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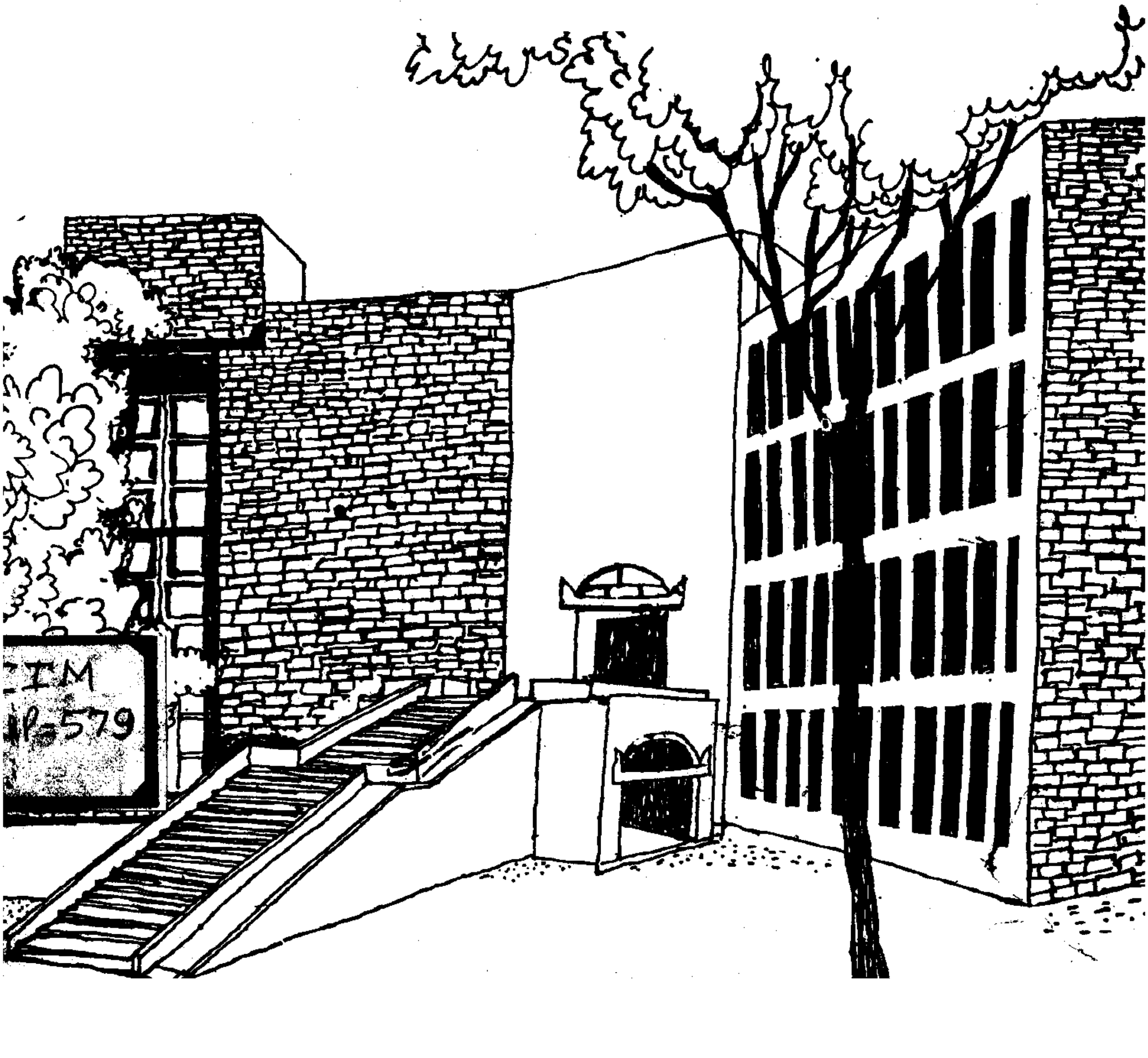

EXPERIENCE WITH CASE METHOD IN SHORT DURATION EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

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SECTION-I: FOCUS AND PLAN OF THE PAPER

Short duration[1] executive development programmes (SEDPs) are widely offered by management schools to train practising executives. They are received very well by the companies as their executives can be trained without affecting significantly the day-to-day working of the company.

The objectives of these programmes have varied depending upon the choice of the subject, the nature of issues to be discussed and the level of participation aimed at Some of the programmes are aimed at imparting knowledge only. Some others aim at not only imparting knowledge but also building certain skills and attitudes. Some examples of objectives of various short duration programmes are given in Exhibit I

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- The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and not of the Institute to which they belong. They alone are responsible for the errors and omissions.

1. For the purpose of this paper a short duration programme is defined as the one run for a maximum duration of two weeks.

A variety of educational methods including lectures, case discussions, role play, experience sharing by participants are used to achieve these objectives. The case method is recommended as a more appropriate pedagogy for helping the participants to build the requisite managerial skills and attitudes, in addition to providing knowledge about the contextual and conceptual aspects of decision making.

SEDPs have certain characteristics, such as short duration, heterogeneity of participant's profile and relatively low stakes of participants in the programme, which might limit the successful exploitation of the potential for learning provided by the case method. In this context this paper attempts to answer the following questions based on the experience and observations of the authors and their colleagues in teaching and coordinating short duration programmes.

- What problems do instructors and coordinators of SEDPs face in exploiting the potential for learning provided by the case method?
- What are the reasons?
- What are the possible solutions?

It discusses the various contingencies faced by the instructors and coordinators in running the method and makes suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of case method in SEDPs.

In the following section we would discuss the salient features of SEDPs. In section-III we would present a variety of contingencies that arose in handling cases in SEDPs and the responses of the instructors and coordinators. An attempt would be made to analyse these contingencies and responses and raise issues for using the case method of learning. in SEDPs. Section-IV makes certain suggestions to the coordinators and instructors for increasing the effectiveness of case method in SEDPs.

SECTION-II: SALIENT FEATURES OF SEDPs AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE USE OF CASE METHOD

In this section we present the salient features of SEDPs which might have a bearing on the effectiveness of the case method of instruction.

