

HBR Management Puzzles—An On-line Resource Presented by the Harvard Business Review in Its Free Blog Network (blogs.hbr.org)

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Last year a colleague sent me a link to a resource I had never seen called an "HBR Management Puzzle" and suggested that I use it in an interactive seminar. I was initially skeptical, as I was not sure how this general description of a business problem could provide the basis for an entire 1-hr class session. Since then, I have used HBR Management Puzzles more than 20 times in my teaching. The puzzles are short descriptions of a managerial decision situation, more appropriately described as a minicase of around 1,000 words. Each puzzle usually introduces two people in a business setting representing two contrasting positions on a timely topic. The puzzle depicts the issue and provides sufficient background information for each side to make its case. It then ends with a question that essentially asks: Which of the two positions is right?

As of October 2013, there were four HBR Management Puzzles available on-line. The first puzzle, "Is It Heresy to Make Salespeople Pay Their Expenses?" (Cespedes, 2012), builds on a commercial HBS case study. The second puzzle, titled "Ignore Costly Market Data and Rely on Google Instead?" (Vosen & Schmidt, 2012), builds on the authors' own journal publication that compares the effectiveness of using market data versus information drawn from Google analytics (Vosen & Schmidt, 2011; the earlier working paper, Vosen & Schmidt, 2009, is available as a free download). The third, "Does the 18-to-49 Demographic Matter Anymore?" (Stipp & McCall, 2012) appeared to match best my own teaching topics in marketing and is thus the one that I have used most often and from which many of my comments below are drawn. Finally, "Good News, Bad News: An HBR Management Puzzle on Innovation Execution" (O'Connell, 2013) building on an AMJ paper by Van Oorschot, Akkermans, Sengupta, and Van Wassenhove (2013), presents a project manager's personal notes on a project that was ultimately unsuccessful, and asks the reader to consider and evaluate what went wrong.

Typically, the puzzles illustrate two very distinct positions. This format lends itself to having a fac-

ulty member ask students to thoughtfully use concepts learned in class in order to select or "pick" a side. In the puzzle about the 18–49 demographic that I have used often, the fundamental question is whether to stick with 18–49 age-based market segmentation or use an advanced marketing intelligence tool instead. These binary decision situations are ideal for stimulating class discussion because students can identify with the different opinions, and thus, feel motivated to justify and defend their choices in class. Asking students to vote at the beginning, middle, and end of a class session further allows the group to observe developmental shifts in decision making and outcome selection over time. From my own experience with the demographics puzzle, typically 80% of the students initially vote for the marketing intelligence tool. After 20 min of discussion, 60% have changed their minds, and then, at the end of the discussion, a majority of students often conclude that they would use both: 18–49 age segmentation when aiming to establish long-term brand value, and marketing intelligence for generating short-term sales. Finally, the binary choice format is also suitable for illustrating the discussion on a whiteboard with one side's position on the left half of the board, the other position on the right, and the arguments moving toward each other listed in the center of the board throughout the course of the seminar. In my view, it is completely understandable but should be mentioned that the topics in the puzzles are more generic than those in fully developed case studies, where the purpose is often to identify the relevant information in up to 40 pages of material and then use it to make a decision about a very specific problem. Although puzzles also start from a very specific problem, the timely topics they address appear less specialized and may thus be suitable for developing a slightly more general competence than a traditional case study. The puzzles should therefore be viewed and applied as a tool to develop students' ability to structure and contribute to relatively general types of debates, which they may face in discussions with colleagues, bosses, or in a job interview.

At around only 1,000 words each, the puzzles are short. In my experience, discussion about a puzzle can usually fill a 30–60-min session. In settings where longer, more comprehensive case studies appear to be less suitable, the puzzles can therefore be particularly useful (e.g., for successfully combining a 50-min lecture on segmentation theory with a 40-min puzzle discussion on the topic in

a single 90-min session). I initially used the puzzle in 50-min seminars that supplemented a 400-student undergraduate introductory marketing lecture. With the students divided into groups of 20, I used the puzzle as a minicase to apply the topics related to segmentation, and in the course of the discussion also covered the issue of advertising media selection. Since then, I have also built this puzzle into postgraduate classes to deepen the students' understanding of segmentation and of how different segmentation approaches may be useful for achieving different goals in the same business situation.

Because they are so short, HBR Management Puzzles can be used in contexts where students have little or no time to prepare material upfront. For example, I find them useful in the first session of a semester, when students do not prepare because they often have not yet decided whether they will actually take the module. A puzzle can be read in 5–10 min even by slower readers whose native language is not English, leaving plenty of time for reflection and discussion. I also use the puzzle in a sample class held during each of our university's open days, when I work with an audience that has just decided on the spot to participate in my session.

