

Writing, Researching, and Teaching Cases



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Harvard Business School is renowned for its business education globally. On their website, they say “Through the rich case- and experience-based curriculum at Harvard Business School, students build deep general management and leadership skills, setting the foundation for lifelong impact on how they lead.” (HBS, 2023). Why cases? Based on personal reflections, I have investigated the benefits of case writing, research, and teaching for scholarship development.

It has been 103 years since the first case study was published by Harvard Business School (HBS, 2017). Arbitrary to discussing the impact of such an old method, exploring the role of teaching cases and writing and researching cases for such purpose in initiating scholarship development was not simple.

The approach

While there are always questions about how we can teach a practice, entrepreneurship in my case, teaching case is a scholarly endeavour to provide a rigorous reply to the questioning. Here, I make an initial endeavour to unpack how all participants in HE institutions – students (at all levels), educators (both research- and teaching-oriented), and the business community – benefit from the wider use of case writing, researching, and teaching.

Firstly, as an effective teaching approach, cases, especially ‘decision-making’ cases, allow students to be embedded in many different business scenarios covering a broad range of industries, topics, and (academic) themes. Taking Harvard Business School as an example, their MBA students are educated using case studies throughout their degrees. These graduates go on to have successful careers in business as if they had lived through many business scenarios (cases) that one can experience in a career. The added benefits of the various levels of available teaching cases, ranging from undergraduate to executive-level that is reflected in the teaching notes, helps

learners receive suitable support for their level.

As an educator who writes and uses case studies, I have gained many benefits. As a user of cases, I have access to a wide range of (most often timely) teaching materials that are presented in a ‘lived experience’, creating opportunities for more engagement and providing a practical way of teaching academic theories (Anderson & Schiano, 2014). As a writer, this is not only a way of putting down the interesting research I have done, but also a serious scholarship development method (e.g., [Scholarship award for LUMS family business researcher, 2022](#)). Teaching cases requires a good depth of knowledge and engaging writing that has helped me to reflect on my research and impact on both students and business. Additionally, cases are increasingly recognised as a way of improving scholarship, and case journals are recognised in important academic outlets (e.g., [Currie & Pandher, 2013](#)).

Lastly, the business community enjoys a range of benefits, including a valuable reflective experience, gaining academic insights, and collaboration with academics. This allows businesses to adopt a much more engaged role in this process, changing from ‘being researched’ to active co-researchers. For example, Kevin Shaw, co-author of a teaching case and an entrepreneur for 33 years, highly praised our engagement project as it provided an opportunity to reflect on his entrepreneurship journey, and he was excited to be involved in his

first collaborative academic research project (Ge & Shaw, 2023). This case has been used widely in teaching entrepreneurship and family business-related topics in Lancaster University Management School and has inspired both undergraduates and postgraduates.

It is worth noting that the case writing, researching, and teaching process is also very helpful in building much-needed rapport and engagement with businesses, and establishes mutual respect between academic knowledge and practical knowledge. During the Entrepreneurs in Residence Conference at Lancaster in 2023, a session was designed to speak about the purpose and use of teaching cases to about 50 entrepreneurs. After this session, a team (composed of four Early Career Researchers from the Department of Entrepreneurship and Strategy) was formed to advance their scholarship development through writing teaching cases. Many interesting insights generated through this process could inspire truly impactful research.

Value for all

My experience is that a good case study must engage the student’s interest through a clear focus and decision point. It should be factual and tell a clear and concise story as well as being well researched and well written.

While they indeed take time and patience (and repeated practice), they provide a valuable opportunity for all parties in Higher Education.