*Limited Time and Flexibility

Since the duration of the programme is short both the faculty and participants have to operate against a time constraint. The programme is tightly packed. The schedules are tight and hence slack time is negligible. The sessions cannot be cancelled or rescheduled easily without affecting other sessions or the time available for preparation. Hence, the flexibility available to the instructor is also restricted. His class strategy has to be right in the first shot. There is little time to make up or reschedule.[2] Similarly, the time available for interaction among the participants to learn about each others motivations, experience and personalities, which is so essential for establishing group discussion norms, is not really adequate. They come to know each other better in the second half of the programme.

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2. On a typical day, we schedule three sessions each with a duration of 70 minutes in the morning. The afternoon sessions are free for self study and preparation for the next days classes. On some days there are sessions in the afternoon as well. The average reading load is 90 pages. The participants are expected to spend at least 8 hours outside the class on preparation and self study.

*Heterogeneity of Participant's Profile

In view of broad selection criteria and simple selection process of screening the nominations the participant profile is heterogeneous with respect to the dimensions given in Exhibit 2.

In a short duration programme one has to live with this heterogeneity for a longer part of the programme as the time available for interaction and development of homogeneity is inadequate. The heterogeneity of the group has implications for preparation of the case individually and in groups before the class, discussion and behaviour in the class and reflection after the class. It is both a strength and weakness. It is a strength when multiple perspectives are to be discussed in the class. It is a weakness when it checks the progress of case preparation and class discussion.

Among the dimensions mentioned in Exhibit 2, the dimension of expectations from the programme by the participant and the sponsor is very important. This aspect is elaborated in the following paragraphs:

* Expectations of the Participants: Not all participants have the same expectations from the programme. We have noted a mix of the following:

ACADEMIC

a) A fundamental understanding of the subject, its tools and techniques

b) A brushing up of knowledge acquired in the area

c) Skills and attitudes that would help the company and his job

d) An opportunity to learn from the experience of other companies

e) Acquiring knowledge developed by Institutes' faculty through its research and consulting.

NONACADEMIC

a) Develop contacts with academic institutes for possible incompany programmes, research and consulting

b) Creating business opportunities

c) A paid holiday, a time to relax by getting away from hectic office routine.

It is observed that the participants have a mix of these expectations. The weightages attached by participants to these expectation differ from one participant to another. These weightages decide his interest, seriousness and level of involvement in the programme. For example, a participant who attaches a very high weightage to building contacts and creating business opportunities will have peripheral interest in the preparation for the case and discussion in the class. He takes the role of the observer. The process of learning through the case method would suffer if the group has such participants in large number. Worse still if the group has large number of participants who treat the programme as a paid holiday. This depends upon the venue of the programme. The residential programmes conducted in luxurious hotels reinforce this expectation.

* <u>Expectations of the Company</u>:

Like the expectations of the participants, the expectations of the company differ from sponsor to sponsor. We have identified the following expectations:

a) An exposure to the subject matter and the experience of other companies

b) Knowledge, skills and attitude that would be useful to the company

c) Prepare participants to take up higher responsibilities

d) Creating business opportunities by establishing contacts

e) Getting to know the Institute for placement, incompany programmes and consulting

f) Help participants take a holiday. In this case the training programme is treated as a reward given to the executive by the company.

These expectations would get reflected in the attitude and behaviour of the participants in the programme. If the company is serious about the programme, so would the participant be. It will also determine the stakes of the participants in the programme.

* <u>Low Stakes</u>:

By and large, it is noticed that the stakes of the participants in the SEDPs are low. This is so because the resources committed by the organization and the individual are not high. Nor are rewards and punishments directly tied with what he gains or loses in the programme. They do not lose much if the programme flops. As a result, they would respond to the stimuli of the programme only if the gains are clearly and directly visible and would withdraw at the slightest sign of loss of perceived relevance.

The other aspect of low stakes is limited competition for taking initiatives, making presentation or challenging each other's solutions.

This imposes considerable burden on the programme faculty and the coordinator in enthusing the participants and getting them committed to respond to the demands of the programme.

These characteristics create certain contingencies in the programme. These contingencies and the responses of instructors and coordinators to these would be discussed in the next section.

SECTION-III: CONTINGENCIES AND RESPONSES

As a consequence of the unique characteristics of SEDPs several contingencies arise. Different instructors have responded to these contingencies differently depending upon their assessment of the situation, their capability to handle uncertainty and experience with similar contingencies before. The following is a discussion of the contingencies and instructor responses, and issues arising out of these interactions.

III.1 FIRST DAY PROBLEMS:

In the very first session on the first day of an executive development programme, the instructor opened the class by asking - "So what should the company do?" The instructor looked around for volunteers. There was silence for sometime. When the silence became unbearable, one of the participants confessed with a smile on his face, "I have not read the case. I don't think others have. Why don't you tell us what it is. May be we can then react". Other participants supported him.

The instructor turned to the group and said - "May be you did not have time to read the case. Here are the case facts". He narrated the case facts and asked the participants to think over the problem and react.

The participants' responses were instantaneous. There was sufficient discussion among the participants. Most of the issues the instructor had planned to bring out, were discussed. The session ended smoothly, but the discussion took more time and the starting of next session was delayed.

Faced with a similar situation, another instructor turned to the class and said - "Okay, why don't you take fifteen minutes to read the case with the following questions in minds." He gave certain questions to ponder over. The discussion started after twenty minutes. The initial responses were off-the-cuff without supporting evidence. Many participants merely repeated case facts. By proper questioning, the instructor conveyed the requirement of evidence based solutions. The relevant issues came out succinctly. The discussion/class covered greater ground than was planned by the instructor. The discussion in this situation too overshot the prescribed class time.

The situations described above are typical first day problems. The participants are either not prepared or under-prepared. This is either because they do not know what to do or they did not have the time to prepare or they took the 'let us see what happens in the class' attitude. This is also reflective of the earlier method of learning by listening to the lectures of instructor.

Instructor's Response

The implications of different approaches to handle this contingency need to be viewed in the context of purposes to be achieved on the first day given that SEDPs are tightly packed.

