A Guideline to Innovative Family Business Case Writing With Students: The American University in Cairo (AUC) Experience

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There is a growing interest in the field of family business as a scientific discipline with a significant increase in the number of researches and teaching cases. Unfortunately, the Egyptian academic contribution to the family business is very limited. Due to that, the American University in Cairo (AUC) started its quest for popularizing the concepts of family business in the year 2017. The paper is mainly addressing the evolution of case write-ups at AUC. The paper starts with an explanation about the personal and institutional attributes which helped in the inception of the family business course. This is followed by description of the topics covered within the family business cases, and then explanation about the structure of the cases, and the teaching note. Examples of evaluation tools through rubrics were discussed. Also achievements, publication impediments were reviewed. The paper is useful for professors who are interested in innovative learning pedagogy since it describes different, verified, and reliable tools for case write-up with the aim of transferring knowledge to educators.

Keywords: family business, teaching cases, pedagogy, family business education, rubrics, guidelines

ORGANIZATIONAL AND PERSONAL BACKGROUND: HOW IT ALL STARTED

The idea of the family business course came from the fact that family business is one of the main strategic themes in the AUC School of Business, due to its connection to the School's focus areas and the extensive scope of family business in Egypt. Another reason was the sizable percentage of students in the School of Business whose parents own family businesses. The idea was to think of ways to help students sustain a family business from an entrepreneurial point of view.

There was also a personal interest to start a course about family business. The reason goes back to the fact that the author started working in family business when he was 14 years old leading up to 31 years of practical experience working in the textile industry in Egypt and dealing with the challenges faced, so the idea was not only related to incepting some sort of discipline at AUC. Within the context mentioned, there was a dire need to adopt a practical orientation towards the delivery as well as the output of the course.

This was exemplified in the development of Egyptian teaching cases within the field of family business starting with the first family business course at AUC and Egypt in Spring 2017. The AUC school of business encouraged adopting case-oriented pedagogy as an effective way of learning (Mahrous and Ahmed ,2010). This came within the broader umbrella of adopting the adult learning pedagogy (Collins ,2004), which enhanced students' critical thinking capabilities as well as encouraging them to play a major role within the educational process.

WHY DO WE NEED TEACHING CASES IN FAMILY BUSINESSES?

There is a need to mention the reasons for adopting a teaching case write-up exercise. First of all, theory must be linked to practice (Tenkasi and Hay, 2004) - this is because there is a lot of grounded theories from multi-disciplines within the field of family business. Unfortunately, however, linking it to practice is very difficult due to the fact that students are more receptive towards explanation from real- life examples that can address their cognitive capabilities. Teaching cases can provide students with real situations that can be related to theories under study. Another issue also related to academia is that theories can sometimes bore students. According to past experience, whenever the professor starts to mention abstract concepts related to theories, students are almost immediately not engaged. Accordingly, there is a need to reframe the theories in the form of practical examples (Moore,2012), taken from the Egyptian as well as the global context. Moreover, there is another issue which is the new trend of adopting case-oriented courses at AUC School of Business, because there is a solid belief that there is a need for interaction between business, academia through cooperative education (Thiel and Hartley 1997). Additionally, another issue related to business is the difficulty to communicate theories to the business environment as well as the lack of literature about real-life cases that can help family business evolve. This was very important since the course was mainly addressing the Egyptian audience. Unfortunately, the number of teaching cases in the family business cases related to the MENA Region (Middle East and North Africa) is very limited in comparison to other parts of the world. Furthermore, the misperception about academia from the perspective of family businesses was also a challenge (Tucker and Lowe, 2014). It was noticed because the author played the dual role of being a business owner and an academic and there is some sort of skepticism between different parties. Since the practitioners cannot see the link between what is being taught in academia and real life.

The author noted a recurring comment that was mentioned many times to him: *"Ashraf, you are giving some sort of academic stuff; this is not the real world,"*. Thus, there was a need to answer the question of: "*How can you translate the academic knowledge discipline to be very appealing to the business practitioners?*".

