ACRJ

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From the New Editorial Team: Publishing Quality Teaching Cases

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of all the Board Members of the Asian Academy of Management (AAoM), we are pleased to announce that the *Asian Case Research Journal (ACRJ)*, a teaching case-focused journal with 20-year history, is now housed by AAoM. We are especially grateful to Prof. Lau Geok Theng, the previous Editor-in-Chief, and Ms. Koh Siew Geok, the Editorial Assistant of *ACRJ* which was originally housed by the National University of Singapore. It is their continuing efforts that have laid the ground for steady progress of the journal, as we move into the next decade.

Increasing global competition, rapid changes in the political and economic environments and unforeseen events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have created unprecedented challenges for organizations. Firms have to respond quickly with substantial shifts in strategy, structures and other managerial aspects. For example, digitalization and the emergence of entrepreneurship are threats for some established firms, yet opportunities for some start-ups. All the changes call for the attention of business scholars to document these developments through their research as well as teaching cases. We hope *ACRJ* can remain a platform for business scholars to share their insights and wisdom on business practice successes and failures.

The Asian region (refers to Asian as well as Asia-Pacific countries) remains the focus of *ACRJ*'s cases. Asia has gained increasing attention from businesspeople and scholars from

all over the world, including increased investment from multinational enterprises (MNEs). Therefore, *ACRJ* is interested in both local stories and cross-cultural stories. This can be seen in our *most cited* and *most read* cases published in the past decade (see <https://www.worldscientific.com/worldscinet/acrj> for relevant information). There will be continuing stories to tell as Asia retains its dynamism and we witness more turbulence, for example, how the recent pandemic is disrupting global supply chains. *ACRJ* is interested in cases that analyze how Asian or MNE businesses, of various sizes and origins, respond and are able to cope with these new challenges. We hope to provide a platform for business scholars to convey guidance distilled through research and consulting to educate the next generation of business students.¹ Developing and publishing quality teaching cases is a key means for disseminating business scholarship to education and practice.

While we appreciate all our readers' interests and support to this journal, we notice that many submissions are made with a lack of understanding of the Scope and Aims of *ACRJ*, and as to what constitutes a quality teaching case. Therefore, this Editorial seeks to instruct potential authors about the type of high-quality teaching cases that *ACRJ* is expecting. In the following sections, we spell out clearly what a quality teaching case looks like, its key elements and how to draft a good teaching note to accompany it. We are eager to have more quality teaching cases published, facilitating the effectiveness of case teaching by our case adopters as well.

WHERE IS *ACRJ* GOING? AIMS AND GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

The case study method, pioneered at Harvard Business School, has become a very accepted and popular practice in business education. Case studies provide material to students, instructors, practitioners as well as consultants to discuss, illustrate and apply theoretical concepts to real-life situations. A business case study is considered to be a method where the *field comes to the class*. The rich descrip-

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tions provided in business case studies enable the students to understand and appreciate the complexities that exist in the field (the world of business and management). Business case studies provide a rich medium through which business students gain understanding of the difficulties of managing and leading enterprises by putting them in the position of the case protagonist and forcing them to work out possible solutions. Students instructed via business cases learn the skills needed to identify, develop and assess possible solutions by analyzing the pros and cons of various solutions to a problem. Thus, the case method provides an excellent avenue to practice the principles of action research:^{2,3} select a problem, collect data on it, analyze and interpret the data, take action, reflect on the actions taken, identify the new problem and go through the steps again. The case method enables the readers to diagnose problems both internal and external to the case organization, conduct research to inform action and develop possible solutions.

The Editorial Team of *ACRJ* believes that the case method will continue to be a valuable method of educating students as well as practicing managers and should to be showcased. We aim to make *ACRJ* a leading case journal that publishes popular, high-quality teaching cases that are relevant to all disciplines of business. We are establishing a rigorous peer-review process in order to ensure that the cases published in the journal meet certain quality benchmarks. Since the transfer, the new Editorial Team has prepared an elaborate set of submission guidelines to help authors meet the expectations of the journal. The revised submission guidelines are available at: <https://www.worldscientific.com/page/acrj/submission-guidelines>. The team is making sincere efforts to ensure that the review process is timely, constructive and developmental for the authors. We are now in a position to make a fresh start and hope to gain cooperation and participation of scholars working on management problems related to Asian countries. Below, we briefly highlight some aspects that the new Editorial Team will focus on for future submissions.

