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METHOD & TECHNIQUES OF RESEARCH & STATISTICS (403)

TOPIC NAME-CASE STUDY

UNIT-IV

Introduction-

Case study research has grown in reputation as an effective methodology to investigate and understand complex issues in real world settings. Case study designs have been used across a number of disciplines, particularly the social sciences, education, business, law, and health, to address a wide range of research questions. Consequently, over the last 40 years, through the application of a variety of methodological approaches, case study research has undergone substantial development. Change and progress have stemmed from parallel influences from historical approaches to research and individual researcher's preferences, perspectives on, and interpretations of case study research. Central to these variations is the underpinning ontological and epistemological orientations of those involved in the evolution of case study research. Researchers who have contributed to the development of case study research come from diverse disciplines and their philosophical underpinnings have created variety and diversity in approaches used. Consequently, various designs have been proposed for preparing,

planning, and conducting case study research with advice on key considerations for achieving success. As a result, while case study research has evolved to be a pragmatic, flexible research approach, the variation in definition, application, validity, and purposefulness can create a confusing platform for it element.

In this article, we examine each of these issues in turn, with the aim of improving our understanding of case study research and clarifying the requisite tenets to consider when designing a case study. We begin with an overview of the history and evolution of case study research, followed by a discussion of the methodological and philosophical variations found within case study designs. We end with a summary of the common characteristics of case study research and a table that brings together the fundamental elements that we found common in all case study approaches to research.

Foundational Concepts

While over time the contributions of researchers from varied disciplines have helped to develop and strengthen case study research, the variety of disciplinary backgrounds has also added complexity, particularly around how case study research is defined, described, and applied in practice. In the sections that follow, the nature of this complexity in explored.

Definitions-

-A case study is a research methodology that has commonly used in social sciences.

-A case study is a research strategy and an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context.

-Case studies are based on an in-depth investigation of a single individual, group or event to explore the causes of underlying principles.

-A case study is a descriptive and exploratory analysis of a person, group or event.

-A case study research can be single or multiple case studies, includes quantitative evidence, relies on multiple sources of evidence and benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions.

-Case studies are analysis of persons, groups, events, decisions, periods, policies, institutions or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods.

Types of case studies-

According to its design, case studies in business research can be divided into three categories: explanatory, descriptive and exploratory.

Explanatory case studies -aim to answer 'how' or 'why' questions with little control on behalf of researcher over occurrence of events. This type of case studies focus on

phenomena within the contexts of real-life situations. Example: “An investigation into the reasons of the global financial and economic crisis of 2008 – 2010.”

Descriptive case studies -aim to analyze the sequence of interpersonal events after a certain amount of time has passed. Studies in business research belonging to this category usually describe culture or sub-culture, and they attempt to discover the key phenomena. Example: “Impact of increasing levels of multiculturalism on marketing practices: A case study of McDonald’s Indonesia.”

Exploratory case studies- aim to find answers to the questions of ‘what’ or ‘who’. Exploratory case study data collection method is often accompanied by additional data collection method(s) such as interviews, questionnaires, experiments etc. Example: “A study into differences of leadership practices between private and public sector organizations in Atlanta, USA.”

Advantages of case study method include data collection and analysis within the context of phenomenon, integration of qualitative and quantitative data in data analysis, and the ability to capture complexities of real-life situations so that the phenomenon can be studied in greater levels of depth. Case studies do have certain disadvantages that may include lack of rigor, challenges associated with data analysis and very little basis for generalizations of findings and conclusions.

common Characteristics of Case Study Research

Despite variation in the approaches of the different exponents of case study, there are characteristics common to all of them. Case study research is consistently described as a versatile form of qualitative inquiry most suitable for a comprehensive, holistic, and in-depth investigation of a complex issue (phenomena, event, situation, organization, program individual or group) in context, where the boundary between the context and

issue is unclear and contains many variables (CRESWELL, 2014; FLYVBJERG, 2011; MERRIAM, 2009; SIMONS, 2009; STAKE, 2006; YIN, 2014). Case study research can be used to study a range of topics and purposes (SIMONS, 2009; STAKE, 2006; STEWART, 2014) however, the essential requisite for employing case study stems from one's motivation to illuminate understanding of complex phenomena (MERRIAM, 2009; STAKE, 2006; YIN, 2014). Primarily exploratory and explanatory in nature, case study is used to gain an understanding of the issue in *real life settings* and recommended to answer *how and why* or less frequently *what* research questions (FLYVBJERG, 2011; MERRIAM, 2009; SIMONS, 2009; STAKE, 2006; STEWART, 2014; YIN 2014).

Defining the case (unit of analysis or object of the study) and bounding the case can be difficult as many points of interest and variables intersect and overlap in case study research. Developing research questions and/or propositions to select the case, identify the focus, and refine the boundaries is recommended to effectively establish these elements in the research design (MERRIAM, 2009; STAKE, 2006; YIN, 2014). Bounding the case is essential to focusing, framing, and managing data collection and analysis. This involves being selective and specific in identifying the parameters of the case including the participant/s, location and/or process to be explored, and establishing the timeframe for investigating the case (MERRIAM, 2009; STAKE, 2006; YIN, 2014).

