

## **The Eureka Moment: Or, Who Speaks in the Case Method?**

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**Abstract:** *What is the theoretical rationale for the case method given its excessive dependence on speech as the main mode of instruction and learning? This paper argues that the problem of speech has not been adequately understood in the business school classroom. This is because the term 'speech' subsumes both 'intentional' speech and the 'sense of being spoken' through the 'desire of the Other.' The former relates to a situation where the speaker knows what he is going to say and then goes on to say it. The latter relates to a situation where the speaker finds that he is saying something more or something less than what he consciously intended to say. It could also be the case that he winds up saying something Other than what he consciously intended to say. In other words, there is a difference between articulation and reconstructing the intention behind the articulation in an act of speech. This is the main reason why both instructors and students are afraid to 'let-go' in the case method of instruction. In order to understand this form of resistance and what must be done to come to terms with it; and find ways to engage successfully with the case method despite it, we must invoke the Lacanian formulations on the relationship between language and desire that constitute the psychoanalytic model of the unconscious. These insights relate to the formulations which argue that the unconscious is not only 'structured like a language,' but is also an expression of the 'desire of the Other.' These formulations from the psychoanalytic doctrine of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan then are what will make it possible to make sense of the resistance to the problem of speech in the classroom. Though this paper focuses on the case method as understood in business schools modelled on the Harvard Business School, it should be possible to apply these insights, by implication, in the context of legal education as well.*

**Keywords:** *Articulation, Case Method, Desire, Intention, Speech, Structure, Transference, Unconscious*

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### **I. Introduction**

Who speaks in the case method? What is the ambit of speech in the classroom? What is the relationship between any given case and the problem of the speaking subject? What is the role of speech in constituting the Eureka moment? These then are some of the fundamental questions that instructors ask themselves either consciously or unconsciously when the exhilaration generated by the case method forces them to think through its theoretical basis. Case instructors will also discover that it is much easier to find the energy levels to engage in the case method year after year if they have greater clarity going forward on what exactly constitutes its theoretical rationale in management education (Ginott, 1994; Srinivasan, 2005). This paper on management education is an attempt to identify and formalize precisely such a rationale by applying psychoanalytic theory to the case method. A case, as defined by the Harvard Business School, is a business narrative which sets out 'the facts in a concrete situation creating an issue requiring discretionary action.' The function of the case in a business school is to make available a 'body of data relevant to the administrator directing a company, to the scholar testing his concepts, and to the student developing an orientation to administrative responsibility, knowledge, skill, and maturity' (Towl, 1969). There has been a remarkable stability over the years in the understanding of not only what constitutes the outlines of a case as a pedagogical genre, but also in the modalities that pertain to how students should go about learning in the classroom (Bonoma, 1989). In order to answer the titular question of who speaks in the case method, it will not suffice to only point out that it is mainly the student who speaks, or who should be asked to speak, as opposed to the case instructor who mainly facilitates the conditions of such speech and resists the desire to perform in his own turn. This is because the moment of insight, of discovery, emerges precisely when the student realizes that he did not speak as such, but rather found that the 'desire of the Other' spoke through him in constituting the Eureka moment in class. As the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan teaches us, 'it is not a question of knowing whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather of knowing whether I am the same as that of which I speak. And it is not at all inappropriate to use the word "thought" here. For Freud uses the term to designate the elements involved in the unconscious that is the signifying mechanisms that we now recognize as being there' (Lacan, 1977a). In other words, what we need to address is how the unconscious is implicated in the problem of speech; and how, furthermore, the advent of speech in the classroom will help us to work out what really is at stake in the case method. The term 'unconscious' will be defined later on in this paper; suffice it to note at this juncture that in order to generate a psychoanalytic interpretation of the case method, we must proceed on the assumption that 'the psychoanalytic experience does nothing other than establish that the unconscious leaves none of our

actions outside its field' (Lacan, 1977b). This then must be our point of departure. The purpose of this paper is to relate the 'explicit' notion of speech in psychoanalysis with the 'implicit' notion of speech in the case method, and see what happens to the relationship between the 'analytic function' and the 'discursive articulation' that serve as the two conceptual co-ordinates of the case method. The main goal of this paper is to demonstrate that an understanding of the unconscious and its 'formations' will make for a better case instructor, and by logical implication, a better decision maker (Evans, 1979a). It will also help the case instructor to understand why he is doing what he is doing rather than dismiss all queries about the case method as reducible to forms of pedagogical intuition.

