

## Chapter 10

# Case Study Research

In order to understand the inherent complexities and the underlying constructs of managing IT outsourcing relationships and the performance of these relationships, empirical research was conducted. The empirical research in terms of an exploratory case study had the following guiding research questions: 1) How do client and vendor organizations manage their IT outsourcing relationship? 2) How do different stakeholders influence, or get influenced by, the IT outsourcing relationship? In this research context, the unit of analysis was both the relationship (question 1) and the individual stakeholders (question 2). As our goal was to explore managerial and individual issues, rather than analytical generalization, no research propositions or hypotheses were developed in advance of the empirical study.

First in this chapter, we present the methodology applied in the case study process. Next, we present three internationally based IT outsourcing relationships that were studied (Solli-Sæther, 2006). In the following section, data collected are put into cross-case issues of managing IT outsourcing relationships. Finally, we use the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 for evaluating different aspects of the cases studied.

## THE CASE STUDY PROCESS

The selection of cases was based on an instrumental approach, which means that the case study was carried out to provide insight into issue or refinement of theory. “The case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else. The choice of case is made because it is expected to advance our understanding of that other interest” (Stake, 1994, p. 237). All three cases were selected for their paradigmatic characteristics in terms of their outsourcing undertaking. In other words, the cases were selected because, the ABB – IBM is a global one; the SAS – CSC contract belongs to one of the largest buy-outs in Europe; the Rolls-Royce – EDS contract is a mature one. All cases are unique, with global client companies from different industries, and all vendor companies are global service providers. In all three international based cases more than a thousand employees were transferred from client to vendor organizations. They provide a broad base of relationship practice, suggesting that a case in each company would be of interest and value to this research study.

Data collection was done through interviews, with questions addressing relationship management issues: enter and exit strategies, activities and phases, contract and contract management, governance structures and relationship management, personnel issues, and knowledge management, with a strong emphasis on what characteristics influenced IT outsourcing relationship. A certain group of questions were addressing individual stakeholder attitude, behavior, and performance. Thus, interviews were focused directly on case study topics. For each client-vendor outsourcing relationship, 2 – 3 interviewees were selected from each of the two parties.

The interviews were scheduled for 1 hour, but some lasted for 90 minutes. All interviewees were assured anonymity to promote openness. Interviews were personal meetings or held as telephone conferences. The exploratory case studies were conducted through July – September 2004. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed immediately afterwards. Transcripts from the 16 interviews comprised 65,342 words and 108 pages of text. The analysis of each case was focused essentially on transcripts of the interviews, but to some extent on other materials made available to the researcher (e.g., presentations, internal reports, press releases, annual reports, the Internet). An abbreviation of each case was written and sent to a contact person of each participating company for approval. The individual cases serve only as the evidentiary base for the study and were used in a cross-case analysis. The purpose was not to portray any single one of the relationships. Rather, it was to synthesize the lessons learned from all of them, dispersed throughout separate cross-case issues.

According to Yin (2003), the case study is preferred in examining contemporary events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. The case study’s unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence, like documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations. For case studies, five components of research design are especially important: a study’s questions, its propositions (if any), its unit(s) of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2003, p. 21). In designing the case study, all these components have been dealt with.

## THREE INTERNATIONAL BASED IT OUTSOURCING RELATIONSHIPS

The following three subsections have the purpose of presenting the outsourcing ventures and revealing company specific data from the discussions of the outsourcing relationships. The overview essentially

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