Editorial

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Making cases "stickier" using the success model

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Can you remember one of the cases you discussed in your MBA program? Even though a significant number of years may have passed since you last experienced a case as a student, I bet you can recall one or more cases from your studies. You may recall the case discussion more vividly than you can recall any of the concepts covered in class lectures.

One of the often-cited benefits of the case method is that the active learning process provides experiences that are often remembered beyond the student's time at the university. Students frequently report drawing upon concepts learned via case studies when solving business problems years after graduation. Students may remember the issues of a particular case and apply what they have learned to career challenges much more effectively than they may recall theoretical concepts.

Cases that are remembered long after the class may be described as "sticky" cases. Stickiness refers to the likelihood that a message will be received and retained (Gladwell, 2019). In case writing, a sticky case is a good thing. Although we may not have empirical data to prove it, we suspect a robust positive correlation between the "stickiness" of a case and student learning. We are often drawn to case writing because we want to do meaningful scholarly work that makes a difference. Making our cases "stickier" may be one way to make that difference (Heath and Heath, 2010). How then can we make our cases more "sticky?"

Chip and Dan Heath proposed six qualities that made ideas sticky in their Success Model (Heath and Heath, 2008). Each letter of the word Success stands for a principle of "stickiness" as follows:

Simplicity:

- Simplicity helps make ideas stick in an unpredictable or chaotic environment. Simple ideas effectively communicated in a brief and compact form are stickier. To make ideas stickier, we must weed out superfluous elements and distill the idea to highlight its essential core.

Unexpectedness:

- We need to get the audience's attention and find ways to keep it. The unexpected causes us to pay attention and think while interest and curiosity keep the reader's attention. The element of surprise makes us take notice while curiosity pulls us along to see what happens next. Unexpected events are retained in our memories.

Concreteness:

- Our brains are wired to remember concrete data. Ideas described in terms of human sensory information are easier to remember than more difficult abstract concepts. Illustrating an idea through a concrete example significantly improves understanding and retention while also ensuring that the idea means the same thing to everyone.

Credibility:

- For ideas to be remembered, they must be believable. Credibility can be achieved through invoking the authority, using compelling statistics or providing convincing details. Ideas that are tangible, real and more believable are more likely to be "sticky."

Emotional:

- People are wired to feel things for people, not for abstractions. As many nonprofits have discovered, people connect emotionally to a photo of a sick child and make donations to the associated organization than they do to broad humanitarian claims.

Ideas that make people feel something can motivate action. Emotional responses such as empathy help people connect with a story or idea and increase the likelihood of being remembered.

Stories:

We have a natural affinity for stories.

- Stories cause audiences to snap to attention instantly. Stories provide a mental simulation – when we hear a good story, we imagine the story's happenings. Our imaginations may help us practice skills to deploy in future situations that mirror the story's context.

These six principles can be used to develop a checklist for cases. Not all six principles need to be present for a case to be "sticky," but having more is better.

Success checklist for cases

- Simplicity – Is the case simple and compact? The authors of Made to Stick remind us that simplicity is not about "dumbing down" a concept but about stripping it down to the most essential elements that make it work. Does the case contain enough information for students to understand the most critical aspect of the case? Can the case be improved by removing unnecessary information? Can the case achieve its learning objectives if it is shortened? Compact Cases (cases shorter than 1,000 words in length) must use the principle of simplicity to be successful. By highlighting a narrow case focus, Compact Cases provide strong learning opportunities in a shortened form.

Unexpectedness will the case capture the student's attention?

- Does it generate sufficient curiosity and interest to hold student's attention? Some of the most successful cases use unexpected elements to grab student attention in the opening hook by describing a reversal of fortune for a formerly successful company or an ethical dilemma encountered in the workplace. Students are drawn into the case as they are curious to find out what happens next. If students know how the situation turns out in the first paragraph of the case, there is no compelling reason for them to read any further. There is nothing unexpected!
- Concreteness – Have I used clear and concrete descriptions to illustrate the critical concepts in the case? Does the case narrative paint a mental picture in the student's mind of the case situation? The use of sensory information to connect students to the actual situation makes the case more memorable. Instead of telling the reader, "Sarah over abused her power as manager and was very manipulative," use dialogue to show the abuse and manipulation. Use the reaction of others to Sarah's abuse and manipulation to make her actions more concrete.