## **II. Speech And The Unconscious**

The concept of the unconscious, especially one that 'is structured like a language,' (which is the Lacanian wager) will help us to understand why the student routinely finds himself as someone who articulates the 'desire of the Other' in the locus of the 'speaking subject.' One of Lacan's definitions of the unconscious that is of relevance here is that 'the unconscious is that part of concrete discourse, insofar as it is trans-individual, that is not at the disposal of the subject in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse' (Lacan, 1977c). The student in this conception may have spoken in response to a challenge, a provocation, or a question that emerges either from the instructor or the discursive logic of the situation in which the class finds itself at a given point in time. But the essential problem is that he may have found difficulty in reconstructing what he found himself saying in the heat of the exchange with the instructor. Or, even if he can, that follows at best after the actual articulation which precedes the reconstruction. It is precisely because of the logical priority of articulation over interpretation that the student is afraid to let go in the first place lest he say something that will hurt the feelings of those present or result in a misunderstanding. Since the analytic reconstruction is dependent on the discursive articulation which precedes it in time, speech must not be understood as a ready-made representation of the conceptual structure embedded in an articulation, but as constitutive of that very articulation. Speech is not just a mode of expression, but the very discursive condition of possibility for the case method since the speaker finds himself spoken rather than speaking. This priority accorded to speech is what is really at stake in the case method even if it has not been explicitly stated to be the case. It can after all be argued that speech is what is missing in theories of mind. Most of these theories are preoccupied with either the acquisition of language in childhood or with the grammatical apparatus that must be presupposed as an innate property of the mind to explain the process of child language acquisition, but they don't explain how speech can function like a Freudian symptom. Hence the analogy that I posit in this paper between the speaking subject in the classroom and the speaking subject on the couch. Both forms of speech are articulated in the presence of an analyst or a case instructor in the locus of a 'subject presumed to know' the secret of desire (Srinivasan, 2011). The ability or extent of participation in such communicative situations is however mediated by the Freudian triad of 'inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety' that is said to characterize the structure of the neurotic subject (Freud, 1926). The term 'neurotic' is used here in the clinical sense and not in an ideological sense since the concept of the 'normal' has given way to the concept of the 'normative,' which, by definition, is a social construct. Furthermore, as Lacan puts it, in one of his better-known formulations, 'only a subject can understand a meaning; conversely, every phenomenon of meaning implies a subject' (Lacan, 1977d). This proposition then is the essential link between the subject and the concept of speech which is referred to as the problem of the 'speaking subject'; the term 'problem' is used here insofar as the speaking subject is not adequately acquainted with his intention, and that he has to interpret what he is saying, i.e. his own intention, as though it were being said by somebody else. The student engages in a case analysis then from the locus of the speaking subject. Not all students are willing to let go and engage from the locus of the speaking subject precisely because they suspect this to be the case, and prefer to steer the case analysis and the discursive exchanges in the classroom as a mere exercise in positioning. This form of resistance is not specific to students; instructors can also be resistant to going beyond talking points prepared in advance. This form of resistance however leads to a situation when the instructor winds up giving a lecture instead of facilitating a genuine case analysis.

## **III. Speech And The Transference**

If the student and the case instructor let go, they will be able to experience the magic of the case method. In order to experience this magic as an experiential reality, however, the participants of the case method will have to be open to the desire of the Other (Fink, 1996). The Other, needless to say, is not reducible to a particular stakeholder; it is, more often than not, the regulative ideal of language or the case method itself, which generates insights every now and then as a byproduct of the case analysis. The Lacanian definition of the Other, to put it simply, is a structural notion. The Other can also be embodied transferentially by a figure like Socrates. As Lacan put it, 'Who is this Other to whom I am more attached than to myself since at the heart of my assent to my identity it is still he who agitates me?' (Lacan, 1977e). In other words, speech in the context of the case method is necessarily transferential since what the case instructor regulates through his very presence in the

