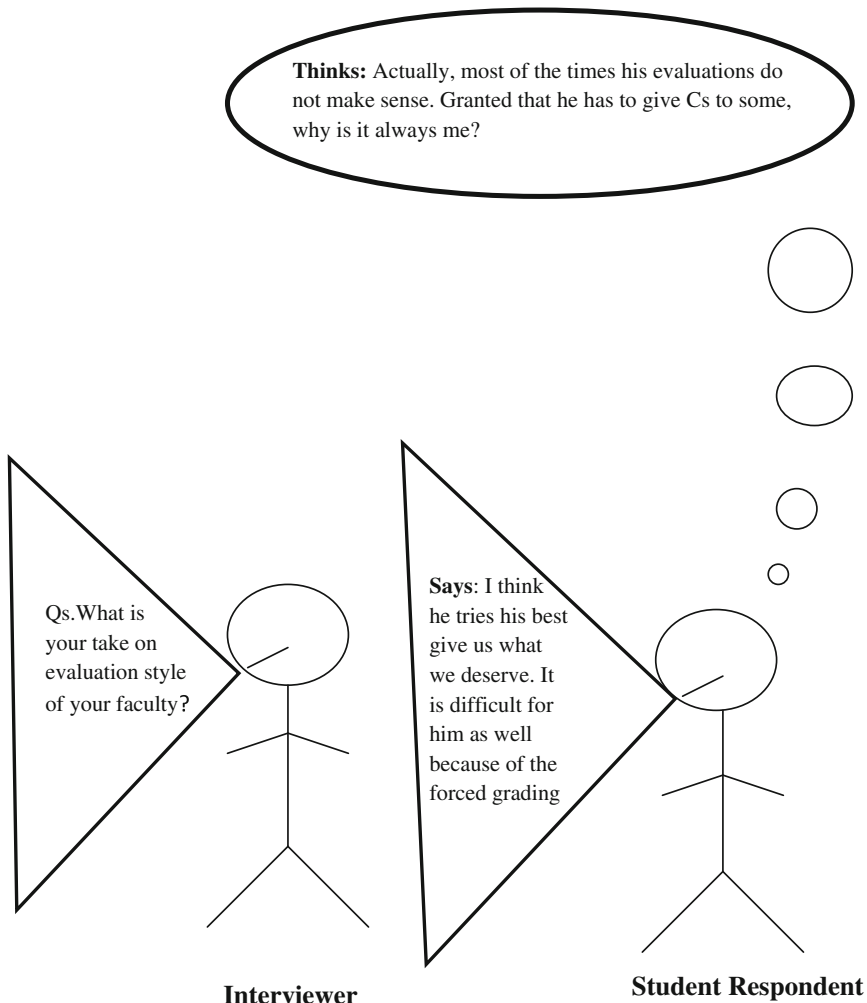


Fig. 2 Sample bubble diagram (scenario 1)

evaluation styles of respective faculties, four respondents gave different responses than previous time in the thought bubbles. These four students had thoughts of doubts over the instructor's fairness of evaluation, though in the speech bubble, they remarked that they felt that the class evaluations were done justly. In case of only one bubble diagram, we had difference in opinions. Thus we had response congruence between speech and thought bubbles in 80 out of 85 bubble drawings. The responses proved that the verbal responses of the students were more or less unanimous with their thoughts. This provided support for our earlier responses with the grounded theory study, thus helping us to triangulate our findings (Golafshani 2003; Jick 1979).