In a long duration programme an instructor could easily reschedule the class after emphasising the need for prior preparation on the part of participants. However, this approach is infeasible as rescheduling of the class would be at the expense of some other aspect to be covered in another session and/or cutting into the preparation time of the participants for next day. More importantly, the first class is most likely to be an agenda setting exercise for both the content of the programme and the learning methodology adopted in the programme. This has to be done well.

The first nature of response i.e. presentation of case by instructor, is fraught with the danger of participants going with the impression that the instructor would explain the case facts if they didn't prepare for subsequent day's classes. But, what can the instructor do if the case is too long? The time needed for narration is shorter than that for reading.

The instructor's response of requesting the participants to read the case has the merit of underscoring the need for reading the case before coming to the class. The message is that they may be asked to read the case in the class itself. If the case is long, they may have to spend the whole session reading the case. This, hopefully, makes them read and prepare the cases assigned for the subsequent days.

Coordinator's Response:

Some coordinators have tried to overcome the problem of underpreparedness on the first day by sending advance reading material along with a note on the pedagogy and its expectations from the participants. The problem however, is that several participants either do not receive the advance reading material in time due to postal delays or do not bring the same with them when they come to the programme. The material has to be distributed again.

Despite handicaps the practice of sending out advance reading material is preferred in the hope that at least some would read.

Some other coordinators have responded by requesting the participants to reach the venue a day earlier and inaugurating the programme that evening. This also has had mixed results. Some participants do not turn up.

Choice of Case:

The above discussion raises the question of the right case to be chosen for the first session. Both types of responses by instructors lead to reasonable achievement of objectives for the session. In both kind of responses the discussion could take off without delay, once the situation was understood, because it did not involve pencil pushing. Can we then recommend that the opening case chosen should be short and easily comprehensible?

Some do not agree. At the Institute some prefer long and complex cases to make the participants experience the multi-dimensional nature of decision making and bring out the inadequacies of individual participant's narrow approach for resolving such problems. This may leave the participants baffled and confused on the first day, which in turn may affect the next day's preparation. Psychologically, a short and easily comprehensible case would instill confidence in the participants, arouse curiosity and motivate them to prepare for the subsequent sessions. There should be a feeling of achievement on the first day.

Time Management:

Owing to these contingencies and the responses, time management becomes a problem. Both responses lead to over-shoting the prescribed time duration and cut into the time for the next session. Anticipating such contingencies, it is advisable to budget longer time for the opening session. A first day format which we have found effective in creating a base for the subsequent sessions is to have only one case on the first day and devote two sessions (double session) to it. Normally, the coordinator of the programme handles this session. The third session is a lecture session to be engaged either by a practising executive or by one of the faculty members.

III.2 DISCUSSION IN THE CLASS

Assuming that the first day's problem has been handled well, the programme could be expected to do well on subsequent days. Yet, there are a number of contingencies relating to the nature of discussion in the class which need is to be tacked well. They seem to arise more or less in the order they are described below.

Case Facts Echo

In the sessions immediately following the first day, those who participate generally repeat the information available in the case with very little analytical rigour and/or drawing relevant inferences. Other participants, usually do not interfere much though they might be feeling uncomfortable about the progress of the class. Three kinds of responses have been noticed on the part of instructors:

1. Ignore such remarks and request others to participate
2. Questioning of the type "so what"
3. Ask questions like "Does that imply that the company should take option A?"

The first of the above approaches sometimes leads to picking one or more participants who are able to contribute constructively towards meaningful discussion. In case the instructor is able to spot/get such contributions fairly early in the session, he would have not only prepared a climate for meaningful learning for the class as a whole but also demonstrated the futility of merely repeating the case information. However, on the other hand, it may take, and usually does, considerable time to spot/get such participants who would make valuable contribution. In such a situation he runs the risk of providing a feeling to at least those who merely repeated case facts, that more repetition of case facts is good contribution. This is a waste of class time, specially if the class has read the case. Instructors, therefore, switch their approach to the second or the third option listed above.

The second approach, "so what?", if used in early sessions of the programmes, is likely to generate a feeling of frustration among the participants, besides being offensive. Given their low stakes, they might switch off in the subsequent sessions. In addition, it would provide very little assistance to the group in moving forward with the case. However, the same approach could be used in later part of the programme, after demonstrating the utility of meaningful discussion.

The third approach has been found to be quite fruitful. In this, the instructor helps the participant in interpreting the case information for purposes of resolving the issues identified. The questioning is so designed that at some useful inferences are "extracted" from the speakers. Irrespective of the success of extracting the inferences, the process has the advantage of communicating adequately the futility of repeating only case facts in the class discussion and the usefulness in presenting inferences backed by case data.

<u>Jaundiced Eyes</u>:

> A case of a small company selling its product in a local market was being discussed. The sales had gone down and the company was thinking of ways of improving its sales. A heated debate was going on in the class about the ways of promoting the product. Somebody was making out a case for employing national media, somebody else was suggesting market research, the third one was recommending door to door campaign and the fourth one was presenting a case for tie up with a national marketeer.

The instructor appeared indifferent but agitated. Nothing was being written on the blackboard. As the tempers rose there was din in the classroom. Everybody kept quiet as the instructor raised his hand to speak. He asked - "What company is this? Is it a large multibranch - multiunit company? Why does it have to worry about national market? How much does it have to sell? - 500 units?"

The class realised that they were not discussing the case situation. They were only relating their experiences to the problem on hand without considering that the company in question was a small one and not a large one.

Here is a case where experience of participants was a hindrance in learning. The problem pointed out by the instructor is a significant one. The participants tend to see every situation from the jaundiced eyes of their experience in their organisation. They need to take their blinkers off if they have to develop new perspective. Earlier this is done in the programme the better it is.

If they do not learn to appreciate the specific situation of the organisation in the case, there is the danger of discussion going off at a tangent. The participants can end up exchanging their experiences rather than getting insight into the relevance of various kinds of experiences in specific situation.

Another side of jaundiced eyes is the eagerness to recognise the actual name of the disguised case. The class ends up discussing the situation of the company as known to the participants rather than what is given in the case.

The instructors in such situations should emphasise the need for focusing on the situation as described in the case. Otherwise classtime is wasted.