The use of multiple methods to collect and analyze data are encouraged and found to be mutually informative in case study research where together they provide a more synergistic and comprehensive view of the issue being studied (FLYVBJERG, 2011; MERRIAM, 2009; STAKE, 2006; YIN, 2014). How the methods are used will vary and depend on the research purpose and design, which is often a variation of a single or multiple case study research design. Interviews and focus groups, observations, and exploring artifacts are most commonly employed to collect and generate data with triangulation of methods and data, however, this is not exclusive.

The fundamental elements of case study research (Table 1) are evident in the approaches of MERRIAM (2009), STAKE (1995, 2006), and YIN (2014) as well as other case study researchers who have contributed to the development and discussion of case study research (CRESWELL, 2013, 2014; FLYVBJERG, 2011; GEORGE & BENNETT, 2007; MILES et al., 2014; SIMONS, 2009). These elements delineate case study from other forms of research and inform the critical aspects of the research design and execution.

Case study elements -

Element	Description
The case	<p>Object of the case study identified as the entity of interest or unit of analysis</p> <p>Program, individual, group, social situation, organization, event, phenomena, or process</p>
A bounded system	<p>Bounded by time, space, and activity</p> <p>Encompasses a system of connections</p> <p>Bounding applies frames to manage contextual variables</p> <p>Boundaries between the case and context can be blurred</p>
Studied in context	<p>Studied in its real life setting or natural environment</p> <p>Context is significant to understanding the case</p> <p>Contextual variables include political, economic, social, cultural, historical, and/or organizational factors</p>
In-depth study	<p>Chosen for intensive analysis of an issue</p> <p>Fieldwork is intrinsic to the process of the inquiry</p> <p>Subjectivity a consistent thread—varies in depth and engagement depending on the philosophical orientation of the research, purpose, and methods</p> <p>Reflexive techniques pivotal to credibility and research process</p>
Selecting the case	<p>Based on the purpose and conditions of the study</p> <p>Involves decisions about people, settings, events, phenomena, social processes</p> <p>Scope: single, within case and multiple case sampling</p> <p>Broad: capture ordinary, unique, varied and/or accessible aspects</p> <p>Methods: specified criteria, methodical and purposive; replication logic: theoretical or literal replication (YIN, 2014)</p>

Multiple sources of evidence	<p>Multiple sources of evidence for comprehensive depth and breadth of inquiry</p> <p>Methods of data collection: interviews, observations, focus groups, artifact and document review, questionnaires and/or surveys</p> <p>Methods of analysis: vary and depend on data collection methods and cases; need to be systematic and rigorous</p> <p>Triangulation highly valued and commonly employed</p>
Case study design	<p>Descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, illustrative, evaluative</p> <p>Single or multiple cases</p> <p>Embedded or holistic (YIN, 2014)</p> <p>Particularistic, heuristic, descriptive (MERRIAM, 1998, 2009)</p> <p>Intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (STAKE, 1995, 2006)</p>

Table 1: Case study elements and descriptors

A final, critical point when conducting case study research is the importance of careful preparation and planning, coupled with the development of a systematic implementation structure (FLYVBJERG, 2011; MERRIAM, 2009; STAKE, 2006; STEWART, 2014; YIN, 2014). As discussed earlier, ensuring the alignment of philosophy and methodology with the research purpose and methods employed underpins a rigorous research process (STEWART, 2014). Clarity in this alignment is fundamental to ensuring the veracity of the research and depends on the design developed. During this process, researchers are encouraged to "logically justify their philosophical position, research design and include a coherent argument for inclusion of varying research methods" (LUCK et al., 2006, p.107). Study propositions, theory, research or issue questions work as a conceptual

framework and need to align with the case to guide the design and determine methods of data collection and analysis (STAKE, 2006; STEWART, 2014; YIN, 2014). Maintaining meticulous records and a systematic chain of evidence over the duration of the study is critical; as is being able to access, present and explain procedures supports the ethical integrity and rigor of the research and findings (MERRIAM, 2009; STEWART, 2014; YIN, 2014). Collective alignment of these elements articulates a justifiable framework for the research study and cultivates trustworthiness and the validity, reliability and credibility of the research fidescriptor.

Considering these fundamental elements and common approaches to case study research, the definition from CRESWELL et al. (2007) seems to best capture the full depth and breadth of case study concepts and descriptions. The authors describe case study as "a methodology, a type of design in qualitative research, an object of study and a product of the inquiry" (p.245). They conclude with a definition that collates the hallmarks of key approaches and represents the core features of a case study:

"Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes" (ibid.).

Conclusion

Since the 1980's a broad scope of case study approaches have developed. This range accentuates the flexibility of case study research as a distinct form of inquiry that enables comprehensive and in-depth insight into a diverse range of issues across a number of disciplines. While differences exist in some areas, commonalities are evident that can guide the application of a case study research design. Key contributors to the development of case study agree that the focus of a case study is the detailed inquiry of a unit of analysis as a bounded system (the case), over time, within its context. The versatility of case study research to accommodate the researcher's philosophical position presents a unique platform for a range of studies that can generate greater insights into areas of inquiry. With the capacity to tailor approaches, case study designs can address a wide range of questions that ask why, what, and how of an issue and assist researchers to explore, explain, describe, evaluate, and theorize about complex issues in context. Outcomes can lead to an in-depth understanding of behaviors, processes, practices, and relationships in context. Professions including the social sciences, education, health, law, management, business, and urban planning have embraced case study research, demonstrating these outcomes. Ongoing application of and sound debate about the value, validity, and capability of case study research have strengthened the efficacy of case study approaches as powerful forms of qualitative research.