TOPICS OF FAMILY BUSINESS CASES

There is a particularity that needs to be taken into consideration when designing a family business case. First of all, the main topics which can be included was governance, succession, ownership, strategy of family business, family dynamics, entrepreneurship, and culture (Sharma, 2004).There were two schools of thoughts represented: first was to address the family business challenges in breadth rather than in depth; this meant that the case can encompass all/some of the mentioned topics, this posit was adopted in most of the cases; since the course was mainly an elementary one, and the students needed to know all of the challenges met by family businesses. However, another posit adopted choosing a certain challenge, and delving into the topic in depth, which was very rare since the inception of the course.

According to observation throughout the years of teaching the family business course it was found that: succession and governance challenges constituted of the major topics of the teaching cases literature. There is an existing scarcity in cases related to family dynamics, culture and therefore also related to values, norms, and traditions. The concept of culture was very appealing to take into consideration while writing cases taking into consideration the richness, and diversity of the Egyptian context. The reason is that Egypt possesses a rich cultural ecosystem with many subcultures involved. This diversity often leads to different opinions regarding seniority, family relations, and gender issues. Other concepts include emotions in family business, leadership, psychology, estate planning, and professionalism. This is very important to mention since these concepts are still in the embryonic phase and it will be a prominent field in teaching cases within the coming period.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEACHING CASE

There was a need to develop a guideline (see exhibit 1) for the case write-up structure (Dul, and Hak,2007). This gave students a complete idea about the major output of the whole family business course, especially that they were divided into teams at the beginning of the semester, and they start writing and showing drafts of their write-ups to the professor.

The first section is an abstract which is usually written after finishing the case write-up, followed by an opening paragraph - which must be an attractive story with a challenge that can attract readers. If the opening paragraph or abstract was dull - chances are, nobody will go on and take a look at the case, so it is essential to write it in a storytelling format. This is an art and it takes some time to learn, for example: *"Ashraf was sitting in a place overlooking the sea at Cape Town or Alexandria in Egypt having his own cup of coffee, thinking about the future of family business."* - This type of emotional attraction is a major selling pitch for the case.

The third section is mainly about giving some sort of an idea about the company itself, the company background, the start as well as the entrepreneurial background of the founder is essential.

The fourth section addressed business related issues like strategy, industry, market, etc. This section is of extreme importance; in order to understand the context of the business, and relate to the rationale of taking decisions. According to literature some cases are mainly written to address strategic planning in family business.

The fifth section addressed family challenges where authors can tackle one aspect or write a generic teaching case with several aspects, so the topics included might be: family dynamics, family ownership, family governance, and family succession or e family business, family succession, or family governance - all depending on the depth of the case, and whether you want to adopt a breadth or depth approach.

The sixth section addressed the dilemma/s which the protagonist was suffering. There is a need create several alternatives for the protagonist to choose from. This is very important because it'll be the introduction to the questions that will be answered within the teaching note. For instance, someone who is distracted about choosing his or her successors and has several alternatives where one is the son or the daughter, due to our culture in Egypt, the preference in most of the cases, is almost always given to the son.

The final section is the closing paragraph which is usually a short one, and it addresses the main questions revolving in the protagonist mind, usually these questions are put in an inquiry format with question marks. It was found that these questions can represent a foundation for the questions which will assigned within the teaching note, it is also advisable to end up the closing paragraph in an artistic story format; in order to create suspense for the reader to know what happened to resolve the existing challenges.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEACHING NOTE

Prominent publishers in family business teaching cases always require teaching note in order to develop the critical thinking capabilities of the students in class and give a better value for the case (Lynn ,1999). It's also an undeniable resource for instructors who are teaching the cases to create discussions and exercises in class, as well as relating to the theoretical foundations of the concepts taught. In addition to that, some of the publishers often require a teaching note. Accordingly, the need for having a structure for the teaching note is extremely important (see exhibit 2). The idea is to have a coherent teaching note - so if it is presented to an instructor in class, he or she will be able to run a discussion, have a role play, or easily choose any kind of interaction with students. It is worth mentioning that each publishing authority has its own requirement. Although there is a variation regarding difficulty from one publisher to another, the author and after several years of experience decided to adopt the harshest measures; in order to produce top notch cases.

