

CASE ANALYSIS: STUDENT AND FACULTY PERCEPTIONS

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This paper reports a study of faculty and student perceptions of the value of case analysis. The survey sample included faculty members and graduate and undergraduate students at two universities. Significant differences were evident between the three groups in the perceptions of the case method in comparison with other teaching approaches. A five step scale (very satisfied - quite satisfied - satisfied, no more or no less - somewhat dissatisfied - very dissatisfied) was used.

Overall satisfaction with case analysis was highest among faculty members and lowest among undergraduate students - 80% of the faculty members expressed high or very high satisfaction, while the tally was 64% for MBA students and 55.9% for undergraduates. High or moderate dissatisfaction was registered by 15.3% of the undergraduates and 4.1% of the MBA students, while no faculty member expressed dissatisfaction.

In comparison with other methods, the case approach did not compare favorably. In comparing case analysis with traditional lecture, 90% of the faculty sample was somewhat or very satisfied, while only 47.6% of MBAs and 32.3% of the undergraduates felt similarly. No faculty members were dissatisfied with case as compared to lecture, but 21.4% of MBA students and 25.8% of undergraduates were.

Comparing case with lecture-text elicited 80% somewhat or very satisfied responses from the faculty, 46.6% from MBA students and 37.1% from undergraduates. None of the faculty sample indicated dissatisfaction, while 19.4% of MBAs and 22.6% of undergraduates did so.

The final comparison was with group projects. Sixty percent of the faculty members were somewhat or very satisfied with the case method in this comparison and none were dissatisfied. Of the MBA sample, 46.6% were somewhat or very satisfied and 13.6% were somewhat or very dissatisfied. Corresponding figures for the undergraduates were 37.1% and 17.7%.

The subjects were also asked their opinions about the relevance of case analysis to the program of study, and the quality of realism evident in case analysis. Faculty members were much more satisfied with relevance (90%) than were the MBA students (56.3%) and the undergraduates (54.3%). Interestingly, MBA students were more satisfied with the realism of cases (52.5%) than either faculty members (50%) or undergraduate students (43.6%).

Clearly, faculty members have a higher regard for the case approach than do students. There may be several explanations for the difference: the experienced case teacher may find the case course more "interesting", in the sense that group dynamics play such an integral role. The professor may achieve ego gratification through skillfully guiding class discussion, in a sense "orchestrating" the outcome. And, the professor may believe that the case approach results in better learning.

The remaining questions focused upon skills developed through case analysis. Undergraduate students were more satisfied with progress in that area (56.5%) than were MBA students (55.4%). Only 50% of the faculty members were somewhat or very satisfied with student improvement in that area. Sixty percent of faculty respondents were somewhat or very satisfied with student ability to identify major problem areas, while 62.2% of the MBAs and 66.2% of the undergraduates were similarly satisfied.

Thirty percent of the faculty members were somewhat or very satisfied with student ability to identify major strategy facts. Corresponding figures for MBAs was 50.5% and for undergraduates 40.3%. Undergraduates were marginally more satisfied (56.5%) with their ability to identify viable alternatives than were MBA students (56.3%). Only 30% of the faculty sample was as satisfied with student ability.

The more worrisome differences are those related to perceived ability. Faculty were less satisfied than students in analytic skill improvement, as well as ability to identify major problem areas, and ability to identify major strategy facts and ability to identify viable alternatives. Assuming the faculty perspective to be more accurate, we are inundating the world with graduates who greatly overestimate their ability to deal with business situations - a view shared by many employers.