


Chapter 5


Case Study Research for Dissertation Success

Tricia J. Stewart

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7083-3310>

Western Connecticut State University, USA

Nicole DeRonck

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4553-663X>

CT Tech, USA

Samantha Tisi

Bethel Public Schools, USA

ABSTRACT

There are many qualitative approaches to dissertation research that doctoral students can utilize including ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative research, and case study. However, this chapter made the argument that case study is a fitting framework for doctoral dissertations because of the straightforward way in which the research design can be presented and data can be collected. While data analysis can be more difficult because of the nature of qualitative research, case study is also an easy way for doctoral students to develop a story based on the findings. In this way, case study allows students the flexibility to build on what they learn to tell the story of the phenomenon under study. One way that students can prepare for working with case study is to bind the work and be mindful of the amount of data that they plan to collect. This chapter also helps doctoral students understand case study, by providing examples taken from actual doctoral dissertations that provide insights on concrete ways to increase the clarity and the robustness of case studies.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter on case study research addresses the critical need for comprehensive guidance on utilizing case study methodology in doctoral dissertations. Case study research is usually qualitative in nature and conducted to describe complex phenomena with an in-depth approach that focuses on a specific case, which can be “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. xiii). The researcher must bind the case—which means to set the parameters that clarify what the case is and sometimes this means also includes what the case is not (Stake, 2005). A further development for case study research includes that a case can be a person, an organization, or an event that can be studied to answer “how” and “why” research questions (Yin, 2009). One of the things that makes case study unique is the importance that is given to the context of the case under study so that the research findings can be comprehensively understood. In order to create this understanding, researchers often utilize a range of data collection methods including interviews, observations, document analysis, and artifacts (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). One of the attractions of case study research is that there are a variety of types of case studies, which can be appealing for conducting research.

The many types of case studies and the ways that data can be collected have become increasingly desirable for conducting research in the social sciences, education, business, and healthcare (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, other areas including policy studies, and the law are beginning to see the benefits of researching and utilizing case study research. While case studies have gained prominence in qualitative research (Lichman, 2013; Yazan, 2015) doctoral students often struggle with implementing this methodology effectively (Sclafani, 2017). Through exploration of design principles, best practices of data collection, and analytical strategies for case study, this chapter provides doctoral students with a structured framework for implementing case study methodology in their research. It also includes examples from completed dissertations, which are meant to help doctoral students contextualize the range of possibilities for case study while providing some concrete details of this type of research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Case study is one of several qualitative approaches that can be combined with quantitative measures such as surveys and existing data for social science research (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Case study has been utilized in a variety of academic disciplines including business, education, health care, organizational studies, and

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