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CASE STUDY DESIGN AND DESIRED SKILLS FOR CONSIDERATION

ABSTRACT

Case study is one of several ways of doing social science research. Case study is preferred method when, (a) 'how' and 'why' question are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context. There are single and multiple designs for conducting case study. One of the rationale for a single case study is when it represents the critical case in testing well-formulated theory; the theory has specified a clear set of propositions as well as circumstance within which the propositions are believed to be true. A second rationale for single case is one in which the case represents an extreme or unique case. A third rationale for single case study is the revelatory case. There are other situations in which the single case study may be conducted. The same study may contain more than a single case when this occurs; the study has to use a multiple case design. Case study investigator need to have certain desired skills like ability to ask good questions, listening, be adaptive and flexible, have a firm grasp of the issues being studied, and know how to avoid bias.

Key words: Case study, Research designs, desired skills.

INTRODUCTION

Researcher can identify some situations in which all research strategies might be relevant (such as exploratory research), and other situations in which two strategies might be considered equally attractive. Researcher also can use more than one strategy in any given study (for e.g. a survey within a case study or a case study within a survey). To this extent, the various strategies are not mutually exclusive. But researcher can also identify some situations in which specific strategy has distinct advantage.

For the Case study, this is when a "how" or "why" question is being asked about a contemporary sets of events over which the researcher has little or no control.

MEANING OF CASE STUDY

A case study is a detailed examination of one setting, or one single subject, or one single depository of documents, or one particular event(Bogdan and Biklen, 1982).

According to one observer, the essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result(Schramm, 1971 in Yin,2009).

COMPONENTS OF RESEARCH DESIGNS FOR CASE STUDIES

For case studies, five components of research design are especially important:

1. A study's questions:
The case study strategy is most likely to be appropriate for 'how' and 'why' questions, so investigator's initial task is to clarify precisely the nature of his study questions in this regard.
2. Study proposition:
As for the second component, each proposition directs attention to something that should be examined within the scope of study; e.g. Assume that your research is on the topic of inter organizational relationships, began with the questions. How and why do organizations collaborate with one another to provide joint services? (e.g. a manufacture and a retail store collaborating to

sell certain computer products). Nevertheless, these 'how' and 'why' questions do not point to what you should study. Only if you are forced to state some propositions are you beginning to move in the right direction. For instance, you might think that organizations collaborate because they derive mutual benefits. This proposition, besides reflecting an important theoretical issue, also begins to tell you where to look for relevant evidence.

3. Unit analysis:

The unit of analysis defines what the case study is focusing on (what the case is), such as an individual, a group, an organization, a city, and so forth.

4. The logic linking data to the propositions:

One promising approach for case studies is the idea of "pattern matching" described by Donald Campbell (1975), whereby several pieces of information from the same case may be related to some theoretical proposition.

5. The criteria for interpreting the findings:

Currently there is no precise way of setting the criteria for interpreting these types of findings.

CASE STUDY DESIGN

1. Single Case Design:

The single case study is an appropriate design under several circumstances. First, recall that a single case study is analogous to single experiments.

- One rationale for a single case study is when it represents the critical case in testing well-formulated theory; the theory has specified a clear set of propositions as well as circumstance within which the propositions are believed to be true.

To conform, challenge or extend theory, there may be a single case, meeting all of the conditions for testing theory.

The single case can then be used to determine whether a theory's proposition's are correct or whether some alternative set of explanations might be more relevant.

- Represents significant contribution to knowledge and theory building:

A second rationale for single case is one in which the case represents an extreme or unique case.

- A third rationale for single case study is the revelatory case:

This situation exists when an investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation.

These above three rationales serve as the major reasons for conducting a single case study.

There are other situations in which the single case study may be conducted as prelude to further study, such as the use of case studies as exploratory devices or such as the conduct of Pilot case that is the first of a multiple case study. However, in these latter instances, the single case study cannot be regarded as complete study on its own.

There can be various sub-unit of analysis in a single case E.g. A Study on a single Public Programme, sub unit of analysis may be- organizer, Manager, Members/ Users etc.

E.g. A Study on Organization as a whole, its sub unit of analysis may be- Location, Role, and Users etc.

These sub units, are called embedded units which can be selected through sampling or cluster sampling. However, the units are selected, the resulting design would be called embedded case study design. In contrast, if case study examined only global nature of programme or of an organization, a holistic design would have been used.

2. Multiple Case Design:

The same study may contain more than a single case when this occurs, the study has to use a multiple case design.

A common example is A Study of School Investigator (such as open classrooms, teacher teaching aids, new technology) in which independent innovations occur at different sites, thus each site might be the subject of an individual case study, and the case study as a whole would have used a multiple case design.

THE CASE STUDY INVESTIGATOR: DESIRED SKILLS A good case study investigator should be able to ask good questions and interpret the answers.

An investigator should be a good "listener" and not be trapped by his or her own ideologies or preconceptions.

An investigator should be adaptive and flexible, so that newly encountered situations can be seen as opportunities, not threats.

An investigator must have a firm grasp of the issues being studied, whether this is a theoretical or policy orientation, even if in an exploratory mode. Such a grasp reduces the relevant events and information to be sought to manageable proportions.

A person should be unbiased by preconceived notions, including those derived from theory. Thus, a person should be sensitive and responsive to contradictory evidence.

1. Question Asking:

An inquiring mind during data collection is required for the investigator to create a rich dialogue with the evidence.

Pondering the possibilities gained from deep familiarity with some aspect of the world, systematizing those ideas in relation to kinds of information one might gather, checking the ideas in the light of that information, dealing with the inevitable discrepancies between that was expected and what was found by rethinking the possibilities of getting more data, and so on. (Becker, 1998, p. 66)

2. Listening:

A good listener

Assimilates large amounts of new information without bias.

Applies the listening skill to the inspection of documentary evidence. (important messages between the lines; any inferences would need to be corroborated with other sources of information.)

3. Adaptableness and Flexibility:

Making minor or major changes of case studies is inevitable.

The investigator has to maintain an unbiased perspective and acknowledge those situations in which you may have inadvertently begun to pursue a totally new investigation.

The need to balance adaptableness with rigor cannot be overemphasized.

4. Grasp of the Issues Being Studied:

Must understand the theoretical or policy issues because analytical judgments have to be made throughout the data collection phase.

Without a firm grasp, you would not know when a deviation was acceptable or desirable.

An investigator is like a detective (insights and inferences).

5. Lack of Bias:

All of the preceding conditions will be negated if an investigator seeks to use a case study only to substantiate a preconceived position.

The possible bias: the degree to which you are open to contrary findings.

To test the tolerance for contrary findings: Report your preliminary findings to two or three critical colleagues. (Yang, 2010).

CONCLUSION

In any type of study, Research design is depends on research question(s). The more that questions seek to explain some present circumstance (e.g. 'how' or 'why' some social phenomenon works), the more that the case study method will be relevant. This method is also relevant the more questions require an 'in-depth' description of some social phenomenon. Good study demands certain desired skills for doing it and own skill level of investigator plays significant role in achieving objectives of case study.

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