Case writing is a scholarly endeavor. *ACRJ* will continue to strongly prefer field-based cases. All cases submitted to *ACRJ* should be based on rigorous fieldwork and intense data analysis. Case studies should be based upon primary research that includes fieldwork, interviews and internal company data. This means that the information in the case will come directly from the focal individual or the company in the case (primary data source), with reputable secondary data sources providing background information. Examples of types of useful secondary data include information published in databases, industry or national statistics, data from investment analysts and industry experts or any other published media. Data sources should be cited in a way that they can be traced by the reader.

ACRJ focuses on publishing high-quality teaching cases. The new Editorial Team is committed to sharpening the focus of *ACRJ* further on teaching cases that provide rich material for learning, discussing and applying theoretical concepts to real-life business challenges. Given this objective, *ACRJ* will focus on accepting teaching cases for publication that highlight a decision dilemma facing an individual or an organization operating in the Asian contexts. We aim to accept for publication cases that provide the readers real-life stories of individuals and organizations that are facing/have faced some significant decision dilemma and are struggling to find solutions to these challenges. The aim of our team will be to select cases that are relevant for students as well as practitioners and where the decision events have occurred in the recent past (3 years from the date of submission). All such cases should have a clear decision point and *ACRJ* will not accept cases that simply illustrate a situation. Each case should clearly specify the timing of the decision and identify the case protagonist(s). *ACRJ* is open to publishing cases on all areas of business, management and policy that have been written for teaching purposes.

The new Editorial Team is committed to ensuring that the journal builds a unique reputation for a quality source of teaching cases. Your quality case contributions will enable us to position *ACRJ* as a journal of high repute among scholars

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who are interested in exploring, studying and writing about individuals and organizations facing management challenges. By publishing high-quality cases we aim to increase the adoption of cases in the classroom that will in turn lead to an increase in the impact of the journal and hence the impact and reputation of our contributors (authors). Eventually, we hope that our published, high quality cases will benefit both lecturers and students in their classroom teaching and learning respectively.

HOW TO WRITE EFFECTIVE CASES WITH A BROAD APPEAL

ACRJ has always focused on case studies set in the Asian context and, of course, this focus will remain. The Asian region is well recognized to be playing an increasingly important role in the global economy. Managerial practice in Asia is affected by the unique culture and history of the region, which differs significantly from that of Western countries that have historically dominated mainstream management theory development. In that regard, *ACRJ* encourages cases that illustrate and teach the management problems specific to the Asian context.

One objective of the new Editorial Team is to improve the popularity and circulation of the cases published. Popular cases facilitate active discussion and debate in the classroom. One of the reasons they succeed at this is because the case authors have focused efforts on engaging the audience from the beginning of their research and writing. Case writing is both art *and* science. For those of us who are accustomed to writing scholarly scientific journal articles, where audience engagement matters little, this mindset change can be substantial. Topic selection and framing play an important part in making a case interesting and attractive to its audience. As a general rule, we prefer organizations that students can relate to as subject matter and topics that would have broad appeal outside of the country of origin, while highlighting the uniqueness of the practice followed in the region.

We seek cases written with a focus or teaching objective in mind, not just information about an organization. The case itself should be about a non-trivial and non-obvious managerial decision which needs to be made by an identified protagonist, in other words, a single decision maker. In some cases, the decision may be made by a management team.

The specifics of the decision or decisions, including the timing, context and options introduced, impact the course and nature of classroom debate. Case decisions should facilitate meaningful debate for good arguments both in favor and against. In most cases, there are multiple options and some of them are not immediately obvious on first observation. Thus, students should be required to reflect and realize that there are additional potential ways to address the central issues at hand, providing opportunities for learning. Great cases require substantial analysis to fully consider ramifications of selecting different sets of options. Therefore, there needs to be sufficient information in the case to support the students' analyses, not to provide too much ready-made solutions that lead the discussion toward predetermined outcomes.