Quantifobia

One of the cases on marketing strategy had several exhibits useful for deciding the pricing policy, which was the dominant issue of marketing strategy in the situation. Assessments of costs and revenues at different levels of production/sales were provided in the exhibits and referred to in the case. While discussing this case, several participants ignored the assessment of costs and revenues and started discussing the suitability of broad approaches of pricing in the specific situation at length.

The instructor first tried to draw the attention of the class to specific exhibits but did not succeed much. He then distributed a sheet on which the worked out figures of overall sales and profit for few years under each of the price options were provided.

The above incident is a frequent occurance in SEDPs, unless the participants have mathematical/technical background. While there could be several reasons for such hestiation to work with figures, the approaches used by instructors to tackle the situation in the class room have been:

*. Go with the participants and discuss the soft side

*. Make then look at exhibits and work out numbers in the class

*. Give the numbers worked out by him

*. Invite the attention of the participants to the number work involved. Supply some numbers, point to relevant exhibits and request them to work out the rest in the class.

The effectiveness of these responses depends on the position of the case in the programme. If it is the very first session, the last response does not yield results. The third one may be better. Under any circumstance the soft option present in the first response should be avoided. If the case analysis demands number work, it should be presented either by the participants or by the instructor. After all, they are needed for a proper understanding and analysis of the situation. However, if the objective of the session is to help the participants learn how to work out the numbers, then the second response is more appropriate.

You have heard us enough:

> "So what should the company do?" was the question. The participants were ready with their analysis. They volunteered, argued out their points, the blackboard was full of words and arrows. It was time to close the discussion. When the instructor was about to say something, one of the participants stood up and asked - "Professor, you have heard us enough. How about telling us what would you have done in this case?" The instructor was in a dilemma.
>
> He was reminded of the tenet that the instructor in the case method does not give his solution. If he does it, he might increase the dependence of the participants on him. They might take the solution as ideal one. He decided to play it neutral. He said - "In this case there is no right or wrong answer - your solution is as good as mine. Fine then we meet tomorrow".
>
> While the participants were quite involved and had progressed well in tackling the case in the class, they felt disappointed after the class. They expected the instructor to give out his analysis so that they could compare theirs with his and argue out the differences. One of the participants even remarked - "We have not come here to talk among ourself. We have come to hear them. He should have given his solution".

This is a common situation faced by all case teachers. The responses however are not uniform. Faced with a similar situation, another instructor presented his analysis with the following preface - "As you have already noted, there could be multiple solutions. The one I am presenting is one of these. It does not differ significantly from what Mr. X has presented. I have added to it the evaluation of Mr. Y". After that the participants were satisfied that the instructor's comments added to their learning in that session. They expressed this to the instructor during coffee break.

While it is necessary that the instructor should leave the class open ended so that the participants learn to live with multiple solutions and ambiguity and thus reflect the realities of decision making, the participants won't be able to appreciate this in a short time available in a SEDP. The ambiguity and incompleteness may act as a stumbling block in their preparation for the next day. As long as the instructor does not communicate that he is giving the right or the ideal solution there is no harm in presenting instructor's analysis if it is different from the class solution. The instructor should, however, underline the critical assumptions involved in his presentation. He should also, if possible, provide the nature of assumptions under which the solutions arrived at through discussions are quite acceptable. In our opinion, this is better than leading the class to the solution the instructor has in mind.

Such selective presentations by the instructors, specially in the first half of the programme would be helpful to the participants in examining their own critical assumptions and thus reflect on their approaches to decision making vis-a-vis those presented by others, including the one by the instructor.

Some Comments on Class Discussion

The sequence of incidents quoted and discussed above is a fairly frequent occurrance in SEDPs. The 'case facts echo' incident typically reflects the participants initial struggle with a somewhat unfamiliar pedagogy like case method. The 'Jaundiced eye' and 'quantifobia' reflect their biases caused, most likely, by the nature of experiences. The fumbling in a new learning process leads to seeking support through incidents like 'you have heard us enough'. Besides these important reasons presented above for the nature of incidents, other reasons like lack of significant stakes, on the part of participants, diversity of backgrounds in the group, and shear lack of adequate hardwork before the class also contribute to causing such incidents.

It has been found useful to take the following steps in reducing such occurrances.

- Plan a case like the one referred in the incident 'Jaundiced eye' fairly easily in the programme. This has the advantages of i) impressing upon the participants about the usefulness of situational focus in discussion,

ii) confidence in learning through each others experiences about handling specific decision areas, and iii) need to use case facts for remainder of the programme.

- Plan a few minutes towards the end of each session for summarising/reviewing what has been covered. This could be attempted by the instructor and/or the coordinator of the programme.

- Review/summary should reflect three aspects, i) tentative conclusions regarding the resolution of problems in the specific situation(s), ii) tentative conclusion regarding the applicability or otherwise at different approaches proposed in the discussions in certain kinds of situation, and iii) underscore the merit of group learning.

Ideally, the steps 2 and 3 should be extracted from the participants. Most of the time it may not be easy. In our opinion the instructor could partially give up these ideals of case method to achieve the broad goals of not only successfully conducting the SEDP but also to inculcate the attitudes so important for further learning by the participants after the programme.

III.3 BEHAVIOUR OF PARTICIPANTS AND INSTRUCTORS IN THE CLASS

The series of incidents covered in this sub-section, pertain primarily to observed behaviour of participants and instructor in the class.

"Okay, Here It is"

A young instructor who was making his debut in edp teaching. He was to teach on the second day of the programme. The case was long. Exhibits were many. A reading was also assigned along with the case. He had given a set of questions to be discussed by the participants in groups before coming to the class. Looking at the first day's performance, he was not sure whether the participants would put in adequate effort the night before. To reduce the uncertainty arising out of this he decided to make a presentation. He opened the class by saying - "let me spend time on the reading and make a presentation on the case".

The presentation was received very well. There were comments by the participants on the presentation. The discussion went off very well. The instructor was satisfied.

After the session, some participants expressed that they had discussed the case the night before and they should have been asked to initiate the case discussion.

