

# Learning from Case Studies

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## Content

- A Case Study in Salford Local Government
- Learning from the past and present
  - Case studies
    - Case study research design
    - Conducting case studies
    - Collecting the evidence. Using it.
    - Relative advantages/disadvantages
- Scenarios for the future
  - The importance of pre-determined elements
    - Shell and the history of scenarios

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- A Case Study in Salford Local Government
  - Customer Services & Benefits
    - From 300 recommendations to 4\* and a Beacon

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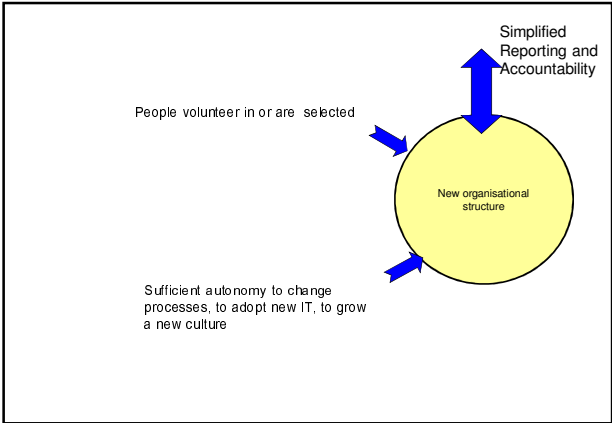
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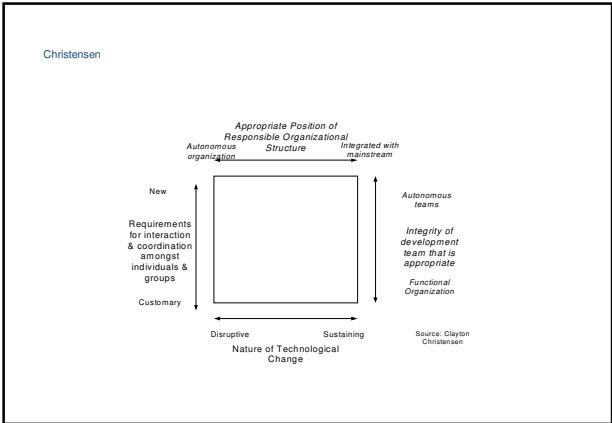
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- Elements of the Case Study
1. A simplified and controlled management structure (a recognised and patrolled boundary)
  2. Mandate
  3. Accountability
  4. Sufficient Resources
  5. Brand/Set of Symbols
  6. Ritual

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- Learning from the past and present
  - Case studies
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    - Relative advantages/disadvantages

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### Definition of a Case Study

- The term 'case study' has multiple meanings. It can be used to describe a detailed study of a single social unit (e.g. a case study of a particular organization) or to describe a research method.
- Yin defines a case study as an empirical enquiry that:
  - investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
  - the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 1994).
- Case study research in business uses empirical evidence from one or more organizations where an attempt is made to study the subject matter in context.
- The purpose of case study research in business and management is to use empirical evidence from real people in real organizations to make an original contribution to knowledge

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### Definition: Components

- Strategy
- Empirical investigation
- A particular contemporary phenomenon
- Within its real life context
- Using multiple sources of evidence

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**Characteristics of Case Study**

- **Focus on depth rather than breadth:** details on possible one instance of phenomenon investigated.
- **Natural setting:** it is examined in its natural setting.
- **Holistic study:** focuses on complexity of relationship, interconnected – not individual.
- **Multiple sources and methods:** wide range of data source.
- **In business and management:** case study research almost always involves a firm or organization

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**Designing the Learning**

1. What is the phenomenon being studied? Define the case – What are the boundaries?
2. What are the research questions?
3. Who are the key players?
4. What are the key social, economic, ecological, political factors? (Describe the context).
5. What data will be required?
6. How was/will data be collected?
7. How was/will data be analysed?
8. What will be the utility of study results? For whom?
9. How will study results be disseminated?

Case Study Workshop 2007  
John C. Platt, Oregon State University

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**Basic Principles of a Case Study**

- Case study examines a phenomenon in its natural setting, employing multiple methods of data collection to gather information one or few entities (people, groups, organizations).
- There are three types of case study research
  - Exploratory: (to discover). Is a pilot study that can be used as a basis for formulating more precise questions or testable hypotheses.
  - Descriptive: (to describe) Is an attempt to describe, for example what happens when a new product is developed and launched in the market.
  - Explanatory: (to test, to explain, or to compare ). Is often contrasted with prediction and prescription, is usually considered less prestigious in scientific circles.

