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Editorial

Letter from the Editor

The *International Journal of Case Method Research & Application - IJCRA*, the authoritative Journal of case method research and application, is the publication of the World Association for Case Method Research & Application, WACRA®. Founding support for *IJCRA* was provided by Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia, Bordeaux école de management, Bordeaux, France, The University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, U.S.A., Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Guadalajara, Mexico, Dominican University, River Forest, Illinois, U.S.A., Lund University, Lund Sweden, Kuwait University, Safat, Kuwait, Zayed University, Dubai, UAE, St. Petersburg State University Graduate School of Management, St. Petersburg, Russia and National Research University Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg, Russia. IJCRA gratefully acknowledges the ongoing financial support of The University of Guelph-Humber, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Essential reading for academics and practitioners involved in interactive and case method based research and teaching, the Journal combines the development of innovative, leading edge teaching methodologies, case writing, case research and case based teaching, real-life examples of case based strategic interventions and leading academic research. To ensure content is original, cutting-edge and of direct relevance to professionals and researchers, all papers are subject to rigorous peer review by experts prior to being accepted for publication. Now in its ninth year, the success the Journal has enjoyed, in my view, comes foremost from the fact that it meets the goals and aspirations of the WACRA membership.

Established in 1984, WACRA has been successful and has grown over the years (members in sixty-five countries) because of its focus on case writing and case method teaching across disciplines and cultural boundaries and because of the inclusion - on an international scale - of innovative, interactive approaches, including games, simulations, distance and continuing education. WACRA has published thirty volumes of peer-reviewed books in two series.

The International Journal of Case Method Research and Application is an international, interdisciplinary forum for researchers, educators and professionals. *IJCRA* solicits and welcomes research across the entire range of topics encompassing the domain of case method research and application and interactive teaching methodologies. The journal’s scope includes case writing and interactive teaching and learning, continuing and distance education crossing national, cultural and disciplinary boundaries. *IJCRA* welcomes theoretical and empirical papers that advance social scientific research on teaching and learning. *IJCRA* is a methodologically pluralistic journal. Conceptual and theory-development papers, empirical hypothesis-testing papers, mathematical modeling papers and case studies are welcome. *IJCRA* has special interest in research addressing important issues that transcend the boundaries of single academic disciplines and corporate managerial functions. Therefore, *IJCRA* welcomes interdisciplinary scholarship and commentaries that challenge the paradigms and assumptions of single disciplines or functions. *IJCRA* solicits and accepts manuscripts on teaching materials and methods. Experimental, developmental work and book reviews will also be considered.

With the publication of Volume XXVI, Issue No. 2, WACRA® continues the publication of scholarly work in the field of case method research and application and related fields. This issue includes research presented and discussed at WACRA® 2013 in Berlin, Germany and ACT 16 in Paris, France.
At the WACRA® 2009 conference in Vancouver, Canada, the WACRA® Board decided to move at the end of each calendar year, beginning in December 2009, the oldest volume of IJCRA to the public domain. Thus, beginning in December 2009, Volume XVII (issues No.1 through No. 4) became available to all scholars and researchers worldwide via the WACRA® website www.wacra.org. As of January 2015, Volumes XVII through and XXIII (four Issues for each Volume, a total of 28 issues) will be available in the public domain to scholars and researchers. To access current volumes of IJCRA, WACRA® membership is required.

Through this initiative the WACRA® Board wishes to facilitate research and teaching applications using the case method and other interactive approaches, assist faculty, especially junior faculty, in their writing and teaching activities and provide wider, international exposure to the publications of contributors to The International Journal of Case Method Research & Application – IJCRA. Moving selected IJCRA volumes to the public domain will encourage wider use of the case method and other interactive teaching methodologies. Reserving access to current issues to members in good standing will encourage membership growth.

