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How schools stimulate, support and sustain case development

By [Emma Simmons](#)



Across the globe, individual faculty are developing cases, whether to teach a specific point of theory, reflect local business circumstances, or to use their research in the classroom. Other teachers consider writing their own cases but perhaps lack the necessary support, resources or motivation. Many schools actively encourage case

development, but not all. What does investment in resources to support case development or start a formal case collection actually look like, and what are the practical considerations? What benefits accrue for faculty, students and the school? We talked to case-producing schools around the world to find out.

All the schools we spoke to for this article have some sort of internal 'case centre', formal case collection or publishing arm, or simply individual staff members who coordinate support for the development and external publication of original cases by their faculty. Beyond the core remit to encourage case development, such resources vary tremendously in size, scope and function; some schools have long established departments offering a wide breadth and depth of services to faculty, while others are much newer or smaller operations. But all face similar challenges ranging from motivating their faculty to develop cases, to ensuring quality standards are upheld in the cases to be published.

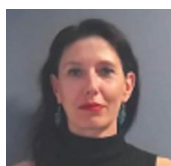
Start with a mission

At the [Global Health Delivery Project](#) at Harvard University, the decision in 2011 to put in place a support structure for case development and publish a [case collection](#) emerged from a clear pedagogical objective. "The impact of our work depends on getting research out into the field quickly," explains [Julie Rosenberg](#). "We understood the important role case pedagogy could play for translating real-world knowledge of health care delivery into changes in practice, and ultimately, patient outcomes. We research, develop and test cases, and we have created standards and templates, as well as supporting tools, that guarantee the usefulness of the finished cases in diverse learning situations across the world."



Julie Rosenberg

At the [Institute for Management Development \(IMD\)](#), the development of cases - now averaging 100 new ones published each year - has long been appreciated as a fundamental element of the institute's culture. "Our [case collection](#) is deeply embedded in our purpose to serve the business community that created us," explains [Anand Narasimhan](#). "IMD faculty are about engaging with the real world and that contact is often the genesis of cases which we, as a school, need to help facilitate and then bring to where they can be used both in the classroom here, and elsewhere around the world."



Brigitte Gomes

[London Business School](#) is one of the most recent institutions to formalise its case development and collection with the inauguration of [London Business School Publishing](#). "By creating a visible point of contact, we are trying to make it easier and more attractive for our faculty to write a case," reports [Brigitte Gomes](#). "There is no doubt that students want to experience cases that our own world-class faculty have written. We know that the teaching experience is elevated when faculty use a case they authored based on their own research." [Suseela Yesudian](#) adds: "In just a few months we have already seen a positive impact on the development of new cases at LBS, and also on our visibility as producers of original cases with other business schools and universities right around the world."

"I set a mission for our case centre at ICFAI Business School (IBS) to promote the case method by developing cases that educators would love to take into their classrooms: 'a case for every class'," explains Debapratim Purkayastha. We heard from many of those we spoke to, how important leadership at school level is to realise such a mindset, but for a case centre to flourish, grow and have impact, it also requires a champion on the ground to ensure objectives are met and standards upheld. "The IBS Case Research Center is now a centre of excellence for our school, and my vision is for its case output to make a positive impact on the lives of millions of students by making them both industry and future ready," adds Purkayastha.



Debapratim Purkayastha

Barriers and incentives

For many schools the rationale for creating and sustaining a case development culture — to encourage and motivate faculty to author cases — is also an ongoing core challenge. Most schools identified the unique positive experience of teaching your own case in class as a prime motivator. Working against this however is the academic 'publish or perish' culture that still dominates in many institutions. It was generally felt that an endorsement of the importance to the institution of producing original cases needs to come from school leaders and be integrated into school policies and norms. Where possible, this is best when formalised as part of faculty assessment, alongside research, publication and successful teaching outcomes. Others suggested that it was long overdue for relevant professional bodies/Academies to acknowledge the serious role cases have to play in real world management knowledge, and redefine what it means to be a 'good scholar' in management education.