The position of the instructor is understandable. Since that was his first session, he was too keen to make a good mark. He could not stand the risk of class going astray for want of adequate forethought and analysis. The ratings at the end of the class were important for him. In his anxiety, he missed an opportunity to involve the participants in the discussion right in the beginning and reinforce the requirements of the case discussion method of learning.

This situation raises the issue of inducting inexperienced instructors into the short periods edps. Should they be taken in at all? When should they be brought in? One could argue against bringing in freshers on the ground that in a short period edp things have to be right, the very first time you do it. The counter issue is that there has to be a first time for everything. Also, the expertise of the instructor or scarcity of faculty resources may in any case warrant inclusion of a fresh faculty member in the programme. In such cases the coordinator and faculty colleagues should discuss his understanding of the class performance on first day and the required class strategy for all the session scheduled next day. This process could help the fresh faculty also to adopt pertinant strategies in handling the session. Just as the participants need reinforcement so does the instructors, particularly new instructors.

I Switched Off:

> "What role can corporate planning play in this public enterprise" - was the opening question to the class posed by the instructor. Though the case was short few participants seem to have read it. The discussion did not take off as envisaged. The instructor asked - one of the participants what was happening. He responded - "This case is not for me, it is for them". He was from the private sector. He perceived that the case situation was irrelevant to his kind of company. He had switched off.

The 'switching off' phenomenon on the part of some participants takes place not only because of lack of perceived relevance of the case situation as in the above incident or when the case is on a foreign company or when the case is old. It has also been observed when

- some participants feel out of place with the rest of of the group for whatever reasons

- topic of discussion is considered, a prior, totally incomprehensible by some participants, like a highly quantitative technique used in the case. The companies from which participants come just do not have the nature of data required to use such a technique
- the discussion by the instructors focus only on some participants who might 'know' something about nature of situation being discussed
- the instructor(s) and the participants discuss the issues involved in a language alien to the rest of the group, etc.

The approaches which have been found to avoid the switching off phenomenon are:

a) Right in the beginning of the programme the coordinator emphasises the importance of learning about resolving decision problem faced in a variety of situations (cases). He also emphasises that the cases selected in the programme reflect a mix of the situation which the participants in their industry ehvironment (not necessary in the specific company) are likely to face.

b) In situations where the switching off phenomenon does occur inspite of such comments, the instructor/ coordinator should emphasize the need to write such cases which are recent and of domestic origin with the help and cooperation of participants and their companies. Usually this approach gets couple of volunteers which could then be persued to develop more appropriate cases.

c) The instructor endeavours to conduct the discussion in a language (terminology etc.) which could be understood and appreciated by the participants. In case the instructor, given his background, is not able to achieve this task, the coordinator intervenes during or at the end of the session to achieve the same.

d) The instructor avoids the kind of response which is apologetic about use of specific cases and/or the nature of technicalities involved. Such response reinforces the perceived irrelevance and spoils the learning climate of the group.

The switching off phenomenon is too important to be ignored in a SEDP as the time available for retaining the learning climate is too little.

<u>We behaved like Gentlemen:</u>

> The class was on. Two participants were arguing out their points. The intervention by the instructor was polite. Case discussion ended after few others contributed to the discussion.
>
> After the session, the participants were dissatisfied. There was a feeling that the session was wasted. During coffee break one of the participants met the instructor and told him that the discussion in the class was irrelevant. He asked why the instructor did not cut the arguments of the speakers and point out the "irrelevance." The instructor asked the same question to the participant. "It would not have been nice on my part to do that," was the reply of the participant.

In this situation everybody including the instructor wanted to be a gentleman. "Why hurt someone, let him have his say," - was the attitude. In the process the discussion suffered and hence the learning objectives of the session.

"After all we are here for a short period. Why create bad feelings. There may not be time to patch up. Let us part as friends.". These are some of the feelings which come in the way of taking hardline against someone in the class. The participation tends to be condescending. Nor does the instructor want to be unpopular. What is the way out?

Some instructors have found a way out by being polite but firm. They have chosen such questions to point out the irrelevance as, "Are we barking up the wrong tree?"

In the early part of a SEDP, the initiative of pointing out the irrelevance and bringing the class on the track has to be taken by the instructors. Once the ice is broken, others could take on such a role. If he does not, nobody will do it.

Small Group Meetings:

It is observed that the discussion in the class would be richer if the participants discuss the case in small groups as a part of preparation for the class. Here the coordinator of the programme has two options.

a) He emphasises the utility of discussion in small groups at the beginning of the programme and requests the participants to form these groups.

b) He forms these groups and intimates the names of their group members to the participants when they check in.

Given the limited time for interactions among the participants, there is the uncertainty in option (a) that the groups are not formed by all the participants. Even if they are formed, they may turn out to be biased groups in the sense that the groups would consist of members with similar attributes like similar companies, age group, level in the organisation etc. This kind of group formation does not bring in the much needed multiple perspective to the case discussion. Hence the second option is preferable. The coordinator should form groups to bring together participants with various company and industry backgrounds, differing functional responsibilities, etc.

Mere formation of the groups does not ensure automatically that all the groups meet to discuss the case before the class as the expectations and the comprehending and communication abilities are not uniform across all participants. The coordinator and his faculty group need to provide the necessary infrastructure support to facilitate meetings in small groups. At times, they have to take rounds to see that the groups do meet. They have to create a sense of involvement in the programme.

Some coordinators have tried scheduling group meetings as a part of the time table of the programme with some success. This regiments the working of the groups. Ideally, the groups should choose their own pace and mode of working. We have observed the following formats of meeting in small groups:

a) Read and analyse the case together

b) Read the case individually and meet to analyse the case together

c) Meet twice - once before reading the case to discuss who will do what and for the second time to pool the ideas together.

Some Comments on Behaviour in Classroom:

The above incidents and their discussions seem to indicate action areas which also go beyond the classroom. These include i) proper selection of cases, ii) screening of participants, iii) selection of faculty, iv) monitoring of learning climate during the programme, and v) proper introduction to programme content and learning methodologies to be pursued in the programme.