classroom is nothing other than the student's desire to speak. It has been pointed out that 'to observe skilled case professors such as strategy guru Michael Porter at Harvard... is like attending participatory theatre...the instructor plays the very demanding lead – nimbly conducting the interaction along many subplots, guiding everyone's contributions to achieve a certain denouement'(Forman and Rymer, 1999). So what Porter does in a situation like this is to regulate the student's desire to speak and to contribute in the attempt to achieve a resolution to the said case. In the absence of the transference, however, the students will not participate. Transference speech, as pointed out above, is that which is generated in response to the presence of the analyst-figure whom Jacques Lacan refers to as 'sujet supposé savior' (Lacan, 1977f). The genealogy of the transference is best understood in the context of Greek philosophy. For Lacan, the invocation of the figure of Socrates is important because the Greeks understood the relationship between the 'love of knowledge' and the 'knowledge of love.' This knowledge is embodied in the figure of Socrates. Lacan argues that Socrates understood transference phenomena much before Freud did in the clinical situation. Furthermore, Socrates is important for Lacan's theory of the four discourses insofar as Socrates represents the discourse of the hysteric (Lacan, 2007; Srinivasan, 2000). One of the interesting things about Socrates is that he never made a 'knowledge claim' in the dialogues, but a great deal of knowledge is nonetheless attributed to him by his interlocutors because of his ability to manage them, and because his very presence would induce a transference amongst those who either participated in the dialogues, or were onlookers to the dialogues. The only knowledge claim that Socrates did make was in the realm of Eros - or what psychoanalysts term 'the transference' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973). Socrates could always tell by walking into a room or a symposium who was in love with whom. It is not clear how exactly he could work this out with such precision, but it may have something to do with how those present in the room spoke to each other, or 'about the Other.' The implications of this approach to human relations should be obvious in the context of the case method given that the refusal to make knowledge claims did not lead to a diminution of the transference to Socrates, but rather to its intensification (Penner, 1992; Srinivasan, 2011). Likewise, case instructors should resist the temptation of performing (i.e. making knowledge claims) and let the students or discussants perform during a case analysis. The task of the case instructor should be to 'facilitate and punctuate' rather than dominate the proceedings in the conventional model of pedagogy; the instructor should only intervene to the extent necessary to manage resistance to the case method effectively (Srinivasan, 2009). The basic claim in the case method is that analyzing cases will make students better at decision making. If this is indeed the case, what is the role played by speech in making this possible? It is important to answer this question because the relationship between the analytic and discursive elements in the case method is difficult for even experienced instructors to understand. The nature of the case method is such that in order to come to grips with the substantive issues, it is necessary to work-through the process of arriving at the truth in a given situation. This is because the main purpose of the case method is to learn how to think in terms of new situations. More often than not, the case is the main text, or the only text, that is used in the classroom; hence the model of truth that is built into the case method is the coherence theory of truth. In psychoanalysis, of course, there is also the added complication of relating the truth within a theory of the transference (Brooks and Woloch, 2000). The truth of the analytic clinic is to be situated topologically between reality and the real. Neither reality nor the real is to be approached directly, but through the mediation of speech in the analytic situation. The truth cannot be approached directly because the patient will then 'act-out' or commit suicide. The differences between the terms 'reality' and the 'real' are as true for the Freudian text as for the Lacanian text (Evans, 1997b). And, furthermore, it is not the analyst's knowledge of the patient that is curative, but the patient's knowledge or insights into his own situation. Merely acquainting the patient with his or her condition by experienced clinicians and having the symptoms categorized, classified, deconstructed, or worked-through by others will not be therapeutic. That is why the analytic notion of truth is different from the philosophical notion of truth. In the analytic notion, the patient must 'participate actively' in finding the truth; he cannot wait for somebody to tell him what the truth is. The analytic notion of truth is also accompanied by an unruly piece of libido which takes the speaking subject in analysis by surprise. Another important difference is that the analytic notion of truth is related to the *tuché*, i.e., to encounters with the real which resist adequate symbolization.