Claire Beswick

Wits Business School began to create a resource structure for supporting case development in the late 1990s, responding to the need to provide topical teaching materials related to the local South African context, and to make learning more relevant to its students. But there were challenges, and a pragmatic approach was needed: "The craft of case writing is an unfamiliar skill for most faculty and certainly different to that of writing a journal article, so we started our case centre to offer support with writing, editing and publishing," recalls Claire Beswick. It is widely recognised that incentives can have a role to play in motivating faculty to author cases. Beswick highlights the difference made when a new online journal publication of cases relating to emerging markets attained a Scopus listing, effectively giving it parallel status to an academic journal. "This gave our faculty the opportunity to have their cases recognised on the same level as their academic journal articles; it has been a game changer for generating interest in authoring cases now that faculty can get academic credit for them," she says.

Similarly, CEIBS set up its case centre about 20 years ago having recognised that students wanted more locally, China-focussed cases than were available at the time, and that they usually learned better with them; the school's leadership also recognised that using good, original and relevant cases would potentially attract better students to the school. The incentive to develop original cases is now embedded in the school's research policy, and it currently has about 1,700 in its collection. "We actively encourage our faculty to write cases. While some may produce three or four cases a year, others might be less productive in case writing. We, therefore, set targets to produce a case at least every couple of years," explains Shimin Chen "We also support faculty to publish their cases for use both at other schools in China and internationally, plus we encourage them to enter our annual Global Contest for the Best China-Focused Cases and other competitions worldwide; the school honours successful case authors with a financial reward," he adds.



Shimin Chen

Support structures and services

Schools organise their case support structures in various ways. Some employ one or more in-house administrators and/or case writers/editors, while others have one or more key coordinating staff and build up a panel of freelance writer/editors. It was generally acknowledged that the relationship between a faculty author and the allocated support case writer is a crucial one and that getting both the background skill sets and the chemistry right is important to a successful outcome of the collaboration: a great case.

Some schools have a steering, academic faculty member at the helm of the internal case centre, reporting to research deans or similar, while others locate case development and publication within the remit of the school's library, publishing or information area. Many have a panel of faculty in place to assist with mentoring and subject area peer review. Broadly, the size of the case development/publishing operation is influenced not just by the commitment of the school to support case development, but also by a combination of the target volume of case output and previous faculty experience on site with authoring cases.

Funding the service is also a factor and handled differently at every school. While some give to authoring faculty any royalties paid by organisations such as The Case Centre for successfully distributed cases,

others, especially those which have smaller volumes of case output, use such income to support further case development or purchase. Uniquely, the Global Health Delivery project at Harvard University relies exclusively on raising philanthropic funds for its case development so the teaching material can be provided at no cost to users, and impact health initiatives worldwide.



Gerald Peichl

At the [University of St. Gallen](#), Gerald Peichl coordinates the school's [case collection](#), started formally in 2013, which, though still smaller than many others, regularly produces award winning cases. "We are fortunate that our case teaching faculty are very motivated to independently develop and teach with their own highly individual cases. Students also write cases as part of their courses, coached by faculty, and those written by Masters and PhD students are eligible to be published," he explains.

Schools with slim-line case support resources still have the option to provide internal mentoring opportunities, or schedule [in-house case writing workshops](#) by organisations such as The Case Centre. Faculty at any school, of course, always have the option to attend [open case writing workshops](#), many of which will offer the opportunity to leave with a first draft of their new case.

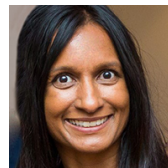
Some internal case centres have an annual planning process which sets targets and a timetable for faculty to submit their proposals for cases. Others operate on a more flexible rolling timeframe ready to support as and when a case idea emerges. Most commonly, because it is so specialised, support with actually getting the case written is offered to faculty. How this works in practice also varies but frequently an initial meeting takes place between the faculty member and an identified writer to explore the case idea, and often both attend a joint initial meeting with the subject company. After this, the allocated writer often takes the lead for a time, carrying out necessary detailed research, sourcing documents, data and exhibits, and maintaining contact with the subject company, while the faculty member acts more like a supervisor. Some schools provide a template to work from or specify page lengths while others do not. The writer often produces the drafts of the case that will eventually be taken through the classroom testing phase before final editing, any plagiarism screening, company clearances, formatting and publication are undertaken by appropriately skilled individuals on the extended team.

