HARVARD EXTENSION SCHOOL

HANDOUT: HOW TO READ A BUSINESS CASE WEBINAR

Bill Ellet

Case Reading Process

1. Read the study questions. Use them as a guide to what may be important in the case.

2. Now read the first and last sections of the case.

3. Take a quick look at the other sections of the case.

4. STOP! Based on what you have read, ask yourself, What is the major issue I need to understand?
   a. Then ask, What do I need to know to resolve the major issue?
   b. Think about quantitative and qualitative concepts you have learned that can help you build knowledge about the issue.
   c. It can be helpful to quickly list things you need to know. Don’t worry about being wrong!

5. Next, go through the case, skim sections, and mark places where you find information you need.

6. Now, carefully read and reflect on the information you’ve identified. Doing this issue by issue is the easiest and least confusing way. ("Peel the onion.") Think about this way: if you were doing research about a multi-faceted issue, would you delve into all the facets of the issue at the same time?

7. As you build your knowledge, ask, How does what I am learning about the case help me understand the major issue?
Case Situations

You can direct your investigation of a business case by understanding the situation depicted in the case. You can use the logic of the situation to help you identify the main issue and analyze it.

Decision

- Definition
  - Someone in the case needs to make a decision. (The need for a decision is explicitly stated in the case.)
  - What should I do?

- You need to know:
  - The decision the main character in the case needs to make
  - The major decision options
  - The most relevant criteria for making the decision
  - What the evidence relevant to each criterion reveals about the decision

Evaluation

- Definition
  - Something—such as a person, performance, or decision—needs to be evaluated.
  - How good/bad or advantageous/disadvantageous is X?

- You need to know:
  - The “something” in the case that needs to be evaluated
  - The criteria relevant to the evaluation
  - What the evidence relevant to each criterion reveals about the evaluation

Problem Diagnosis

- Definition
  - Someone in the case needs to know why something happened.
  - What caused it?

- You need to know:
  - The problem the main character in the case needs to diagnose
  - Relevant concepts and frameworks that can help diagnose the problem
  - What the concepts and evidence reveal about the most important causes of the problem