Using Case Study in Entrepreneurship and Innovation Education: Methodological Aspects

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Използване на казуси в обучението по предприемачество и иновации: методологически аспекти
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Abstract: The article examines the main characteristics of case studies, focused on issues connected with entrepreneurship and innovation. A general definition of teaching cases is drawn, together with basic characteristics of a successfully developed entrepreneurship case studies. Based on two general criteria, scope and volume, three different types of cases are offered: micro cases are up to one page story, used as an example in a lecture; mini cases are from 3 to 6 pages story, showing major entrepreneurial problem and alternatives for decision; full text cases up to 12 pages are academic research texts, investigating in a long term problems and situations, connected with future development of the entrepreneurial and innovation activities and are used as instrument for fostering of practical application of students’ theoretical knowledge.

Key words: Case Study, Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Резюме: Статията изследва основните характеристики на обучителните казуси, чиято тематика е фокусирана върху предприемачеството и иновациите. Изведена е обобщаваща дефиниция на практически ориентири текстове, здраво с отличителните черти, присъщи на добре построените казуси. Въз основа на два главни критерия, обхват и обем, са предложени три различни типа разработки: микро казуси с обем до една страница, които могат да се използват като илюстративен пример в лекция; мини казуси с обем от 3 до 6 страници, които описват съществен предприемачески проблем и възможни алтернативи за неговото разрешаване; пълностраний казуси с обем до 12 страници, които по същество са академични исследователски текстове, анализиращи в дългосрочен аспект проблеми и ситуации, свързани с бъдещото развитие на предприемаческите и иновационни дейности и които могат да се използват като инструмент за стимулиране на практически приложението на теоретичните знания на студентите.

Ключови думи: казус, предприемачество и иновации

I. Introduction

According to some opinions of students, business actors and society representatives one of the reproofs towards academics and the process of providing higher education is the weak interconnection between theoretical formulations and the practical application of the young specialists’ knowledge and skills.

I. Въведение

Една от основните забележки, отправени от студенти, представители на бизнес средите и обществеността към академичната общност и процеса на обучение във висшето образование е слабата връзка между теоретичните постановки и практическото приложение на формираните чрез тях знания и умения на младите специалисти.
In order to overcome that unbalanced situation many lecturers, academic teams and educational organisations use in their work the approach of case study teaching. That teaching method is well known in the field of higher education and is widely used mostly in North-European and American universities, where there are some examples of decades of tradition in using the case study approach. In Bulgaria the application of case studies in educational processes has been put into practice in the last 10-15 years, mainly in the field of humanities.

II. Core features of case study

There are a lot of perceptions about the meaning and core characteristics of the term *case*. The differences are caused by several influencing factors – the field of application of the case; the problems that the case introduces; the point of view of the case author and the goals that they want to achieve with the case, etc. But when we speak about cases used in education in management, marketing, or entrepreneurship, a general definition of case as a teaching instrument can be drawn.

That is a research text, or a short story, based on real life situations from the experience of a real organisation, entrepreneur, manager or even employee, composed to illustrate a specific problem of potential opportunity and allowing the reader (student) to propose alternative solutions of the stated problem/opportunity in order to achieve favorable results for the organisation or person in hand (Cooney, 2008b; Patton, 2001; Penchev, 2001).

The main task of a case used as an educational tool is to enable students to achieve balance between theory and practice, and to encourage them to apply their theoretical knowledge in real situations (Cooney, 2008a; Ellet, 2007; Patton, 2001).
Lane, 2007b; MARPHLI Team, 2002; Roper & Millar, 1999; Swiercz, 2000; Wylie, 2003).

The basic characteristics of a successfully developed case in the field of entrepreneurial education are:

- **Topicality.** The case is a short, understandable for the general public story, whose time scope should spread over 3 to 5 years’ period in the future;
- **Authenticity.** Since the case is in fact a historical explanation of decisions and situations, it must reliably represent the reality in an unbiased manner;
- **Realism.** The story is based on real persons and companies and is usually focused on the dynamics of the development of the company or the entrepreneur;
- **Active position.** The reader (student) is put into a specific role (owner, CEO, manager, etc.) and must assess their decisions from that point of view;
- **Sufficient information.** The text should include information sufficient in quantity and quality (incl. accounting reports, product specifications, market analyses, etc.), which will allow students to identify possible alternatives and to generate adequate solutions;
- **Initiative.** The information represented in the text must be structured in a way, which encourages the readers to search for additional facts and records in order to form their opinion.