Being short, having clear-cut questions and superficially clear answers that have a good potential for substantial and deep discussions, puzzles also seem appropriate for introducing the concept of a case study to students who have not yet worked with cases and may not be used to interactive teaching styles in general. I used a puzzle to introduce the interactive case study approach to a group of first-year students at an institution in China, where students may be less used to contributing their views in class. Here, the puzzles provide a short and very accessible example of an interactive session.

In contrast to many commercially available case studies, puzzles do not come with a teaching note. Hence, they may be less suitable for instructors who have limited time for preparation and seek very structured material to deliver. On the other hand, good guidelines for case teaching are available (see Mari, 2010, for a review of two exemplary resources). Moreover, because the issue in each puzzle is straightforward, I found that a constructive class discussion evolves starting from the very specific question raised in the case. For sharing with colleagues how I guide students through the puzzle discussions, I have developed some com-

ments (similar to a "teaching note"), which I am happy to provide to other instructors upon request.

HBR Management Puzzles are posted to the HBR blog, and although it is not required, the free registration may be useful for regular users. The blog hosts many useful materials, discussions, examples, and opinions. To find the puzzles, you may search for "management puzzle" within the site. However, I found it easier to Google "HBR Management Puzzle," as this approach also makes it possible to find the material under an address other than blogs.hbr.org, which is important when you want students to access the material in regions such as China where blogs are usually inaccessible.

Only four puzzles were posted between July 2012 and October 2013; it may thus be possible that some faculty members may not be able to find a suitable puzzle. However, the HBR blog also hosts a limited set of short case studies (e.g., Ofek & Avery, 2013) that appear to be condensed versions of full commercial cases. These cases are about twice as long as the puzzles but may also be useful for those who are interested in the puzzles but find that the currently available ones do not match their needs. Two additional HBR on-line resources that are not called management puzzles but were written in the same genre include, "Flash Case Study: Will a Pilot Program Unleash this Innovation, or Kill It?" (written by Davidson & Büchel, 2012, and based upon an article written by Davidson and Büchel in 2011) and a minicase called "Is the CEO's Inappropriate Relationship 'One Risk Too Many'?" (Lewellyn & Muller-Kahle, 2012). I have used the flash case study with both executive education as well as postgraduate groups and have found it to be an excellent discussion stimulator. Particularly for executives, the short description of a relatively generic case allows participants to not only contribute their own experiences, but also actively reflect on them. To conclude, I find the puzzles to be particularly useful in settings that do not allow for the effective use of traditional case studies. In my experience, puzzles have been most helpful for introducing interactive case teaching methods to students and to supplement a traditional case-based module.

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If a Picture is Worth 1,000 Words, Is a Video Worth 3,000 Words? A Review of Video Resources Available for Use in Today's Management Classroom.

Reviewed by Frank Shipper, Salisbury University.

Using commercial videos in the classroom is not new (Champoux, 2001). In 1972, I was a student in an organizational behavior class in an MBA pro-

gram at the University of Utah taught by Prof. Joseph C. Bentley. The class watched *Twelve Angry Men* produced in 1957 starring Henry Fonda and then analyzed it. As an aside, the textbook for that course was *Organizational Behavior: Theory and Application* by Whyte (1969). In its 807 pages there was not one picture, diagram, or sidebar. Everything between the blue and tan covers was in black and white.

To say that things have changed is an understatement. In the almost 45 years since my graduate studies took place, the world has become colored and digitized. Pick up almost any popular text today and it will be full of color pictures, diagrams, and sidebars. Videos of every type and genre are available on the Internet and many, if not most of them, can be viewed for free. Simultaneously, and clearly in response to changes in the external environment, our academic environments have also changed. Many, if not most, universities offer traditional on-line courses today, with some offering a new breed of on-line courses called massive open online courses (MOOCs). Besides the changes in educational material and delivery media, our students have also changed. Postman (1985) contends that the average attention span of people exposed to modern technology is decreasing and the greater the exposure the greater the decrease in attention span.

To offset these changes, especially those in students, I would argue that the practice of teaching has to involve new technologies that assist in making learning intrinsically motivating. Intrinsically motivating learning activities increase students' attention span (Dukette & Cornish, 2009). Massive open on-line courses and on-line educational organizations such as the Kahn Academy (www.khanacademy.org) are using new technologies to keep students engaged. Judicious adoption of some of those techniques can facilitate engagement in the traditional face-to-face "in-person" classroom too.

To begin to utilize on-line resources, an easy first step is to integrate short videos into the classroom. The emphasis here is on *short*, again keeping in mind the students of today. Psychologists estimate that the average attention span of an adult is 20 min, but according to a recent study, when looking at something on-line, 70% of viewers will watch to the end of a 1-min video, whereas only 50% of viewers will watch to the end of a 5-min video (Agarwal, 2011). The integration of video into any classroom format also takes advantage of mul-

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