Further readings and templates

# Chapter 7: Writing assignments, reports and dissertations

## Writing for case study assessment

### Case studies

Case studies can be powerful learning tools for the reasons given in Chapter 6. As a means of assessment, they provide the tutor with an invaluable insight into your ability to develop your ideas, apply what you have learnt theoretically and think as a manager in a particular type of scenario, so it should be no surprise that case studies are assessed against these kinds of criteria. As stated above, it is generally your ability to think and understand which gets assessed, *not whether you get the answer right.* In fact, in many case studies, there are no right and wrong answers.

Cases can come in different forms and ask you to produce different kinds of thinking:

 **Problems** – where the task is to identify the main issues. This may seem straightforward, but analysing information and determining which pieces of information are most and least relevant is not an easy thing to do. This actually reflects the reality of management where information and opinion (some of which may not be factually correct) can come from a variety of sources and be interpreted in a number of ways.

 **Decisions** – as with ‘problems’ above, the task is often to make a decision taking into account various conflicting and challenging interests and priorities. It may be that a case requires you to make a series of decisions or to make them in the correct order.

 **Evaluations** – in some case study assessments, you will be required to evaluate what someone else has done, and identify the implications of their actions. As with many aspects of case studies, there may not be one right or wrong answer, and so whilst it can be relatively easy to argue whether what someone else did was right or wrong, you may often be required to come up with a better solution. In many instances, there will not be a ‘better’ solution, since ‘better’ will depend on how you evaluate the outcomes.

 **Rules** – it may seem straightforward in leadership (or business management) to apply rules, but some cases will ask you to analyse situations where rules could be ignored, misinterpreted (sometimes deliberately, sometimes not), applied strictly, applied to some people and not others – or where rules may not exist at all, and you are required to develop some rules in order to stop certain activities from happening.

Case studies as a means of assessment can be enjoyable for some and stressful for others. Some people love the idea of identifying and discussing their own thinking, defending that thinking and being passionate about seeing issues and solutions that no-one else has spotted, but if you want a right and a wrong answer, then this method of assessment may be difficult to handle. As mentioned above, life rarely has right and wrong answers – and that is as true in professional life as it is when analysing a case study.

**Case Study assessments rarely have right and wrong answers. They are usually assessed not on whether someone is right or wrong, but on the quality of thinking demonstrated in forming the argument.**

### ‘So, what does this mean for group assessment?’

Case studies assessed through group work provide potentially more complexity than essay questions. It is quite possible in an essay-based assignment to arrive at a well-argued answer based on the evidence. For a case study, each person within the group may have a different view of what is going on in the case study – and possibly strong views as to why they believe what they think.

If a group does split an assignment up, then it is relatively easy to develop an argument based on the research that different folk might have done. A case study, however, is far more difficult to divide up – which actually says something about the real world around us, and the value in splitting up assignments.

Such complexity means that the chance to reach a consensus might much more reduced than it would be in answering a straightforward question. In reality, the discussion that you might have as a group about a case study may be closer to a discussion at a management team meeting. It also means that you should consider carefully which of several solutions or issues *is likely to be* the most important in the particular scenario you need to deal with, based on the evidence given in the case. The implication of this is that you will need to challenge others within the group if their views differ from yours, and use the evidence to do so.

The long-term value of doing so regularly is that it develops the abilities of all involved to argue for their point of view, and to do so based on the evidence presented (which is not always clear – as is the case in real life).