

An Ounce of Change

Sumanth P Desai and Sushil Kumar Pare

KLS Institute of Management Education and Research, Karnataka, India

Sanjay Hanji

MIT Vishwapravayag University, Maharashtra, India

M M Munshi

Visvesvaraya Technological University, India

Abstract. This compelling case study presents a dilemma faced by a student, Sharada, at the crossroads of her career. She must choose between pursuing a lucrative career and her family business in a small town, which needs to be resurrected. As she grapples with the decision of whether to pursue a corporate career or salvage her family’s legacy, Sharada’s ability to analyze operational and business challenges is put to the test. Her prime focus is to understand her family’s restaurant business, delving into its intricacies, ranging from the economics of offering a fixed menu to the challenges posed by competitive pricing and staffing costs. During a festive season, Sharada seizes the opportunity to analyze the restaurant’s operations with one cook and one helper, and then with an additional temporary helper. Sharada confronts the complexities of a traditional family business and modern practices, seeking to bridge generational gaps, earn her parents’ trust, and secure the restaurant’s future with her analytical insights.

Keywords: Johnson-Bellman rule, job scheduling, Gantt chart, kitchen operations, small-scale restaurants, change management.

“Aerodynamically, the bumblebee shouldn’t be able to fly, but the bumblebee doesn’t know it, so it goes on flying anyway.” - Mary Kay Ash

1. Introduction

MBA programs often attract students from diverse academic backgrounds, including engineering, science, commerce, and the humanities. While students with quantitative undergraduate degrees quickly grasp mathematical and analytical subjects, those from non-quantitative backgrounds often struggle with these concepts (Opstad, 2023). Over the years, the authors of the case study have observed a similar phenomenon in their classes, particularly in the case of Johnson’s rule, a widely applied production scheduling technique. Despite its practicality, Johnson’s rule is often abstract to students because its relevance is restricted to manufacturing setups. This disconnect leads to lack of interest, especially among undergraduate students other than STEM. With

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the aim of addressing this challenge, the authors created a relatable and application-oriented approach for teaching Johnson's rule. By applying this concept to a restaurant business, they used a familiar and engaging context to make it more accessible and relevant to a broader audience.

This case study focuses on optimizing kitchen operations in a small family-owned Indian restaurant. This approach simplifies the concept and bridges the gap between abstract theory and practical implementation by engaging students from various backgrounds. The restaurant featured in this case study specializes in serving *thali* meals, an Indian counterpart to the Western table d'hôte dining style. A *thali* typically includes variety of dishes served on a single platter, offering a well-balanced meal catering to the diverse tastes of Indian cuisine at fixed price. Operations within the kitchen of such a restaurant involve multiple processes, from food preparation to plating, all of which must be managed efficiently to meet customer demand during peak hours. This complexity provides a unique and relatable framework to illustrate Johnson's rule in a non-production setting, showcasing its versatility and broader application in the service industry.

This case study aligns with the principles of active learning, in which students directly engage with practical problems to better understand theoretical concepts. Using a familiar scenario, such as restaurant operations, helps students visualize abstract ideas, encourages participation, and makes learning more engaging. Active learning methods, such as this case-based approach, are known to enhance students' comprehension and retention of complex topics.

Although the context of an Indian *thali* restaurant is specific, the underlying lessons are universal. Managing operational efficiency, optimizing workflows, and solving resource allocation problems are the challenges faced by businesses worldwide. This case highlights how the concepts of operations management can be adapted to diverse settings, making them relevant to students across the globe.

2. Literature Review

Active Learning in Management Education

Education in the 21st century has witnessed a significant shift from teacher-centered approach to student-centered approach. Traditional lecture-based methods, once the norm, have been criticized for their limitations in engaging students and fostering critical thinking (Umble and Umble, 2005; Schreurs and Dumbraveanu, 2014). This shift has paved the way for active and experiential learning methodologies that actively involve students in the learning process of management education (Figueiró and Raufflet, 2015). Active learning methods are effective tools for linking theory to practice, promoting critical