Teaching note usually starts with case synopsis, which is a more focused abstract. Some other publishers require a case summary. The second section is to mention the keywords related to the case, unfortunately sometimes the keywords are misleading for example finding a case with a keyword "Family business", without tackling any family business challenges within the case. Accordingly, authors must be always aware about what is written within the keywords section. For family business cases there is always a need to address topics like succession, governance, professionalism …etc.

The third section is the teaching objectives which must be available. Taking into consideration that teaching objectives are mainly for instructors, and it must address what are the instructor goals for teaching the case. It is essential that the teaching objectives are related to the family business dimensions.

The fourth section is about the learning objectives and outcomes for the students which the instructor intends to cover. Usually it is advisable to use Bloom's taxonomy to describe this section, it is also essential to note that the learning objectives and outcomes must be related directly to what is written in the case which is mainly related to the family business topic. It is advised not to increase the number of objectives or outcomes to more than three points for each of them.

The fifth section is the assignment questions which must be related to the dilemma faced. Some challenges were encountered with students where there is always a question of balance - whether you want to write in-breadth or in-depth. This is important because it will help the author to decide what is the needed number of questions. Also, the idea is that the assignment questions must be covering the business side as well as the family side. It has been noticed in some cases published in prominent places that the case was sometimes misunderstood.

The sixth section is the target audience which is extremely important. Unfortunately, some authors try to expand the target audience disregarding the level of difficulty of the case. For example, cases which are focusing on freshmen students, might not be suitable for post graduate students, and vice versa. So it is advisable to focus on one or two target groups maximum. It is also advisable to explain this section in details; since case reviewers might be misled about what is the target audience of the case

The seventh section is about the teaching plan which answer the questions of what will be the approach of teaching used, why should the instructor review the background readings, how will the instructor divide the students for class discussions, and s/he will prepare the students for the case discussion.

The eighth section is addressing the discussion plan, and it must answer the following questions: where will the professor use this case? How is the professor going to use it? How many minutes will be allocated for discussion? What are the exercises that you are going to enlist during the discussion of the case? What is the assigned duration for each question? How are you going to discuss it?

The ninth section is addressing the research methods used, and it must answer the following questions: Did the author/s acquire information from primary resources or secondary resources? Who were the main sources of information? Did the author/s use real names or disguised ones? When was the information acquired?

The tenth section is addressing testing in class, which is really important to validate that the case has been discussed, and that weaknesses as well strengths has been reviewed whether in class or at an official gathering, for example an academic conference.

The eleventh section is the theoretical linkages which provide a grounding for the practical implications discussed within the case. The instructor is supposed to mention all of the theories related to the case with high emphasis on the family business ones including family systems, succession, governance, stewardship, agency, and other relevant theories. The practical experience proved that students might be reluctant to learn about grounding theories of family business if it is delivered without the related practice. Accordingly, it is advisable for the instructor to refer to the theories within the context of the case discussion.

The twelfth section is the case analysis which is about answering the assignment questions and how you relate the question to the theory. It is essential that the answers to the questions include the related theory, as well as reference at the beginning of the question; in order to attract the attention of the instructor to revise the reference, and communicate it to the students. It is of extreme importance to provide suggested in depth answers for the questions, without interfering or directing the students towards adopting a certain opinion; but rather diversified ones to enhance their critical thinking.

Some cases can have an epilogue. The instructor does not present the epilogue within the case. S/he can, however, present the epilogue within the teaching note and try to give an example or a question in class and ask students what they think happened; in order to grab their attention to think about how the protagonist dealt with the dilemma/s presented in the case.The instructor should be ready for the case discussion accordingly a list background readings related to family business topics under discussion must be available; in order to prepare the theoretical foundation for the case discussion.

ELEMENTS OF CONCERN IN A TEACHING CASE

There were elements which created challenges during the case write up: First, students sometimes were not able to understand or identify who is the protagonist of the case. This was taken from the feedback of a reviewer who asked *"Who is the protagonist"*. Second, students are sometimes not attentive to the timeline of the events, in some cases, the timeline of the events is misunderstood or not put in chronological order. There is also a need for a totally clear dilemma, in some situations the authors were not able to crystallize the dilemma, which required a lot of effort to revise during the reviewing rounds. Also one of the challenges noticed with reviewers as well as with students, is that there is the question of whether or not you should provide a lot of details. Providing comprehensive details is always a must, although some students and businesses are sometimes bored with details and think that they are not really relevant to the case. Therefore, a balance between the highly relevant details and the non-relevant ones must be found in order to avoid boredom. Last but not least, the English language, editing, grammar, syntax, and proofreading are main challenges for authors who are not English native speakers. There is a need for case authors to hire professional editors to help in the improvement of the case language.

