Encyclopedia of Case Study Research

Reporting Case Study Research

The phrase *reporting case study research* refers to the presenting or writing up of researchers' work, often the last stage in case study research process. This entry deals with the major considerations researchers should take when preparing their work for publication or presentation.

Conceptual Overview and Discussion

For the case researcher, probably the greatest factor that will influence the form of the case report will be the intended audience for the case. Because the results of case research may be of interest to a wide range of audience types—for example, other academic specialists within a field of study or discipline, organizational or public policy practitioners, or students—their interests and needs will be different. It is these differences that should drive how the case is written up and that will determine what information or information subsets (e.g., methodology, analytics, discussion, and results) from the research will need to be included or emphasized in the reporting of the case. If the research is being presented to members of an academic audience, who are already familiar with the methodology being used within the case, their interest will normally be in how the particulars of the case relate to the larger body of related research. On the other hand, it is likely that public policy or organizational practitioners will be more interested in what concrete or practical lessons may be drawn from the case rather than the case's contribution to an abstract body of theory. For students, the focus will likely be on how the case material relates to a body of theory and how the case may inform them concerning the application of theory in a real-life setting. In any event, the audience's interest for particular types of information needs must be kept foremost in the mind of the researcher, whether he or she is writing for fellow academics, students, or managers.

Regardless of the audience, however, it must be recognized that it is the nature of case research itself that provides one of the greatest challenges to the researcher for the writing up and reporting of his or her research. Because each case is relatively unique, case research by its nature is not amenable to rote or formulaic approaches to reporting. "Standard" or "proprietary" formats that are used in other forms of research, for example, experimental or quantitative survey-based research as published

in journals, are not likely to be suitable for most case reports. This is why case researchers have a wider latitude and a greater range of choice for the form and format of their case reports. However, this latitude comes with a price for the case researcher: Unlike the formulaic constraints that may exist for other types of research reporting, for the case researcher this task is much more complex and demanding.

Although the writing up or reporting of case research is actually the last stage in the case **[p. 807 ↓]** research process, researchers may (and, many would argue, should) engage in the writing of the case earlier in the research cycle. Although the process of writing up from the beginning is a demanding and challenging one, this type of approach ensures that, for the researcher, the case material—whether thoughts, ideas, data summary, or synthesis—is not forgotten or missed when he or she is reporting the results of the case research. In addition, the act of writing up the case as the research moves forward often aids in the execution of the research itself; it forces the researcher to be reflexive concerning the case, its aim, and the knowledge to be found within or drawn from the case. It also avoids placing the researcher in a position of "where to start" once all the data have been gathered and the analysis completed, thus militating against a condition of writer's block.

Compositional Structure

To assist those engaging in case research, Robert Yin categorizes six primary types of compositional structures that case researchers may use for reporting their results. These include the (1) *linear analytic structure* (essentially a journal-like style or format), the (2) *comparative structure* (where the data within a case are presented two or more times using alternative models or explanations), (3) a *chronological structure* (where case material is presented to the reader in a chronological or temporal sequence), (4) a *theory-building structure* (where the structure is dependent upon the logic of the theory developed within the case), (5) a *suspense structure* (where outcomes or conclusions are presented first, explanatory material is presented second, and an element of surprise is used to link the two), and (6) an *unsequenced structure* (where descriptive material is presented in a fashion that makes the best sense for that particular case).

Although it is not one of Yin's pantology (or survey) of compositional structures, case reporting may also be accomplished through a purely narrative or storytelling form. This is particularly suitable if the researcher wishes the audience to have a more vicarious or intimate experience of the case as a story with emplotment and characterization. It is a particularly valuable approach in that the narrative form facilitates readers in "living" inside the case, in essence experiencing what the actors in the case themselves experience. This approach is most useful for reporting research that is intended to be persuasive. Quite often this is the form of case research that is later published in a book format.

Although it is recommended that the writing up of the case report is conducted in parallel with the conduct of the research itself, regardless of the type of compositional structure chosen for the report the final task faced by the researcher will be to complete the report. It is recommended that case researchers engage in three penultimate activities in preparation for the completion of the write-up or case report. First, the researcher may use a checklist to ensure that the case is presented in as complete a fashion as possible. For complex cases, this ensures that nothing is missed in the case report. There are numerous examples that are readily available to the researcher from within the literature on case methods. The second activity is to have someone involved in the case (e.g., a respondent) read and comment upon the report itself. If a case is amenable to this procedure, this type of review may serve as a ratification check for the researcher. For researchers new to case research these activities should be adopted until the case researcher's level of experience with writing cases matures. Finally, once the write-up has been completed it should be critically reviewed by someone other than the author. This third-party reader serves a function akin to that of an anonymous reviewer for publication, a final check on the presentation style and internal consistency of the case report.

The Exemplary Case Report

Regardless of the compositional structure selected, the researcher's engagement with the writing up process at whatever stage or stages, or the review process chosen to ensure completeness of the final report, an exemplary case report will meet a number of critical tests. First, it must put forth persuasive arguments. These arguments must

be based upon a method and analysis that are transparent and understandable to the reader. The conclusions derived from the analysis and the discussion must also be plausible to the reader in light of the unique nature of the case. Finally, the presentation of the case material, the discussion, and the conclusion(s) must resonate with the interests of the intended audience. **[p. 808 ↓]** If the case report can pass these critical benchmarks, then the case researcher has been successful.

Finally, case researchers may wish to give some consideration to presentation of case results in an oral presentation format. For cases that are more action-research, practitioner site-specific, or educationally oriented, researchers may be required to report the results of the case using a combination of both written and oral formats. Although the tenets of an exemplary case report described in the preceding paragraph still apply, the case researcher must also determine how best to report the results of a case to a sponsoring committee, senior manager(s), a functional group within an organization, or students. In these circumstances the researcher may be faced with the challenge of presenting what could be a complicated case to an audience that is pressed for time, whose members are almost solely interested in either just the facts or any recommendations, or potential ways to solve problems presented by the case itself. Should this be the case, the researcher should endeavor to report the results more succinctly than otherwise would be warranted. In any event, careful consideration needs to be given to the necessities for parallelism in the formally written case report and oral presentation of facts, recommendations, or problems.

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See also

Further Readings

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