

Case Study Research Design in Public Administration: A Conceptual Framework

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19 November 2015



Define tomorrow.

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Introduction

The popularity of case study research has seen to grow in the social sciences such as –

- Psychology (Hersen & Barlow 1976)
- Sociology (Hamel 1992; Ragin & Becker 1992)
- Political Sciences (George & Bennett 2005; Gerring 2004)
- Public Administration (Brower, Abolafia & Carr 2000; King 2011:489; McNabb 2010)

Introduction

- Perry & Kraemer (1986:223): 20% of articles published the Public Administration Review (PAR) between 1975 and 1984 were case studies.
- Brower, Abolafia & Carr (2000:373) found fourteen years later:
 - PAR: 94%
 - Administration and Society (A&S): 82%
 - Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory (JPART): 72%
- Adams and White (1994:574) and Orosz, McKenna & Reding (1997:1983): 69% of dissertations (doctoral theses) reported on case studies.

Introduction

- Certain degree of ambiguity about the meaning of the concept 'case study research' within Public Administration
 - Brower et al. (2000:371): a research design
 - McCurdy and Cleary (1984:49): a technique
 - Adams & White (1994:567): an approach
 - Perry & Kraemer (1986:224): a methodology
 - Garson (2002:209): a method

Introduction

- Despite the ambiguousness of this concept several authors criticised case studies in Public Administration as -
 - having limited value for Public Administration theory building (McCurdy and Cleary 1984:49) and
 - being of low quality (Adams and White 1994:573; Perry and Kraemer (1986:224).
- An absence of a generic conceptual framework for -
 - understanding the defining attributes of the concept 'case study' (Walker & Avant 2013:168) and
 - assessing the outcomes (Flybjerg 2006:14; Gerring 2007:115; Yin 2009:47) of case studies.

Purpose of paper

To propose a conceptual framework for
understanding and assessing
Public Administration case study research

Research design and methods

- Non-empirical research design
- Conceptual study, using a technique of concept analysis to “handle and clarify” (Wilson 1963:vii) the concept ‘case study’ in order to craft a conceptual framework
- Conceptual framework: “the current version of the researcher’s map of the territory being investigated” (Miles and Huberman 1984: 33)
- The territory of the investigation on which this article reports is the concept ‘case study’

Research design and methods

- We used the eight steps in concept analysis as suggested by Walker and Avant (2013: 165) in their seminal work *Strategies for Theory Construction in Nursing* to analyse the concept 'case study'
 - *Select a concept.*
 - *Determine the aims or purposes of analysis.*
 - *Identify all uses of the concept that you can discover.*
 - *Determine the defining attributes.*
 - *Identify a model case.*
 - *Identify borderline, related, contrary, invented, and illegitimate cases.*
 - *Identify antecedents and consequences.*
 - *Define empirical referents.*

Research design and methods

This paper will report on the first four steps suggested by Walker and Avant (2013):

1. **Select a concept:** case study: popularity & ambiguity
2. **Aim or purpose:** obtaining optimal clarity regarding the characteristics and meaning of the selected concept (Trafford 2008: 274; Walker & Avant 2013: 165)
3. **Uses:** thinking tool constructed as a conceptual framework
4. Identification of the **defining attributes** of the concept 'case study'

Conceptual framework of a case study

1	Case	Instance of a unit of analysis					
2	Selection strategy	Typical	Extreme	Critical	Revelatory	Longitudinal	Replication logic
3	Design	Single/ Multiple	Single	Single	Single	Single	Multiple
4	Purpose	Explain Describe Explore	Describe Explore	Explain Describe	Explore	Explain	Explain Describe Explore
5	Nature of data collection	Conceptual Qualitative Quantitative					
6	Data analysis	Pattern matching Logic models Explanation building Time series					Pattern matching Logic models Explanation building Time series Cross-case synthesis
7	Outcome	Comparison	Theory/ hypothesis testing	Theory generalisations Theory/ hypothesis testing	Theory building	Theory (explanation) building	Analytical Generalisation Replication Comparison

The defining attributes of the concept 'case study'

- The case as a single instance of a phenomenon (unit of analysis)
- The case selection strategy and its inter-relationship with the selected research design

Conceptual framework: application on an example of a case study

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Conclusion

By applying the eight steps suggested by Walker and Avant (2015) to analyse the concept 'case study', one can deduce that the defining attributes of the concept 'case study' are two dimensional, namely –

- distinctive activities (selection strategies and research design) focusing on
- a distinctive object (an instance of a larger class or phenomenon).

The concept 'case study' thus refers to the –

- appropriately designed study of a
- purposefully selected
- single instance of a phenomenon.

Conclusion

This paper thus contributes to the discourse on case studies by

- proposing a conceptual framework
- to clarify the conceptual ambiguity in this field
- by enhancing the understanding and assessing of Public Administration case study research.

The various components in the conceptual framework thus serve as

- thinking tools for researchers
- to ensure the scientifically sound outcomes of their studies.

Thank you

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