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Case study: The social microscope as a research method

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Abstract

This study was aimed to determine the approach to take a case study. Case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research. Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. Social scientists, in particular, have made wide use of this qualitative research method to examine contemporary real-life situations and provide the basis for the application of ideas and extension of methods. (Yin, 1984, p. 23). Many well-known case study researchers such as Robert E. Stake, Helen Simons, and Robert K. Yin have written about case study research and suggested techniques for organizing and conducting the research successfully.

Keywords: social, microscope, research, method

Introduction

The case study is a complete analysis and report on the status of a particular individual, subject, school, institution, playground, community, or city with a view to ensure possible improvement of status of the case under investigation. Case study is a diagnostic study; it probes deeply and analyses the inter action between the factors that explain present status of the ones that influence change or growth. It is essentially a qualitative approach to ascertaining truth of the matter. The status of 'case' to be studied is in some way exceptional in the sense that its contribution to the field is extraordinarily great. The results and findings of the case study are also unique. Rightly called as "the social microscope".

Methodology

Case study research draws upon their work and proposes six steps that should be used:

- Determine and define the research questions
- Select the cases and determine data gathering and analysis techniques
- Prepare to collect the data
- Collect data in the field
- Evaluate and analyze the data
- Prepare the report

Step 1. Determine and Define the Research Questions

The researcher investigates the object of the case study in depth using a variety of data gathering methods to produce evidence that leads to understanding of the case and answers the research questions. Case study research generally answers one or more questions which begin with "how" or "why." The questions are targeted to a limited number of events or conditions and their inter-relationship.

Step 2. Select the Cases and Determine Data Gathering and Analysis Techniques

During the design phase of case study research, the researcher determines what approaches to use in selecting single or multiple real-life cases to examine in depth and which instruments and data gathering approaches to use. When using multiple cases, each case is treated as a single case. Each cases conclusions can then be used as information contributing to the whole

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study, but each case remains a single case.

Step 3. Prepare to Collect the Data

Because case study research generates a large amount of data from multiple sources, systematic organization of the data is important to prevent the researcher from becoming overwhelmed by the amount of data and to prevent the researcher from losing sight of the original research purpose and questions. Advance preparation assists in handling large amounts of data in a documented and systematic fashion. Researchers prepare databases to assist with categorizing, sorting, storing, and retrieving data for analysis.

Step 4. Collect Data in the Field

The researcher must collect and store multiple sources of evidence comprehensively and systematically, in formats that can be referenced and sorted so that converging lines of inquiry and patterns can be uncovered. Researchers carefully observe the object of the case study and identify causal factors associated with the observed phenomenon. Renegotiation of arrangements with the objects of the study or addition of questions to interviews may be necessary as the study progresses. Case study research is flexible, but when changes are made, they are documented systematically.

Step 5. Evaluate and Analyze the Data

The researcher examines raw data using many interpretations in order to find linkages between the research object and the outcomes with reference to the original research questions. Throughout the evaluation and analysis process, the researcher remains open to new opportunities and insights. The case study method, with its use of multiple data collection methods and analysis techniques, provides researchers with opportunities to triangulate data in order to strengthen the research findings and conclusions.

Step 6. Prepare the report

Techniques for composing the report can include handling each case as a separate chapter or treating the case as a chronological recounting. Some researchers report the case study as a story. During the report preparation process, researchers critically examine the document looking for ways the report is incomplete. The researcher uses representative audience groups to review and comment on the draft document. Based on the comments, the researcher rewrites and makes revisions. Some case study researchers suggest that the document review audience include a journalist and some suggest that the documents should be reviewed by the participants in the study.

Discussion

Cases studies are complex because they generally involve multiple sources of data, may include multiple cases within a study, and produce large amounts of data for analysis. Researchers from many disciplines use the case study method to build upon theory, to produce new theory, to dispute or challenge theory, to explain a situation, to provide a basis to apply solutions to situations, to explore, or to describe an object or phenomenon.

Conclusion

The advantages of the case study method are its applicability to real-life, contemporary, human situations and its public accessibility through written reports. Case study results relate directly to the common reader everyday experience and

facilitate an understanding of complex real-life situations.

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