

## CASES AND ISSUES

**The Case** is a bounded system, a bounded social system. A system is an assemblage of interacting things or parts into a functioning whole. For our research, the systems are social, having human functions and purposes, sometimes temporary systems. A bounded system has spaces, territories, with recognizable edges between the inside and outside, with different functions occurring in different spaces. Examples are an organization, a program, a family, a class in school, a person. Cases usually are not phenomena, events, relationships, policies, but those things can be studied by studying an organization, program, etc.

**An Issue** is a matter of contention which is of special concern or importance. In case study, an issue has to do with the functioning of the case, particularly reflecting one or more of its purposes, an exercise in management by those in control. Certain choices or actions are taken, with uncertainty as to the implication or outcome, with different effects on different constituents likely. The causal relationships between action and outcome usually are unclear and debatable.

The statement of an issue can take the form: For this case, with certain purposes in mind, certain actions have been taken, with implication for certain outcomes and well-being, with lack of agreement as to the desirability of the outcomes and appropriateness of the original actions.

For example, in the case of a youth program, privileges are denied youngsters who break rules. Those in control define the rules, the breaking of rules, the privileges, and the extent of denial. The youth have requested opportunity to evaluate this disciplinary system. The staff is not favorably disposed to giving any such authority. There is an issue here regarding the well-being of the program and the well-being of the youth. The purposes, functions, and benefits of the program are in play. The issue could be stated, If the youth are given this sharing of authority, will they use it in ways that further their own growth and development? Or perhaps in ways that handicap efforts of the staff to carry out the intended functions?

Or for example, in the case of a school choice program where parents can place their children in any school in the system if it is in their residency area or if there are openings. At the beginning of the term, all resident applicants have first choice, all previously attending non-residents have second choice with random selection if places are scarce, and previously non-attending non-residents having subsequent choice with random selection if places are scarce. Thus, priority is given to residents and the status quo. Some have advocated an affirmative action program, to the effect that those who have been denied educational privilege in the past should be given first choices as to placement. Thus there is issue here, which could be stated as: The action of the authorities has been to base choice on residency and past attendance but that may perpetuate inequity in educational opportunity. Or it could be stated as a question, Does the policy to base school placement on residency and past attendance perpetuate inequity?

Statement of an important issue for the study of cases will benefit by making clear the following:

- (a) the case
- (b) the function of the case under consideration
- (c) the aspiration or purpose(s) of the function
- (d) action taken to control the function
- (e) the implication the action or its anticipated outcome
- (f) possible negative effects of the action

In addition, because this study of cases is to likely to be improved by drawing upon the scholarly research or professional experience, statement of the issue can be enhanced by showing the relevance of that research or experience. Particularly, what constructs, relationships, theories or working principles may be useful in interpreting implications of actions taken.