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While conducting empirical research regarding the relationship between case characteristics and student performance, the authors were surprised to find a lack of conceptual and empirical research regarding instructor case selection. This conceptual paper explores the case selection process and introduces case selection as an under-investigated component of the case teaching method in management education. Case selection is important because it is a critical component of the case teaching method. There has been no empirical testing of the effectiveness of case selection technique. The authors identify and propose case selection criteria for instructors of management education.

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Case Selection

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the importance of case selection as an essential component of the case teaching method in the context of management education, as well as to establish and propose a set of case selection criteria (See Figure 1). The case teaching method has been used in management education for over a century. The case method is widely used today for undergraduate and graduate management education, yet little if any attention is given in the literature to the process (theoretical or in practice) by which instructors *select* cases (Liang & Wang, 2004; Rippin, et al., 2002). To some extent, case selection is a blind spot, in that instructors practice it frequently, but do not rely on empirical findings to test or confirm their assumptions and hypotheses regarding the effectiveness of their particular techniques for choosing cases.

Early on, faculty were required to write the cases they taught. Therefore, the selection of cases for teaching largely occurred at the case research stage. The evolution of the case teaching method offers a partial explanation of why case selection has arrived at its present state, where its importance is understated and it is to some degree ignored in the literature. Today, case selection occurs as an integral and intentional part of the case teaching process. Case selection deserves further attention in the academic literature due to the vast array of cases available, the wide appeal of the case teaching method, and, more importantly, that cases directly affect teaching objectives and learning goals (Campbell & Lewis, 1991).

This paper focuses on case selection within the context of the case teaching method. In order to better understand case selection one must examine the broader picture of the case teaching method (Stewart & Winn, 1996). The academic literature acknowledges that there are multiple versions of the case teaching method used in management education (Ashamalla & Crocitto, 2001; Mesny, 2013; Shugan, 2006). Distinct from the case research method, the case teaching method is an active learning teaching tool with four defining characteristics according to Christensen and Hansen, 'an active student discussion, a discussion process facilitated by the instructor, a focus on the specific rather than the general, and concentrating on cognitive, affective, and practical learning goals' (Mesney, 2013, p. 57-58). However, there is no universally accepted, agreed on singular model, process, rubric or lexicon of the case teaching method.

History of Case Method

As alluded to earlier, our review of the history of teaching cases, in the context of business education, revealed why case selection has been overlooked. In 1908 Harvard Business School's first Dean, Edwin Gay, decided that a method of teaching should be used that was analogous to that being used in the law school - the case method.[1] Distinguishing the proposed business teaching method from the law school's case method, Gay referred to it as the "problem method." Gay, aware that, unlike law, business had no established body of cases available, decided that "his faculty would simply have to employ a "problem method" whenever it seemed possible" (Cruikshank, 1987, p.74). Dean Gay was committed to the case method and discussion in the classroom, but noted that one of the "chief difficulties is the obtaining of proper case material for discussion" (Cruikshank, 1987, p. 76).

In 1911 Arch Shaw, a founder and publisher of a management magazine, was concerned that business students "wouldn't recognize a problem if they saw one" (Cruikshank, 1987, p. 71). Shaw donated money to Harvard Business School (HBS) with the requirement that it "be applied for the purpose of investigation of business problems" (Cruikshank, 1987, p. 59). The fund was used to establish Harvard's Bureau of Business Research, which still exists today. The Bureau's early researchers emphasized the practical (particularly given the limits on time and resources), and their objectives included discovering what could be of "immediate use in the curriculum" (Cruikshank, 1987, p. 60).

The lack of a body of prepared and written cases resulted in 1) case selection not being an option for faculty, 2) faculty writing their own cases, and 3) the development of Harvard's Bureau of Business Research (to aid development of case material). Therefore, case selection historically occurred at the point of identifying the company or firm to be researched. Eventually the trend became one of instructors using cases researched and written by other academics, with case selection occurring at the teaching stage as opposed to the research or writing stage. This trend operates as the fundamental model for case selection today. The lack of recognition in the literature of the importance of case selection is partly explained by the fact that the shifting of case selection from the research and writing stages to the teaching stage did not occur systematically. The literature on management case education has yet to recognize or investigate the stage at which case selection occurs and its importance to the case teaching method. This paper addresses this gap in the literature.