In addition, some authors think that one well developed case might generate confrontation among the different points of view because the educated persons analyse the advantages and disadvantages of the possible alternatives form their specific position towards the situation, described in the case (Penchev, 2001).
An important prerequisite for developing a high-quality case is also the choice of an appropriate example (object) for analysing. The following requirements must be taken into consideration:

- The example must represent interesting and/or important problems, connected with entrepreneurship and innovations;
- Sufficient informational resources should be available;
- The information obtained should be reliable;
- The example must involve focusing on a particular situation or a problem to be discussed or resolved;
- The case focus must motivate readers for designing original and practical ideas from their position;
- The time scope of the case must be relevant, the case solutions should be applicable in the future.

III. Types of cases: Typology and elements

A large number of classifications of educational cases could be suggested – for example, depending on the case object (for start-ups, small and medium enterprises, big multinational companies, etc.); on the business sector, analysed in the text; on the subject of the research (entrepreneurial problems, managerial problems, marketing problems, etc.) (Herreid, 1997; Lane, 2007a; Yin, 2008).

In general, when speaking of cases in the field of management, entrepreneurship and innovations, two interconnected criteria for defining the case type could be drawn up, irrespectively of the specific purpose of the case. These are thematic scope and volume of the case.

Based on them, three main types of cases could be distinguished: micro case, mini case, full text case (Figure 1).

Micro cases are texts with length of less than a standard typewritten page.

Важна предпоставка за изготвянето на висококачествен казус е и изборът на подходящ пример (обект) за анализ. Следва да се имат предвид следните изисквания:

- Примерът да разглежда интересни и/или важни проблеми, свързани с предприемачество и иновации;
- Да са налице достатъчно информационни източници;
- Набавената информация да е достоверна;
- Примерът да предполага фокусиране върху конкретна ситуация или проблем, които да бъдат дискутирани или разрешени;
- Фокусът на казуса да мотивира читателите към формулиране на оригинални и практически предложения от тяхната позиция;
- Времевият обхват на казуса да е подходящ, решенията на казуса да могат да се приложат в бъдеще.

III. Видове казуси: типология и структурни елементи

Възможно е да се предложат голем брой класификации на казусите, използвани за обучение – например в зависимост от обекта, който изследват (за стартърите и новосъздадени фирми, МСП, големи мултинационални компании и др.), от отрасъла, който анализират, от предмета на изследване (предприемачески проблем, мениджърски и маркетингови проблеми и т.н.) (Herreid, 1997; Lane, 2007a; Yin, 2008).

В най-общ план за разработки в областта на управлението, предприемачеството и иновациите могат да се изведат два взаимосвързани критерия, определящи типа казус независимо от неговата конкретна насоченост. Това са тематичен обхват и обем на казуса. На тази основа могат да се разграничат три основни типа разработки: микро казус, мини казус, пълнотекстов казус (фиг. 1). Микро казусът е текст с дължина не повече от една стандартна машинописна страница,
They illustrate specific problems or situations, extracted from the experience of the organisation or entrepreneur analysed. The micro case could include only a short introduction of the company or the person in hand, together with the main stages of its/their business development.

The goal here is to describe briefly a moment from the past, connected with the success or the failure of the entrepreneur/company. The text layout in that composition does not include any specific elements, but more or less analyses the situation with questions like “What has happened until now?” and “What lessons could be learned from the activities till that moment?”. The reader is put in a passive role - it is expected from him to outline and identify main theoretical formulations, represented by the example, and in some cases to try to answer questions like “How would I react in a similar situation?” with the help of their theoretical knowledge.

Целта тук е съвсем накратко да се opiше минал момент, имаш отношение към успеха или неуспеха на предприемача/фирмата. Изложеното в подобно казусно описване не съдържа строго определени елементи, а по-скоро анализира ситуацията от гледна точка на въпроси като „Какво се случи до момента?“ и „Какви поуки могат да се изведат от направените стъпки до сега?“. Читателят се поставя в пасивна роля като от него се очаква да открие и разпознае основни теоретически постановки, представени чрез примера и в някои случаи да се опита да отговори на въпрос от рода на „Как бих постъпил аз в подобна ситуация?“, използвайки за тази цел своите теоретични познания.
Micro cases are often used as an illustrative material in a lecture, textbook chapter or presentation, aiming to show the interdependence between theory and practice more clearly.

