



APPLICATION OF CONSULTING AND CASE METHODS IN BUSINESS PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the case method and the consulting method as two of the principal interactive instructional approaches within business pedagogy, and substantiates their comparative characteristics and complementary application in forming the practical economic-managerial competencies of students. Drawing on the case-method tradition established at Harvard and the action-learning tradition developed by Revans, the study compares the two methods across seven pedagogical criteria and proposes an integrated “case–consulting cycle” model that sequences case-based analysis with consulting-based intervention within a single instructional cycle. The effectiveness of the combined model was verified through a pedagogical experiment comparing a case-method-only group, a consulting-method-only group, and a combined case–consulting group across five competency indicators. The results show that while the case method more strongly develops analytical-diagnostic thinking and the consulting method more strongly develops practical problem-solving and client communication, the combined group outperformed both single-method groups on every indicator, confirming the pedagogical value of integrating the two methods rather than applying them in isolation.

KEYWORDS: business pedagogy, case method, consulting method, action learning, experiential learning, business education, teaching methodology, Uzbekistan.

INTRODUCTION

Modern business pedagogy relies on a small number of interactive instructional methods, each developed historically to solve a specific pedagogical problem: how to teach sound judgment, rather than settled knowledge, in domains where a single correct answer is rarely available in advance. Two of the most influential of these methods are the case method, first articulated in professional legal education and subsequently adapted across law, business, and medical schools, and the consulting method, which grew out of the action-learning tradition in management development and is today embodied in large-scale practical training programmes for entrepreneurs worldwide.¹

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, the strategic push toward entrepreneurship set out in the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026² and the upbringing-oriented aims of the Concept for the Development of the Public Education System until 2030³ have been accompanied by a growing use of business games, case competitions, and consulting-style entrepreneurship trainings within schools, colleges, and business incubators. In practice, however, the case method and the consulting method tend to be applied separately, often by different institutions and for different purposes, rather than as deliberately sequenced components of a single business-pedagogical course.

The existing methodological literature and teaching practice tend to treat the case method and the consulting method as alternative choices rather than as complementary tools whose comparative strengths and weaknesses can be explicitly mapped and combined. As a result, teachers lack a structured basis for deciding when to use each method or how to sequence them within a course, and empirical comparisons of their combined effect on student

¹Garvin, D.A. *Making the Case: Professional Education for the World of Practice*. Harvard Magazine, 2003, Vol. 106, No. 1, pp. 56–65.

²Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PF-60, “On the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026,” January 28, 2022, Goal 29.

³Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PF-5712, “On Approval of the Concept for the Development of the Public Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030,” April 29, 2019.



competencies remain limited, particularly in the context of Uzbekistan's business-pedagogical practice. This gap between two well-established but separately studied methods constitutes the central problem addressed in this article.

The purpose of the present study is to compare the case method and the consulting method within business pedagogy along a common set of pedagogical criteria, to substantiate an integrated "case–consulting cycle" model, and to verify its effectiveness empirically against each method applied in isolation. In accordance with this purpose, the following tasks were set: to systematize the theoretical and methodological literature on the two methods; to develop a comparative-functional characterization and an integrated cyclical model combining them; and to conduct a pedagogical experiment comparing case-only, consulting-only, and combined instructional groups across five competency indicators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The foundational rationale for the case method in business education was articulated by the Harvard Business School faculty collected in McNair's volume, which framed the method's central aim as the cultivation of judgment through the analysis of specific, richly detailed business situations rather than the transmission of general principles alone.⁴ This rationale was later systematized into practical guidance for case teaching by Barnes, Christensen, and Hansen, whose account of participant-centered learning — including techniques for discussion leadership, questioning, and the management of classroom disagreement — remains a standard reference for case-method instructors.⁵

The case method has not been without its critics. Argyris, drawing on his own observations of management-development programs, argued that the case method, despite its reputation for developing analytical rigor, tends to foster only single-loop learning: because the facts of a case are fixed once written, students can revise their conclusions but rarely have the opportunity to test whether their recommendations would actually work when confronted with a real, responsive situation.⁶ This limitation motivates the search for a complementary method capable of exposing students to genuine uncertainty and real or realistic consequences — precisely the gap that the consulting method is designed to fill.