- Credibility – Are the actions in the case described truthfully, and are they believable? Have useful statistics been incorporated to support the credibility of the case? Have appropriate citations been used to provide authoritative support for case facts? Students have a strong sense of the credibility of case information. Students often discount cases that are not perceived as credible as unworthy of their efforts. Discounting happens when students perceive that the case is fictional rather than reality-based. Students stop reading the case and discussion is limited.
- Emotional – Does the case include a protagonist to provide an emotional connection for students? Is the case written to trigger an emotional response? Experience tells us that students are more likely to engage with a case if a person (protagonist) generates either empathy or dislike. If students care about the protagonist, they want to help him/her with a solution. If students dislike the protagonist, they may be motivated to outdo him/her by providing a better solution. Without an emotional connection to the case, we are not likely to have a robust case discussion, and thus a good learning outcome.
- Stories – Does the case tell a good story in an engaging way? Does it have a clear beginning, middle and end? Good storytelling is almost a given in case writing. Cases use a narrative storytelling approach to providing information about problems or issues that the student is expected to analyze. The more engaging the story, the more engaged are the students. Good case writers know that the story can become more compelling by including characters, an interesting setting, plot (sequence of events) and tension to drive the action. Students are asked to provide the resolution to the story by recommending a course of action.

Plan for stickiness at the beginning of the case writing process

Although the Success principles can be used to make a case draft "stickier," it seems case writers should look for "sticky" ideas at the beginning of the case writing process. To write a good Compact Case we need to consider the appropriateness of the idea for the Compact Case form. Ideas that will work beautifully for a full-length case may not be successful in the format of a Compact Case.

So, what makes a "good idea" for a Compact Case? These principles come to mind:

- Tight focus: The topic for the Compact Case should be capable of being described in a single sentence or even just a few words. What is this case really about? If the case writer cannot distill the case focus into just a few words, she may have chosen a topic too broad for the compact form (Sounds like the Simplicity principle, doesn't it!).
- Interesting and engaging focus: Choose an idea that will generate active student participation and engagement. Great cases are ones that students find interesting, relevant and engaging.
- Achievable case focus: Cases should contain all the information students need to analyze and evaluate to form possible solutions. One way this is accomplished in successful Compact Cases is by choosing a case focus that builds on students' experience and knowledge bases. Students can supplement the case information with their personal experiences and general knowledge of the industry. Although this may seem the antithesis of the Unexpected principle, the well-written Compact Case bridges the familiar with a surprising turn of events. Imagine a Compact Case about a thriving fast-food company experiencing major upheavals over food safety violations. Students will be familiar with the company, its competitors, and industry dynamics while the food safety issues will provide the unexpected element.

- Will it "Sing?" Cases that "sing" leave instructors and students with "resonating memories of the class discussion, even long after the fact" (Seeger, 1992). Four Ps for writing cases that sing are identified – Problems, Pieces, People and Possibilities. A case that sings focused on significant issues that left little doubt about the themes of student discussion. "Pieces" addressed student engagement in that the best cases were in new and intriguing contexts that stimulated student curiosity and interest. The "People" aspect suggested that cases needed the voices of real people to bring the case to life and make it sing. Using dialogue and incorporating individuals into the case gave students a lens or perspective for viewing and appreciating the events of the

