Case studies about Swedish Companies

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Abstract

The purpose with this paper is to investigate and get deeper understanding of case studies about Swedish companies. I will focus on the way the case studies have been constructed, the purposes of the studies and how well the findings may be implemented to other contexts. I find this interesting because case studies are something that can benefit every company in other to in some way improve and streamline the business. The data used in this paper will be obtained from various case studies within the subject "Swedish companies" and therefore analyzed to draw conclusions.

The findings from this study is that every case study is unique, and there is not one single, optimal way to construct a case study. One must take the purpose of the study into consideration and establish the study from this. However, there are common traits between case studies, such as the ways of obtaining data for the studies and the uniqueness of research question. How well the findings of a case study can be generalized to other contexts also depends on the uniqueness of the purpose of the study.

Keywords

Case studies, Swedish companies, Case methodology, Qualitative Research

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Introduction

What is a case study?

It is said that the method of case studies was implemented by the French scientist Fréderic le Play when studying family economy in 1829 (Forni, Fray & Quaranta 1998). How a case study is defined and its uses vary between different contexts. Therefore, a single definition of case studies is hard to come across. However, a case study is a useful tool to get deeper understanding of a certain subject. A case study is an analyzation about, for example, a certain individual, a group of people, a company or a situation. Thomas (2011) suggests that case studies lay ground for analyses of several different sources, such as persons, enterprises, projects or different situations. Rolls (2010) suggests that case studies also may be used when studying events or specific topics. Dagsputa (2015) defines case studies as research method that is used to explore a phenomenon in a concrete, real-life situation. The collection of data in a case study occurs during an uninterrupted period of time. (Cresswell 2013). A case study analysis does not only have to rely on one single case study, for it may take other studies in consideration, such as quantitative surveys and alternative sources of data. (Yin 2014). Using multiple sources when gathering information may improve the trustworthiness of the case study (Patton 1990). When only a small amount of cases is examined, one for instance, and a theory is established, the relatability of implementing this to other contexts may not be fully dependable. (Henn, Weinstein & Foard 2006 p. 59). According to Flyvbjerg (2006) case studies are strong and essential research methods that holds a high scientific level relative other research methods. There are also several sources biases to take into consideration in a case study, such as the people being interviewed, the timing of the research and the question asked (Norris 1997). The interviewed might avoid telling the truth because of many reason, such as avoiding conflicts, embellish reality or to maintain relationships. (Bryant 2008).

A case study is to be used while focusing on qualitative rather than quantitative factors. It may be implemented while focusing on the words "how" and "why" (Baxter & Jack 2008), and therefore increase understanding. Once a case study has been completed it can be used to develop theories. The strength of building theories from a case study analysis is that the theory has trustworthiness because it has been built on empirical documentation (Eisenhardt 1989 p.548). Due to this, case studies can be of importance when testing a hypothesis (Levy The usage of case studies can be advantageous because they allow investigation and can reveal details at micro levels. (Zainal 2007). However, a case study might be to qualitative or too narrow to be used to generalize to other contexts or be used to draw scientific conclusions, but not in all cases. (Søilen & Huber 2006). According to Kolberg (2003), case studies offers a working hypothesis, and this may only be generalizable to other cases if the cases are similar enough, but it is up to everyone to judge if generalization is appropriate.

Don W. Stacks suggests three types of structures of case studies used within social science (Heath 2005)

- The linear case study
- The process case study
- The grounded case study

The linear case study mostly focuses on research from a historical point of view, analyzing earlier data. *The process case study* observes the research item as a unique element in a greater procedure. *The grounded case study* mainly focuses on goals and ambitions within a corporation. This method is often built on some kind of organizational model. (Heath 2005).

Stake (1995) presents three types of case studies;

- Instrumental case studies
- intrinsic case studies
- collective case studies

In an *instrumental case study* the researcher describes certain circumstance or research question of interest. The purpose of the study is to determine whether the circumstance exists in the case. The purpose of the *Intrinsic case study* is to study the case itself, for instance a certain group of people or a specific department in a company. The researcher focuses on the singularity of the case instead of constructing a theory. In a *collective case study* the researcher collects and includes data from several different cases and other origin.

Yin (2009) suggests three types of case studies

- Exploratory case studies
- Descriptive case studies
- Explanatory case studies

An Exploratory case study is a type of study that is used to find patterns when preforming a case study, hoping to be able to construct a model or establish a theory. This type of study is often used when the researchers have a specific question of interest, such as "What are the ways for an organization become more environmentally friendly?"

