



Research Method of Qualitative Research: ‘Case Study’

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Abstract:

A case study is an intensive analysis of an individual unit (e.g., a person, group, or event) stressing developmental factors in relation to context. The case study is common in social sciences and life sciences. Case studies may be descriptive or explanatory. The latter type is used to explore causation in order to find underlying principles. They may be prospective (in which criteria are established and cases fitting the criteria are included as they become available) or retrospective (in which criteria are established for selecting cases from historical records for inclusion in the study). Here the investigator defines via this article that how qualitative research practiced through case study method.

Keywords: *Case Study, Generalization, Qualitative Research*

1. Introduction:

Thomas offers the following definition of case study: "Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame — an object — within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates."

Rather than using samples and following a rigid protocol (strict set of rules) to examine limited number of variables, case study methods involve an in-depth, longitudinal (over a long period of time) examination of a single instance or event: a case. They provide a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analyzing information, and reporting the results. As a result the researcher may gain a sharpened understanding of why the instance happened as it did, and what might become important to look at more extensively in future research. Case studies lend themselves to both generating and testing hypotheses.

Another suggestion is that case study should be defined as a research strategy, an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context. Case study research can mean single and multiple case studies, can include quantitative evidence, relies on multiple sources of evidence, and benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions. Case studies should not be confused with qualitative research and they can be based on any mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Single-subject research provides the statistical framework for making inferences from quantitative case-study data. This is also supported and well-formulated in (Lamnek, 2005): "The case study is a research approach, situated between concrete data taking techniques and methodologic paradigms." The case study is sometimes mistaken for the case method, but the two are not the same.

2. History of the Case Study

It is generally believed that the case-study method was first introduced into social science by Frederic Le Play in 1829 as a handmaiden to statistics in his studies of family budgets.

The use of case studies for the creation of new theory in social sciences has been further developed by the sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss who presented their research method, Grounded theory, in 1967.

The popularity of case studies in testing hypotheses has developed only in recent decades. One of the areas in which case studies have been gaining popularity is education and in particular educational evaluation.

Case studies have also been used as a teaching method and as part of professional development, especially in business and legal education. The problem-based learning (PBL) movement is such an example. When used in (non-business) education and professional development, case studies are often referred to as critical incidents.

When the Harvard Business School was started, the faculty quickly realized that there were no textbooks suitable to a graduate program in business. Their first solution to this problem was to interview leading practitioners of business and to write detailed accounts of what these managers were doing. Cases are generally written by business school faculty with particular learning objectives in mind and are refined in the classroom before publication. Additional relevant documentation (such as financial statements, time-lines, and short biographies, often referred to in the case as "exhibits"), multimedia supplements (such as video-recordings of interviews with the case protagonist), and a carefully crafted teaching note often accompany cases.

Case selection and structure

An average, or typical, case is often not the richest in information. In clarifying lines of history and causation it is more useful to select subjects that offer an interesting, unusual or particularly revealing set of circumstances. A case selection that is based on representativeness will seldom be able to produce these kinds of insights. When selecting a subject for a case study, researchers will therefore use information-oriented sampling, as opposed to random sampling.[5] Outlier cases (that is, those which are extreme, deviant or atypical) reveal more information than the putatively representative case. Alternatively, a case may be selected as a key case, chosen because of the inherent interest of the case or the circumstances surrounding it. Or it may be chosen because of researchers' in-depth local knowledge; where researchers have this local knowledge they are in a position to "soak and poke" as Fennoputs it, and thereby to offer reasoned lines of explanation based on this rich knowledge of setting and circumstances.

Three types of cases may thus be distinguished:

1. Key cases
2. Outlier cases
3. Local knowledge cases

Whatever the frame of reference for the choice of the subject of the case study (key, outlier, local knowledge), there is a distinction to be made between the subject and the object of the case study. The subject is the "practical, historical unity" through which the theoretical focus of the study is being viewed. The object is that theoretical focus – the analytical frame. Thus, for example, if a researcher were interested in US resistance to communist expansion as a theoretical

focus, then the Korean War might be taken to be the subject, the lens, the case study through which the theoretical focus, the object, could be viewed and explicated.

Beyond decisions about case selection and the subject and object of the study, decisions need to be made about purpose, approach and process in the case study. Thomas thus proposes a typology for the case study wherein purposes are first identified (evaluative or exploratory), then approaches are delineated (theory-testing, theory-building or illustrative), then processes are decided upon, with a principal choice being between whether the study is to be single or multiple, and choices also about whether the study is to be retrospective, snapshot or diachronic, and whether it is nested, parallel or sequential. It is thus possible to take many routes through this typology, with, for example, an exploratory, theory-building, multiple, nested study, or an evaluative, theory-testing, single, retrospective study. The typology thus offers many permutations for case study structure.