Mini cases (case story) describe in more details events and/or problems, which have a significant impact over the activities of the entrepreneur or the company. Here the orientation is on sharing experience with the help of a detailed picture of all decisions and steps that lead to the analysed problem or situation. Usually this type of case is 3 to 6 pages long and the text has clear structure. The major elements are (Farhoomand, 2004; Herreid, 1999; National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2008):

- Introduction: brief description of the problem/event and the reasons which raised it;
- Core: description of the environment (external and internal factors) in which the entrepreneur or the company operate; particular details of the problem in hand and the implemented activities by the person/organisation (if there are any) for overcoming the problem are displayed;
- Alternatives: the main routes for taking subsequent steps, based on the facts from the core part are defined;
- Conclusion: the main aspects of the problem/situation analysed are concisely indicated, and questions are formulated, which foster the reader to search for additional information and even generate more alternative decisions, besides those stated in the case;

In general, the case story follows the logical relation challenge (problem) – initiatives (decision) – results. Its application is mainly in group discussions, when the participants must analyze the information, included in the case,
to make a reasonable choice among the proposed alternatives or to offer their original solutions of the problem.

Full text cases (case study) are in fact in the category of the so called academic type cases. They contain considerably deeper analyses than those in the other two types and the main goal is to describe a specific situation or a stage from the development of the entrepreneurial activity from different viewpoints and in a longer time period. The case volume is usually about 8 to 12 pages, but often cases with volume up to 30 pages can be found.

It is recommended that cases, focused on problems from the field of management and entrepreneurship should have in their structure the following elements (Cooney, 2008b; Cooney, 2009; Leenders et al., 2001; Leenders et al., 1998; Neale et al., 2006; Penchev, 2001):

- Synopsis: states the primary problems, discussed in the case; the case focus is defined (for example technological innovation, niche market, strong growth, etc.)

- Introduction: the context of the organisation/entrepreneur is briefly described, as well as the problems and key issues to be addressed, time scope and solution limitations;

- Portrait of the entrepreneur/organisation:
  - Origins of the idea;
  - Establishment of the business entity (first steps), favorable factors for starting the business activity, difficulties, close to failure moments, etc.;
  - Personality and work-style of the main characters (owners, managers, inventors etc.): their personal opinions about the venture, how they see the everyday process; opinions from others, reflecting the personality and style of the key characters;

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- Specific situations (described with dialogue and characters) for decision making, especially for decisions vital for the business development of the organisation;
- Organisational structure;
- Main problems in the past: how the person or the organisation coped with them;
- Major achievements: events, that influenced the existence and success of the organisation;

- Environment analysis: industry overview (competitors, markets, trends, etc.); country overview (PEST analysis); supportive mechanisms (e.g. incubators, universities, others) and their role;

- Origin and evolution of key business issues: with the help of facts, figures, financial statements key turning points for the organisation development are described;

- Primary areas for future development are: particular future intentions for development, competitive advantages, growth targets;

- Problems and decisions: impact over the future development;

- Open questions – possible alternatives: formulating of several possible decisions and routes for action. Leaving options open to discussion so that case research teams could come up with their own opinions, even if they don’t comply with the alternatives suggested by the author.

Full text academic cases are useful for assignment to research teams of students as an active educational instrument (project, homework assignment), because they suggest extensive research of additional data, validation of the suggested alternatives, generation of directions for future development of the research object. In addition to the main text of the case, it is necessary teaching notes for the lecturer to be developed.

- Конкретни ситуации (с персонажи и диалог) за вземане на важни за бизнес начинанието решения;

- Организационна структура;
- Основни проблеми в миналото: как лицето или организацията са се справили с тях;
- Значими постижения: събития, определящи съществуването и успеха на организацията;

- Анализ на средата: описание на отрасъла (конкуренти, пазари, тенденции и др.); особенности на национално ниво (PEST анализ); подпомагащи механизми (инкубатори, университети, центрове за трансфер на технологии и др.)

- Възникване и развитие на ключови за организацията проблеми или особености: с помощта на факти, цифри, финансови анализи се описват преломни за развитието на организацията моменти.

- Основни области за бъдещо развитие на предприемача/организацията: конкретни бъдещи намерения, конкурентни предимства, цели за разрастване.

