

Letter from the Editor

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TCJ's value proposition

Recently, I have been thinking about *TCJ* and what makes the journal unique. My thinking has been triggered by Emerald Group Publishing's sales force members who wanted to better understand how to sell Emerald's E-Case Collection and by potential authors who want to know why they should publish their cases in *TCJ*. Both sales team members and prospective authors represent important stakeholders for *TCJ*, but are not the only ones that should be considered when contemplating the strategic positioning of *TCJ*. We must also consider the instructors that choose to use *TCJ* cases in their classes and the students that are the end consumers of those cases. Considering all these stakeholders, what is *TCJ*'s unique selling point or value proposition?

First, let us define the concept of a value proposition. Value propositions have been described as an important part of an enterprise's business model that provides the basis for differentiation of the enterprise's offerings (Payne and Frow, 2014). Value propositions consider how a "firm's offering adds value from the perspective of a customer" (Lannings and Michaels, 1988). Value propositions often include answers to the following questions: what is the product/service? Who is the target audience? And what value is provided? How does the product/service differ from anything else on the market? (MaRS Library, 2009).

What is *TCJ*'s product?

TCJ has addressed this question in our online information on both The Case Association and Emerald websites. *TCJ* "publishes factual teaching cases spanning the full spectrum of business management disciplines" (Emerald Group Publishing, n.d.). Our guidelines to authors and other promotional materials indicate that *TCJ* also publishes articles relating to case teaching, case writing and case reviewing. *TCJ* does not confine itself to publication of decision-focused cases. Evaluative, illustrative, descriptive or analytical cases and critical incidents are welcomed as well as industry or technical notes (Morris, 2017).

Who are *TCJ*'s customers?

TCJ has three primary customers – the libraries and distributors that subscribe to Emerald's E-Case Collection, the instructors who adopt *TCJ* cases for use in their classes and the students who study *TCJ* cases in their classes. *TCJ* cases are described as targeting customers interested in experiential and active learning opportunities, implying an emphasis on the development of critical thinking skills as students engage in the process of thinking, analyzing or problem solving.

What value does *TCJ* provide?

TCJ publishes high-quality cases that have reviewed by case writing and discipline-specific experts through its double-blind peer review process. Most *TCJ* reviewers have long careers in publishing outstanding teaching cases and are also subject matter experts in business disciplines relevant to the case focus. Novice reviewers are paired with editorial board members or experienced reviewers to ensure that a rigorous review is conducted. Our reviewers ensure:

- Information sufficiency: sufficient information is provided in the case to permit students to address the case issues.
- Data accuracy: data, charts, tables and so forth included in the case are correct and properly displayed.



- Objectivity: information in the case is presented in a fair and unbiased manner, leaving the evaluation and critical analysis to the students.
- Interest and engagement: the case is interesting and would sufficiently engage today's students.
- Impact: the case contains new, significant information or takes a fresh perspective. *TCJ* cases are strongly related to current theory/practice in the targeted business discipline. *TCJ* cases must make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge in the associated discipline. The learning objectives outlined in the Instructor's Manual (IM) must also address important topics in targeted courses and be able to be met through the case.
- Instructional support: the IM must provide sufficient support to enable case adopters to teach the case as well as the authors.

TCJ reviewers critique and evaluate the IM as well as the case to ensure that the case provides an effective learning and teaching experience.

While the *TCJ* review process is designed to promote the publication of high-quality cases that will be effective learning tools, the process also provides value to case authors. High-quality cases are adopted more frequently by other instructors and help to build the perception of the quality of the journal itself. Accrediting bodies and promotion and tenure committees are interested in faculty demonstrating increases in the quality and impact of their research endeavors. In two research studies ranking the perceived quality of academic journals, active scholars ranked *TCJ* second only to *The Case Research Journal* in overall reputation (Currie and Pandher, 2013) and in terms of awareness, quality and importance to the field (Harris, 2016).

How does *TCJ*'s product differ from anything else on the market?

This question gets to the essence of strategic positioning. What is *TCJ*'s competitive advantage? The answer to this question should be important to our stakeholders, although it may emphasize different attributes depending on whose perspective is addressed. Exhibit 1 provides a graphic depiction of *TCJ*'s value proposition and provides a structure for our discussion of the unique aspects of *TCJ*'s differentiation.

For stakeholders

For students, *TCJ* cases are current, understandable and provide a worthwhile learning experience. The learning that students gain from the case is greater than the effort expended in preparing for case discussion or in analyzing case materials. *TCJ* cases focus on interesting companies, issues or situations that resonate with student interests and promote learning that sticks with the student far longer than other types of learning.

For instructors, *TCJ* cases provide peer-reviewed instructor's manuals that make it easy to find a good case for particular topics or courses. This is a unique value as many other cases distributed through well-known outlets do not provide IMs or peer-reviewed IMs. Many *TCJ* cases have been classroom tested to ensure that they work as intended and produce high-quality learning outcomes. Reviewers sometimes offer to test the cases in their own classes to help authors develop cases further. This is also somewhat unique to *TCJ*.

For authors, *TCJ*'s developmental and collaborative approach to the case review process provides first-time case authors with the necessary support to improve their cases and ultimately publish them. For experienced authors, *TCJ* provides an outlet for high-quality cases that may not fit into journals with more restrictive editorial policies as to the type and focus of cases (e.g. some journals only publish decision-focused cases based on primary research). For all authors, *TCJ* provides global distribution of cases through Emerald's E-Case Collection and The Case Centre.

