Letter from the Editor

Rebecca J. Morris

Hackathons and skyrocketing case adoptions

As a leading case journal, *TCJ* has long embraced innovations in case pedagogy. Not all cases needed to be the field researched, decision focused, 15–20 paged case we all experienced in our undergraduate and MBA programs. Current and past *TCJ* editors believed there was room for a variety of case models and we published evaluative or descriptive cases, i.e. cases based on secondary research, historical cases, multi-media cases, teaching cases developed from qualitative research cases, industry notes and others. Our editorial policy focused on two primary criteria – all cases published in *TCJ* must be based on facts (real people in real organizations facing real challenges) and must provide for effective student learning.

In 2015, *TCJ* introduced Compact Cases as a new focus for the journal. Compact Cases are limited to 500–1,000 words and were designed to provide more compelling cases to better engage today's students. We developed Compact Cases to provide effective learning tools for students who did not come to class prepared to engage in the analysis and discussion of traditional cases. The shorter format of a Compact Case was designed to provide greater learning value for the student than the work he/she was required to expend in preparing it. Students could read the case in about 15 minutes and then focus on thinking critically about the issues of the case instead of spending what little time they had just reading the case itself.

I have taught with Compact Cases in graduate and undergraduate strategic management courses at two universities and can unequivocally say that my students seemed better prepared and were more engaged in the case discussion. Students tended to address issues contained in the case instead of trying to hide their lack of preparation by sharing anecdotes about their own experiences. When I have spoken about Compact Cases at conferences, instructors have reacted very positively to the concept of a significantly shorter case and have expressed interest in using them in their own courses.

Unfortunately, the supply of Compact Cases has not kept up with demand. At the beginning of the year, we set a goal to publish ten Compact Cases in Volume 14 of *TCJ*. This goal was not reached. We strongly believe this format works well for teaching and learning and would like to encourage other case writers to develop Compact Cases. Despite promoting Compact Cases at every case conference I have attended in the last three years, submissions of shorter cases have not been forthcoming. How could I change that?

The concept of a Compact Case Hackathon emerged as a leading contender for generating more short cases.

What is a Hackathon?

The term "Hackathon" has been most often associated with software development. Groups of programmers might gather to develop a new app in a high-intensity session. Vince Vaughn and Owen Wilson famously participated in a Google Hackathon in the 2013 movie *The Internship*. Even the Vatican hosted a Hackathon in March 2018 to develop technological solutions to solve issues of social inclusion, interfaith dialogue and resources for refugees. Hackathons are sprint-like events in which participants collaborate intensively to create a useable project.

A Compact Case Hackathon challenges participants to develop a Compact Case in a collaborative small group setting in a short time period. Participants are given background materials (business press articles, industry reports, YouTube videos, etc.) that will provide the source material for the onsite development of a compact case during the session. Using their laptops or smartphones and working in small groups, participants develop and write two to three learning objectives and the initial draft of a Compact Case. Internet access is available for participants to conduct online research to complete their work. Case writing mentors are

available for consultations with groups as needed. The final product of the session is a Compact Case and partial teaching note (at least the learning objectives for the case). Participants are encouraged to continue to work on refining the case and completing the teaching note before submitting the Compact Case to *TCJ* for potential publication.

The first Compact Case Hackathon was held at The CASE Association meeting in Providence, Rhode Island in May 2018. In all, 20 participants in four small groups worked to complete Compact Cases within the four-hour work period. The groups convened later in the day to review what needed to be in the accompanying teaching note and to plan their next steps for readying their work for journal submission. All four groups continued to work remotely after the conference and one group submitted their case to *TCJ* a short time later (we hope the others will come in soon).

Feedback on the session was very positive. Several participants liked the "learning by immersion" aspect of the Hackathon indicating that they had learned more about case writing by actually doing it rather than passively listening to a seminar. Others thought that the framing of case issues and writing was more creative through the collaborative efforts of the group. Participants were motivated to complete the case citing a desire to benefit from their time investment in the process. The possibility of a journal publication as a result of the Hackathon was an unexpected but highly valued benefit of attending the session.

We are holding additional Hackathons in 2018 and 2019. I will be doing three Hackathons in Germany and Denmark in November 2018. A larger Compact Case Hackathon will be part of the program for the CASE Association annual meeting held in conjunction with the Eastern Academy of Management meeting in Wilmington, Delaware on May 8–11, 2019 (submission date for the conference is November 30, 2018). If you have a group of collaborators that you had like to work with, bring the group to the Hackathon and use it to kickstart your work! Join the fun and excitement of the Hackathon and come away with a possible publication!