- Конкретни проблеми и решения: влияние върху бъдещото развитие;

- Отворени въпроси – възможни алтернативи: формулиране на няколко възможни решения и варианти за действие. Остава се възможност за дискутиране, за да се стимулират изследователските екипи да предложат свои варианти, различни от предложените от автора на казуса.

Пълнотекстовите, академичен тип, казуси са подходящи за възлагане на изследователските екипи във вид на активна форма на обучение (курсова работа, проект), тъй като предполагат задълбочено търсене на допълнителна информация, обосноваване на предлаганите решения, генериране на насоки за бъдещо развитие на обекта на изследване.

Към тези казуси е необходимо и разработване на методически указания за преподавателя/обучителя.
With their help the case author clarifies to the discussion moderator where it is suitable to use the case (topics or subjects); how the students should be approached, what the potential questions for discussion are; what the criteria for assessment of the teams’ work, based on the case are; whether there are additional resources for information, references, etc.

Instructions like those could also be used for the mini cases, but more often they are replaced by several questions for focusing the discussion on specific aspects of the case (Heath, 2006). Table 1 represents brief explanations of the basic differences among the three types of cases in the field of entrepreneurship and innovation, according to the main criteria for their differentiation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria Критерии</th>
<th>Case type Вид казус</th>
<th>Full text / academic case (case study)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Micro case (example)</td>
<td>Mini case (case story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Микро казус</td>
<td>Мини казус</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume Обем</td>
<td>up to 1 page</td>
<td>3-6 pages (up to 1900 words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>до 1 страница</td>
<td>3-6 страници (до 1900 думи)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8-12 pages (up to 3800 words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8-12 страници (до 3800 думи)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic focus Тематичен фокус</td>
<td>Description of a particular entrepreneurial problem or opportunity.</td>
<td>Orientated to capturing lessons learned from entrepreneur’s experience;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focuses on significant events and revisits decisions that led up to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Описание на конкретен проблем или възможност за предприемача.</td>
<td>Ориентиран към споделение на опит, базиращ се на успехите и неуспехите на предприемача или компаниата;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Фокусира се върху значителни за предприемача събития и разглежда решенията и стъпките, които са ги предизвикали.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Examines the big picture, takes a longer time frame;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May be broken up into parts to cover different phases or perspectives of the history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Разглежда ситуацията от различни перспективи, обхващаща по-дълъг времеви период;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Може да бъде обособен на съставни части, описващи отделни фази или гледни точки на разглежданата проблем</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1. Characteristics of the different case types (cont’d)
Таблица 1. Характеристики на видовете казуси (продълж.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Micro Case</th>
<th>Mini Case</th>
<th>Full text / academic case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>No specific structure. Includes:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- a short introduction of the company or the person;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- describes the problem or the opportunities in hand, possible alternatives,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>actions already undertaken, results and consequences from the decisions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Introduction**: What is the nature of the problem? When did the case take place? Where did the case take place? Why did the issue/problem arise?

**Body**: 
- general background of business environment;
- company/entrepreneur background;
- details of the specific issue(s) faced by the company/entrepreneur;
- Logical structure “Challenge-Initiatives-Results”