Table 1 Cases in this issue

Case title and target audience	*Authors*	*Synopsis*
Egg production: Conventional or cage-free? Target audience:	Carlos Trejo-Pech and Susan White	Eggs produced by cage-free birds while more expensive than conventionally produced eggs are gaining in popularity among consumers who want only eggs that are produced more humanely. Major distributors, including Whole Foods, McDonalds and Starbucks have pledged to sell only cage-free produced eggs by 2025. Several states including California, Oregon and Michigan have passed laws limiting conventional egg production. The case provides costs and industry information and needed to project free cash flows and the risk-adjusted opportunity cost of capital and perform break-even capital budgeting analysis of the two egg production alternatives
Lockheed Martin acquisitions: stay the course or change strategy Target audience: graduate (MBA) or undergraduate strategy course. Specialized courses in Mergers and Acquisitions	Susan White and Protiti Dastidar	This case is an interdisciplinary case containing aspects of strategy and finance. Lockheed Martin made a strategic move in 2016, to divest its Information Systems and Global Strategies Division (IS&GS), which engaged in government consulting, primarily in the defense and aerospace industries. Lockheed wanted to reassess its decision to divest consulting, given the high growth rates expected in this business, particularly in cybersecurity consulting. On the other hand, if Lockheed decided to maintain its hardware focus, it wanted to expand its offerings. In addition to strategy analysis, two possible target firms can be analyzed: Fortinet and Maxar
Governing changes in government: The Water Story of Mahabubnagar Target audience: Undergraduate public management courses or change management and innovation management courses	Harikrishnan Varma, James Poovathingal and Ram Kakani	Mahbubnagar is a land-locked, arid and largely agricultural district in Telangana state, India. When the existing dug wells dried up, the farmers of Mahabubnagar shifted to boreholes. However, the unscientific extraction of groundwater beyond the tolerance limits resulted in the depletion of the groundwater table. Eventually, the government had to intervene realizing that this would become a massive water crisis. The government appointed a multi-disciplinary task force to investigate and solve the problem. In its journey, the task force hit upon the idea of tapping the excess water from the fields using a cheap and efficient farmer-centric discharge-water harvesting method which showed spectacular results in less than six months. Though the farmers adopted it initially and gained immensely from it, they soon gave up the innovation. When the task force met two years later to evaluate the program success, they were shocked by the unenthusiastic response and behaviour of the farmers
Fall of a Titan: understanding the Jet Airways crisis Target audience: undergraduate strategic management courses, executive education	Shashank Kathpal and Asif Akhtar	A carefully crafted business strategy can make the business competitive. The fall of Jet Airways has demonstrated the penalties of a poorly crafted business strategy. Jet Airways suspended all its operations on April 17, 2019, due unavailability of required funds and reached on the verge of bankruptcy a year after. This case was intended to study the challenges Jet Airways faced due to poor strategic decisions made by the company. This endeavor aimed at highlighting the importance of strategic analysis and the effective utilization of resources. This case took the illustration of Jet Airways, on how one of the best Indian airline company touched the verge of bankruptcy. The case discussed the concept of Porter's five forces model, PESTEL analysis, SWOT analysis and Merger and Acquisition to understand the company's business environment
Assessing value of a digital company: Uber's IPO 2019 Target audience: Undergraduate, graduate (MBA) or executive level finance courses	Olga Kandinskaia and Francisco López-Lubián	In 2019, Uber, the famous ride-sharing company, made waves in financial markets as the most controversial IPO valuation. With a wide range of proposed values, Uber puzzled investors, once again living up to its fame of a rebel and a disruptor. When Uber finally went public in May 2019, its IPO valuation stood at US$82.4bn. The heated discussion in the media continued even after the IPO: "Is Uber worth this amount? Is there an upside potential for the investors who bought shares at the IPO price? What if this is a hype and markets are simply embracing higher valuations?"
Starbucks in China: What lessons can Starbucks learn from Luckin? Target audience: Undergraduate entrepreneurship or business strategy courses, international entrepreneurship/business courses	Heidi Bertels and David Desplaces	While Luckin's stock tanked due to an accounting scandal in 2020, the Chinese coffee company had not gone unnoticed by coffee powerhouse Starbucks. Luckins had seen explosive growth since its inception in Bejing in 2017. The company's strategy focused on convenience using technology, as well as cost by limiting physical stores and had allowed the company to gain traction in the Chinese market. The case allows students to develop a business model canvas for existing companies, deduce the generic strategy the companies are pursuing based on the business model canvas and develop recommendations moving forward

case. Finally, great cases provide for "Possibilities" – the case must allow for the development of alternative courses of action. A case that sings engaged students by permitting a variety of options to be evaluated and actively debated (As I write this, it appears that "Singing" and "Stickiness" have much in common!).

We write cases to have an impact on student learning. This editorial letter has provided two frameworks for evaluating case ideas to make sure that they have the potential to make that impact. If we want our cases to make a difference, it behooves us to choose case ideas that have promising "stickiness" or "singing" abilities. Even the most gifted case writer may not be able to take a "bad" case idea and make it "sticky." Let us spend our time on ideas that can "sing."

In this issue

This issue includes six cases (Table 1) 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 and the authors. Enjoy!

References

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