



DESIGN MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

# Guidelines: *Case Study* *Program*



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**DMI Case Studies**

These Guidelines for the Case Study Program came from the Design Management Institute's Case Study Program. The Institute conducts research and develops educational materials on the role of design and design management in business success. Case studies, the *Design Management Review*, reprints from the *Review*, and other educational materials are available from the Design Management Institute. Visit [www.dmi.org](http://www.dmi.org) to see a catalog of DMI publications.

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# Description: *What is a case study?*

*The “teaching case” is, in DMI parlance, an empirical, field-based document that represents a slice of reality—a particular time and place in the life of a real organization. Unlike lectures, printed materials, and television, which are mostly passive learning media, the case study cannot be properly understood—indeed it is incomplete, veritably crippled—without active participation by students in the learning process. A good case study draws students (whether MBA candidates, post-graduate executives, or any other reader) directly into a problem and challenges them to analyze the situation and grapple with decisions that must be made. Learning takes place when students accept that challenge and become deeply involved with the material as they prepare for and engage in class discussion; a superior case study compels them to do so.*

As a teaching strategy, case studies have enjoyed a long tradition in business education. Since its founding in 1908, the Harvard Business School began to employ the case method; HBS subsequently became a major center of case development (followed by Stanford, the University of Virginia, and others) and the premier proponent of the case method of business education. Other schools in the U.S. adopted case studies selectively. Internationally, the case study method has become popular more recently. Hitotsubashi and Keio universities in Japan adopted the case study method in their business schools; INSEAD in France and IMD in Switzerland have developed, and used cases extensively; the London Business School and business schools in Sweden and Denmark have accelerated their development and use of cases in the last decade.

As a literary and pedagogical genre, the case study is particularly important in under-researched fields, where no body of literature or theoretical framework yet exists. It brings new research quickly and efficiently to the classroom, and its empirical approach and problem orientation enable researchers, teachers, and students to focus on a particular issue in a real company, and to do so within a broader context. Because design management has until recently received little attention from business or engineering schools, DMI has chosen to focus its initial research efforts on this genre. DMI case studies are helping both educators and professionals understand how companies actually manage their design resources; how design relates to other functions like engineering, marketing, manufacturing, and corporate communications; and how design decisions affect many facets of an organization. Together, the cases demonstrate the importance of design as an integral part of a company's business strategy and competitiveness.

### ***How Does A Case Study Contribute to Learning?***

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The immediate impact of the case study is in

the class discussion, where students (or executives) become engaged in the problems of a company, its industry, and the particular issue at hand. With DMI case studies, the issue involves the design process—in product development, corporate identity, communications, architecture, and so forth. After becoming “hooked” on the case through the opening scenario, the students get to know the people involved, their backgrounds, skills, experiences; they see how these individuals interact and collaborate effectively and not-so-effectively; and they become acquainted with the complexity and ambiguity of a real world situation, where decisions are made by imperfect people in a context of incomplete information. Most important, they are propelled into the uncertainties of the workplace and faced with determining a course of action that involves their reasoning, intuition, and emotions in a classroom debate.

The longer-term importance of the case study is its role in building up a body of literature that will find its place in permanent collections for business education. Not only do case studies themselves become part of that literature—e.g., in case study books—but they provide the empirical foundation for comparative studies and theoretical work. Thus DMI's best case studies are being published in case books that offer teachers tested modules for design management education. DMI's entire case collection will provide a broad platform upon which to build further research, and a solid basis from which to develop comparative analyses and theoretical frameworks in the field of design management.

### ***How is a Case Study Developed?***

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The case development process, described in detail below, involves extensive field research; a careful, iterative writing process; professional design work for pedagogically effective layout; trial teaching, and collaboration with both company participants and instructors from a variety of disciplines. The develop-

ment of well-written, engaging, accurate, pedagogically effective cases is by nature interactive and time-consuming.

### ***Why Participate in Case Study Development?***

Organizations participate in case study research because of several benefits. The case development process itself encourages a rethinking of the project or problem under study and fosters learning within the company on such issues as company communications, decision-making, strategic planning, and leadership.