**Alternatives**

**Conclusion**: a short synthesis of the case to reiterate the main issues, or even to raise new questions.

**Abstract**

**Introduction**

**Organisation/person background**

**Environment** (deeper analysis) - external and internal factors;

**Origin and evolution of key business issues**;

**Key areas** of interest of the organisation / person;

**Specific problems / decisions**;

**Open questions - possible alternatives**;

**Conclusion**

**Резюме**

**Въведение**

**Описание на организацията / предприемача**

**Среда** - задълбочен анализ на външни и вътрешни фактори;

**Възникване и развитие на ключови за организацията проблеми или особености**;

**Основни области, представляящи интерес на организацията**;

**Конкретни проблеми и решения**;

**Отворени въпроси - възможни алтернативи**;

**Заключение**.
### Table 1. Characteristics of the different case types (cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Micro</th>
<th>Mini case</th>
<th>Full text / academic case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching notes</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not compulsory. Discussion questions are formulated after the case.</td>
<td>Compulsory. Serve as an instrument for orientating the lecturer/moderator in case objectives and training goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Методически указания</strong></td>
<td>Не</td>
<td>Не са задължителни. Формулират се въпроси за дискусия към казуса.</td>
<td>Задължителни. Служат за насочване работата на преподавателя (водещия дискусията).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Application</strong></td>
<td>An illustrative material in a lecture, textbook, chapter or presentation.</td>
<td>A material for group discussions during student seminars and practical exercises.</td>
<td>An assignment to research teams of students as an active educational instrument (project, homework)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Приложение</strong></td>
<td>Илюстративен материал в рамките на теоретичен текст (лекция, тема).</td>
<td>За група дискусия по време на семинарни или практически упражнения.</td>
<td>За екипа разработка под формата на активна форма за обучение и презентиране.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### IV. Conclusions

The practical application of reality-based teaching cases in training students and specialists from different professional fields enables strengthening of the interdependence between theoretical formulations and solving real problems and situations from the business environment with their help.

Particularly, in the field of education in management, entrepreneurship and innovation three main types of cases can be used: micro cases (specific example in a lecture), mini cases (exploration of a problem and influencing factors and generation of alternatives) and full text cases, describing thoroughly a problem or a stage in the development of the entrepreneurial activity and requiring preparation of a detailed analysis and formulation of appropriate alternatives for long-term application.

By including cases in the teaching process, lecturers stimulate students to apply their knowledge to business practice;
to improve their analytical thinking for defining key aspects from the development of a business organisation; to become more confident in making decisions; to work in teams more efficiently and to explain and stand up for their positions.

Introducing a fully developed case for analysing is only one stage from the overall approach of case study teaching. Some necessary prerequisites for achieving strong results are the initial preparation and careful writing of the text, on one hand, and the expedient approach to managing the students’ team work with the case and the performing of their analysis, on the other hand. It is a complex and arduous task which could be rewarded with the moral satisfaction from the practical application of the generated alternatives and their positive effects for the company or entrepreneur. That is in fact the primary goal of each case in the field of entrepreneurship and innovation.

da подобрят своето аналитично мислене, за да усъвършенстват дефиниран проблемни области в развитието на една бизнес организация; да придобият увереност при вземането на решения; да работят в екипи и да представлят и зацитатат своите позиции.

Разбира се, представянето за разработване на завършен казус е само един етап от общия подход на обучението чрез казуси. Необходими предпоставки за постигането на добър краен резултат са подготовката и качественото на съставяне на текста на казуса, от една страна, и правилният подход за ръководене работата на изследователските екипи (студенти) при разработването на анализа, от друга. Сложна и трудоемка задача, която би могла да се възцяга с моралното удовлетворение от практическото приложение на генерираните альтернативи и постигнатите чрез тях положителни резултати. А това всъщност е и глобалната цел на всяки един казус от областта на предприемачеството.

Acknowledgements:

To Dr. Thomas Cooney, president of the European Council for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ECSB), European commission expert in entrepreneurship, for his comments during the seminar of the STARTENT project, Brussels, May 2010.

To Dr. Gerard McElwee, editor of The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Professor of Entrepreneurship, for his recommendations and comments on some parts of the text during work meeting of the STARTENT project partners, Nottingham Trent University (England), October 2010.

Благодарности:

На д-р Томас Куун, президент на Европейски съвет за малък бизнес и предприемачество, експерт по предприемачество към Европейската комисия за насоките и разясненията по темата по време на работа среща в Брюксел, Май 2010 г.

На д-р Герард МакЕли, редактор на International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation за отзивите и коментарите на някои части от този текст по време на работа среща в Нотингам Трент университет (Великобритания), Октомври 2010 г.

Reference/Литература


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1 In training the students of the Faculty of Business and Management at University of Ruse "Angel Kanchev" the case study approach has been used for more than 10 years. The faculty members have developed practice-based materials, which include most of the aspects of the economic sectors at local and national levels. Some of the students’ analyses are partly or entirely applied in the organisations, used as examples in the cases.

1 В обучението на студенти от Факултет „Бизнес и мениджмънт” на Русенски университет „А. Кънчев” използването на казуси е факт вече повече от 10 години. От академичния състав на факултета са разработени практически базирани текстове, обхващащи голяма част от икономическите сектори, представени на регионално и национално ниво. При някои от студентските разработки върху казусите е налице частично или изцяло практическо приложение на формулираните алтернативи по покана на организациите, използвани за пример.