The theoretical foundation of the consulting method lies in Revans's theory of action learning, summarized in his formula $L = P + Q$, whereby learning (L) results from the combination of programmed knowledge (P) and the questioning insight (Q) generated by engaging with a genuine, unresolved problem alongside peers.⁷ Revans's insistence that learners work on live organizational problems, with real stakeholders and real consequences, is precisely what distinguishes the consulting method from the case method's use of a fixed, already-resolved situation. At a practical, large-scale level, the International Labour Organization's Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) programme illustrates how consulting-oriented, trainer-as-business-advisor methodology can be delivered systematically to entrepreneurs, combining structured business-management content with direct, individualized advisory engagement — a model of clear relevance to Uzbekistan's own entrepreneurship-support ecosystem.⁸

The European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework offers a useful bridge between the two methods: its "Ideas and Opportunities" competence area, emphasizing analysis, evaluation, and ethical judgment, corresponds closely to what the case method is designed to train, while its "Into Action" area, emphasizing planning, resource mobilization, and coping with uncertainty, corresponds closely to what the consulting method is designed to train.⁹ This correspondence suggests that the two methods are not competing alternatives but address different, complementary competence areas within the same overall framework. At a deeper theoretical level, Kolb's experiential learning cycle — concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active

⁴McNair, M.P. (ed.) *The Case Method at the Harvard Business School: Papers by Present and Past Members of the Faculty and Staff*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1954.

⁵Barnes, L.B., Christensen, C.R., Hansen, A.J. *Teaching and the Case Method: Text, Cases, and Readings*. 3rd ed. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1994.

⁶Argyris, C. *Some Limitations of the Case Method: Experiences in a Management Development Program*. *Academy of Management Review*, 1980, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 291–298.

⁷Revans, R.W. *Action Learning: New Techniques for Management*. London: Blond & Briggs, 1980.

⁸International Labour Office. *Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB): Implementation Guide*. Geneva: ILO, 2014.

⁹Bacigalupo, M., Kampylis, P., Punie, Y., Van den Brande, G. *EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework*. Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union, 2016, EUR 27939 EN.



experimentation — helps explain why: the case method emphasizes reflective observation and abstract conceptualization applied to an already-given experience, while the consulting method emphasizes concrete experience and active experimentation in creating and testing a new one.¹⁰ Read together, the two methods cover the full experiential learning cycle in a way that neither covers alone — a theoretical observation that directly motivates the integrated model developed in this article.

Despite this apparent theoretical complementarity, the literature on the case method and the literature on action learning and consulting-based instruction have developed largely as separate traditions — the former rooted in law and business school pedagogy, the latter in adult and management-development education. Little research specifies how the two methods can be deliberately sequenced within a single business-pedagogical course, or compares their combined effect on student competencies against either method applied alone. It is this gap that the present study seeks to address.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the stated purpose, the study combined theoretical and empirical research methods. At the theoretical level, the comparative-analytical method was used to characterize the case method and the consulting method along seven shared pedagogical criteria, and the method of pedagogical modeling was used to construct an integrated cyclical model combining the two methods into a single instructional sequence.

At the empirical level, a pedagogical experiment was conducted with three groups of students enrolled in a business-pedagogy course: a case-method-only group ($n = 28$), taught exclusively through case analysis and discussion; a consulting-method-only group ($n = 27$), taught exclusively through live or realistically simulated consulting projects; and a combined case–consulting group ($n = 29$), taught according to the integrated cyclical model developed in this study. At the end of the instructional period, all three groups were assessed using a common, expert-rater rubric covering five competency indicators: analytical-diagnostic thinking, decision-making and strategic judgment, practical problem-solving, communication and client presentation, and reflective learning. Each indicator was scored on a 0–100 scale, and comparative-statistical methods were used to interpret differences among the three groups.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1. Comparative-functional characteristics and the integrated case–consulting cycle

The comparative-analytical characterization of the case method and the consulting method across seven pedagogical criteria is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative characteristics of the case method and the consulting method in business pedagogy

Criterion	Case Method	Consulting Method
Object of analysis	A pre-written, historically fixed business situation	A live or realistically simulated organizational problem
Learner's role	Analyst / decision-maker interpreting a closed set of facts	Advisor / change agent engaging an evolving "client" situation
Time orientation	Retrospective — the situation has already unfolded	Prospective — recommendations must anticipate future action
Primary skill developed	Analytical-diagnostic thinking, structured judgment	Practical problem-solving, client communication, implementation planning
Typical output	Class discussion, written case analysis	Consulting report, oral recommendation, action plan
Evaluation criteria	Quality of argument, use of frameworks, discussion contribution	Feasibility, persuasiveness, responsiveness to client constraints
Principal limitation	Risk of single-loop learning; the facts are fixed and cannot be probed further	Resource- and time-intensive; requires access to real or realistic organizational partners

Source: compiled by the author.¹¹

¹⁰Kolb, D.A. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984.

¹¹Compiled by the author based on the research findings.

