

How to use case studies/exercises

1. The advantage of using real cases as training material

Telling a story that illustrates a chain of events and that gets the reader emotionally involved is a well-established technique when it comes to transmitting knowledge and developing competence. This was the approach to instruction long before formal education came on the scene and it's still a highly effective teaching tool. Our memory actually retains stories for a much longer time than it does explanations and academic lectures. A good story manages to penetrate the subconscious mind and awakens emotions, which are a powerful learning stimulus.

Case studies are diverse stories, either long or short, describing a chain of events that have occurred under certain circumstances. The story is told from the viewpoint of someone who has experienced this incident. They describe how events unfold, as well as the reaction and emotional response of the one telling the story. Of course others may have reacted in an entirely different way to the situation.

Reading, interpreting and analyzing real cases is a well-tried and effective training technique for all types of educational purposes.

2. Why are case studies such effective training material?

A well constructed case can be used to develop a whole range of skills. Below are just some of them:

- Encourage an emotional response and empathy.
- Put problems and opportunities in a holistic context.
- Help to realize the full context of the issue being discussed.
- Make it easier to verbalize and act out events and evaluate the consequences.
- Encourage to analyze and appreciate a variety of viewpoints.

Training in Hospitality

- Are flexible, as trainers can easily include them in circumstances relevant to their specific business field. There's also no issue concerning copyright!
- Give the opportunity to consider own problems when discussing a particular case.
- Can bridge the gap between theory and reality or between training and work.
- Are an entertaining and relaxed way of tackling important topics.

3. The skills being focused on in “Training in hospitality – case studies and exercises”

- Provide an understanding of why and how we use the competence and knowledge we possess.
- Bring out in us what we know, what we feel, and add to that.
- Strengthen cooperation and communication skills among group members when it comes to finding solutions.
- Encourage staff to logically discuss and appreciate the different viewpoints expressed in a group and so improve their communication skills and ability to work effectively as a group.
- Help find solutions to a variety of problems and have staff consider alternative solutions should the problem arise again.
- Provide an opportunity to evaluate decisions that have been made and have staff come up with alternative solutions.

4. Some ideas on how to use the training material

1. Read over the case and then exercise two to three times before attempting to solve it. (Various details are frequently missed with the first reading). A good approach is to have one person read the case aloud.

2. Start by analysing the facts of the case and highlighting those that are relevant. Sometimes there are facts that are of secondary importance when doing the exercise, but nevertheless could have some relevance.

3. Focus on the facts provided in the case or common general assumptions associated with the situation. If some facts seem lacking it's good to have the participant add them in. Avoid letting personal opinions or feelings influence the outcome.

4. Add to the case if necessary, e.g. additional characters, additional serious errors, a better conclusion etc. A trainer and/or staff can also add their experience and use the opportunity to discuss these. In addition, acting out scenes and role playing can provide excellent opportunities to practise interaction and find ways to solve problems.

5. The importance of the trainers and the competence they should possess

For training material to be most effective, it's essential that trainers are familiar with the training techniques used in case studies and the level of competence that's being aimed for:

- They should be competent in organizing and managing group work.
- They should be familiar with the concept of motivation and the different approaches to learning (learning styles).
- They should appreciate the value of role playing when it comes to training abstract notions of competence such as cooperation, interaction, imitative and solutions.
- They should emphasize that there can be different ways to solve a problem.
- They should guide staff towards a conclusion that everybody is reasonably satisfied with.
- They should be aware of the different levels of the programme and take these into account when training.
- They should give professional feedback to staff aimed at developing their competence.

6. Some ideas regarding using the training material

1. If time is limited it's possible to select just one case study and a few exercises.
2. If there's sufficient time one can select a number of case studies and/or exercises that either go with each case or are taken from the data bank.
3. It's recommended that the trainer in an organized manner goes through the case and the accompanying exercises using a variety of training techniques, i.e. adding to the case, role playing, having staff create their own case, having a meeting where everyone gets to express an opinion as to a solution etc.
4. The trainer evaluates progress amongst staff based on the case, and provides constructive feedback (praise and criticism) based on the checklist.
5. Should cases be used in distance learning situations, there are various electronic options available when doing the exercises, working together, evaluating progress and giving feedback.
6. Social network platforms are a good way in which to work together towards finding solutions.
7. Trainers can improve their competence by attending a course on using case studies as a teaching method.

7. How the training material is structured

The programme material is intended for the following four job categories: Front desk/reception, service in restaurants, housekeeping and car rental.

In each job category five important skills were selected by the Education and Training Service Centre of Iceland (ETSC).

The exercises with each case study assume a competence level of 1-3 as defined by the National Quality Forum (NQF).

The exercises are also in accordance with the quality control criteria recommended by Vakinn, the official quality and environmental system within the Icelandic tourist sector.

The material can be used for training in a variety of workplace environments, as well as being the basis for an entire course at an educational centre.

The Exercise Data Bank

The exercise data bank contains both open and general exercises testing one's understanding of the profession, job experience and professional knowledge. The exercises also develop crucial skills such as communication, cooperation, empathy, expression and dissemination. These exercises can be used in conjunction with every case study in all four job categories, i.e. front desk/reception, restaurant service, housekeeping and car rental. The exercises are divided into 3 levels of competence so the trainer can choose the appropriate level.

Exercise – Level 1 – Professional knowledge and its application

- a. What was well done in this particular case study?
- b. What mistakes were made and how did they come about?
- c. How do the employees and/or the customers feel in this situation? Put yourself in their shoes and provide an explanation or act out.
- d. Could the employee have reacted in a different way? Explain or act out.
- e. What would you have done and why? Explain.
- f. Recreate the incident and provide a more positive outcome.
- g. Act out a short scene based on the incident where you show quality service and practise your communication skills.

Exercise – Level 2 - Understanding, overview and responsibility

- a. Explain what might have been the reason for things going well, or indeed not so well.
- b. How could employees/management prevent such a mistake being repeated?
- c. What consequences could the mistake have for the staff and/or the company?
- d. What different consequences could this type of interaction have on foreign visitors? Give examples using two different nationalities.

Exercise – Level 3 – Independence and responsibility, problem-solving competence with the assistance of references

- a. Study the appropriate level of service quality recommended by Vakinn and evaluate the case based on this.
- b. Evaluate whether you feel the recommended level of quality in service has been met and justify your answer.

- c. Read the learning outcomes provided by Vakinn and identify where standards have been met and where improvements could be made when it comes to staff job competence/job training.
- d. Come with suggestions for improvement.

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