Generalizing from Case Studies

A critical case can be defined as having strategic importance in relation to the general problem. A critical case allows the following type of generalization, 'If it is valid for this case, it is valid for all (or many) cases.' In its negative form, the generalization would be, 'If it is not valid for this case, then it is not valid for any (or only few) cases.'

The case study is also effective for generalizing using the type of test that Karl Popper called falsification, which forms part of critical reflexivity. Falsification is one of the most rigorous tests to which a scientific proposition can be subjected: if just one observation does not fit with the proposition it is considered not valid generally and must therefore be either revised or rejected. Popper himself used the now famous example of, "All swans are white," and proposed that just one observation of a single black swan would falsify this proposition and in this way have general significance and stimulate further investigations and theory-building. The case study is well suited for identifying "black swans" because of its in-depth approach: what appears to be "white" often turns out on closer examination to be "black."

Galileo Galilei's rejection of Aristotle's law of gravity was based on a case study selected by information-oriented sampling and not random sampling. The rejection consisted primarily of a conceptual experiment and later on of a practical one. These experiments, with the benefit of hindsight, are self-evident. Nevertheless, Aristotle's incorrect view of gravity dominated scientific inquiry for nearly two thousand years before it was falsified. In his experimental thinking, Galileo reasoned as follows: if two objects with the same weight are released from the same height at the same time, they will hit the ground simultaneously, having fallen at the same speed. If the two objects are then stuck together into one, this object will have double the weight and will according to the Aristotelian view therefore fall faster than the two individual objects. This conclusion seemed contradictory to Galileo. The only way to avoid the contradiction was to eliminate weight as a determinant factor for acceleration in free fall. Galileo's experimentalism did not involve a large random sample of trials of objects falling from a wide range of randomly selected heights under varying wind conditions, and so on. Rather, it was a matter of a single experiment, that is, a case study.

Galileo's view continued to be subjected to doubt, however, and the Aristotelian view was not finally rejected until half a century later, with the invention of the air pump. The air pump made it possible to conduct the ultimate experiment, known by every pupil, whereby a coin or a piece of lead inside a vacuum tube falls with the same speed as a feather. After this experiment,

Aristotle's view could be maintained no longer. What is especially worth noting, however, is that the matter was settled by an individual case due to the clever choice of the extremes of metal and feather. One might call it a critical case, for if Galileo's thesis held for these materials, it could be expected to be valid for all or a large range of materials. Random and large samples were at no time part of the picture. However it was Galileo's view that was the subject of doubt as it was not reasonable enough to be the Aristotelian view. By selecting cases strategically in this manner one may arrive at case studies that allow generalization.

3. Narrative and Case Study

Case studies frequently contain a strong element of narrative, which typically builds on plot, i.e., a sequence of events and their relationship to each other and to context. A classic structure often used in narrative case studies is the Monmouth or hero's journey, with a beginning, middle, and an end, where, first, the harmony of daily life is broken by a particularly interesting or dramatic event that leads into the main story. Here, second, the plot builds to a point of no return, from where the protagonist – who in a case study need not be a person but may be an organization, a project, or a community – has no choice but to deal with matters, and thus is tested. At this point, characteristically, there is conflict and the conflict intensifies. Third, and finally, harmony is re-established by the conflict being solved, or at least explained, as part of the case study.

The use of narrative involves a danger, however, of committing what has been called the narrative fallacy. This fallacy consists of a human propensity to simplify data through a predilection for compact stories over complex data sets. It is easier for the human mind to remember and make decisions on the basis of stories with meaning than to remember strings of data. This is one reason why narrative case studies are so powerful and why many of the classics in case study research are written in the narrative format. But humans read meaning into data and compose stories, even where this is unwarranted. In case study research, the way to avoid the narrative fallacy is no different from the way to avoid other error: the usual consistent checks for validity and reliability in how data are collected, analyzed, and presented.

4. The Case Study Paradox

Case studies have existed as long as recorded history. Much of what is known about the empirical world has been produced by case study research, and many of the classics in a long range of disciplines are case studies, including in psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, education, economics, political science, management, geography, biology, and medical science. Half of all articles in the top political science journals use case studies, for instance. But there is a paradox here, as argued by Oxford professor Bent Flyvbjerg. At the same time that case studies are extensively used and have produced canonical works, one may observe that the case study is generally held in low regard, or is simply ignored, within the academy. Statistics on courses offered in universities confirm this. It has been argued that the case study paradox exists because the case study is widely misunderstood as a research method. Flyvbjerg argues that by clearing the misunderstandings about the case study, the case study paradox may be resolved.

5. Misconceptions

Flyvbjerg identified five common misunderstandings about case-study research.

1. General, theoretical knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical knowledge.
2. One cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case and, therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development.
3. The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building.

4. The case study contains a bias toward verification, i.e., a tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions.
5. It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies.

These statements can be said to represent the cautionary view of case studies in conventional philosophy of science. Flyvbjerg argued that these statements are too categorical, and argued for the value of phenomenological insights gleaned by closely examining contextual "expert knowledge".

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