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## Case studies as literature

*What can we say about the literary quality of case studies?*

### Introduction

A case study present a detailed picture of a phenomena that is very complex and help us get closer to an answer (Soafer, 1999). It's "investigating one or multiple cases, for example in business, a case study often study a number of organizations" (Stake, 1995 p.1102).

Case studies can be made with both qualitative and quantitative methods (Yin, 1981). Yin (1981, p.58) also applied that "As a research strategy, the distinguishing characteristic of the case study is that it attempts to examine: (a) a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when (b) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident".

The purpose of a case study is to produce definitions (Kidder, 1982), evaluate theory (Pinfield, 1986; Anderson, 1983) or develop new theories (e.g., Gersick, 1988; Harris & Sutton, 1986). The content of a case study and the declaration of the researching-process, should be descriptive so that others can criticize approaches, methodology and observations done in the research, easily follow the steps in the research-process and also evaluate the innovative process (Hansson, 2002).

The determination about quality in a case study is difficult. If it doesn't have a good quality, it doesn't belong in the scientific world. Today is quantitative research more approved by scientists because there is defined and clear criteria for the approach. Soafer (1999 p.1106) stated that "The best qualitative research is systematic and rigorous, and it seeks to reduce bias and error and to identify evidence that disconfirms initial or emergent hypotheses".

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## Method

This paper is based on secondary sources. I have collected empiric data from different scientific papers and literature about case studies. By searching on databases, that are available at Halmstad University's webpage, I have selected relevant articles and literature to base this paper on. Databases that I used are *Web of science core collection*, *Scopus*, *Summon* and *Google scholar*. The paper is formed after a scientific paper (Rowley, 2002) where I used the same font and layout. I have constructed the references in the text and the source reference according to the system American Psychological Association, APA (Mattsson & Örtenblad, 2013, s.52).

Keywords: case study, qualitative assurance, qualitative case study.

## Empiric

When you do a case study in economics, it's about one or multiple organizations where you select important persons and point out their function in the organization. By doing this in multiple organizations in the same industry, you can later compare them and do benchmarking. (Solberg Söilen & Huber 2006).

Quantitative method means gathering systematic data that later can be categorised (Nationalencyklopedin, 2016, 30 November). Observations, experiments and statistics are approaches in quantitative research (Åsberg, 2001). A case study is a qualitative research where you seek deep to gather information to get a big, detailed picture and methods used in qualitative research are here as well observations, depth interview, hermeneutics and phenomenography (Åsberg, 2001).

The distinguishing in the method of a qualitative research is the approach when determine a phenomena. How findings later seen credible and the method generalizes. (Johansson, 2003). Case studies are today a very common and likable approach among researchers in qualitative method (Tomas, 2011). Researchers have concluded that case study research is a separate approach in qualitative method (Denzin & Lincoln,

## Case studies as literature

## Case studies as literature

2011). Unlike quantitative research, there is no standards on how the case study should be structured and performed. Therefore there is a higher risk for a lower quality on the research when there is no standard measurements to apply on the results. Without an accepted concept of quality for qualitative research, it's hard to accomplish good results that can be used by other scientists (Starrin & Svensson, 1994).

Generalization is a criteria in quantitative research method. It means that you create wide and extended conclusions that later can apply in general and not in one specific case. This criteria is not established in qualitative research hence it is not a main goal for the research. A qualitative research primarily want's to establish a wide and detailed picture that makes the recipient understand it altogether. (Polit & Beck, 2010)

A qualitative researcher that is doing a case study can according to Guba (1987) never construct a full legitimate generalization. This because the results are always nested in circumstances from the specific situations, and can therefor never be general to apply on the unobserved. Also some scientists believe that qualitative research can bring greater and more exceptional theories than quantitative, and be applied on other aspects. The rich details and the depth of information gives them a great deal of potential to contribute something new to the science (Misco, 2007) and (Glaser, 2002).

Firestone (1993) has developed three different models about generalization that is functional on both quantitative and qualitative studies. The third model involve generalizability in case studies. The model is called *case-to-case transfer* and means that findings in a case study can be transferred to a different group of people or a different environment. Transferability can be explained to resemble cooperating businesses. The main work of the transfer is the readers' job, like customers, to estimate in which degree the findings can be applied to new phenomena. The researcher's task is to equip the readers with accurate and specific information so they are able to estimate the findings and its ability to transfer to other cases.

As we earlier discussed, a case study is based on qualitative or quantitative methods for gathering information, or it could be a mixed approach by using both. When using both methods it's called triangulation (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012).

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"By combining multiple observers, theories, methods, and empirical materials, researchers can hope to overcome the weakness or intrinsic biases and the problems. Often the purpose of triangulation in specific contexts is to obtain confirmation of findings through convergence of different perspectives. The point at which the perspectives converge is seen to represent reality" (Jakob, 2001).

The two approaches, quantitative and qualitative method, should be seen as a complement to each other (Denzin, 1978), and the information gathered by quantitative research can give essential input to a qualitative approach like fieldwork (Jick, 1979). George and Bennet (2005), also implied that case studies are complementary and can be used when develop theory in social science.