In order for students to be able to put themselves in the shoes of the decision-maker, it is helpful to include some information about the protagonist's background and decision-making style. It is important to show that the decision-makers are human and are struggling to take the best course of action. Carefully selected quotes from the decision-maker can help students understand the situation and the decision maker's perspective at the same time. Another way to develop the character of the protagonist is to discuss how they handled prior decisions or managed issues in the past — highlighting both the successful and unsuccessful ones. In addition, a few well-selected exhibits or photographs help to provide visual representations.

Great cases are carefully assembled and well-written. Cases should follow case-writing convention and be in past tense (except for quotes). Attention spans are getting shorter, so it is best to keep each section short and contain a single idea. Exhibits, including tables, charts and diagrams, should be well laid out and legible. Exhibits should be introduced

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in the text. They should provide meaningful information about the company, competitive context or specific decision to be made. Authors should have obtained permission to use any copyrighted diagrams or other graphics they include as exhibits. In today's interconnected world, it is a good idea to add link to videos illustrating the organization or topics in the case, if available, to bring the case to life.

THE TEACHING NOTE

The teaching note (TN) is an essential component of the case teaching package. It should contain a short synopsis of the case, highlighting the specific issue(s) or challenge(s) the decision-maker(s) faces along with a brief description of the context. Case authors should identify the target student group (i.e., undergraduate, postgraduate or executive), potential courses and levels (e.g., introductory international business), and outline the learning objectives including relevant theories and frameworks. The TN should include a list of suggested background readings and assignment questions to promote classroom discussion. The most important part of the TN is a comprehensive case analysis with emphasis on possible answers to assigned questions. The TN should also include, if available, an epilogue to follow up on "what actually happened" as students are often curious about this. This also allows further discussion as to whether the protagonist made the "correct" decision and what might have happened had alternative courses of action, perhaps those advocated by the students, had taken place.

An excellent TN will provide sufficient guidance to enable an instructor with little knowledge of the situation to successfully prepare for teaching the case as efficiently as possible as time is always limited. We suggest the authors teach this case at least once prior to submission and perhaps share it with their close colleagues to get their feedback. The case authors can then share this experience regarding how the case has worked in different classes along with "tricks" or possible problems. The inclusion of a sample teaching strategy

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and potential class timeline is helpful to save the teachers' valuable preparation time. Instructors appreciate receiving teaching suggestions about how to open the case discussion, ideas for teamwork, ways to help students understand the more advanced parts of the case and pointers to consolidate the "key take-aways", i.e., major lessons learnt.

To protect the integrity of your case, the TN will not be published along with the case. Instead, the TN will be available to instructors along with any supplementary materials. For quantitative cases, instructors appreciate receiving a supplementary student spreadsheet model containing the case exhibits and an instructor spreadsheet model with the analysis of the data. Instructors also appreciate supplementary teaching aids that will enhance student engagement which may include links to company website, reports, photos or video and audio clips (e.g., an interview with the key decision maker).

CONCLUSION

This Editorial has served to elaborate the Aims and Scope of *ACRJ* under the recent change of management to AAoM and the new Editorial Team. We hope this Editorial can serve to enhance the suitability and quality of teaching cases and notes submitted to *ACRJ*. We also hope that the new *ACRJ* can serve as a platform where scholars can disseminate their business research into business practice. The new Editorial Team will work with potential authors to publish quality and widely-circulated teaching cases for the purpose of enhancing teaching effectiveness. Of course, *using* cases effectively in the classroom goes hand-in-hand with this goal. Using cases effectively is thought to be difficult in Asia. For example, Delios and Makino⁴ have highlighted the particular difficulties of case teaching in Asian classrooms and provided further suggestions for dealing with these difficulties constructively. But this is the subject of another Editorial which will soon be published in a following issue. We believe that the development and use of quality cases serves the

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ultimate goal of effective business education. Yet we realize that we still have many aspects of this goal upon which to reflect and improve, and we will certainly face more challenges with the rapid transformation of all aspects of society including higher education. However, our determination and diligence to connect business practice into our business teaching will not change. Working together, hopefully we can turn our dreams into reality.

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