Case Study Methodology & Design
A Scholar-Practitioner Perspective
Qualitative Research

Knowledge Without Boundaries Symposium
University of Phoenix

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I. What is Case Study Research?
II. When to Use Case Study vs. Other Methods
III. Types of Case Studies
IV. Strategy for Planning Case Study
V. Multiple Sources of Evidence
VI. Analyzing the Evidence (data)
VII. Reporting Case Study Results
VIII. Case Study Strengths & Limitations
IX. Contribution to Theories & Examples of Case Studies
The case study is a rigorous research approach or strategy that facilitates exploration of a contemporary phenomenon (i.e. “case”) in depth within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. Case studies may contain quantitative AND qualitative design components.

### When to Use Case Studies

**Leading Scholars:** Baxter, Burawoy, Eisenhardt, Jack, Merriam, Stake, Yin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>Form of Research Question</th>
<th>Requires Control of Behavioral Events?</th>
<th>Focuses on Contemporary Events?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>how, why?</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>who, what, where, how many, how much?</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Analysis</td>
<td>who, what, where, how many, how much?</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>how, why?</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>how, why?</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 1.1 Relevant Situations for Different Research Methods

**SOURCE:** COSMOS Corporation (1983)
Why Use for Dissertations?

- The approach to case study is based on a *constructivist paradigm*, supporting the claim that truth is relative, and for students as researchers, it provides the opportunity to create meaningful & important knowledge.
- As new researchers, case studies allow for close collaboration by enabling participants to tell their stories & describe their views of reality.
- For applied research, case studies may serve as practical or meet a *scholar-practitioner’s* purpose.
- Build important professional & academic skills for future utility.
- IRB considerations:
  - What are risks posed to individuals being interviewed?
  - Documents being gathered: How to protect identifying information?
  - May easily meet criteria for "Exempt Research" (low risk to participants).
Types of Case Studies

- **Exploratory** — (most common with case studies - open technique)
  - Explores conditions/situations with no clear set of outcomes
  - *Illustrative case study*, form of exploratory used to describe a situation or a phenomenon, what is happening with it, and why it is happening

- **Explanatory** — (understand of why things are happening)
  - Seeks to explain complex, causal links; e.g. study an election

- **Descriptive** — (describing the situation being studied)
  - Describes patterns, comparisons, phenomenon, real life context

- **Intrinsic** — (the case is of interest, not to build theory)
  - Used with researcher’s special interest & intent to understand

- **Instrumental** — (case is of supportive role to understand issue)
  - Used to understand/provide insight into secondary interests

- **Multiple** — (similar to “collective or community”)
  - Explores differences within & between cases

4 Steps: Strategy for Planning Case Study
Step 1 of 4: Overall Design

1. Design the case study
   a) *Bounded*; unit of analysis / case / context / setting
   b) May warrant propositions, “issues” (akin to hypotheses)
   c) Conceptual framework – constructs, features, theories
   d) Research question(s)

*Think of conceptual framework as in a Venn Diagram*
### Why Did it Take So Long for Travis Kalanick to Resign as CEO From Uber? — A Case Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions, Research &amp; Known Info.</th>
<th>Target Populations</th>
<th>Program Elements</th>
<th>[anticipated] Outcomes/Themes/Patterns</th>
<th>Case Study Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The widely successful ride-sharing start-up was not a classic Silicon Valley story</td>
<td>Senior managers at Uber under Kalanick; Board of Directors; HR</td>
<td>Social Media; blogs; customer complaints</td>
<td>Unfair treatment</td>
<td>Steps leading up to CEO’s “resignation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management was viewed by riders &amp; drivers as “a bunch of greedy, self-centered jerks”</td>
<td>Disgruntled employees; sexual harassment victims; discrimination claimants</td>
<td>Public records re: lawsuits, newspaper articles, press releases</td>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Investor funding; co. policies/practices, SOPs, financial results</td>
<td>Toxic company culture; fraternity-like atmosphere</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sexual Harassment</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Legal: Investor lawsuits</td>
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**Unfair treatment**