At the outset, it must be recognised that for a variety of reasons the programme coordinator and faculty are likely to have only limited leeway in applicant screening, faculty choice, and selection of case situations. However, proper introduction of the programme content and learning method and monitoring of learning during class sessions and outside could be definitely attempted by the programme coordinator with the assistance of the faculty. Following approaches have been found useful in this regard:

a) Conduct the first session of the programme by using a case. The purpose of this session is to delimit the objectives and contents of the programme. Also, the participants could be briefed, after going through a case discussion in the class, regarding the method of learning including the requirement of before class preparation both by individual participants and in small groups.

b) The session should be conducted by a faculty who is fully conversant with the programme as well as the participants. Most likely, the coordinator alone may be able to fill such a bill.

c) Coordinator should organise faculty meetings both before the start of programme, may be on the previous evening of the programme, and during the programme. This helps not only in assessing the progress both of content as well as pedagogy, but also spotting some participants with "chips on the sholders" and/or those not having active participation in the class.

III.4 BREAKDOWNS AND TERMINAL FRUSTRATIONS

Quovadis?

In the morning of the third day of a one week programme some participants met the coordinator and expressed that they were not getting anything from the programme. They were feeling frustrated. They just did not understand why they were discussing so many cases. Their expectations from the programme were different. The coordinator noted that the sessions scheduled that day morning also did not go off well.

The coordinator was to take a session in the afternoon, owing to the inability of another faculty member to be present. It was a last minute adjustment. The coordinator decided to lecture on the various aspects of the course and linkages across cases first, and take up the discussion of the afternoon case later. He started by saying, - "There seems to be lot of confusion and feeling of despondency with respect to the direction in which we are moving. Let me take sometime to clarify the issues." He explained: i) how the issues discussed in the various cases were linked, ii) what the objective of each session was and iii) how every session was expected to build on the learning in other sessions. He summarised the contents of the various readings and presented a conceptual framework. He also took the opportunity to explain how to learn from the case-discussion. He stressed the need for working in small groups that were constituted in the beginning of the programme. There were questions and counter questions on this lecture. After the doubts were cleared, the instructor gave ten minutes off and requested the participants to reassemble for the scheduled case discussion.

That afternoon's class was rated to be the best class of the programme. The subsequent sessions went off smoothly. The level of preparation increased substantially. In fact, after the programme, one of the participants wrote to the coordinator that his intervention on the third day of the programme was the best thing that happened during the programme. But for that intervention, the programme would have flopped.

It should be noted here that the intervention by the coordinator was not by design. Some of the participants approached the coordinator and expressed their dissatisfaction. And by chance it so happened that the coordinator was to substitute a faculty member. Very rarely such coincidences occur in the same SEDP! Seldom do the participants share their evaluation of the programme and the faculty openly with the coordinator in the middle of the programme.

One of the views in this context could be that the coordinator shouldnot have given a pep talk. He should have told the participants that the initial confusion and frustration was also a part of the case method of learning and things would be clearer as the programme progressed. By doing so he would have stuck to the tenets of the case method.

Such a response would have had one of the following reactions:

* The participants agree to go by what the coordinator says and put in efforts to prepare for the classes and learn.

* The participants nod and decide to tolerate the method till the programme is over. They cultivate the feeling that things won't improve anyway.
* This would operate as a self-fulfilling prophecy. It would affect their preparation for the subsequent sessions and the interest in the programme would go down.

Given the low stakes of the participants in SEDPs, the probability of occurrence of the second reaction is much higher.

The Issues

The situation described above and the discussion thereof, raise three significant issues: i) should recapituation be attempted whether at the end of each session or as separate session? ii) what should bethe position/timing of separate sessions if planned? and iii) what should be the role of the coordinator?

On the first issue, our position is amply illustrated by the remarks of Heller.[3]

"Experience suggests that most management groups expect to be given facts and a sense of progress. There is no educational value in frustrating these expectations too violently. If a course is long and there is much opportunity for case study work, then one can risk some early disillusionment in the knowledge that the sense of progress will come later and will then justify an earlier fumbling and stumbling".

3. Heller, Frank A. "The Use of Case Studies at a Technical College", p.28, in Case Study Practice, British Institute of Management, 1960

Short period edp is like a short distance race where early fumbling and stumbling costs the race itself

On the second issue, we would suggest that the first session of the programme should be planned as an agenda setting session through discussion of a case. The nature of agenda is two fold: firstly, delimit the scope of the programme content and demonstrate interlinkages of various modules/sessions and secondly, emphasize the requirements of the pedagogy i.e., adequate preparation on the part of individual participant and discussion in small groups before coming to class as well as the method of learning by discussion during the class. However, this alone is not likely to be sufficient. To drive home the agenda it would be necessary that, if possible, each session provides a lingake/reinforcement for the programme agenda. In case this is not possible, a separate session some time in the middle of the programme has been found to serve the purpose admirably.

The role of the coordinator is primarily to plan the separate sessions on perspectives as well as get faculty cooperation in implementing the reinforcement part in each session/module. The coordinator, as leader of the programme, would be best suited to conduct the agenda/perspective sessions. He could also intervene in each session with prior consent of concerned faculty to link up the learning in each session with overall programme objectives.

The programme faculty, including the coordinator, were witnessing a presentation by each of the two groups of participants on an integrated case. It was the last session of a short duration executive development programme.

Both groups finished their presentation in about half an hour each, which was about half the time alloted for each presentation. The faculty as well as the coordinator felt that neither group had put in the requisite effort nor had they learnt much from the programme during the last one week. Both groups had left out significant issues, and had at best treated the remaining with superficial analysis without much logic.

The faculty provided detailed feedback on the presentations mostly pointing out the areas of improvement. While the faculty was commenting, the coordinator observed that the participants were getting quite agitated. At the end of the feedback by faculty one of the participants stood up and agitatedly blamed the case itself. He not only argued that the case was lousy but went to the extent of emphasizing that no one even could really resolve the issues because of inherent weakness in the case. In the end he suggested that the faculty members must provide their solution.

Quite apart from the poor presentations, the comments by the participants came as a bomb-shell to each one of the faculty, and need more so to the coordinator. The faculty knew that the case was sound and tested out successfully as an integrated case in earlier batches of the same programme.