CASE SELECTION CRITERIA

We propose a set of case selection criteria (See Figure 1) as a way of identifying various components to ultimately better and more systematically understand the case selection process. We developed the characteristics partly in response to the paucity of research (conceptual and empirical) related to case selection for teaching. As we noted, the literature tends to focus on the case teaching method without consideration for case selection, e.g. Campbell & Lewis (1991).

Given the evolution and popularity of the case teaching method, it is time for the *process* by which instructors select cases to be thoroughly investigated in order to help both case writers and instructors better achieve their goals. Case instructors armed with an increased understanding of the characteristics that may influence case selection will be more deliberate in choosing cases so as to increase teaching effectiveness. Andersen & Schiano acknowledge that the “choice of cases can have a dramatic impact on the quality of your course,” but do not attempt to categorize or test the effectiveness of factors they propose as critical for case selection. Although this paper focuses on case teaching, case writers will be better able to write cases that help instructors achieve teaching objectives and students achieve learning goals if equipped with an increased understanding of the characteristics that affect instructors’ selection of cases.

We now posit and examine specific elements of case selection. Given the lack of research on case selection, we derived the following case and curricular characteristics from the authors’ years of case teaching experience, feedback from case writers and instructors in management education, and varied information available in the literature (e.g., Andersen & Schiano, 2014; Campbell & Lewis, 1991; Libby, 1991; Rippin, et al., 2002). We categorize the criteria of case selection into two major groupings: 1) case characteristics and 2) curricular characteristics. Instructors using the case teaching method may rely on a number of factors when selecting cases to teach in a specific class session, for inclusion in a case reader or course text, or for a class assignment.

Case Characteristics

We define case characteristics as attributes or dimensions of a case that instructors may consciously (or not) consider when selecting a case, and that are likely to affect teaching and learning outcomes**.** Case characteristics include, but are not limited to: 1) Case Focus; 2) Case Framing; 3) Company Structure; 4) Teaching Note; and 5) Information Richness – Qualitative and Quantitative.

Case Focus

The focus of the case refers to the strategic dimensions of the business arena/firm/organization that are most salient in terms of problem identification, analysis, diagnosis and resolution. The case focus is the central topical area(s) of the case. Topical areas could be disciplines (such as management, marketing, or accounting) or sub-disciplines (such as strategic management, business policy) (Liang & Wang, 2004; Libby, 1991). Topical areas might also include analytic or diagnostic tools necessary for solving the case (such as a SWOT, Structural Analysis of an Industry, Value Chain Analysis, Competitor Analysis, Portfolio Analysis).

Case Framing

When writing a case, case writers might decide whether or not to "show" or "hide" the strategic alternatives most available to a firm to resolve the major issue(s) of the case situation (Campbell & Lewis, 1991). In other words, strategic alternatives can be explicit or implicit. A case might include specific explicit alternatives (e.g., expand internationally, acquire a smaller firm) that instructors can adopt as part of the case assignment. On the other hand, implicit case framing involves hidden or disguised strategic alternatives. A case may signal the need for a company to increase its level of vertical integration; however, it would not explicitly or visibly list this option or any other options as a strategic alternative. Under this scenario, the most viable strategic options are generally listed in the teaching note for the edification of the instructor.

Instructors also may examine the extent to which a case suggests one "best" alternative or a set of alternatives. In other words, does the case suggest or lead students toward a correct response or point them in only one strategic direction. Students, when analyzing and diagnosing a case situation, generally are required to identify and describe a set of major issues which are used to derive strategic and tactical recommendations. When the list of strategic options is not explicit, students are forced to generate strategic options through analysis and diagnosis of the case situation. Alternatively, a case that includes an explicit list of strategic options, allows students the opportunity to expedite their analysis toward the step of identifying major issues. The identification of major issues is often included as a segment of a case analysis assignment.

Company Structure

Company structure is often defined in multiple ways. One definition of company structure is whether a firm is a single business unit, a diversified firm (related or unrelated), or a conglomerate. Another definition is whether a firm is structured by function or division (e.g., product, customer, geography, etc.)