**Discrimination**

**Toxic company culture; fraternity-like atmosphere**

**Sexual Harassment**

**Legal: Investor lawsuits**

**Steps leading up to CEO’s “resignation”**

**New “adult” management team brought in to stabilize company; company training; HR policies enforced**
Step 2 of 4—Data Collection: Multiple Sources of Evidence and Create Database of all Data Collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Evidence</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Documentation</strong></td>
<td>• Stable, repeated review; exact&lt;br&gt;• Unobtrusive – exists prior to case&lt;br&gt;• Broad coverage; extended time span</td>
<td>• Retrievability may be difficult/blocke&lt;br&gt;• Biased selectivity&lt;br&gt;• Reporting bias, reflects author bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Archival Records</strong></td>
<td>• Same as above&lt;br&gt;• Precise and quantitative</td>
<td>• Same as above&lt;br&gt;• Privacy might inhibit access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
<td>• Targeted - focuses on case study topic&lt;br&gt;• Insightful – provides perceived causal inferences&lt;br&gt;• (Consider: questionnaire, survey)</td>
<td>• Bias due to poor questions&lt;br&gt;• Response bias; incomplete recollection&lt;br&gt;• Reflexivity-interviewee expresses what interviewer wants to hear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direct Observations</strong></td>
<td>• Reality – covers events in real time&lt;br&gt;• Contextual – covers event context</td>
<td>• Time consuming; cost of observer’s time&lt;br&gt;• Selectivity - might miss facts, actions&lt;br&gt;• Reflexivity-observer presence impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Observation</strong></td>
<td>• Same as above&lt;br&gt;• Insightful into interpersonal context, actions, &amp; behaviors</td>
<td>• Same as above&lt;br&gt;• Bias due to investigator’s actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Artifacts</strong></td>
<td>• Insightful into cultural features&lt;br&gt;• Insightful into technical/other operations</td>
<td>• Selectivity&lt;br&gt;• Availability of relevant items&lt;br&gt;• Retrievability may be blocked</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Step 3 of 4 - Analyzing the Evidence (Data)

Triangulation Based on Multiple Data Sources/Theories, etc.

- Develop analytic strategy to manage most difficult aspect of case studies
- Researcher must develop rigorous empirical thinking & organizational skills – no formulas, applications, tools, or “cookbook recipes”
- Database needed to separately gather, capture, code, assess, analyze evidence (e.g. NVivo)
- Create visual displays/matrices, flowcharts, other graphics
- General strategies include:
  - Relying on theoretical preposition(s)
  - Formulate / begin to develop a case description
  - Use both qualitative and quantitative data if applicable
  - Examine rival explanations – contrasting data results, investigator bias, societal trends, etc.
- Pattern matching
- Explanation building – time-series analysis, historical, chronologies
(Step 3 of 4 cont’d)

Analyze by Building Models / Figures / Matrices

Simulate Actual versus Preferred Organizational Model in Action

Joe: President
Bob: Co-Chairman
Anne: Co-Chairman
Practice Leaders
Sr. Brokers
Other Staff

3/25/2018

Step 1: Identify roles with overlapping responsibilities. These roles may be duplicative or need clearer definitions.
Step 2: Identify roles that are involved in multiple decision making areas. These roles are likely bottlenecks.
Step 3: Identify roles to which decisions could be delegated. Identify opportunities.