If the quality of a case study is good enough, a new theory can be based by the qualitative research. Eisenhardt (1989 p.9) said that "Analyzing data is the heart of building theory from case studies, but it is both the most difficult and the least codified part of the process". There are some benefits with this process of building new theories, and that is for example less researcher bias, and that the theory can be tested by created measurements and then a hypotheses can be verified wrong (Eisenhardt, 1989). It is also important that the methodology in the case study is detailed and accurate so the process can be repeated with the same outcome (Hansson, 2002).

According to Yeasmin & Rahman (2012) is social science more difficult than original science. By follow basic principles of research methodology, a scientist can gather information and achieve the intended goal, but in social science there is a much more complex element that makes is more difficult. That is the human behaviour. Because the phenomena, in social science, is under the influence of human behaviour means that there can be changes in the phenomena that sometimes is very hard to measure.

Remenyi, Money, Price and Bannister, (2002) imply that there are three types of case studies. Two of these are in the association of scientific research. In the first type, the scientist is interested in one particular object. The scientist focus on

## Case studies as literature

one or multiple organizations for example, to do benchmarking. Remenyi et al (2002) also illustrate that case studies will present a wider perspective of the research object. With a wider perspective, these type of research declare a chance for a full vision of the entire researching process (Patton & Appelbaum, 2003).

Remenyi et al (2002 p.14) says further on that case study is like a story.

“ A wellrendered story clearly explains it’s meaning in such a way that the listener or reader understands the message. The story needs to make sense, or put another way, it needs to resonate with the listener or reader. If there is no resonance, than the story and the research has failed”.

### Analysis

Case studies have become very popular among researchers and other scientists (Tomas, 2011). Though for many researchers like Starrin and Svensson (1994), the qualitative study is not totally accepted. Starrin and Svensson (1994), Pilot and Beck (2010) and Guaba (19) all agrees on that there is a higher risk for low quality in qualitative research like case studies because of the lack of standard measurements and the inability to generalize. Firestone (1993) developed a model that demonstrates how to generalize on both quantitative and qualitative information. The model is called case-to – case transfer and displays on how to transfer findings from one case study to another. The readers of the research evaluate the findings to see if they are adaptable. If the findings are adaptable, the conclusions can applies to other groups of people or other environments.

What Pilot and Beck (2010) also report is that the main focus for a qualitative research is not to be able to generalize the conclusion, but to provide detailed information so that listeners and readers fully understand the aspects in the research of the case study. It’s more the rich details and the depth of information that is valuable in the new findings they add to the science. Therefore, the contribution can even be in a higher rank than conclusions from quantitative research (Misco, 2007) and (Glaser, 2002).

By doing so called triangulation, Yeasmin and Rahman (2012) report that by mixing qualitative with quantitative methods, the biases are being reduced and the quality of the research improves.

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Both Alexander (2001) and Denzin (1978) agrees about reduced biases and errors by triangulation and that the both methods should be complement to one another. By using a quantative approach, you can identify what's interesting to do a qualitative research on. It's optimal to mix the both methods to perfoeme the best research (Jick, 1979) and (George & Bennet, 2005).

Soafer (1999) adds to this, that research should also be performed standardized and precise to reduce biases and faults. Then the results and answer to hypothesis is optimal and new theories can be created (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Remenyi et al (2002) draws parallels between telling a story and a good case study. So if the listener or reader doesn't fully understand, it is not a good case study that can contribute to new science.

### **Conclusion**

By doing a research you want to come up with new findings to the science and these findings should be interesting for other researchers. If the research is irrelevant than there is no contribution to science equals low quality.

The view about the quality of a qualitative research is divided. If the conclusion is not generalizable there is low quality of the research hence other scientists cannot use it and there is no 'new' input in the scientific world. While others suggest that the many details obtained from the case study is in fact the input to science. Other also imply that it is functional to generalize, or transfer, findings to use on other groups or other environment even in qualitative research. As we see, there is varied opinions about the determination of quality in a case study. But then again, the generalization is not a main goal in qualitative research according to some scientists but the depth of understanding with its very describing, colourful picture.

Research should be measurable and accurate so the process can be repeated by other researchers with the exact same outcome, and it should involve few faults and biases as possible. What seems to be a good way to implement research method is to use triangulation and mix qualitative research with quantitative. By mixing the methods, it's also reduces biases and errors in the process and the outcome gets more relevant. This deliver a qualitative research with good quality

## **Case studies as literature**

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and therefore can contribute to the scientific world and also help other scientist to provide new findings.

So using case studies as literature should be more accepted because it's a great sources of knowledge and is more described than some other literature there is. I also think that case studies can be a more interesting source for information hence it's so close to reality. Though, as we can hear, there can be low quality in a case study and there is in some cases not possible to generalize, but on other hand, there is other scientific literature that contains errors as well.

### **Future studies**

In future studies it would be interesting to do a research on the development of the quality criteria of case studies. For example, are there any measurements for the case studies in 5 years? It would also be interesting to study the acceptance on case studies as research method, if there is any change in the near future. Is it more or less accepted as a research approach?

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## Case studies as literature

## Case studies as literature

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