As Table 1 demonstrates, the two methods differ systematically rather than randomly: the case method is retrospective, analysis-centered, and evaluated on the quality of argument, while the consulting method is prospective, action-centered, and evaluated on feasibility and client responsiveness. This systematic difference is what allows the two methods to be combined into a single instructional sequence rather than treated as interchangeable options. The resulting integrated model — the case–consulting cycle — is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The case–consulting cycle: an integrated model for business-pedagogical instruction

Source: compiled by the author.

As shown in Figure 1, the cycle begins with case immersion, in which students study a real or realistically simulated business situation, followed by diagnostic analysis, in which the case method’s analytical apparatus is applied to identify the underlying problem. The cycle then shifts into the consulting register: students formulate a consulting recommendation addressed to a specific “client,” defend it in a client presentation before peers or an instructor acting as the client, and receive structured feedback and engage in reflection before beginning the next case. This sequencing ensures that every case-based analysis is followed by an action-oriented consulting response, and that every consulting recommendation is grounded in prior case-based diagnostic work — directly operationalizing the theoretical complementarity between the two methods discussed above.

4.2. Empirical results: comparing case-only, consulting-only, and combined groups

The results of the post-experiment competency assessment across the three instructional groups are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Post-experiment competency indicators by instructional group (% , five-indicator rubric)

Competency Indicator	Case-Method-Only Group (n=28)	Consulting-Method-Only Group (n=27)	Combined Case–Consulting Group (n=29)
Analytical-Diagnostic Thinking	78%	64%	84%
Decision-Making / Strategic Judgment	71%	69%	82%
Practical Problem-Solving (Implementation)	58%	79%	85%
Communication & Client Presentation	62%	81%	87%
Reflective Learning	66%	63%	80%
Composite Average	67.0%	71.2%	83.6%

Source: compiled by the author based on the results of the pedagogical experiment.¹²

¹²Compiled by the author based on the results of the pedagogical experiment.

The data in Table 2 confirm the theoretical expectation that the two methods develop different competencies with different strength. The case-method-only group scored highest among the two single-method groups on analytical-diagnostic thinking (78%) and decision-making (71%), but lowest on practical problem-solving (58%) and communication and client presentation (62%). The consulting-method-only group showed the reverse pattern, scoring strongly on practical problem-solving (79%) and client presentation (81%), but comparatively weakly on analytical-diagnostic thinking (64%) and reflective learning (63%). The combined case–consulting group, by contrast, outperformed both single-method groups on every one of the five indicators, with a composite average of 83.6 percent against 67.0 percent for the case-only group and 71.2 percent for the consulting-only group (Figure 2).

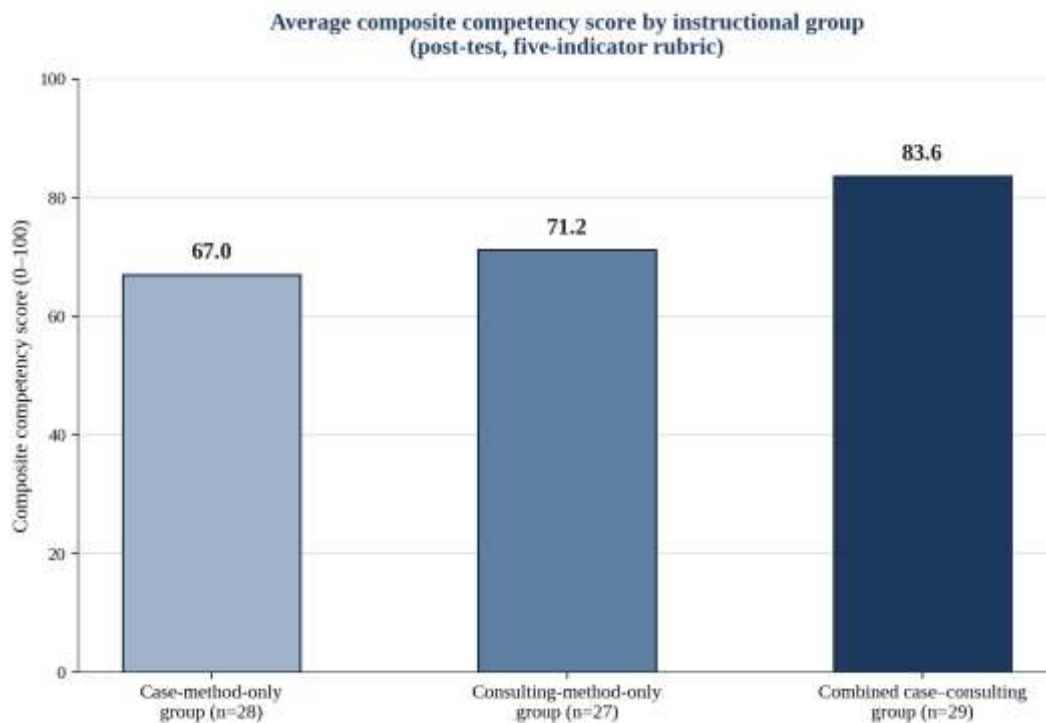


Figure 2. Average composite competency score by instructional group

Source: compiled by the author based on the results of the pedagogical experiment.