The coordinator of the programme came on the stage and with all humility and patience at his command explained the worth of the case as an excellent instrument to integrate the learning in the programme. He then presented his analysis. At the end of his presentation the group was visibly moved. The coordinator could sense the feeling of guilt among the participants. But, it was too late for them to retrieve the lost ground. It was the last day of the programme.

Invariably, in each programme there is an integrated case presentation towards the end. The case chosen for such presentation is intended to enable the participants to integrate the learning that is expected to take place in the programme.

We have found the presentation on an integrated case (by participants) to be very effective in generating interest, taking up challenges as emerging in the case with excellent motivation, and overall provide a concrete measure of the extent of learning in the programme.

Typically the class is divided into two sub-groups to discuss and present the case. The groups are expected to choose their leader and appoint sub-groups to look into specific aspects of the case. A broad assignment sheet along with the case is distributed two days in advance of the day of presentation. The coordinator briefs the participants about the nature and kind of presentation. Faculty guidance is restricted to clarification of facts. Each group is alloted about one hour for the presentation.

The mode adopted by the programme faculty for ending the session has differed from programme to programme.

- The faculty comments on the presentations
- An executive from the company, which is the subject matter of the case, comments on the presentation and shares with the groups what the company actually did.
- The presentations are put to vote and the best presentation is chosen.

While a combination of the first two options is most useful, time constraints on the programme force the coordinator to choose one of these. The third one is a less preferred option as at times it vitiates the terminal atmosphere of the programme. The group chosen second feels downcast. At the end of one such voting, one of the participants remarked to the coordinator "you should not have done that. We had worked equally hard".

All through the programme (in which the incident took place), despite interventions by the coordinator and other faculty members, some participants of the programme had held the opinion that they were not learning anything from case discussion method. On top of all this, these participants were vocal inside and outside the class. As couple of them had formal management degrees, thus, they probably also carried some credibility with the other participants. This had affected the workings of the individual preparation as well as preparation in small groups before the class sessions. When the presentation session was announced, their immediate reaction was to request the coordinator to drop the session and allow the participants sometime to go to the city for shopping. This reaction was unexpected. The coordinator regained his composure and explained to the group the usefulness of the exercise and shared with them his fruitful experience with earlier batches and suggested that they should experience the exercise to be able to appreciate the benefits. To which the class agreed.

Two important issues arise in the context of the above incident. The first being the nature of measures required to fix those participants who seem to have 'chip on their shoulders' and the second regarding the appropriateness of the kind of response by the coordinator and the faculty after the presentations.

Regarding the first issue, the approaches are somewhat clear i.e. spot the 'chip on the shoulder' types both in and outside the class, 'fire' them in a manner that brings home the futility of such behaviour to not only them but also other participants, and monitor the learning climate for taking corrective actions on a somewhat continuous basis. Apart from being a great help in monitoring such aspects, senior/experienced faculty colleagues are generally more adapt in fixing such errant participants who generally constitute about 5 to 10% of the total number. However, either because of such lack of experience in the faculty group/and/or because of higher degree of skills on the part of participants, sometimes the rescue operations may not succeed as in the incident cited above. In fact, part dis-appearance of the symptoms during the programme may also call the faculty into complacency. There is very little one can do regarding such aspects except may be devise better methods of monitoring the learning climate during the programme and better screening of participants before accepting their nomination for the programme.

Several questions can be raised about the nature of response by the faculty and the coordinator. Shouldn't the faculty have behaved in a 'gentlemanly way and not brought out the negative aspects of the presentations to the point of provoking the group? Shouldn't the coordinator have kept quiet? Or shouldn't he have said - "We are here to ask questions and not answer them. We make you think and not preach a solution"? Why did he instead make a detailed presentation against the tenets of the case discussion method? Was it to protect his own image? Image of the programme? or satisfy the participants that they got something?

Answers to these questions would vary depending on the position one takes with regard to the protection of the tenets of the case discussion method. Someone who analyses the coordinator's response, independently of the contingency, would criticise him for violating the norms of the method. Some others would support him for doing what was not only appropriate for the occasion per se but which could also possibly kindle a lamp in the heart of participants to take their own learning seriously in future.

We would go with the coordinator in this situation. The right question to ask is not what would the principles of case method expect him to do in this situation but what is appropriate in the situation.

III.5 ROUNDING UP

In the foregoing paragraphs we presented several contingencies faced by participants, instructors and co-ordinators. The responses of instructors and coordinators to these contingencies were analysed and commented upon. It was pointed out how the features of SEDPs determined both the nature of contingencies and the responses of the instructors and coordinators. Invariably the instructors have had to make compromises with the professed principles of handling the cases to create a better learning climate for the case discussion method later. We have often seen that the participants response to the demands of the case method become favourable after such interventions. Invariably the feedback of the participants at the end of the programme has been that the case method was appropriate for learning management.

Based on the comments and issues raised in this section, we would be presenting certain suggestions for the considerations of instructors and coordinators in the next section.

SECTION-IV: SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR MAKING THE CASE METHOD EFFECTIVE IN SEDPs

Despite the limitations of time and flexibility the case method of learning is a useful pedagogy in SEDP. We have noticed the following gains from this pedagogy from our discussion with participants and formal feedback taken at the end of our programmes.

* A better appreciation of the usefulness of the problem solving approach.
* Introspection - i.e., helping the participant to examine his decision making process before, during and after the programme and realise the differences in achievement.
* Provide an understanding of how others in the same decision making situation, analyse the situation and take decisions and make him aware of the multiple approaches and solutions to the same problem.
* An expansion of perspective and flexibility achieved through a variety of decision making situations.

The contingencies arising from heterogeneity of participants profiles and low stakes of participants in the programme can be anticipated and provided for. Based on our analysis in Section-III we can suggest the following to the instructors and coordinators of SEDP for making the case method effective.

PLANNING THE PROGRAMME

Suggestions to the Coordinator:

* Considerable effort in planning the programme are needed to ensure that the choice of faculty members, choice of cases, sequencing of cases and readings, choice of integrated cases are appropriate.