Each Compact Case Hackathon begins with a short case writing presentation focusing on the unique aspects of Compact Cases. Participants will spend the bulk of the session "hacking" their cases, starting first with the development of learning objectives and then writing the initial draft of the case itself. The Hackathon concludes with the presentation of cases and provision of constructive feedback for developing the cases further for journal submission. All cases developed in a Compact Case Hackathon that are subsequently accepted for publication in *TCJ* will be considered for recognition (and a prize!) as the "Best Compact Case." If you would like more information about upcoming Compact Case Hackathons or if your university would like to host one, please e-mail me at tcjeditor@gmail.com

More case adoptions means more impact

I am pleased to report that *TCJ* case downloads have more than doubled in the last year. In all, 7,000 institutional downloads have been recorded for *TCJ* cases so far this year (see Exhibit 1 for downloads over the last four years). Remember that these are institutional numbers – each download could represent from one to thousands of users. Increased usage of our cases is important in establishing both the quality of the journal and the impact of our cases. If your library does not already subscribe to Emerald's E-Case Collection, it is time to start that conversation at your institution.

TCJ cases are also getting used around the world. While the majority of case adoptions are in the USA, the next nine countries in terms of downloads are Australia, China, India, Ireland, Pakistan, Malaysia, UK, Germany and South Africa. We can be grateful to Emerald Publishing for their support and promotion of *TCJ*. Our partnership is making a difference!

In this issue

This issue includes seven cases (see Table I) focused on a wide variety of companies, locations and issues. Each case has a strong IM providing effective teaching strategies, theoretical linkages and complete answers and analysis to all discussion questions. *TCJ* IMs have been rigorously peer reviewed to ensure that adopting faculty can teach these cases as well as the authors. Enjoy!

Case title and target audience	Authors	Synopsis
Vodafone–Idea merger: emergence of a telecom giant amidst predatory price wars Audience: senior undergraduate and graduate students in courses such as mergers and acquisitions, competitive strategies, industry analysis and marketing strategies	Wiboon Kittilaksanawong and Sinduja Kandaswamy	The Indian telecom market was witnessing a fierce price war, especially from an aggressive entry of a new player Reliance Jio Infocomm Limited (Jio) with a predatory pricing strategy. To react to the increasingly intense rivalry and maintain top positions, the second and third largest telecom operator Vodafone India and Idea Cellular Limited (Idea) decided to merge. The combined entity would become the largest wireless carrier in India. Was the merger the right competitive strategy for Vodafone India and Idea to fight against the wars? What synergies could the merger bring about?
The rebranding of VoiceStream to T-Mobile Audience: undergraduate and graduate courses in marketing, management or strategy	Skyler King, Anthony Allred and Clinton Amos	VoiceStream was a strong brand within the digital wireless communications industry at the time CEO Robert Dodson led the company. It had a loyal following of customers and a strong reputation for value. Despite pushback from senior management, CEO Robert Dotson made the decision to undergo a rebranding strategy during a period of declining revenue and growth. As VoiceStream transitioned to T-Mobile, it had initial success, but faced the challenge of how to position the brand long term.
The unmaking of Video Symphony: personal ethics, business decisions and management practices Audience: undergraduate and graduate courses in business and law that integrate ethical decision making	Nancy Dodd, Stephen Rapier, Doreen Shanahan and Jeffrey Baker	In the 1990s Mike Flanagan foresaw video moving from analog to digital and developed an equipment rental business to meet the needs of the entertainment/media production industry. By 1996 he established a second company to offer training in the use of Avid, a digital video-editing program. Flanagan sold the rental business in 1998 and by 2002 expanded the training away from a business model to a "full-fledged college business model." By 2014 what started as a successful training program developed into a negative interaction with the US Department of Education (DOE) and Flanagan found himself being forced out of business.
From start-up to expansion: Vittrium Building Products Audience: undergraduate and graduate courses in strategy and entrepreneurship	Rebecca Wilson-Mah, Charles Krusekopf and Alice de Koning	After three years in business together Des Carpenter and Kees Schaddelee had a decision to make – should they double the size of their location, based on the opportunities and competitive threats they perceived? The start-up phase took longer than expected and access to distribution channels was more difficult than expected. Nonetheless, the business gained traction with online sales that proved the concept of custom-made counters using Environite™ technology was viable. As they prepared to expand the business, the owner-managers needed to decide on a growth strategy that would let them leverage their strengths. In analyzing their successes so far, they needed to evaluate their business model including their product line, target markets, marketing strategy (including the pricing strategy, product lines, and channels of distribution) and operations.
The University Club Audience: upper-level undergraduate students in marketing or strategy courses. Graduate courses in marketing strategy	Brooke Klassen, Marjorie Delbaere and Brooklyn Hess	The case was written to help students understand the value that a product or service can offer a consumer in terms of helping them accomplish important tasks and overcome obstacles. It is intended to help students understand the link between marketing strategy and different business models.
Kabbage: an innovative source of short-term business loans Audience: undergraduate courses in small business management, entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial finance	Emma Fleck and Michael Ozlanski	New entrepreneurial businesses are one of the key drivers of innovation and economic development. However, one of their greatest obstacles is accessing capital, especially since they are often initially unprofitable and lack tangible assets in the first few years of operation. Since debt financing from banks can be difficult for them to obtain, their capacity for growth can be limited. This case introduces students to Kabbage, a company that reduced the barriers associated with start-up and micro-business lending by using a fully automated, data-driven platform. Kabbage made

(continued)

Exhibit 1

Figure E1 *The CASE Journal* case downloads by institution

Source: Data obtained from *TCJ*'s Scholar One reports (October 3, 2018)