A *descriptive case study* is built on the exploratory case study, but the goal is to get a deeper understanding of a certain topic. An example to this kind of study is "What are the effect in an organization by becoming more environmentally friendly?" The researcher focuses on more detailed aspects of the subject, such as its effects or looks at it from other perspectives.

An *explanatory case study* takes the research even one step further to explain how or why a certain action resulted in a certain way. For example, "Why did the organizations actions make them more environmentally friendly? "

Susam-Sarajeva (2009) claims that case studies are the most commonly used by students at universities. One reason for this is that case studies allows the researchers to

investigate real life issues and therefore focuses more on real situations rather than theoretical.

Swedish companies

This report will focus on case studies concerning Swedish companies. A company can be defined as a group of individuals associated together in a business-purpose (19) A commonly used synonym to the word "company" is the word "corporation", which may be defined as business or organization which holds rights and have duties in front of the law, with a specific purpose. (20). By Swedish companies I mean those who are currently or have been active in the Swedish market. Some of the companies mentioned in this study may for various reason have their business in other countries, but I still define those as Swedish companies if they somehow still are active in the Swedish market. An example of this is Volvo which since 2009 is owned by a Chinese company, but since Volvo was established and still is active in Sweden it will be considered as a "Swedish company" in this report.

Method

This report has been written to clarify and therefore receive a better understanding about case studies about Swedish companies. My goal is to find and compare differences in how case studies are written, and how the construction of those affects the reader and the impact of the study. I also intend to estimate the amount of case studies available concerning Swedish companies and in which branch of industry they operate. I will also categorize the type of report (master thesis, doctoral thesis etc.) to get an estimation of the purpose of the case study.

To establish this report, I will use several different sources to find the data needed to answer my issue. These sources will include various publications available from different databases and books but it will also include other sources that I find interesting and related to the subject. Once this empirical data has been collected, it will be analyzed and compared and therefore lays ground for conclusions and results. In this report, 10 different case studies will be presented and analyzed. Once this has been done, I will compile all data and therefore attempt to draw conclusions and search for similarities between the cases. To get an idea of the amount of cases studies published within this subject, I will the database DiVA. By doing an advanced search in the databases with strict criteria's, I am hoping to get an estimation of how many case studies there are within this subject, when they were published, which industry they concern and the purpose of the study.

Empirical findings

Now that I have defined what a case study is, how it is done, the purposes, advantages and disadvantages, I can begin presenting case studies about Swedish companies. I will shortly present the case study and the way it has been constructed, and after I hope to be able to draw conclusions and get better understanding of case studies.

Balance Scorecard as communication tool – A case study of Volvo Parts

This is a case study established by Amelie Gustavsson, Vanessa Kanngiesser and Malin Sjöbeck (2009) as a Bachelor thesis at Lund University. The purpose of this case study is to examine if Balance Scorecards (BSC) may be used as a communication tools at Volvo Parts. The authors chose to focus on one company only since it would give them greater insight in how the company works. The purpose of their case study was to receive understanding whether their expectations and ideas could be confirmed. The authors critics case studies because of problematic generalization. However, they state that they hope to be able to implement their findings to other contexts, even though they are also conscious that this might not be possible.

The researchers collected their empirical data by using primary sources. This was done by qualitative interviews with employees at Volvo Parts, asking for nuanced answers. Before constructing the questionnaire, the authors studied earlier research to get a theoretical point of view to their questions. Thereafter they held five different interviews, approximately one hour each. Secondary data was also used to complete the case study, including literature and articles. This case study could according to Stake (1995) be defined as a *"instrumental case study"*, because there is a certain question of interest that is to be researched.

Saab – From move your mind to sell some cars? – A case study of Saab strategic position on the Swedish market

This is a case study written as a master's thesis by Backman, Jacobsson & Wallin (2005) at University of Gothenburg. The purpose of their case study was to examine the strategic position of Saab Automobiles on the Swedish market. In this case, the authors do not have a specific question of interest to investigate since they want to examine Saabs marketing position in general. They mention the limitations of generalizing their findings to other contexts, but makes clear that they do not approve to this statement. This is because they will not include any interpretations because their purpose is to describe the reality. However, they believe that their findings still will be able to be used to generalize to other cases. The researchers chose to use both primary and

secondary data when gathering information. The primary data was collected from personal interviews with employees at Saab and retailers.

This case could be defined as an *Intrinsic case study,* because there is not specific questions they wish to investigate and they do not wish to build a theory from the case. Instead they focus on the case itself to receive understanding about their subject.