Teaching Note

Case instructors are likely to differ with respect to their use of teaching notes (Campbell & Lewis, 1991). For many instructors, teaching notes are used similar to an instructor's manual, guiding their class preparation and determining the substance of primary teaching points. Other instructors refer to the teaching note as more of a reference from which they draw keywords or tools of analysis to use when teaching the case. Yet, others do not refer to teaching notes at all. Rather, they rely on expertise and knowledge derived from their time-honored case teaching pedagogies, analytical frameworks, and teaching styles. Instructors new to the case teaching method are likely to desire informative and detailed teaching notes which can serve as a foundation for class session preparation. Ultimately, the teaching note may be a factor distinguishing cases judged equal on other case selection factors.

Information Richness - Qualitative and Quantitative

We define information richness as the total amount of information available to students, for use in analyzing and solving the case. The information provided in the case serves as a primary source of information (Swiercz & Ross, 2003). Other information may be available and accessible from a variety of sources outside of the case as well. Thus, information richness is the sum of information provided in the case combined with information available from a host of other sources including the academic institution, the faculty team or instructor, the focal company of the case, and the Internet (Rippin, et al., 2002).

Further, cases differ in their level of sophistication and treatment of firms' and organizations' financials and financial standing. Most cases contain basic financials including an income statement and balance sheet. Many cases also contain industry level financials (e.g., ratios, revenues, costs, profits). Higher level cases tend to include the basic financials as well as financials that facilitate assignment of sophisticated financial analyses, including valuation of companies as well as merger and acquisition transactions. Further, cases differ in their level, depth and amount of quantitative data regarding marketing phenomena, economic indicators and other quantifiable factors such as industry and global trends. The information richness of a case increases as the financial data become more extensive and expansive, and as statistics regarding various aspects of marketing, demographics, and economics, become more elaborate.

Academic institutions and focal companies can have a significant impact on information richness as well. Academic institutions, faculty, and librarians influence the quality and quantity of information available to students through library subscription databases and other resources such as subject matter experts, proprietary reports, and finance terminals. In general, companies' corporate philosophies regarding open-sourcing of information can have a major impact on information richness for particular cases. Specifically, corporate decisions related to the release of information (such as analysts' reports and industry, consumer and trade statistics, rankings or ratings) on its company websites or made available through other means can have an effect on information richness.

Curricular Characteristics

As previously mentioned, we believe teaching objectives and learning goals associated with specific case assignments will often serve as the primary drivers of case selection. Furthermore, we posit that instructors do not select cases in a vacuum or without consideration of the following curricular characteristics, all things pertaining to the instruction of the course: 1) Institution; 2) Instructor; 3) Course; 4) Student; and 5) Assignment.

Institution

Institutional factors such as type of school (e.g., college vs. university, 4 yr. vs. graduate, etc.) may influence case selection (Booth, et al., 2000; Libby, 1991). Additionally, across all types of schools, instructors are more likely to experience institutional pressures when their teaching takes place in the context of a required or mandated academic program (such as a common course experience, capstone, courses with the same curriculum across multiple sections, or team-taught courses).

Instructor

The instructor's pedagogical preferences and professional background are likely to influence case selection (Campbell & Lewis, 1991; Liang & Wang, 2004; Libby, 1991). For example, one's sub-discipline and expertise will play a role in the frequency of adopting the case teaching method, selection of types of cases, topics and major issues to be focused on in course assignments. Inexperienced instructors, given their unfamiliarity with teaching using the case teaching method, may be more inclined to rely on teaching notes and more commonly, traditionally used cases. Instructors with no practical business experience may see benefit in relying on the case teaching method as a way to bring the "real-world" to their classes. Further, experienced instructors are likely to develop their own personal and untested heuristics often shared among colleagues and case teaching scholars that potentially increase the efficiency and effectiveness of case selection.

Course

Course characteristics include course level, type, class size, and course discipline. In some courses the case focus may or may not be the same as the course discipline. For example, an accounting course may include a case focused on ethics, operations, or organizational behavior. Strategy courses will typically include cases that focus on multiple disciplines within the business arena for the purpose of integration. Cases exist for almost every discipline or field within management and business. Some disciplines use cases more than others, e.g., accounting vs. organizational behavior (Liang & Wang, 2004; Libby, 1991). Instructors evaluate cases for difficulty and complexity, in order to appropriately select cases in the context of course level (i.e., lower-level or upper-level). For example, instructors teaching strategic management and business policy are likely to select cases targeting specific topics or that offer the opportunity to integrate information, knowledge, concepts and theories from courses completed as prerequisites for the capstone experience (Rippin, et al., 2002). Class size is likely to influence case selection because it often impacts the frequency of student participation and level of student engagement, as well as the feasibility of active learning (Booth, et al., 2000; Doran, et al, 2011; Rippin, et al., 2002).

