

What is a case study?

Case studies require you to apply theory to a real-world example. Generally a case study provides a description of a particular practice, for example a business problem, scenario or situation, as a basis for a critical analysis, review and/or evaluation. Importantly, the critical analysis/review/evaluation of the case in point is then undertaken by applying the relevant theory to a real-world example.

Writing a case study

There are a variety of ways in which case studies are used and, therefore, structured. Two common ways of writing a case study are as a report or as an essay. You can use the same information for either structure, just presented differently. If you have a case study assignment, make sure you ask your lecturer or tutor which format you are supposed to use.

Writing a case study in report format

A formal case report is generally organised into sections with headings. These are usually numbered as in the example below:

Letter of transmittal (not always required)
Title page
Executive summary
Table of contents
1.0 Introduction or case background
2.0 Body of the analysis
3.0 Alternative solutions
4.0 Conclusion/recommendations
5.0 Implementation plan (if requested)
6.0 References List
7.0 Appendices

Source

Summers, J. & Smith, B. (2003). *Communication skills handbook*, Milton, Qld, Australia: John Wiley & Sons

Writing a case study in essay format

When a case study is written as an essay, it has an introduction, body and conclusion. The most important point to remember is to present the analysis of the particular case in relation to the theory and the best practice that stems from that theory.

The following example paragraph from a case study demonstrates analysis of a business case.

Academic Skills Quick Guide

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4.3 Nature of Organisational Design and Design Principles

ABC Mission has a matrix organisational design because it incorporates the following six design principles: specialisation, departmentalisation, chain of command, span of control, centralisation and decentralisation, and formalisation (Robbins, Millet & Walters-Marsh, 2004, p. 474). ...(remainder of paragraph omitted).

The span of control at ABC Mission is one where there are dual lines of control (Robbins, Millet & Walters-Marsh 2004, p. 475). In the Aged Care business at ABC Mission, there are two Regional Directors, one for Western Region and one for Northern Region (see Appendix 3 for the organisational chart for ABC). While staff within each department have their respective managers heading the department, the two Regional Directors often request tasks/information from staff within these support departments. While there is the potential in this sort of structure for role conflict, unclear expectations and role ambiguity from having to report to two bosses (Robbins et al. 2004, p. 475), the issue of staff reporting to more than one boss does not seem to cause problems at ABC Mission. Therefore it seems that the dual lines of control in the organisation work well.

Note how:

The first paragraph makes a statement about the case in relation to one of the theoretical concepts:

- It has attributes which are consistent with a matrix organisational structure.
- There is an in-text reference to link to the theory.

The second paragraph explains how the case under study demonstrates the theory and draws the ideas presented in the paragraph to a logical conclusion which connects with the judgment made in the opening sentence.

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