It is preferable to convene periodic meetings of the faculty teaching in the programme to exchange ideas and suggestions on cases and readings and their sequencing to be included. Efforts should be initiated well in advance to develop new teaching material. The feedback of instructors, coordinators and participants of earlier programmes be discussed to identify the areas requiring improvement, and gaps in cases and readings. Time should also be spent on developing as clear a profile of the target beneficiaries of the programme. It is necessary to screen the nominations received to keep the disruptive heterogeneity to the minimum. While doing so, we shouldn't forget that heterogeneity can be a source of creative alternatives.

* Despite the likelihood of some participants not finding time to read the material, it is advisable to send advance reading material.
* Organise the sessions reading material and cases in such a way as to move from simple to the complex. This would build the confidence of the participants and the credibility of the programme.
* Provide for double sessions to discuss longer cases and readings. Depth in analysis could be acquired through this.

Suggestions to the Instructors:

For the instructors teaching in the programme it is advisable to discuss the objectives of his sessions, the emphasis of the cases and topics to be taught and their interlinkages with other sessions with the coordinator and other members of the faculty teaching in the programme.

* In view of the time constraint, the choice of the case and the background reading material becomes a critical decision. While choosing the case and the reading material they need to keep in mind not only the learning objectives of the session, but also the profile of participants attending the programme. This will minimise the chances of switch off.

* Ask for double sessions if the cases are too long or more time is required to analyse the cases in depth. In the SEDPs a completely analysed case session is to be preferred to incomplete ones.

DURING THE PROGRAMME

Suggestions to the Coordinator:

* Explain the prerequisites of the case method in the beginning of the course and the likely problems that could arise in using this method of learning. The first case discussion class could be used to point out the problem areas.

* Consciously look for both positive and negative signals pointing to the effectiveness of the method and bring these to the notice of the class in review and integration sessions, coffee breaks and small group informal meetings. Also encourage open feedback on the method of learning.

* Form small groups right in the beginning and monitor the interactions within these groups. Arrange to provide the necessary infrastructure for facilitating group meetings. Check whether the groups are working or not.

* Attend all the sessions in the programme. This is absolutely essential to understand the behaviour and progress of the class.

* Intervene, with prior permission of the instructor, in the class discussion, if you feel that class is not perceiving the discussion to be relevant or seeing the interlinkages, and point out the relevance or interlinkages.

* Interact constantly with programme faculty to brief them on what happened in the previous sessions, and your assessment of participants' interest and capability.

* Hold hand, if necessary, with debutant faculty. Review their class strategy. Give feedback, suggest changes if needed. Be open to their questions. However, do not impose your style and views on him. Let him develop his own style and analysis.

To the Instructors:

* Get prior information on the class performance from the coordinator and preceeding instructors. It is advisable to attend the previous and succeeding sessions in the programme. Prepare alternative class strategies so that class time is not wasted because of your inability to adapt quickly to an unanticipated situation. Remember that you have no time to make up or reschedule the session. It has to be right in the first shot.

* You may provide your solution at the end if you feel that your analysis and solutions are different from that of the class, especially if you are teaching in the first half of the programme. But, do not provide your analysis till the participants have made a fair attempt to crack the case. Similarly, if the class has not analysed the exhibits and done the number work you could give yours. However, let the class give its interpretation and decision. The key therefore is to share selectively and judiciously.

* Do not dismiss summarily the reproduction of case facts by the participants. Encourage them to take the next step of analysing the facts and using the analysis for decision making. Be polite but firm in giving feedback.

* Encourage reflection over class discussion by discussing the readings in the middle of your module.

* Keep a tab not only on dominant or vocal participants but also on non-vocal participants. Involve the non-vocal participants in the case discussion. If you do not take the initiative, they will withdraw and not talk in the class throughout the programme as their stakes are low. In the same way, dominant participants will not give chance to others unless they are told to do so.

* Encourage the participants to work in small groups formed by the coordinator. You could start by asking the group as a whole to present its views.

* Point to the "jaundiced eyes" trap the participants might fall into. Take the first quick opportunity to point out that while the experience of the participants is relevant in developing alternative courses of action, the analysis of these options and the recommendation therefrom has to be on the basis of the facts of the case.

* Heterogeneity of the participants cuts both way. Try and exploit the positive potential in generating new alternatives and evaluation criteria. Exchange of related experiences per se could be either towards the end of the class or in the beginning of the next class.

AFTER THE PROGRAMME

A review of the programme performance is necessary to learn lessons for managing the case method in SEDRs in future. It is advisable to take formal feedback from the participants on various aspects of the case study method such as choice of cases, sequencing of cases, interaction among the participants, interaction of participants with the faculty members, working of small groups and the effectiveness of integrated case presentation. The coordinator should also document his own experience in interacting with the participants and the programme faculty to make the case method effective.

Exhibit - I

OBJECTIVES OF SOME SEDPs OFFERED BY
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT, AHMEDABAD

A) Programme on Technology Management offered by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

* To sensitise the participants to the emerging problems of technology management
* To discuss concepts which would help manage these resources effectively
* To provide a forum to enable participants to learn new approaches to managing technology.

B) Programme on Corporate Planning offered by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

* Provide an understanding of the analytical and organizational tools for formulating and evaluating corporate plans.
* Give an exposure to the tasks, skills, and attitudes required to be an effective corporate planner
* Have an appreciation of the problems in introducing formal planning systems and implementing corporate plans
* Create a forum for exchanging participants' ideas and experiences in formulating and implementing corporate plans.

C) Programme on Marketing Decisions: Advances in Data Analysis, offered by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

* To discuss some important marketing decision areas and explore scientific and information based approaches to the resolution of problems.
* To develop familiarity with the use of multivariate techniques and approaches.
* To provide an opportunity to participants to use some of the techniques and approaches on some real life problems using the computer facility available at the Institute.

Exhibit - 2

DIMENSIONS OF PARTICIPANTS PROFILE

a) Age

b) Educational Background

c) Years, level and kind of experience on the job

d) Comprehension and communication abilities

e) Work habits

f) Decision making process

g) Company background and management culture

h) Expectations from the programme by the participants

i) Prejudiced and preconceived notions about the effectiveness of case method of learning

j) Interference by the company during the programme.

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47

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