The following cases/papers are included in Volume XXVI, Issue No. 2:

Merridee Bujaki and Sylvain Durocher: **FINANCIAL RATIOS AND STRATEGY IN THE CANADIAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR.** This case presents a three part scenario that walks students through calculating and interpreting a number of financial statement ratios for three firms in the Canadian telecommunications sector. As telecommunications are now an important aspect of most people’s day-to-day activities, the context of this case is meaningful to most students, hence enhancing their intrinsic motivation to explore the links between financial ratios and strategy. The case scenario invites students to play the role of a financial advisor who is researching possible investments in a telecommunication company’s stock for two individual clients. Part 1 of the case presents abbreviated financial statement information and asks students individually to calculate performance and leverage ratios. Working in small groups, students are then asked to interpret their findings. Part 2 of the case introduces the DuPont Model and asks students to rearrange the ratios they have calculated to apply the DuPont Model and to determine what additional insights this model offers. Part 3 of the case provides the students with additional information on the ownership structure, dividend payout ratio, credit ratings, and corporate governance scores for the three companies and encourages them to think critically about why each company might have chosen the operating and financing strategies they did. Finally, students are invited to select one company to invest in from the perspective of each individual involved in the scenario and to indicate which company they would personally prefer.

Stephen Lynch and Geoffrey Smith: **SUSTAINABLE GROWTH FOR COFFEE FARMERS IN GUATEMALA: ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES TO CERTIFICATION?.** Emilio Juarez is a coffee farmer in the Esquipulas region of rural Guatemala. In 2004 he converted his small subsistence farm that provided food for his family to the growing of coffee as a cash crop. He sought a new life for his family and believed that the growing and sale of coffee might provide some measurable income and economic stability. In 2009 he decided to join a Coffee Partnership. The two partners were Tim Hortons International (TDI) and Hanns R. Neumann Stiftung (HRNS) Foundation. The three pillars of the partnership, environmental, economic and social sustainability, appealed to Emilio. There was no certification, for example Fair Trade or organic, attached to this program, although farmers had the option to become certified. Emilio needed to decide what the advantages and disadvantages of certification might be and what the impact would be on his coffee business and his family, today and into the future.

Alexander Vengerov: **SCHMOOC FORM OF MOOC ORGANIZATION.** The paper analyzes the current literature on mass education in its MOOC form, latest advances in educational theories, and over 10 years of author’s experimentation with scalable online learning formats in technology-related domains. The results are then, integrated into a proposal of the particular SCHMOOC organization of the MOOC approach.
Natalia D. Strekalova and Aleksandr A. Kaisarov: LEADERSHIP STRATEGY OF LSR GROUP ON THE RUSSIAN CERAMIC BRICK MARKET. LSR Group, founded in 1993, demonstrates an impressive growth rate and business development in Russia. This company has become the largest industrial construction holding, Russia’s leader in a number of sectors of the construction industry, including the ceramic bricks production. Since 1997, when the first brick factory was acquired, the company constantly strived for the market leadership and in 10 years managed to obtain 70 per cent market share of the Northwestern region of Russia. This case presents the main challenges that the company had to face, and also how the company managed to meet them using various types of innovations. By the end of 2002, the LSR Group’s management received information that the largest Austrian company «Wienerberger» was conducting negotiations with the management of the German company «Knauf» to buy its brick factory «Pobeda/Knauf» near Saint-Petersburg. Wienerberger’s market entry - the world's largest manufacturer of ceramic brick – would create a real threat to the company’s business. How should the company respond to the threat from a powerful competitor? Strategic decisions to buy the «Pobeda/Knauf» and to build a vertically integrated marketing channel helped the LSR Group to capture 70% of the brick market (an increase from 48%). The «Pobeda/Knauf» acquisition allowed LSR Group not only to increase its production power, but also to adopt more progressive “Made in Germany” management practices. The case presents information of the Russian market, construction industry development, strategic analysis of the company's macro environment, industry and competition analysis of the ceramic bricks manufacturers in Northwestern market Russia.

Hans E Klein, Editor-in-Chief