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**Positivist Case Studies**

- **Good case study design is vital**
- **Yin (1994) suggests five components of good case study design:**
  1. a study's questions
  2. its propositions, if any
  3. its unit(s) of analysis
  4. the logic linking the data to the propositions
  5. the criteria for interpreting the findings

**Interpretive Case Studies**

- Interpretive case studies generally attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them
- Interpretive case studies define quality in terms of the plausibility of the story and the overall argument (not validity and reliability)
- Interpretive case studies focus on the social construction of reality – how and why people see the world the way they do

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**Conducting case studies**

- Make sure that you find an interesting case
- Desired skills of the investigator:
  - Good knowledge of the phenomenon
  - Sensitivity for novel & unexpected issues in data collection
  - Asking good questions
  - Being a good "listener"
  - Adaptiveness & flexibility
- **A case study protocol** should be essential part of every case study project
  - A protocol contains the instrument for the research, but also the procedures and general rules that should be followed using the instrument:
  - Overview of the study project (objectives, issues, readings, literature & research)
  - Field procedures (access to field sites, sources of information)
  - Case study questions posed to INVESTIGATORS; key classifications; suggestions for likely sources of evidence (not the literal questions to be asked)
  - A guide for the case study report
- Gather rich data and try to establish the context

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**Collecting the evidence**

- Qualitative or Quantitative or Mixed
- Determining boundaries
- Use multiple sources of evidence: data triangulation
- Develop a case study protocol (Yin, 1994)
- Pilot cases may be a suitable strategy
- Sources of evidence:
  - Documents (letters, agendas, progress reports)
  - Archival records (Service records, organizational charts, budgets etc.)
  - Interviews (typically open-ended, but also focused, structured & surveys are possible)
  - Direct observations (formal or casual; useful to have multiple observers)
  - Participant observation (assuming a role in the situation & getting an inside view of the events)
  - Physical artefacts

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**Advantages of Case Study**

- Appropriate for complex problems
- Include contextual influences
- Provision of deep and comprehensive analysis
- An holistic study; the researcher focuses on the complexity of relationships and processes and how they are interconnected and inter-related, rather than trying to isolate individual factors.
- Case study can be of particular value in the applied social sciences where research often aims to provide practitioners with tools. i.e. consultants providing recommendations for practitioners.
  - It can deal with complex situation
  - It is appropriate for situations where we have little controls
  - Suitable for both theory building and testing
  - Allows to show complexities and explore alternative
  - Produce data that is close to people's experience
  - No clearly defined boundaries

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**Disadvantages of a Case Study**

- Case studies lack statistical reliability and validity.
- Case studies can be used to generate hypotheses but not to test them.
- Generalizations cannot be made on the basis of case studies
  - Purpose is to generalize to theoretical propositions, not to population as in statistical research
  - The presence of researcher can affect how people behave
  - There are no specific rules to follow
- Lack of systematic handling of data -> Systematic reporting of all evidence
- Case study research can be time consuming: Take too long, end up with unreadable documents -> Time limits & writing formula depend on the choices of investigators
- A disadvantage of case study research is that it can be difficult to gain access to the particular company or group of companies that you want to study
- Another disadvantage is that the researcher has no control over the situation

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- Scenarios for the future
  - The importance of pre-determined elements
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### The Importance of Pre-Determined Elements

- Things that have happened and can be understood and that will affect the future.
- Rigorous personal analysis (Pierre Wack, Shell)
- Identifying pre-determined elements and working them into plausible scenarios enables us to prepare for the future.
- Hence case study learning becomes learning about the future.

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### The Importance of Pre-Determined Elements

- Statistical data about benefits claiming
- Housing condition
- Views expressed, convictions and passions revealed amongst office staff
- Anecdotes of interaction between claimants and officers
  - Distilling and personalisation of the lessons so that multiple, coherent scenarios can be drawn out.

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### Shell

- Oil Crisis 1970s
- Assumptions had been of expansion
- Would suppliers act in concert?
- The Shah of Iran / OPEC / Israel etc.

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**Guru**  
**Pierre Wack**

Aug 29th 2008 Like 2 Tweet 0

Pierre Wack (1922-1997) was an unconventional French oil executive who developed the use of scenario planning (see [article](#)) at Royal Dutch Shell's London headquarters in the 1970s. So successful was he that the Anglo-Dutch oil giant was able to anticipate not just one Arab-induced oil shock during that decade, but two.

By the standards of Shell executives, Wack was wacky. He almost invariably had an incense stick burning in his office and his own favourite guru was not Peter Drucker or Douglas McGregor but a bizarre bald Russian called Georges Gurdjieff.

19-10-2005 © A. T. Wood-Harper 2005

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**Shell**

- Oil Crisis 1970s
- Assumptions had been of expansion
- Would suppliers act in concert?
- The Shah of Iran / OPEC / Israel etc.
- The South African CV
  - Clem Sunter
  - Mont Fleur
  - Adam Kahane

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**Learning from Case Studies**

**Past, Present & Future.**

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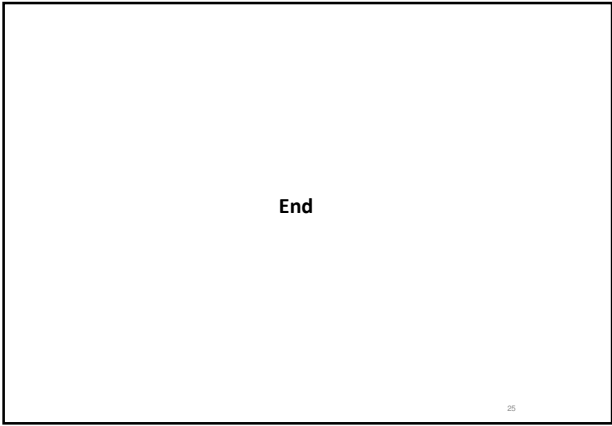
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