Powerless Intermediaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Role Intent</th>
<th>Role Reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Joe: President   | • Actively managing to XYZ Co. annual plan  
                    • Drives results  
                    • Accountable to Board for company performance  
                    • Makes highest level management decisions  
                    • Delegates appropriately and ensures next tier of leadership is prepared, empowered, and accountable for talent management | • Bottleneck – involved in all decisions  
                    • Important initiatives are sidelined (IT, integrative plans)  
                    • Overloaded in people management responsibilities  
                    • Involved in too many decisions  
                    • No obvious, no designated next tier of management to develop next level tier |
| Bob: Co-Chairman | • Sets strategic direction for XYZ Co.  
                    • Manages/oversees role of President  
                    • Acts as subject matter expert (SME) for casualty practice group members | • Strategic initiatives not being acted on  
                    • Involved in most day-to-day operations  
                    • Joint decision making with Joe  
                    • Actively overseeing Casualty practice group |
| Anne: Co-Chairman| • Sets strategic direction for XYZ Co.  
                    • Shares chairman responsibilities w/ Bob | • Not present or actively engaged in business operations |
| Sr. Brokers      | • Empowered, accountable, actively overseeing & developing lesser skilled talent | • Leadership role is usurped by Joe  
                    • Sr. Brokers not being held accountable for lesser skilled individuals or teams |
| All Other Staff  | • Has clear roles and responsibilities  
                    • Understanding of appropriate decision making expectations and limitations  
                    • Understands immediate reporting relationships, is empowered, and possesses clear level of decision making authority | • Operates within small team  
                    • Unlikely to have understanding of how team contributing to “bigger picture”  
                    • Lack of clarity around how company priorities set/cambersome prioritization  
                    • Sees only one or two decision makers |
4. Develop conclusions, recommendations, & implications
   a) No “standard” format
   b) Define the audience
   c) Compose textual & visual explanations
   d) Present evidence to support conclusions
(Step 4 of 4, cont’d)

Reporting Case Study Results

- Define one’s audience(s)
- If similar studies exist, review published materials
- Prepare textual (written) and visual materials
- Display enough information for reader to grasp context & support/make own conclusions
- Draft, review with like-minded colleagues
- Finalize – Four (4) variations:
  1. Single narrative for single case study
  2. For multiple case study, separate narratives, showing comparable and contrasting conclusions
  3. No traditional narrative but a series of questions & answers
  4. Multiple cases: Integrated writing showing cross-case, descriptive analysis
Case Study Strengths & Limitations

**Strengths:**
- Detailed description and analysis provide a better understanding of “how” and “why” things happen
- Case study data can lead to the identification of patterns and relationships, creating, extending, or testing a theory
- May create or advance theories by expanding constructs and relationships within distinct settings
- Applicability to “real life” – evaluate programs or develop intervention(s)
- Develops organization discipline
- Applied research relevance

