

# Building Dynamic Groups



## Case Studies

A **case discussion** uses a **case study**—a description of a situation in writing, on audio tape, or on video tape – which the participants study and then discuss, guided by the questions and probing of the instructor. A typical case discussion focuses on the issues involved in the situation, what action should be taken or what lessons can be learned, and how to handle or avoid such situation in the future.

This method allows participants to discover certain learning points themselves rather than simply receiving them from the instructor. Case discussions attempt to teach people, or allow people to practice using the thought processes needed to analyze a real situation and to identify possible actions. This method is *not* designed to teach people the “right” solution for a given situation.

### Key Principles

A case study can be effective when one or more of the following is true:

1. The objective is
  - To teach awareness rather than specific skills
  - To teach analysis skills rather than the “right” answer
  - To stimulate a real-life situation in limited time with limited resources
  - To encourage people to participate
  - To demonstrate that the program content is not just conceptual, but applies to the real world
  - To give participants a chance to air their views or vent their emotions
  - To make participants more confident about the validity of their views and their ability to analyze situations as well as defining solutions
  - To test participants’ understanding of concepts, approaches, and issues
2. The subject is
  - Complex and many-sided
  - Not one that lends itself to any one answer
3. The group is
  - Sophisticated, able to organize and deal with large amount of information
  - Skilled at analysis
  - Large (ten to thirty participants) and individual participation is desirable
  - Confident and articulate enough to express opinions, to challenge, and to reinforce one another
  - Opinionated or emotional – group needs a chance to air their views or emotions

### How a Case Discussion Typically Works

The instructor introduces the case and guides the participants to the correct focus. Participants read and analyze the case in preparation for discussion. Instructor starts and guides the participants’ discussion, asking questions, probing, and summarizing. Instructor may use flip charts or a blackboard to document the flow of discussion. Instructor summarizes the learning points or issues brought out by the case. If the case will be used in the next activity, instructor connects the discussion to that activity.

**Reference:** Abella, K. (1986). Case Discussions. Building Successful Training Programs. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.