A second case study benefit is visibility: companies invest resources in case development because they know that good cases reach hundreds, if not thousands of students and other readers over a number of years. Each year thousands of copies of DMI's "Umpqua Bank: Managing the Culture and Implementing the Brand," "Braun AG: Designing and Developing for a New Oral Care Category," "Apple PowerBook: Design Quality and Time to Market," "Braun AG: The KF 40 Coffee Machine," "Changing Corporate Identity: The Case of a Regional Hospital," and "Crown Equipment Corporation: Design Services Strategy," among others, are used in business, engineering, and design schools throughout the world. In 1992 the Braun case became part of the required first-year curriculum at the Harvard Business School. Many cases are

later published in books on management by authors such as Tom Peters, Kim Clark of the Harvard Business School, and Steve Eppinger of MIT Sloan School. All DMI case studies are distributed by Harvard Business School Publishing (HBSP), an arrangement that ensures maximum visibility and circulation for the collection. The cases are sold via the HBSP Web site, catalogue, and newsletter, effectively reaching thousands of academics and business professionals worldwide.

A third benefit is that case study companies know that through helping educate future managers, they are investing in their own future and in the future of their industry.

### ***How are Companies Chosen for a Case Study?***

DMI chooses case study companies on the basis of pedagogical need, company interest, and resources available. Typically we choose successful companies that understand that success comes not from being problem-free, but from meeting and overcoming the problems that will inevitably confront a dynamic, risk-taking organization. To guide our case selection, we review the design management issues already covered in our completed cases and those that need to be covered as we continue to expand our library of cases. For example, do we need a new case on corporate identity? Do we have enough cases on design policy? Have we covered all the major design issues in product development?

## *Development Process*

Once an organization agrees to participate in a case study, it can expect the process to proceed more or less as follows:

### ***1. Initial Case Study Agreement***

*Identifying a "case champion" who will shepherd the case through the company.*

This is the main "case contact," who plays a critical role during the entire course of case

development, and whose office will be responsible for the casewriter's visit to the company.

*Identifying the "case approval person"—a senior manager who has the authority to approve the case, or to sign off on the completed case.*

This may be the case champion or someone else in the company. It is important to

identify this person up front so he or she can be kept informed of the progress of the case. *Assuring confidentiality.* DMI has a formal Confidentiality Agreement that is filed with the company. Each person quoted will be asked to check the quotes; moreover, the case itself cannot be released—distributed or used—without the signature of the case approval person.

## **2. Background Research**

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In order to be prepared for field research, the casewriter reads as much as possible on the company, the industry, and the specific issue or product involved (to the degree that it is known).

### **Company involvement**

The office of the case champion sends company documents, e.g. company publications like annual reports, newsletters, etc.; newspaper and magazine articles; product information. The case champion identifies and provides information on individuals who should be involved in the case, and arranges a schedule for the casewriter's visit, coordinating interviews and other appointments.

## **3. Field Research**

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### **Interviews**

Depending on the complexity of the case, an in-depth research visit usually runs two to five days. During this time, the casewriter talks with people at all pertinent levels in the organizations, from all relevant disciplines. It is important that the project have the imprimatur of a top manager, so that people feel comfortable being candid with the casewriter.

Interviews are usually scheduled for one hour, though people sometimes run over as they tend to enjoy talking about things they've committed months or years of their lives to. Individual interviews are the most effective. An exception may be for the purpose of understanding the dynamics of the relationship between, say, members of a product development team. Then, in addi-

tion to talking with each member individually, a casewriter may find it useful to meet them as a group and let them reminisce with each other about the project under study.

### **Plant visits**

In order to understand such matters as technology, production processes, organization of work, and company environment, the casewriter needs to visit the pertinent sites. This is particularly valuable after the casewriter has had some interviews and has learned something about the company.

### **Finding a case focus**

Sometimes the focus of a case study—the issue, problem, or conflict that will engage students in fruitful discussion—is evident from the start of the research process. Other times—more often than not—the casewriter, with the help of the company, needs to discover such an issue during the field visit. Unless the case “story” has some engaging, dynamic element, i.e. at least one crucial issue “about which two intelligent people can disagree,” then the case is likely to be boring and without real educational value.

### **Collecting written and visual materials**

During the company visit the casewriter collects additional written materials (published documents, copies of memos, correspondence, etc.) and visual materials (concept sketches, slides, blueprints, videos, advertisements, etc.)—whatever is pertinent to the case. It is most helpful to collect such materials on the spot; otherwise people get busy and forget to mail them later. Again, no private document will be published or circulated without the company's permission.