BEST PRACTICE IN TEACHING CASES EVALUATION

There are important questions for the professor to ask while designing an evaluation for the case. These questions include: What is the rubric used in order to evaluate the case? Is this rubric comprehensive enough? When will the professor give feedback about the case write-up? How will the professor secure fairness in grading? In order to assure answering these questions, a rubric (see exhibit 3) was designed, explained, and distributed among the students. Each element of the rubric was explained, and used in training for case writing through case analysis exercises (Rochford and Borchert, 2011)

The professor provided at least three formal and two informal feedbacks about the case throughout the whole academic semester. Also, the professor designed a contribution sheet to assure that all of the teams' members' writing cases have already contributed in the case write-up. Another tool to secure fairness was to design a peer review sheet to be distributed two times during the semester.

ACHIEVEMENTS MILESTONES

A major achievement that was considered a breakthrough was the first prize award from the EFMD 2020 in the family business field. EFMD is an abbreviation of European Foundation for Management Development. AUC won the case writing award for 2019 where the professor wrote a case with students. The case was 10 pages-long with 3952 words about the family business in the IT industry. It revolved around the idea of family business, succession, planning, and strategy. As for the teaching note, it was 8 pages with 2587 words and 6 questions.

Although the achievement was really rewarding; however, it did not come without exerting efforts. Therefore, the journey is worth describing:

In 2017, the students wrote a case under the title *"Technology Park: Harvesting the Fruits of Family Business"*, with three revisions throughout the family business course. In Fall 2017, the authors presented the case to KCC (Khazindar Case Clearinghouse for publishing). In Spring 2018, it was revised by an external editorial board. In Fall 2018, the professor made two rounds of revisions to resolve the reviewers' comments, and ins Spring 2019, it was revised by editors again. In Fall 2019, we published in the case center.org. In Fall 2019, The AUC applied for the EFMD award, and then the award was received in Spring 2020.

Another major achievement was reached in 2021 where a team composed of the Professor and family business course students won the second prize award in a regional competition initiated by Emerald and

KCC. The title of the case was "The New Era Brothers for Trade the Problematic Evolution of a Family Business Within Several Industries".

The case was 11 pages-long with 5123 words about the family business in the acting in several industries. It revolved around the idea of family business, succession, planning, and strategy. As for the teaching note, it was 14 pages with 4970 words and 6 questions, after two revisions required by the reviewers.

PUBLISHING CASES: THE PROBLEMATIC IMPEDIMENTS

There was some sort of problematic impediments while publishing cases, one of which was the hectic case reviewing process. For example, one of the cases took around two and a half years to obtain consent for publication which was extremely difficult, sometimes for family businesses, in addition to losing track of authors and finding qualified editors to go over the cases. This is all followed by finding the most convenient publication journal.

One of the pitfalls that happened was when the professor applied for publication at renowned journal. Everything was seemingly fine; the peer review was promising and the protagonist gave the initial consent, but at the end after asking for the final consent form signature, he said it contains too many sensitive details, and as a result he was not able to give consent for its publishing, which caused frustration to the instructor as well as the students.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLISHING

The output of the case writing exercises throughout the years was highly significant as it was rewarded with two awards, two conference proceedings, two cases in the reviewing phase, one accepted case for publication, and seven published cases in prominent publishing houses (see exhibit 4). To reach the current status of having AUC as a regional pioneer within the field of family business case write-ups, there are several recommendations that need to be taken into consideration.

First; peer review is certainly helpful, where for example, when it takes place during a class, narrowing the segment of the case is essential. Additionally, authors must narrow down the target audience of the case. The more the audience broadens the target segment, the less the impact of the teaching case is.

Second; focusing on the questions developed within the dilemma and maintaining a balance between the direct assignment questions and those that need critical thinking related to the theory. This is extremely important, direct questions will never get the aspired quality.

