Chapter 2
Types of Case Studies

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is designed to inform and educate the researcher about various types of case study designs. For each design there is a description about the type and an explanation of its purpose. There is also a sample description as well as how to collect data for each case study type. Disadvantages to each design is discussed as well as the essential components to include when writing up the final report. Finally, a table comparing all the case study types is incorporated.

INTRODUCTION

Although case studies have been used primarily in the medical and law fields, they can be used in other educational arenas as well. Case studies used in education serve to provide the learner with "practice identifying the parameters of a problem, recognizing and articulating positions, evaluating courses of action, and arguing different points of view" (Christensen, 1981, p. 184). Case studies can (a) vary in length, (b) provide for a collaboration between individuals where multiple perspectives can be examined, (c) be realistic or fictional, and (d) include all the necessary data or only part of them and require participants to add their own (Christensen, 1981).

This chapter presents an overview of various types of case study designs. The chapter includes a brief background about case studies before moving into individual discussions about the case study types.

BACKGROUND

According to Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, a case study is "an intensive analysis of an individual unit (such as a person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment." More specifically, case studies analyze precise details about an individual personal account of an event or dilemma or a small group of persons' detailed narrative of a situation. From these scenarios, conclusions—based only on the context provided—can then be drawn. Case studies generally include descriptive research and an exploration of the dilemma but do not look at a cause-and-effect relationship or at a generalized discovery of a truth (Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 2006).

Several different types of case studies are currently being used in higher education, including illustrative, exploratory, critical instance, program implementation, program effects, prospective, cumulative, narrative, medical, and embedded (Bassey, 1999). In the following section, the most popular types—illustrative, critical instance, cumulative, and narrative—are discussed first, followed by a presentation of the less-known types.

TYPES OF CASE STUDIES

This section presents an overview of the different types of case studies. Each discussion begins with information on the case study's description and purpose. Methods for sample selection, data collection, and reporting of results are then presented, followed by a discussion of potential disadvantages. Finally, one or two links to examples of the specific case study type are provided.

ILLUSTRATIVE CASE STUDIES

Description

Illustrative case studies are descriptive studies that depict one or more circumstances of an event to explain the situation. According to Hayes, Kyer, and Weber (2015), this type of case study is used to "describe a situation or a phenomenon, what is happening with it, and why it is happening" (p. 8). It is used to familiarize students with a topic and introduce them to the common language found in the case study. Illustrative case studies are particularly useful when the targeted audience knows little if anything about the topic because these case studies describe every aspect of

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