Elsewhere, experienced faculty work independently on producing their case drafts and they are simply offered final editing, formatting and assistance with enabling internal and external publication. At a time when video and multimedia cases are increasingly popular, case support departments need to stay flexible and innovative, often offering and/or coordinating access to the appropriate internal or external technical and creative skills required. More than one school we spoke to reflected how cases will need to evolve in the post Covid-19 era when much more teaching will take place [outside the traditional classroom](#) on platforms such as Zoom, and modifications or additions to existing cases may also be necessary.

Quality vs quantity

If the prime objective of schools establishing in-house support resources is to encourage the production of new cases, is there a danger that quality may be sacrificed? All schools we consulted were unequivocal that quality is, and must remain, the top priority. "We have defined a threshold quality that every case must achieve before it can be published," reports Debapratim Purkayastha. "It is crucial to our reputation that unless a case meets or exceeds minimum specified requirements, it will not be published in the repository."

At London Business School quality control and peer review are embedded at every stage of developing a case. "We are fortunate that our faculty fully appreciate what quality is expected of a new case and they regularly collaborate with one another and share drafts within subject areas to achieve an excellent end product," observes Brigitte Gomes. The inclusion of [teaching notes](#) is increasingly recognised as an important element of upholding quality standards. "All London Business School cases must have an accompanying teaching note, which are fine-tuned alongside the case itself during pre-publication classroom testing," confirms Suseela Yesudian.



Suseela Yesudian

Claire Beswick concurs: "Insisting on classroom testing as part of the case development process and ensuring a teaching note is written ensures that our faculty focus on fulfilling the teaching objectives for the case rather than just using it as an illustration of a business scenario. There is a clear difference between a case and a good case, and we are determined to ensure our output is only in the latter category."

Julie Rosenberg acknowledges that the process of developing a case may be long - more than a year - if that is what is necessary to ensure it will ultimately perform its intended pedagogical role and to collect feedback and input from stakeholders. "We only ever publish a case after it has been fully piloted and is complete with a teaching note and any necessary background notes for students. We have to be certain that those instructors out in the field who may often be teaching with cases for the first time, will be able to use it seamlessly and with success," she says.



At CEIBS, guaranteeing the quality of cases is taken very seriously: “While there are many case collections worldwide, there has previously been no China-focused case library that stands out internationally,” explain Shimin Chen. “That is what our mission is all about, and we want to build and maintain the best case collection with a China focus for business education both in China and globally. Given this mission, quality control is very important for us. We have an anonymised review system involving a panel of more than 50 peer reviewers across all subject disciplines plus associate editors from business schools in China. Currently, this rigorous process can reject up to half of case drafts initially submitted.”

It should be noted that when cases are also registered for publication externally to the school, there will often be additional checks undertaken to ensure quality standards are met. Among other criteria, The Case Centre will always seek verification of [prior classroom testing](#) and the appropriate subject company clearances before including a new case in the database for schools to view and order. Several of the institutions we spoke to mentioned how the [quality criteria](#) specified by The Case Centre were helpful benchmarks and its advice had proved helpful to newer collections in their set-up phase.

Additional benefits

Building visible resources to support case development and formalising the school's collection can reap benefits beyond fostering the number and quality of cases produced at the school. A level of consistency across cases can be assured, which can help set expectations for readers and instructors. Accreditation bodies such as AACSB, EFMD and AMBA recognise case development to greater or lesser degrees. Importantly, schools can often demonstrate that their original cases embody some of the attributes the bodies seek to recognise in the accreditation process, notably topicality, relevance, applicability to practice, and innovation.

So does branding a 'formal' case collection help? Many of those schools we spoke to highlight the benefits of focusing and raising the profile of cases developed at the school. At the University of St. Gallen, Gerald Peichl recalls: “We did seek to increase our visibility externally by creating a formal case collection and we considered it would help internally too, though it is hard to actually measure the impact bringing together cases into a formal collection has,” he adds.

We give the last word of our exploration to Anand Narasimhan who places the school's case collection in a wider context: “We have created our own case writing community here at IMD: a team offering mutual support in creating quality teaching output from faculty research which we assess to the same standards as other academic work. Faculty feel proud when one of their cases is published and it delivers a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. We also appreciate the far reach of many of our cases, which can be taught anywhere around the globe. This knowledge cements our case collection as deeply existential to our purpose as an institution and offers a service to the world.”



Anand Narasimhan

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