Sometimes the level of analysis for case selection is the case packet (as opposed to the individual case). In such cases, an analysis of case selection must consider the underlying reasons for selecting individual cases but only in the context of the entire case packet. So, the selection of individual cases may be difficult to predict without an understanding of the teaching objectives and learning goals across the entire case packet. In such conditions, we suggest analysis of case selection at the case packet level rather than the individual case level.

Student

We also argue that instructors focus on a significant number of student characteristics when selecting cases. As stated above, the course level or students' class year (first-year undergraduate through master's level) is a major factor considered in case selection, in part, because cases diverge significantly in terms of their complexity, difficulty, and diversity of issues (Liang & Wang, 2004). Further, we hypothesize instructors account for class diversity (e.g., students' academic studies and standing, geographic diversity and awareness, and previous experiences) with the case teaching method as well (Libby, 1991; Ramburuth & Daniel, 2011). For example, strategy professors may begin an academic semester with simple and accessible cases to build students' knowledge, skills and abilities to a point where they can analyze and diagnose a more complex case situation or scenario. The types and years of students' work experiences might also play a role when considering non-traditional and graduate school contexts.

Assignment Requirements

We posit that instructors select different cases for various types of assignments, including cases assigned for: 1) class discussion only; 2) student teams to write papers and/or present informally or formally; and 3) individual students to write papers, and/or present informally or formally, (Stewart & Winn, 1996). Many other assignment parameters may influence case selection. The following list, while not exhaustive, is an attempt to catalog key assignment requirements:

- types of and degree of qualitative analyses;
- types of and degree of quantitative analyses;
- specific demonstration of tools of analysis (SWOT; SAI: Value Chain; EVA);
- type and number of recommendations or alternative recommendations;
- written paper – length;
- informal or formal presentation – presentation content and style requirements;
- individual or team assignment.

It should be noted that sometimes case selection occurs as a result of the assignment design rather than assignment design occurring as a result of the case selection. For example, an instructor might select a case and then revise the assignment, having concluded that the case is the perfect fit for a SWOT or Value Chain Analysis.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper identifies a gap in the literature regarding case selection. Instructors (and case writers) will benefit from a better understanding of and the systematic development of case selection criteria. Future empirical research focusing on case selection should address the testing of case selection criteria identified in this paper, as well as implications for teaching objectives and learning goals.

CONCLUSION

This paper argues strongly for the importance of case selection as an element of the case teaching method. The pervasiveness of the case teaching method in management education and the assumed learning outcomes associated with case teaching speak to the need for a deeper investigation of case selection as an element of the case teaching method. A significant number of prestigious case publication outlets produce a substantial number of teaching cases each year. HBS faculty alone produce 350 new cases per year (Harvard Business School MBA website, n.d.). Management texts with teaching cases are published every year. For example, new editions of strategic management and business policy texts which include anywhere from ten to twenty teaching cases are published regularly for use in management education. An increased understanding of case selection would be beneficial to case writers and instructors alike. Case writers will be able to engage in continuous improvement based on the objectives and preferences of case instructors. Case instructors will be better able to meet their teaching objectives (and students their learning goals) by being able to match teaching objectives and learning goals to case selection criteria.

ENDNOTE

1. The law case method had been developed decades earlier by Harvard law school professor and dean, Christopher Columbus Langdell (Cruikshank, 1987, p. 74). Langdell avoided standard lectures and focused on providing students with numerous examples from which they derived general principles through class discussion.

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APPENDIX

FIGURE 1
CASE SELECTION CRITERIA

Case Characteristics	Curricular Characteristics
• **Case Focus** o Topical area or sub-discipline	• **Institution** o Type of school or dept.
• **Case Framing** o Implicit or explicit strategic alternatives	• **Instructor** o Pedagogical preferences o Sub-discipline
• **Company Structure** o SBU vs. diversified	• **Course** o Level o Type o Class size o Discipline
• **Teaching Note** o Effect on pedagogy	• **Student** o Level o Diversity o Experience
• **Information Richness** **-- Qualitative & Quantitative** o (e.g., analyst reports, company financials, etc.)	• **Assignment requirements** o Discussion vs. written o Individual vs. team o Analysis: type or tool o Recommendations, type & #