#### **IV. *Tuché* And Automaton**

The philosophical notion of truth is related to either the mathematical or logical notion of the truth – this is referred to as the 'automaton' in the Lacanian schema (Lacan, 1977g). It is therefore important to understand the relationship between *tuché* and automaton to make sense of the analytic trajectory and its implications for a theory of the case method. An encounter with the real will not by itself generate an insight unless the discursive structure provides the space necessary to work-through the encounter in the symbolic. '*Tuché* and automaton' are terms that Lacan borrows from Aristotle's physics; they must be understood as a conceptual dyad. The difference between the use of these terms in Aristotle and psychoanalysis is that in the latter, unlike the former, the dyad plays out in the context of a libidinal trauma in the symbolic that serves as the

function of a 'cause.' Freud never forgot the truth that the French psychiatrist Jean-Martin-Charcot had taught him in his younger years on the libidinal structure of causation when Charcot had remarked 'Il y a toujours la chose genital' (Sadoff, 1998). That is why, unlike Aristotle (who was content to merely 'classify and console' like Victorian psychiatrists), Freud went on to discover that the conceptual structure of psychoanalysis is necessarily mediated by the erotic transference. This transference was like an erotic force-field that made it difficult for the subject to understand the promptings of his own unconscious. The term that links these conceptual extremes of truth and problem-solving then in psychoanalysis is subjectivity (Hall, 2004). The term 'subjectivity' is used here in two different senses: the 'what' and the 'who.' The term 'subjectivity' could also mean 'subjective' as the opposite of the term 'objective,' and whether or not a particular problem has been decisively solved. There is also the dimension of 'who', if any, is solving or going to solve the problem and the extent of the problem-solver's dependence on the relationship between the analytic function of the mind and the discursive structure of language. This is the difference between merely reading a case and subjecting it to a thorough analysis in class. If the analytic dimension is all that mattered then there is no need to discuss anything after reading a case; its meaning should become obvious. But, as instructors know from experience, that is not the case. It is important to open up the case for analysis and discussion, and get as many students as possible to participate. It is also important to subsume the affective excess that is produced in such a discussion. Psychoanalysis can be of immense help in working-through this affective excess.

### **V.     Psychanalysis And Management**

This claim is all the more interesting because psychoanalysis has an important contribution to make in the management curriculum as demonstrated in the success of programs in organizational psychology at INSEAD. The analyst who pioneered the applications of psychoanalysis within the management curriculum is Manfred Kets de Vries and his associates. They have not only applied psychoanalysis to organizational dynamics, but have also thought-through the role that it can play in theories of decision-making, executive coaching, leadership development, and human relations (Kets de Vries, 1991). These developments are of consequence to the case method as well. So, for instance, Kets de Vries is fond of pointing out that his encounter with the case method at the Harvard Business School was mediated by a course that he did on psychoanalysis and management with Abraham Zaleznik. So unlike the typical student who was content doing the usual courses in the curriculum, Kets de Vries was 'touched by the shadow of Freud,' and this proved to be an absolutely crucial source of intellectual and methodological influence in his contributions to the 'clinical paradigm' in organizational studies (Van de Loo, 2000). Most importantly, he adds, 'it helped me to make sense of the irrational, my own as well as other people's. It also made me realize the artificiality of the concept of economic man. It was refreshing to find out how real people functioned' (Kets de Vries, 1995). It is important to remember that a great deal of behavior in organizations is irrational, but this is easy to overlook because everybody thinks that they are rational. The excessive preoccupation with rationality may itself be an ego-defense since psychoanalysts know that the irrational is not the exception but the rule (Freud, 1946). One of the main questions that organizational theorists want to understand is why rationality is so difficult to attain amongst decision-makers, organizations, and workers; organizations it appears are as prone to neuroses as individuals and in need of therapy (Kets de Vries and Miller, 1986; Kets de Vries, 2004). The main goal of the clinical paradigm is to make organizations healthier so that employers and employees can be more authentic in their interactions with each other (Kets de Vries, 2001). So, if this is the goal for organizations in the future, then, an application of psychoanalytic insights to the case method will ensure that it becomes possible for students to manage in 'a psychoanalytically informed manner' when they become managers. The organization must also institute organizational mechanisms to ensure that intra-psychic conflicts in decision-makers does not lead to acting-out repressed conflicts in public, especially in situations characterized by organizational or industrial strife (O'Connor, 1999; Arnaud, 2002). In order to do so, they have to learn how to work-through forms of affective turbulence during any given instance of decision-making (Carr, 2002; Gabriel and Carr, 2002). A decision-maker is less likely to act out - in the attempt to act decisively - if he understands the relationship between speech, decision-making, and the unconscious. While such an understanding may not guarantee the decision-maker against making a mistake, it will at least ensure that he will take corrective action whenever required. This approach of taking corrective action in a timely fashion is more likely to happen if they have made time for the case method in programs in law or business (Srinivasan, 2010).