Third; relating all assignment questions to relevant theories is key, as well as mentioning the tools used to address discussion questions in-class.

Third; starting by publishing in journals with high acceptance rates is also key. There are some journals which have only a ten percent acceptance rate. It is not recommended to submit the first case to a journal with low acceptance rate.

Fourth; there is a need to have a prepared scenario to attract family business to get their stories published, hence trying to sell the idea that publishing the case is a win-win scenario is much needed and not only for the family, but for the university and for the students.

Fifth; trying to allocate a budget within the university to get editorial support is extremely important.

CONCLUSION

The field of case writing within the family business discipline is still new in the Egyptian context and the Middle East. Accordingly, there is a need to increase the interest in this field and to convey the knowledge diffused through the AUC experience. AUC can act as a catalyst in this process; since one of its main objectives is to link the university to the business environment. In light of this, teaching cases can provide the connection between education and business; where the students act as potential successors and the family businesses can benefit from different teaching cases addressing different challenges that are contextualized to the Egyptian environment. AUC experience has always been full of pitfalls, however there are promising rewards in the near sight.

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Teaching Case Structure

The structure, and general guidelines of the case can be seen below:

1) Abstract
2) Opening Paragraph
3) Company's Background
4) Industry overview
5) Family Challenges
    - Timeline for the evolution of the family business.
    - Family dynamics' challenge
    - Ownership Challenge
    - Governance and Professionalism Challenge
    - Succession Challenge
6) Dilemma/s
7) Closing Paragraph

Exhibit 2 Teaching Note Structure

1) Case Synopsis
2) Keywords
3) Teaching objectives
4) Learning objectives
5) Assignment Questions
6) Target audience
7) Teaching plan
8) Discussion plan
9) Research methods
10) Testing in class
11) Theoretical linkages
12) Case Analysis (answers to case questions)
13) Epilogue (if available)
14) Background readings
15) Teaching Note Exhibits / Tables

Exhibit 3 Family Business Case, and Teaching Notes Rubric

FACTOR	1 (POOR)	2 (FAIR)	3 (GOOD)	4 (VERY GOOD)	5 (OUTSTANDING)
COMPLYING WITH GUIDLINES					
PROVIDING VALID EVIDENCE FOR THE CONTENT (THROUGH PRIMARY OR SECONDARY DATA)					
QUALITY OF CONTENT (ELABORATION, AND RELEVANCE)					
STRINGENCY OF LANGUAGE USED (GRAMMAR ,SYNTAX, ORTHOGRAPHY)					

Exhibit 4 Cases Status

CASE TITLE	PUBLICATION/CONFERENCE VENUE	STATUS	AWARD	Expected year of publication/ year of publication
El Batraa Manufactures for Chemicals and Paint	Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies	Accepted for publication		2021
The New Era Brothers for Trade :The Problematic Evolution of a Family Business Within Several Industries.	Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies	In the reviewing phase	Second prize award for the Emerald (emerald emerging market case studies)/KCC (Khazindar case clearing)	2021
United Group: Exploring the prospects of The Future.	Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies	In the reviewing phase		2021
PowerJet: An Uncertainty of Legacy	Case focus	In the reviewing phase		2021
Technology Park Company: Harvesting the Fruits of a Family Business	Case centre	Published	European foundation for Management Development award (EFMD) 2019 for teaching cases in the field of Family business.	2019
The Dispersion of a Realm: Alumin for Trading	Case centre	Published		2020
ElectroMitry: 45 Years Serving Technology in Egypt.	Case centre	Published		2020
Nourpack: Chaos in the Future	Case centre	Published		2019
MOG for metal manufacturing.	Case centre	Published		2019
Quadratics Pharma: Understanding Family Challenges in Businesses	Sage business cases	Published		2021

Stone Builders for Construction: Thirty Grandchildren, One Business.	Sage business cases	Published		2021
Egyptian Tires and Batteries Importers.		Conference proceeding within the Family business in the Arab world conference (FBAW)		2021
Textile Egypt Company: Understanding Family Challenges		Conference proceeding within the Family business in the Arab world conference (FBAW)		2021

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