Case Study Methods

Scout Information Centre
0845 300 1818

The study of **"cases" -** usually problem situations - can be an absorbing training method. It offers the benefits of allowing individuals to approach problems and situations objectively and logically. At its best it encourages leaders to project themselves into a situation, to understand the feelings of those involved and thus to develop an understanding of behaviour and decision making. As described here, a case is a study in depth of a problem, usually one which has been encountered by a learner. The case describes a situation which a certain person has to handle, the action taken and the outcome. (it thus goes beyond the straightforward "situation" where only the problem itself may be given.)

However, this method is only really effective if the cases used by the trainer satisfy certain preliminary requirements. These are described below. To gain maximum benefit from this method requires time - perhaps about 3/4 hour to 1 hour on a case.

Selecting a case for study

The trainer should ask "what are the training needs of the particular group for whom the case is intended?" Are they, for example, about a breakdown in relationships in a working group.

Decide what objectives you are trying to meet. Then select an apparently appropriate case or, ideally, selection of cases. These may come from personal experience (or imagination), from other trainers, or from a group member but then it will take some time to draw out and write up clearly so that all the factors are correctly described.

Requirements of a case

1) The case should describe the situation fully. It must clearly indicate the person ("worker") handling the problem and should focus upon this person's actions throughout.

2) The situation should be one in which the learners can fairly easily identify i.e. similar to one in which they have been involved, or looking to possible involvement.

3) The description should be clear. It should convey the main issues involved and the overall atmosphere of the incident so that the learners can make a judgement.

4) It should describe clearly how the situation was handled and with what outcome. However, it should not in any way imply criticism of the person or actions as this discourages identification by those studying the case.

Using the case

It is best to have one or two different cases available. The account is more easily studied if it is put on paper with each member having a copy. Certainly it is better if read - on a flip chart if necessary, rather than just hearing it read. Read the case through as individuals, then as a group, probably led by the trainer (who is neutral on the issues in the discussion and whose main function is to provide a clear structure for study):-

1. Test case for acceptability

    a) Are all group members clear as to the exact course of events described?

    b) Is the outcome of the incident a desirable one? Might there have been a different outcome if the person involved had acted differently?

    c) Is this case worth discussing? Is it a problem of the kind we ourselves meet or might meet? Do we think it relevant? (If not then this case is best abandoned and a new one sought.)

The Scout Association, Information Centre, Gilwell Park, Bury Road, Chingford, London E4 7QW. Email: info.centre@scout.org.uk
Direct: 0181 498 5400 Local rate call: 0845 300 1818 Fax: 0181 498 5407 Website www.scoutbase.org.uk

2. Get diagnosis on what happened and why?

   a) If numbers permit, divide the learners into sub-groups for a detailed study. List each good point and each "fault" as it occurred within the case.

   b) Return to main group. On a central chart list all points from sub-groups. It is vital that there is adequate writing space to record these. It will encourage a systematic approach and avoid misunderstanding.

   Take one point from each group in turn, in sequence of the "points" occurring.

   Synthesise at each point - i.e. bring together allied points from other groups.

   Put question mark if not agreed by all.

   c) Sum up diagnosis: what happened and why?

3. Get implications for action in terms of

   i) What should the worker have done?

   ii) How should they have done it?

   a) Discuss in sub-groups desirable APPROACH (in time sequence)

   • exactly what the worker should have done

   • with whom

   • where

   • how

   b) Put on central chart as approaches (one approach at a time)
   (Note: one group may have more than one approach and several groups may have the same approach).

   c) Look for similarities of approach and summarise differences.

   d) Discuss each approach and test by role play of group members where helpful. (For example, one member may feel strongly about a particular approach or style which the worker should have adopted. This could be tested in the group by members taking on the roles of the characters involved).

4. Draw conclusions in the group

   a) If the situation described is one that still needs resolving, what should the worker do next?

   b) Ask if any tentative conclusions about situations can be drawn from discussion of the case.

The Scout Association, Information Centre, Gilwell Park, Bury Road, Chingford, London E4 7QW. Email: info.centre@scout.org.uk
Direct: 0181 498 5400 Local rate call: 0845 300 1818 Fax: 0181 498 5407 Website www.scoutbase.org.uk