### **VI.    Freud And The Case Method**

It is interesting to note that both psychoanalysis and management have a 'theoretical affinity' for the case method of learning and use the case narrative as a basic unit of cognition and decision-making (Forrester, 1996; Forrester, 2007; Srinivasan, 2010). Freud himself was a great case writer though he did not write as many cases as he might have wanted to given that he had to develop both a meta-psychology and its applications for psychoanalysis; he also had to analyze patients in large numbers in order to successfully institutionalize

psychoanalysis in Vienna and elsewhere (Greenwald, 1959). The persistence of the case method is a clue to the fact that a lot more is happening in classrooms using the case method than has been understood to be the case. Some of the concerns that these discourses have in common include the following: problem-solving, representation, truth, the opposition between the analytic and discursive functions of the mind, and in situating the role of speech as a form of cognitive mediation since psychoanalysis is the prototype of the talking cure. Both the student and the patient must be willing to speak and the insights that they encounter about the problem being analyzed emerges from a thorough situation analysis that is carved out of a given case. It is the analysts and the case instructor who must take responsibility when resistance is engendered in the clinic or the classroom. In Lacan's formulation, 'there is no other resistance to analysis than that of the analyst himself' (Lacan, 1977h). And, even if pattern recognition made it possible for the case instructor or the analyst to look ahead and glimpse at solutions that have been proffered on past occasions, there is simply no pedagogical or therapeutic value to premature interventions from the instructor and the patient. In the Freudian doctrine, there is an enormous difference between the analyst's knowledge and the patient's knowledge. The therapeutic effects, if any, come from the patient's knowledge of his own condition albeit in the context of a transference relationship to the analyst and the analytic process. The analyst therefore cannot pronounce a diagnosis ahead of a patient's willingness to accept an insight (Freud, 1940a; Devereux, 1963). Analogously, the case instructor knows that merely talking about the main ideas in a discipline will not have much pedagogical value. It is only when the student rediscovers the fire and the wheel of the basic concepts in the context of a case analysis that progress is possible. It is then that a student takes responsibility for his learning and assumes the function of a knowing subject.

## VII. Conclusion

The student and the patient then must not be denied their share of the Eureka moment through a premature encounter with theory since their knowledge is different from that of the instructor and the analyst. This differentiation between different forms or qualitative representations of knowledge presupposes that the student is willing to be patient just as the patient is willing to be a student. Or, as Freud put it, there 'has existed from the very first an inseparable bond between cure and research. Knowledge brought therapeutic success; it was impossible to gain fresh insight without perceiving its beneficent results' (Freud, 1926). Both the patient and the student will have to learn to speak in a way that will enable the disclosures of the unconscious to manifest itself in the locus of the Other. This is the only hope for progress in such situations given the levels of resistance that must be overcome by the student and the instructor, and the patient and the analyst. The object of resistance then is to the fact that their interaction is not completely within their control, but necessarily mediated by the transference vicissitudes of the given participants in the pedagogical and clinical contexts towards the desire of the Other. Since the transference may manifest itself as a form of resistance, and not necessarily as cooperation with the analytic method, it is important to handle the manifestations of the transference carefully. Avoiding extreme affects in the transference can make it possible 'in enlightening the patient on the true nature of the phenomena of transference'. If the emotional labor seems too much at first sight, then, the analyst should remember that 'a patient never forgets again what he has experienced in the form of transference; it carries a greater force of conviction than anything he can acquire in other ways' (Freud, 1940b). This was the transference conviction that Freud himself carried in the after-math of his encounter and early psychiatric training with Jean-Martin Charcot in France. The relationship between the problem of speech and the desire of the Other then can only be understood in the context of the transference. It is only by thinking through the modalities of the transference that it will become possible to understand the part played by resistance to 'letting-go' to the process of case analysis in both the clinic and the classroom.

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