

Book review

In his influential work on education the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey emphasized that learning was best conceived and practiced as a form of doing rather than passive learning. Although instructors clearly have information to convey that information needs to be made part of the student and teachers' active skills, needs to be applied, if it is to be retained and integrated into the student and teachers ways of acting on the world. In education, according to this view, one does not simply learn that a certain proposition is true, one learns how to engage with and change the world.

Nowhere is this active education as important as it is in business education. Business educators are, after all, training young men and women to be leaders in enterprises that must fail or succeed not in the ivory towers of academia but in the real world. If we are to be successful as such educators we must give our students a strong sense of what it is like to operate in the business world and how best to solve the concrete problems that they will face in their careers. We cannot, of course, actually run businesses in our classes, but we can and should at least simulate the business environment as best we can. The case study method, in which students are given information about a business situation and asked to make decisions on the basis of that information, provides a very good means of carrying out such a simulation.

Despite this, and despite the adoption of the case study method by many of the world's top MBA programs, both students and teachers often feel uncomfortable with the method and many business classes go back to lecture classes in which the teacher conveys information to passive students. Such lectures might be enlivened by class discussions, but the students are not given an opportunity to actively work with the knowledge, which all too often is soon forgotten. The comfortable old methods are often much easier for both teachers and students than the less traditional ones; even if the knowledge is not retained in the long term, students may feel more comfortable having grasped abstract propositions that they can put down as test answers than if they had gained skills that are less easy to put down on paper but will have real value in their careers.

In his first book, *A Unique Way of Case Analysis*, Dr. Vinai Viriyavidhayavongs provided an excellent manual that helped both teachers and students become more comfortable with this very important educational method. One of the anxieties of the method is that the students, and at times the teacher, are faced with what seems to be amorphous sets of facts and have no easy way of

proceeding; in some cases it may even be necessary to define what the problem itself is. What Dr. Vinai Viriyavidhayavongs did in his excellent book was to provide an outline of a method that could structure the quest for solutions. Because problems in the business world tend to be even more amorphous than case studies, the availability of a structured way of approaching problems gives future business persons an invaluable resource for their future careers. The seven step approach to problem solving might, in fact, be among the most important of the tools that a student might acquire during his or her business education.

Thus, his first book was an important addition to the business education literature. I am very pleased to find that his second book, *Guide to Doing a Good Case Analysis*, provides more detail about the individual steps of the method. What is especially important here is that the method is not presented as a mechanical means of problem-solving; rather, the author fully recognizes that there is no absolute method that would be applicable to every problem or every person. Both situations and particular talents vary, so what is needed is a general framework that can be adapted to specific actual world problems. Happily, this is precisely what Dr. Vinai Viriyavidhayavongs presents. His goal is not to present the student with a substitute for thought and creativity but a means of unleashing thought and engaging in creative problem solving that is tailored to both the problem and the person.

All education, from a Deweyan point of view, should take the form of a personal growth that allows the student to be better able to act effectively in the world. A case-study based education that is guided by Dr. Vinai Viriyavidhayavongs's first excellent book, is made even more useful in his second; it will certainly be able to further such personal growth.

Review by Rev. Prathip M. Komolmas, Ph.D., President Emeritus