

■ Themes

If the instructor does not have an answer to the case or a choice of an alternative, how can she or he manage the discussion? *Use themes to manage the discussion. Themes include topics, areas of analysis, and decisions.* The instructor who has a set of themes can manage the class in subtle fashion to ensure that decisions are aired and topics covered. He or she does not have to show the answer. In fact, doing so is counterproductive because it encourages students to develop answers which meet the teacher's views, rather than approaches that fit the case situation or the student's skills and abilities. Because implementation is so important, each student must develop approaches and answers that fit her or his talents and judgments.

■ Questions

The instructor should *understand that in the discussion process action drives analysis.* That is, if a student has made a decision about what to do, the instructor can always focus on the supporting analysis with a question like "Why would you do that?" or "What evidence supports that approach?" The action orientation ensures that the analysis that is done will be relevant to a decision, not just analysis for its own sake.

Use questions to manage the trade-off between depth and breadth, and to heighten conflict. Most cases have too much to cover in one class session so the teacher is forced by necessity to make choices between depth and breadth. Questions, or perhaps a statement or two, can be used to provide the necessary focus. A question like "How does that relate to the company's distribution policy?" during a pricing discussion will encourage lateral movement to distribution as a topic; a second or third question about pricing or about the student's thought process will encourage greater depth on pricing. Because these situations are so delicate and numerous, the instructor needs the copious list of questions described above.

Use questions of various types for various purposes. Since questions are so useful in the classroom, the instructor should be able to use a wide variety. Some might be to a particular student to encourage development of a particular point or to clarify an opinion or statement. Others might be "to the wall, floor, or ceiling." That is, they are gentle nudges to the discussion and are addressed to no one in particular. "I wonder how the competition would react," is an example of this type of comment or question.

■ Managing Conflict

The essence of case discussion is the airing of conflict between two or more opposing views. The best discussions include opposing views which are supportable and reasonable. One of the instructor's tasks is to *clarify and heighten conflicts.* The clarification and heightening provides a richness and excitement to the discussion.

Students should be encouraged to openly and honestly consider differences of opinion. Comments like "Bill and Betty have differing views and both can't be right; will someone clear this up?" are most useful.

Use the board to clarify conflicts and issues. Do not use the board as a passive recording device. The board is a very useful device because it is so passive, and also under the general control of the instructor. It can be used to list topics and then prioritize their coverage, or to do "compare and contrast exercises." Flow diagrams and pro/con lists are examples of other important uses for the board. It is important, however, to *understand that students view the chalkboard recording of their comments as important feedback.* There is no easy solution to the conflicts this raises, but it should be noted.



■ Listening

Listen. If student ownership of the discussion is important, the role of the instructor as listener is perhaps the most critical element in establishing that ownership. The instructor should limit his or her own comments during the discussion and should be sure to listen hard and carefully to each comment. This encourages the students to listen to each other, and to view participation as serious. Most important, the instructor's listening establishes the primacy of students' comments in the classroom.

Listening is a part of another important role: *Provide respect and protection to students and their comments.* Respect and protection are an important part of encouraging students to participate and test ideas. Protection, however, does not mean that standards are low and any "off the wall" idea, even one not carefully thought out, is accepted and embraced. It does mean that such a comment is not ridiculed but is gently shown to be "full of holes," preferably by other students' comments. Part of the development of standards is to manage conflict so that well-considered, carefully conceived comments gain their rightful merit in the discussion.