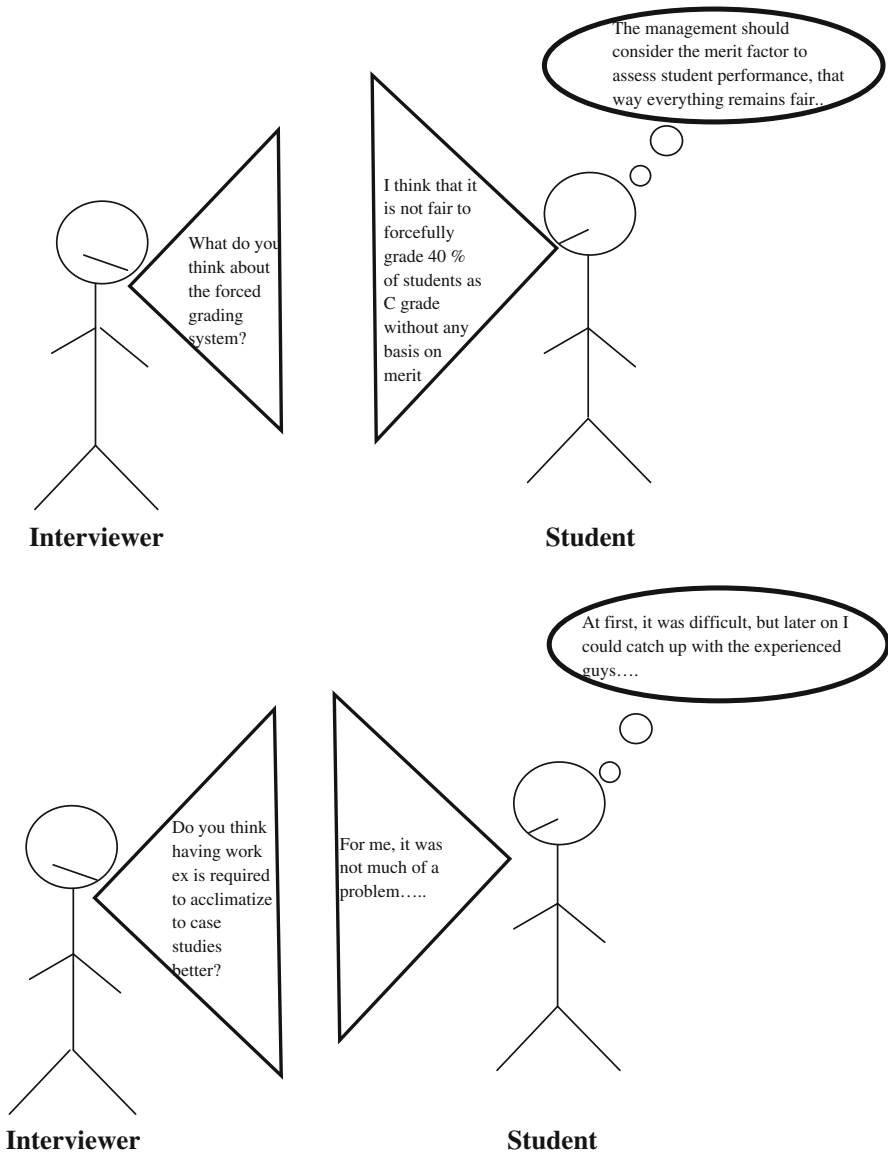


Fig. 3 A few more examples of bubble diagrams (scenarios 2 and 3)

Theory building using action diagram: How students’ perceive case pedagogy

Action diagrams were used to illustrate the cause effect relationships between the different codes (Rodon and Pastor 2007). Action diagrams have three parts-actions, conditions and consequences. Actions refer to the actual behavioral outcome of the parties involved in the process. Conditions refer to the situations leading to the actions. Finally, consequences refer to the results of the behavior/action (Rodon and

