

The Essence of Case Writing

Prof. Kundaswamy was amused when the Board of Governors of the Institute of Management expressed surprise as to why there were only four case studies done during the year 2006. This happened when the annual report of Institute was being presented for the Board's perusal and approval. A senior Board member, who had been on the Board several times, since the Institute's inception, was particularly concerned about it.

Prof. Kundaswamy recollected the year when he joined the Institute and after four months he prepared course outline for teaching the course of Strategic Management, to the first batch of the Postgraduate students. The Faculty Council (FC), disapproved the course outline as it agreed with the Director (who was Chairman of the Council) that most of the cases given in the course outline were cases from foreign countries. As asked by the Council, he then presented a fresh outline of the course after six weeks, now with Indian cases prepared by faculty members of a leading institute. The Director, who was a very learned man and had been in reputed management schools, commented that the cases were substandard, citing example of a particular case. Kundaswamy objected that the Director was referring to another case with similar title, but different author. The Director agreed but maintained the cases were not good ones. Kundaswamy was frustrated. Irritated, he asked the FC where from he could get the cases, if good ones were rejected as foreign cases and Indian ones were rejected for bad quality. The course was to commence two week later. He was advised that he should write new cases to teach the course. When Kundaswamy asked as to how could he write 20-25 cases immediately, it was resolved that the whole Faculty Council should help him in writing the cases. He made a personal resolution and wrote cases regularly as he had been doing in the past. It is a different matter that none other faculty member, including those who were sent for training in case writing, wrote any case in the next five years.

One of the reasons perhaps was the fact that instead of rewarding the effort of case writing (which demands lot of time) despite the fact that case writing was officially considered research, the Institute did not consider even the time spent on the same as official work (see the case Research Incentives).

While such lack of support continued for first three Directors (third being an acting director), with 2nd and 3rd having no experience of cases writing, the fourth one went a step further. He refused to allow even xeroxing on his machine (which also had the facility of reducing size), when Prof. Kundaswamy wanted to get 50 copies printed, to distribute them to about 40 students (who wrote 8 case studies under his supervision) and the organizations which had supplied data. He had to conduct a training programme to compensate for 50 copies Xeroxed and bound, to make the first case series of the Institute, which was released by the Honourable Minister of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India on the day of convocation. It is different matter that neither Prof. Kundaswamy nor any of the students who joined the first case writing in the country at this scale, were seen in any of the photographs, nor got copy of the book, which were all locked in the Directors' bookshelf. Not only that he did not respond to the request for permission of publication of the case. Prof. Kundaswamy had promised his students that if an opportunity arose, he would like to get them published. Incidentally, just before joining of this Director, the Board had approved creation of an Academic Resource Park, for supplying high quality course material for management education.

Most of the faculty members, specially at senior level were never exposed to case method of learning and teaching. Indeed, almost half of them were not exposed to management education in a formal manner. Some among the latter expressed in private conversation that they did not believe that management was an exclusive discipline of education. The Institute also did not take active measures to indoctrinate case method of teaching. There were as many case methods as the number of faculty members who taught through case method (mostly marketing and strategic management teachers), a popular one being the students being assigned cases individually or in group and asked to make presentation. The teachers then commented on them. By the turn of the twenty first century it became all the more easy when the reputed institutions from the deveped countries started allowing free downloading of their cases, along with Instructor's notes, through internet.

One of the key factors, Prof. Kundaswamy thought, was the lack of realization among the faculty, the Board and the participants as to what benefits case writing could bring to them. If some actions were taken in this regard, multiple benefits could accrue not only to the faculty members, but to the Institute as a whole.

Question:

1. Why Prof. Kundaswamy was amused on the revelation of low number of case writing?
2. What are reasons for low number of cases written?
3. What are the possible benefits of case writing? To whom?
4. Can Board/Director do anything to improve the situation?