**Weaknesses:**
- Findings are not generalizable
- Methodology not well understood
- May be confused with *case method*, which is a teaching approach
- May be viewed as a “catch-all” category for anything that does not fit into other methods
- Process of inference—how interviews, archival records, & notes are assembled into a coherent whole, yet what is counted & what is discounted—remains usually hidden from the reader
- Inconsistently designed
## Case Study Designs & Contribution to Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design/ (Scholar)*</th>
<th>Phenomenon</th>
<th>Research Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“No theory first” (Eisenhardt)</td>
<td>New or interesting phenomenon; no theory or outside theory</td>
<td>Most common; captures richness of data collected without being limited by theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Gaps and holes” (Yin)</td>
<td>Phenomenon is partially understood; inside theory</td>
<td>Existing theory can be used as starting point; replication logic may apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Social construction of reality” (Stake)</td>
<td>Phenomenon is understood; inside theory</td>
<td>Meaning- &amp; sense-making, specific actions, places, or times to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Anomalies” (ext’d. case method) Burawoy</td>
<td>Phenomenon is understood; identifying anomalies as failures to existing theories</td>
<td>Previous/existing theories cannot explain situation; examines divergent “voices” (data) to understand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Case Study Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploratory</td>
<td>Study of nurse-patient relationship &amp; how develops (Lotzkar &amp; Bottorff, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanatory</td>
<td>e-commerce, learning community in Brazil (Joia, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Understanding the needs of women with Parkinson’s disease (Tolson, Fleming, &amp; Schartau, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple-case/Community</td>
<td>Across communities to study services for rape victims (Campbell, Ahrens, 1998); can be anthropological study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Phenomenon</td>
<td>Marijuana smokers &amp; musicians (Becker, 1963)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical</td>
<td>Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 – studied extensively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. &amp; Institutions</td>
<td>London factory workplace study, Ford Motor Co. (Benyon, 1973)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. A qualitative **descriptive case study** explaining professional development in community corrections (Delaney, 2014)
2. A qualitative **single explanatory case study** of the Positive Actions Within Students (PAWS) behavioral management program (Marrs, 2016)
3. Mental health case manager burnout: A[an instrumental] **case study** (Schussel, Alan)
4. Female leadership in nonprofit animal rescues: A qualitative **descriptive case study** (Wallace, 2014)
5. **A Case Study**: Succession Planning in a Nonprofit Organization (James, 2013)
6. Exploring Creativity and Intrinsic Motivation in the Workplace: A **Single-Case Study** (Cook, 2018)
7. A qualitative **descriptive case study**: The impact of texting on writing professors (Carr, 2015)
8. Teaching Middle-School Inclusion Classrooms: A Qualitative **Exploratory Multiple-Case Study** (Lashley, 2018)
9. Intergenerational Recruiting in the Manufacturing Environment: An **Intrinsic Case Study** (Morgan, 2016)
10. The value of Scrum to organizations: A **case study** (Cornelius, 2014)
### The Value of Scrum to Organizations: A [Multi] Case Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions, Research &amp; Prior Experiences</th>
<th>Target Populations</th>
<th>Program Elements / Evidence</th>
<th>Outcomes/Themes/Patterns</th>
<th>Long-Term Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners of Scrum view practice as highly successful for software development; however, no empirical evidence exists</td>
<td>Participants from USA software companies in 17 industries</td>
<td>Interviews, Audio Visual content, Text &amp; digital documents</td>
<td>Scrum supports efficiency &amp; waste elimination</td>
<td>Higher level of teamwork and collaboration on software projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to identify change management tools for effective Scrum adoption</td>
<td>Cross-functional roles included: Business Ldr; Scrum Coach; Product Owner; Scrum master; Scrum team members; other support roles</td>
<td>Artifacts: Project: charters, schedules, status reports; Product&amp; sprint backlogs; Financial Statements</td>
<td>Delivered software improves customer experiences</td>
<td>Formal org. change mgmt. process &amp; results inform business leaders of Scrum value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Program Elements / Evidence**
  - Interviews
  - Audio Visual content
  - Text & digital documents

- **Artifacts:**
  - Project: charters, schedules, status reports
  - Product& sprint backlogs
  - Financial Statements

- **Outcomes/Themes/Patterns:**
  - Scrum supports efficiency & waste elimination
  - Delivered software improves customer experiences
  - Finished software faster to market

- **Long-Term Outcomes:**
  - Higher level of teamwork and collaboration on software projects
  - Formal org. change mgmt. process & results inform business leaders of Scrum value
**Assumptions, Research & Prior Experiences**

- Voter engagement & issue engagement historically are separate efforts
- Linking voter & issue engagement on a year-round basis increases effective citizen engagement

**Target Populations**

- Low-income citizens in economically marginal neighborhoods
- Local, regional, and national civic engagement organizations

**Program Elements**

- Integrated & non-partisan voter engagement
- Collaborative & trusted leadership
- Resource partnerships and tools
- Adaptability to political context

**Short-Term Outcomes**

- Citizen capacity
- Organizational partner capacity
- Coalition capacity
- Leadership development
- Voter turnout

**Long-Term Outcomes**

- Citizen civic engagement
- Voter turnout

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Example

Voter engagement & issue engagement historically are separate efforts. Linking voter & issue engagement on a year-round basis increases effective citizen engagement.

**Voter engagement & issue engagement**

- Low-income citizens in economically marginal neighborhoods
- Local, regional, and national civic engagement organizations

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**Long-Term Outcomes**

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