CRM-A case study of Nordea Private Banking

This is a case study written by David Johansson & Mikael Westin at Halmstad University as a bachelor thesis in 2013. The purpose of this study was to get better understanding of how Nordea Private banking works with attracting new customers and maintaining their present customers. Their research question is "How does Nordea Private banking works with CRM to maintain high customer loyalty?". (CRM = *customer relationship management).* This case study could be defined as an *exploratory case study* they have a specific question of interest they wish to answer.

The author mentions the advantages and disadvantages with case studies. One disadvantage mentioned is that the complexity in a case study might make analyzation more difficult, that when focusing on all details of a case it might draw the researchers from the actual topic of the study.

The primary data used in this case was collected from personal interviews with high-positioned employees in Nordea Private Banking. The authors mention that by using qualitative research rather than quantitative, they may not be able to draw any statistical conclusions and generalize their findings to a whole population.

H&M and CSR

This is a case study written by Karoline Wikström Nilsson in 2012. The purpose of the case study is to determine how H&M's social responsibility has developed and changed during the last 10 years, and the effects of CSR to human rights and the environment. To gain understanding to this question the author does a qualitative research by analysing annual reports released by the company. The author claims that the findings will be able to be generalized to other companies within this business.

This study focuses on social perspectives, and may therefore be defined as a *linear case study.* It may also be defined as an *explanatory case study* since the purpose is to investigate how the surroundings is effected by CRS.

How can a leader motivate the everyday business – A case study about Clas Ohlson

This case study was written by Pardis Aenehband in 2007 as a bachelor thesis at Gävle University. The purpose of the study was to gain understanding how the leader himself believes they use their leadership to motivate their employees. The limitations of this

study were one Clas Ohlson store in Gävle and four stores in Stockholm. The data which was collected came from qualitative sources, by personal interviews with the managers of each store. The secondary data that was used came from published sources such as commercial databases and information from the organization itself. The author mentions that secondary data is positive because of its low costs, but may not be suitable for the specific problem or there may exist biases at detailed levels. He also mentions that his findings may not be able to generalize to other contexts because the findings are typical for the specific company. This case can be defined as an *explanatory case study* since the purpose is to get understanding how the leader's behaviour can affect the other employees.

Efficiency improvement of an order process -A case study at Rottne Industri AB

This case study was written as a diploma work by Christian Karlsson and Martin Eriksson 2012 at Linnaeus university. The purpose of the study was to examine how to improve the effectiveness of an order process, and any factors that may interfere. The issue of the report was to determine how factors that has a negative impact on the order process could be reduced to improve effectivity. The author mentions as a limitation that they cannot study all material to the depth because it would be to comprehensive. The primary data which was used in the study was obtained from personal interviews, because the type of data they needed was not available at other sources. The authors mention that their findings may not be able to be generalized to other companies because their research only contained one company.

In this case study the authors assume from the start that there are factors that have a negative impact on the order process and which to investigate why these factors exist how they could be reduced. Because of this, this case study can be defined as *an explanatory case study*.

Swedish small firm's utilization of allowances for income smoothing and internal financing

This research was written as a doctoral thesis Håkan A. Andersson in 2006. The purpose of this study was to get a deeper understanding how Swedish small-sized companies use income smoothing and internal financing. The way the author collected his data was by examining two years of annual financial statements and tax declarations from 34 companies. The author uses a template specifically created for his researches build on tax declaration, in which he can investigate how income smoothing could have been or had been used. The findings were analysed by using different theoretical models and financial variables. The financial variables and key figures was calculated from tax declarations and a thoroughgoing investigation of the databases was made to improve validity of the research. Because the author used several different sources for his case study, it may be defined as a *collective case study.*

How many case studies are there concerning Swedish companies?

As of 2016-12-01 there are currently 2243 case studies published at the database DiVA, under the category business and economy, both in Swedish and English. 2207 of those are published by students as diploma works. The rest of the studies are various publications, such as doctoral thesis and books. 96% of the publications are written in Swedish. However, not all those case studies concern specific companies, but also other institutions such as Swedish municipalities. How many studies that was published at each in shown below.

Year	Count	Year	Count	Year	Count
2016	195	**2009**	137	**2002**	73
2015	221	**2008**	144	**2001**	76
2014	187	**2007**	118	**2000**	35
2013	166	**2006**	144	**1999**	21
2012	160	**2005**	118	**1998**	1
2011	141	**2004**	89	**1996**	2
2010	138	**2003**	74	**1994**	1

It is hard to estimate which businesses the case studies concern, however, many of the studies investigates improvements that can be made within industrial companies, the effects of different leaderships, communication within the company and IT-related subjects.

