ACE THE CASE: Case Study Interview Strategies

A case study is most common with business and consulting firms. The employer presents a problem or situation and expects the candidate to thoroughly analyze the situation and provide a recommendation for improvement before a panel of interviewers. It is very likely that the case study will resemble a situation that the employer has previously encountered; therefore, we recommend reviewing the employer website for sample case studies and strategies for responding. Effective communication and analytical skills are being assessed during the case study.

The Career Management Center provides access to Vault, which features consulting firm profiles and guides and resources for learning more about case study strategies and sample questions. The Vault Guide provides information on the top US consulting firms and a new feature added in 2013 also ranks the top firms in Asia and Europe. Rankings are also available based on diversity, prestige, discipline/area, and best to work for.

Case interviews determine the following skills:
• Effective communication
• Analytical thinking and problem solving
• Resourcefulness and initiative
• Confidence and cultural fit
• Self-leadership (how you react in pressure cooker situations)

Case Interview Preparation Strategies
- Stay abreast of industry trends and current events
- Review case interview resources offered by firms to understand their processes
- Create a case team and work through case problems together
- Participate in competitions
- Connect with consultants at your target firms for tips
- Practice math tricks and applying frameworks

Case Interview Process

1. Review case
2. Diagnose the problem & ask informed questions
3. Apply frameworks & make assumptions
4. Document process
5. Recommend solutions
Top 10 Case Interview Tips

1. Listen carefully to the question and take notes (there are often clues embedded in the question to help you get started). Understand what is being asked of you, and pay attention to your audience.

2. Repeat question to recruiter to ensure you have the information needed for a strong start.

3. Ask 1-2 clarifying questions if necessary – Begin to formulate a hypothesis in your head and test if they are reasonable. While asking these questions, you are buying yourself a few moments to postulate.

4. Structure the problem, i.e., begin to fit the problem into one of the frameworks.

5. Pick a branch to probe. Develop hypotheses, ask for relevant facts, defend/refine hypothesis based on new information, probe further and describe implications you see. *Key Note: if you find yourself running down a rabbit trail of random issues with no end, stop, think and go back up to 30,000 feet to see if you are even in the right ballpark. It is better to discover this halfway into the interview and leave yourself some recovery time, than to discover this when your hour is done.

6. Pick a second branch and so on.

7. Prioritize your response. Support your arguments with your strongest points first.

8. Put it all together. Try to answer overall questions (the big picture) with a reasonable and actionable conclusion.
   - Review where you have been and what you know
   - Clarify what you do not understand, and what, with more time, you would like to know.
   - Solidify and tender your recommendation (where appropriate, as sometimes the interviewer cares less about your recommendation and more about how you get to it.)

9. Demonstrate your ability to adjust your solution. The employer will sometimes provide additional information to lead to an alternative approach. At this time, consider alternative solutions to show your flexibility.

10. Get feedback. Each case is a learning experience, and understanding where you can continuously improve will present you a stronger consultant candidate.

Case Interview Preparation Resources

- Accenture:

- Bain & Co:
• Boston Consulting Group (BCG):

• Deloitte:

• McKinsey:
  o http://www.mckinsey.com/careers/interviewing

• Oliver Wyman:
  o http://www.oliverwyman.com/careers/entry-level/interview-preparation.html#Roleofthecaseinterview

• Case In Point 9: Complete Case Interview Preparation (April 2016) by Marc P. Cosentino