A first pass at *TCJ*'s value proposition can be summarized as follows.

TCJ publishes high-quality peer-reviewed and classroom-tested teaching cases that provide superior support for instructors.

In my opinion, *TCJ* differs from other case sources in the quality of the cases we publish, our developmental and supportive peer review process and in the quality of the instructor support we provide in our peer-reviewed instructor's manuals. We provide unique value to the students, instructors and authors we serve.

In this issue

The cases in this issue provide an excellent demonstration of *TCJ*'s value proposition. Enjoy!

- **Take-off or abort? Chief Smith and Flight Line in NAS Ionian** (Sue-Chan, C. and Fisher, K.). This case presents the leadership challenges that Chief Petty Officer Amanda Smith navigated as the first woman assigned to lead a Flight Line work center at NAS Ionian, an organization that was characterized by a culture of "hegemonic masculinity." Failure to effectively lead the work center could have catastrophic consequences, including death of service personnel. Flight Line work centers, located in naval air stations throughout the world, serviced the air operations of aircraft carriers of the US Navy and provided allied air support. The assignment was a test of Smith's leadership because the NAS Ionian Flight Line had experienced a spate of misconduct by personnel and had failed important maintenance inspections. Chief Smith was tasked to improve the morale and performance of the work center's sailors who had diverse personal and professional backgrounds. She was also directed to ensure that the work center passed important maintenance inspections despite the challenges of dealing with subordinates, rank peers, and senior officers who had never previously worked with a woman in her role (undergraduate, graduate, human resource management, management, industrial-organizational psychology, organizational behavior, leadership).
- **Performance management – making a difference?** (Boroff, K. and Boroff, A.). Captain Joseph Brunetti was given the assignment to provide his superior officer an analysis of what to expect when the US Army implemented its new process to evaluate the performance of noncommissioned officers (NCOs) called sergeants. Brunetti had about 104 sergeants in his unit. The US Army created a new process in 2015 to evaluate sergeants to overcome the deficiencies in the Army's old process, now 28 years old. Under the old process, almost every sergeant was rated at the highest levels, making it near impossible for the US Army to know whom to promote to higher ranks. Under the old process, very little counseling took place, so NCOs were not given guidance on how to develop themselves. Raters and senior raters were not held accountable for their work in performance management, either. Under the new process, which included a forced distribution form of ranking, senior raters had to offer counselings as well as options for future assignments. Brunetti, who had only limited experience in rating sergeants anyway, had to prepare for his boss what was called an "operations report," outlining what the organization could expect with the changeover to the new process and what may need attention as the process would continue in subsequent years (undergraduate, graduate, general management, human resource management).
- **Systems breakdown in recruitment at McCune Contracting** (Wafai, H., Waines, L.A. and Wilson-Mah, R.). Rachel Banning was assigned a new role in HR with the responsibility to update recruitment and orientation systems to meet the rapidly growing demand for manpower at McCune Contracting, an oilfield services provider in Alberta, Canada. McCune's industry peers were competing to attract the same skilled employees, within a relatively small talent pool. The HR team was only a few short weeks away from the upcoming peak "turnaround season" when they would be expected to recruit and deploy 500 new temporary workers for their clients' sites. Banning knew she had to take immediate actions to fix as many of the systems issues as possible and to eventually set the team up with a more permanent solution for systems integration (undergraduate, graduate, operations management, management information systems).
- **Cara Pils, a brand despite itself** (Kervyn, N., Breazeale, M. and Herak, I.). Cara Pils is the private label beer brand of Colruyt, the biggest supermarket retailer in Belgium. As a true private label brand, Cara Pils has never been advertised. In 2015, Colruyt undertook an initiative to reposition its numerous private label brands under two larger private label brands. Unexpectedly, customers were incensed by this initiative, came out in droves and took the

matter to social media hoping to lament the demise of their beloved brand. This case study investigates the roots of this strong brand attachment and the consequences for its brand management (undergraduate, graduate, marketing management, brand strategy).

- Cow comfort: a case study in sustainable entrepreneurship (Pahl, J.). The case is set in Northeast Wisconsin, where the two largest industries are dairy farming and papermaking. Dairy farms have a continual need for bedding material for cows, and Lynn Heemeyer recognized an opportunity for a new bedding material: a waste byproduct of recycled paper. The case includes the progression of Heemeyer's venture, Alternative Animal Bedding (AAB) – from the idea phase, to initiation and growth, to near collapse, recovery, and renewed growth. By September 2015, AAB was at a turning point; sales were increasing, and Lynn's daughter, Jess, had joined the business. Jess's challenge: how best to grow the business (undergraduate, graduate, entrepreneurship).
- Paytm's wallet business: on a growth trajectory or suicide mission? (Agarwal, R. and Tuteja, S.). Paytm has become a popular method to make cashless payments in India. Be it for transferring funds through mobile numbers, online payment of utility bills, cabs, etc. or payment to offline merchants. This case elaborates on the position Paytm has attained in the market thus far and its ambitious future growth plans. It describes the strategies being adopted by Paytm's competitors and the new developments in the payments business in India. The case finally narrates the challenges the Fintech firm faces at present and poses a pertinent question: is Paytm on a growth trajectory or committing suicide by leaping so fast? (undergraduate, graduate, strategic management, digital marketing).

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Appendix

Exhibit 1

Figure A1 *TCJ's* value proposition