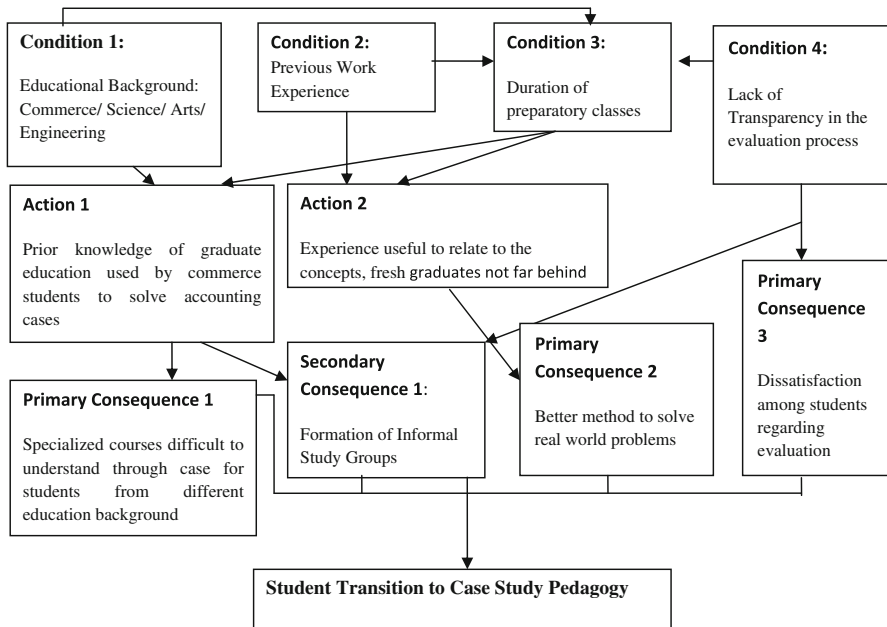


Fig. 4 Action diagram of students' perceptions about case pedagogy

Pastor 2007). Consequences may be direct/primary consequences, or unintended consequences or secondary, depending on their nature (Rodon and Pastor (2007)). Using the procedures described by Rodon and Pastor (2007), we developed an action diagram of the process of formation of the perceptions about the newly introduced case based teaching method (Fig. 4).

Some of the antecedent conditions which were found to be key components of the initial transition process were educational background (condition 1), work experience (condition 2), short duration for preparatory courses (condition 3), and ambiguous evaluation and grading techniques (condition 4).

Conclusion

The study showed that a smooth transition to case study method for teaching was limited by certain barriers such as the students' ability to understand the concepts on their own, adequate time allotted by the institutions to provide proper preparatory lessons for subjects like Accounting and Finance and the ability of the teacher to churn out the concepts from the cases. For certain general subjects like Organizational Behaviour, Human Resource Management, Marketing and Strategy, it was observed that students had really warmed up to the case study method. However, for technical subjects such as finance, accounting and quantitative methods, students were not convinced that cases alone were enough to clear their concepts in these subjects. Majority of our respondents voted for a judicial mix of

lectures and case studies to ensure more effective learning in these subjects in future. On a positive note, students acknowledged that the case method was useful for simulating a real-world corporate environment in the classroom, thus inspiring them to think like real-life managers. Students felt that such an orientation would benefit them in the long run in terms of job opportunities during campus interviews.

However, majority of the respondents were of the opinion that certain aspects of the current case teaching process required modifications in future. The main concern was the issue of initial difficulty that the first year students felt while trying to understand technical subjects solely through case discussions. Many felt that the sessions could have been a much more productive had the faculty divided the entire session into lectures for concept clearing and cases for understanding application of the concepts. Students also were not happy that such a teaching style was not in use in their earlier education stages. This provided us with indications that to make case studies a standard and easy way of course delivery, efforts should start from a more fundamental level. From the teacher's point of view, well-planned workshops should be organized by the institute management to train the faculty members on how to conduct courses using case studies and how to evaluate students in a fair way. Earlier studies have not probed much deeper into specific issues behind the transition and adaption process to a case pedagogy from the student's perspective. In this regard, this study provided some fresh outlooks to the various pertaining factors regarding the central research question, along with reconfirming some of the findings of earlier investigations. Our study also provided implications that blind replication of the HCM style of case teaching may not work in MBA courses in India, since the students have to go through a tough transition from the lecture style which they had been accustomed with for their entire life.

Limitations and future directions

Due to the subjective nature of our enquiry, the extent to which this study can be generalized may be questioned. The small sample size also was not adequate to reach any universal generalization about pedagogic transition process. Hence quantitative purists may not be convinced about the conclusiveness of our research findings. In our defence, we would like to state that, from the outset of our investigation, our objective was not to generalize the phenomenon, and we indeed believe, that in a different academic setting, a different set of results may be obtained. We were not able to interview other stakeholders involved in the process such as the faculties or the management people of the institute due to time and resource constraints, which could have led to a much better triangulated research.

However, our interviews with the 33 students provided us with a huge volume of recorded data with a total duration of over 10 h which took us over 3 weeks to transcribe. Hence, in terms of rigor, we believe that we conducted a deeper examination of the issues at hand. Another advantage of having the GT inspired semi-structured questions was that we could cover several sensitive topics without directly coming to the point. We believe that such an approach was necessary to make the students give honest responses about their perceptions about the pedagogic

style of the college that they were enrolled in. Our objective was not to prescribe any full-proof solution to the issues of pedagogic transition, rather we merely pointed at how, as academic practitioners, we can understand the context and the actors involved in such processes and then take some actions to enhance the same. Hence our suggestions are very specific to the boundaries of our study context. With respect to implementation of case study pedagogy in management courses in countries where the dominant teaching style is lecture mode, we urge academicians and curriculum designers to not remain ambivalent to the various adjustment issues of students about to enroll in such courses and be prepared for useful modifications for the simultaneous benefit of the students as well as the teachers.

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