Analysis

The type of case study varies between the observed studies. However, he most common case study method of the ones investigated is *explanatory case studies. (Yin 2009).* The researchers want to explain why a certain action resulted in a certain way, sort of a causality study. This type of study is very detailed and focuses on qualitative factors. This type of study can therefore give a very qualitative explanation to a situation. The problem with this is that the findings may only be relevant for the company being investigated, and no other companies. However, the uniqueness in a case study does not have to be negative. When a study is tailored for a specific company or business, eventual findings of the study can be of use for the company to improve their business or to get better understanding of a situation. From a company's view, a case study represents reality better than a theory do. Theories or statements concerning the markets or businesses in general may be generalized to many companies, but not all. Therefore, a specialized case study focusing on only one company may be of great value for just that company.

Most of the studies uses personal interviews as the main source of data for their study. This is done because their purposes are to get better understanding of their subject, and therefore focusing of qualitative data instead of quantitative (Baxter & Jack 2008). Many of the case studies which used personal interviews to collect data interviewed several employees within the company. By using multiple sources of data, the findings of the study therefore become more trustworthy (Patton 1990). However, Andersson's (2006) study concerning income smoothing did not consist of any personal interviews, but since it was defined as a *collective case study (*stake 1995), it gained high validity because data from different sources was examined (Patton 1990). Still, not many of the observed case studies had as ambition to construct a theory from their findings, even though a theory built on a case study can be considered trustworthy. (Eisenhardt 1989). Many of the authors stated that their research focuses on one company only, and therefore their findings may not be able to be generalized to other companies or contexts (Henn, Weinstein & Foard 2006). This can be linked to objectivity within the study, since there are research biases to take into consideration. Since most of the researchers obtained their primary data from personal interviews with employees and managers, the data might become distorted (Norris 1997). People tend to avoid telling the truth or to embellish reality for various reasons (Bryant 2008). Therefore, the persons being interviewed may not be fully objective because they might not want to talk negative about their business or organization.

The type of case studies I have observed in this report have mostly consisted of work published by students. The reason for this is that it reflects the case studies available on the database DiVA, which mostly consist of this kind of work. One explanation to this may be that case studies are the most common method for research by students (Susam-Sarajeva 2009). The reasons for this can be many, but one is that students find it appealing to work with real-life situations, which case studies allow. The amount of case studies published at DiVA has increased the recent 10 years. One reason for this may be that the interest for case study has grown the recent years. Another cause for this can be that companies require case studies due to globalization and increased competition on the market, to improve their business.

Conclusion

Every case study is unique. There is not one single, optimal way to construct a case study. It must be tailored for the specific purpose of the study. The findings of the study may be generalized to other companies, businesses and organizations, but this depends on how the study have been constructed. The findings of a case study with a general issue (e.g. "How can sales within the clothing industry be improved?") may be used to establish a theory and thereafter implement to other contexts. However, the findings of a very specified case study (e.g. "How did the new CEO of Volvo affect the suppliers in Poland?") are very narrow and may concern only the company of interest. Therefore, the findings may only be relevant for just that study. To sum up, given investigated

eight case studies, case studies about Swedish companies is unique in its way, such as the purpose and uniqueness of the case. However, there are also common traits between the studies, such as the construction of the case studies and how the data has been obtained.

Future research

This is a very broad area of investigation, and there are thousands of case studies available for research. If one would increase the number of investigated case studies, the findings would be more reliable and one would therefore receive better understanding. This study has also been limited to case studies about Swedish companies. If one would expand their area of investigation to companies from other countries, one would get a broader understanding and may draw conclusions on how the case studies varies depending on origin.

Implications

This report was limited to case studies concerning Swedish companies only. I chose to limit my report to only Swedish companies since I, myself, live in Sweden and therefore have a better understanding of corporations and organizations in Sweden than other countries. I believe that this fact improves the quality of this report. Another reason to why I focused on Swedish companies is that if there would be no limitations the amount of data available would be superabundant. This would result in a way to broad approach and the quality would be surpassed by the quantity. I focused on case studies concerning companies before other topics such as media. This is because the case studies are constructed in different ways depending on the subject, and therefore potential findings may not be able to be generalized to future research. By targeting certain aspects, I believe I received a more trustworthy and fair comparison between the case studies.

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