This pattern is consistent with the theoretical account developed in the literature review: the case method and the consulting method address complementary rather than overlapping competence areas, so that combining them within a single instructional cycle produces gains that neither method achieves in isolation. Notably, the combined group's advantage was not confined to the competencies emphasized by whichever method was applied second; it held across all five indicators, suggesting that the cyclical, iterative structure of the model — rather than mere exposure to both methods — is what drives the observed improvement.

4.3. Conditions for effective integration

The results indicate that realizing the full benefit of the case–consulting cycle depends on several pedagogical conditions. First, the transition from diagnostic analysis to consulting recommendation must be made explicit within the course design; simply teaching a case-based unit followed by an unrelated consulting project does not reproduce the cyclical structure shown in Figure 1 and is unlikely to generate the same complementary effect. Second, the client presentation stage requires a credible “client” role — played by an instructor, invited practitioner, or peer group — capable of responding with realistic questions and constraints, since it is this responsiveness that most clearly distinguishes the consulting method from a conventional written case analysis. Third, the feedback and reflection stage requires dedicated time and a structured format, such as a reflective journal or debriefing protocol, since without it students tend to carry forward the same analytical habits from one case to the next rather than genuinely integrating consulting-stage lessons into subsequent diagnostic work. Finally, instructors applying the combined model require preparation in both traditions, since the discussion-leadership skills central to case teaching differ substantially from the advisory and feedback skills central to consulting-based instruction.



CONCLUSION

The present study has compared the case method and the consulting method as two principal interactive approaches within business pedagogy and has substantiated an integrated “case–consulting cycle” model that combines them within a single instructional sequence. The theoretical analysis showed that the two methods differ systematically across seven pedagogical criteria and address complementary areas of the experiential learning cycle described by Kolb, providing a clear rationale for their deliberate combination rather than isolated use.

The empirical verification of the model, conducted through a pedagogical experiment comparing case-only, consulting-only, and combined instructional groups, confirmed this theoretical expectation. While the case method more strongly developed analytical-diagnostic thinking and the consulting method more strongly developed practical problem-solving and client communication, the combined group outperformed both single-method groups on every one of the five competency indicators assessed, with a composite score roughly 12–17 percentage points higher than either single-method group.

These findings suggest that the case method and the consulting method should not be treated as alternative instructional choices but as complementary components of a single business-pedagogical cycle. The scientific novelty of the research lies in the comparative-functional systematization of the two methods and in the substantiation and empirical verification of the integrated case–consulting cycle model. The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of applying this model, together with its comparative criteria and diagnostic rubric, in the design of business-pedagogy curricula, teacher-training programmes, and entrepreneurship-education courses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, the following scientific and practical recommendations aimed at improving the application of consulting and case methods in business pedagogy have been formulated:

- 1. Adopting the case–consulting cycle as a course-design principle.** Business-pedagogy courses should be structured so that case-based diagnostic units are explicitly followed by consulting-based recommendation and presentation units, rather than treating the two methods as separate, unrelated course components.
- 2. Formalizing the client role in consulting exercises.** Institutions should identify and prepare credible “clients” — instructors, invited practitioners, or peer panels — capable of responding to student recommendations with realistic questions and constraints, since the quality of this role substantially determines the consulting method’s pedagogical value.
- 3. Building dedicated reflection and feedback protocols.** Structured reflective journals or debriefing sessions should be incorporated after each client presentation, so that lessons from the consulting stage are consciously carried forward into subsequent case-based diagnostic work.
- 4. Providing dual-track methodological training for instructors.** Teachers should receive preparation in both case-discussion leadership and consulting-style advisory and feedback skills, since the two traditions draw on substantially different facilitation competencies.
- 5. Using the comparative-diagnostic rubric for course evaluation.** The five-indicator rubric applied in this study — analytical-diagnostic thinking, decision-making, practical problem-solving, communication, and reflective learning — should be adopted as a standard tool for evaluating the balance of competencies developed within business-pedagogy courses.
- 6. Expanding the research agenda.** Future research should test the case–consulting cycle model across different age groups and educational levels, examine its long-term effect on students’ subsequent entrepreneurial or managerial performance, and explore its adaptation to fully online or hybrid instructional formats.

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