### **Write-ups of field visit notes**

At the end of each day, the casewriter schedules in time to write up each day's material. That way, with a fresh memory, the casewriter can supplement the interview notes before that information is lost, and determine the questions that remain to be explored during the following day.

*Company involvement (in addition to the interviewees' time):*

Because of the logistics involved, the casewriter counts on the enthusiasm and organizational ability of the case champion, whose office will set up the entire visit, minimizing cancellations, tracking down necessary materials, and so forth.

#### **4. Crafting The Case Study**

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##### **The Text**

This typically takes from several days to several weeks, even months. Distilling mounds of information into a compelling, coherent case study that meets quality standards for accuracy, good writing, and effective presentation requires several drafts. Refining a case study for balance, tone, richness, flexibility and, ultimately, longevity, requires patience and experience. Casewriters often work with the professor who will be the first to teach the case.

##### **Figures, Exhibits, Tables, Appendices**

Because of the communicative power of visual information, DMI insists that its cases have first-rate visual materials. DMI's designers translate company figures, charts, photographs, and so forth into visually effective components of the case study. Exhibit drafts are sent to the company for review. If necessary, sensitive information can be disguised.

##### **Design and Layout**

Final design and layout is done by DMI's publishing personnel. Their goal is a document that is pedagogically effective, visually attractive, and easily accessible to the reader.

##### **Epilogue**

The Epilogue—"What happened?"—is a one to four page document that provides a resolution to the story in the case. It is typically handed out at the end of the class discussion so the students can learn what the company actually did—e.g. what decision it made—and what the impact was, up to the present, of that decision.

*Company involvement:*

The casewriter always finds many questions that need follow-up by telephone, and typically requires further information, perhaps in printed documents, that needs to be tracked down and sent. Interviewees who have been quoted will be asked to read the text and approve the quotes. The case champion and other participants will be asked to check the case for accuracy.

#### **5. Preliminary Approval and Trial Teaching**

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When the case is almost ready for trial teaching (if appropriate), it is sent to the case approval person, whose signature releases a case for its classroom debut. This occasion provides a crucial opportunity to see what "works" and doesn't work in the case. Does the case provide enough information on the alternative decisions to foster lively interaction among students? Do the students have enough data with which to reach a decision? Do the students find the situation compelling or too contrived? Do they argue with each other? Is anything unclear?

*Company involvement:*

The company's case approval person reads and signs off on the case. A preliminary approval applies to the trial teaching session only, and presumes that changes will be made, both in response to company requests, and in response to the teaching experience.

"Case players" from the company are usually invited to visit the class; they tend to enjoy listening to the discussion as much as the students enjoy talking to them afterwards.

#### **6. Final Revision, General Approval, Printing, and Distribution**

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The casewriter studies the feedback from students and teachers carefully and makes appropriate revisions to the case as a result. After revisions and professional proofreading, the case study, if necessary, is sent to the company's case approval person for a final, general approval. It is then ready to be hand-

ed over to Harvard Business School Publications for inclusion in their Web site, catalogue, and newsletter. Harvard is a primary source of case studies for business schools, engineering schools, design schools, and executive education programs all over the world.

*Company involvement:*

The company provides information necessary for the revisions and the signature of the case release person. Participants in the case may choose to stay involved with the case over its lifetime, visiting classes and keeping the casewriter informed about the company's progress.

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## *Supplementary Materials*

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### *The Teaching Note*

After the case has been taught, the casewriter, often in collaboration with an instructor, prepares a “teaching note” that will help future instructors use the case in a variety of educational settings—e.g. MBA education, undergraduate education, executive education—and a variety of courses—e.g. marketing, operations management, product development, communications. These notes give the instructor further background information on the company and “hindsight” on central issues in the case; they often contain further data and extensive follow-up information. They provide sample questions for students and guidelines for discussion.

### *Artifacts*

A case study is always enhanced by artifacts—products, parts, materials, brochures, etc.—that the students can see and handle. The company often provides these artifacts to each school where the case is taught so they will be available as needed.

### *Technical Notes*

Instructors often find a “note” on the technology or field in which the case is set to be a valuable teaching tool. If such a note—e.g. on steel producing processes or the computer industry or industrial design—is not available, the casewriter may develop one, keeping in mind the needs of students and other readers as they prepare for case discussions in that field.