



# *BRINGING CASE STUDIES BACK IN: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS*

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*Lorraine Eden  
Charles F. Hermann  
Dan Li  
Texas A&M University*

**For presentation at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual JIBS Frontiers  
Conference, Michigan State University  
9-18-2004**

# *What Motivated this Paper?*

## **Selection from a desk reject letter from JIBS.....**

...The papers [published in JIBS] split into three categories (1) pure theory, (2) **theory applied to cases**, and (3) theory applied empirically using econometrics...Almost all the papers have a **research question, literature review, and theory development section with hypotheses/propositions...**

The issues surrounding case based (qualitative) research in social science journals have been discussed for some time now since **most journals publish few case studies. JIBS also publishes few case studies, but does not automatically reject them.** The key issue is **whether the paper makes a contribution to the literature** in terms of theory, first, and if the answer to that question is 'yes', then, the second question is **whether the case study successfully adds value to the theory.....**

# The Puzzle.....

- **Why are so many case studies not acceptable in JIBS, not even meeting minimal criteria to go out for first review?**
  - Answer #1: Case studies do not belong in IB research and should not be published in JIBS.
  - Answer #2: Case studies do belong in IB research and should be publishable in JIBS, but are typically poorly done.
- **If the correct answer is #2, how can we improve the quality of case studies in international business and increase their acceptability in JIBS?**

# The Research Case Study

- The case study is a “**research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings**” (Eisenhardt, 1989: 534).
- Case studies can involve single or multiple cases, and even a single case can contain multiple levels of analysis.
- Case study data collection methods typically include archives, interviews, surveys and observations.
- While case studies can include both qualitative and quantitative methods, traditionally case studies are seen as a **qualitative research method**.


# Unit of Analysis

## NOTE

**The unit of analysis here is the research case study not the teaching case study; that is, we focus on case studies that are done to “contribute to our knowledge as social scientists of “individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena”. (Yin, Case Study Research, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, 2003: 1)**

# Research Questions

- *Are case studies an appropriate methodology for IB research?*
- *What proportion of articles in top IB journals are case studies, or more generally, use qualitative research methods?*
- *Are there lessons from other disciplines that could inform case studies in IB?*
- *What is a “good” case study design – and how as reviewers and editors do we know one when we see one?*



# 1. Are Case Studies an Appropriate Methodology for IB Research?

# Research Methods

- **Conceptual** - literature reviews, conceptual frameworks, mapping and economic/financial modeling.
- **Quantitative** - papers using surveys or secondary data that were analyzed using statistical packages
- **Qualitative** - theory-building and theory-testing approaches based on qualitative data
- **Joint** - combination of qualitative & quantitative methods

# *Quantitative Research*

- **Quantitative research typically follows the deductive method. This involves:**
  - 1. Statement of the problem and why it's important**
  - 2. Literature review**
  - 3. Theory development with testable and falsifiable hypotheses**
  - 4. Collection of data (typically secondary data or survey)**
  - 5. Analysis of data using descriptive statistics and/or econometrics to test the hypotheses**
  - 6. Discussion of the implications**
  - 7. Conclusions**

# Qualitative Research

Case studies are part of a broader class of research methods that are qualitative. Qualitative research can be *inductive* or *deductive*. Typical methods for data collection and analysis include:

- **Case studies**
- participant observation
- content analysis
- discourse analysis
- focus groups
- Narrative (unstructured) interviews
- archival research

# *Qualitative Research “Gets No Respect”*

Marschan-Piekkari and Welch, 2004 (Handbook on Qualitative Research Methods for International Business, 2004) argue that:

***“qualitative research still remains a minority and even marginalized pursuit within IB, and one which often carries the stigma of being a poor career move”.***

Why? They suggest two reasons for the low status of qualitative research in the IB profession; first, that **IB scholars do not universally accept qualitative methods as legitimate science**, and second, that the **North American scholars prefer ‘hard science’**, which they equate with quantitative data.

## *More Specifically ... Criticisms of Case Studies*

- **Case studies are seen as descriptive and lacking in analytical rigor.**
- **Case studies may not be generalizable (they do not cumulate) so that overall learning in terms of theory building may be small. Moreover, generalizing from a small number of case studies may lead to errors in theory development.**
- **It may be difficult to replicate existing case studies, and therefore difficult to assess their validity.**
- **Case studies may suffer from a degrees-of-freedom problem. That is, there are few observations but many independent variables so that a unique solution cannot be observed.**
- **Pragmatic issue: Case studies are extremely labor-intensive research, particularly if it involves field work and interviews. International case studies are expensive, both in time and money.**

# *Qualitative Research Should Be More Appreciated*

Compared to survey methods, qualitative research permits **deeper cross-cultural understanding** and may be **less affected by cultural bias and ethnocentric assumptions** of the researcher (Marschan-Piekkari and Welch, 2004: 8).

Research instruments can be **tailored to the particular research question and location** where the research is **conducted**. For example, in developing countries where **secondary datasets are much less available** and **respondents may have little experience with surveys**, qualitative methods may be more appropriate (Marschan-Piekkari and Welch, 2004: 8).

### **IB research as a discipline includes as three areas:**

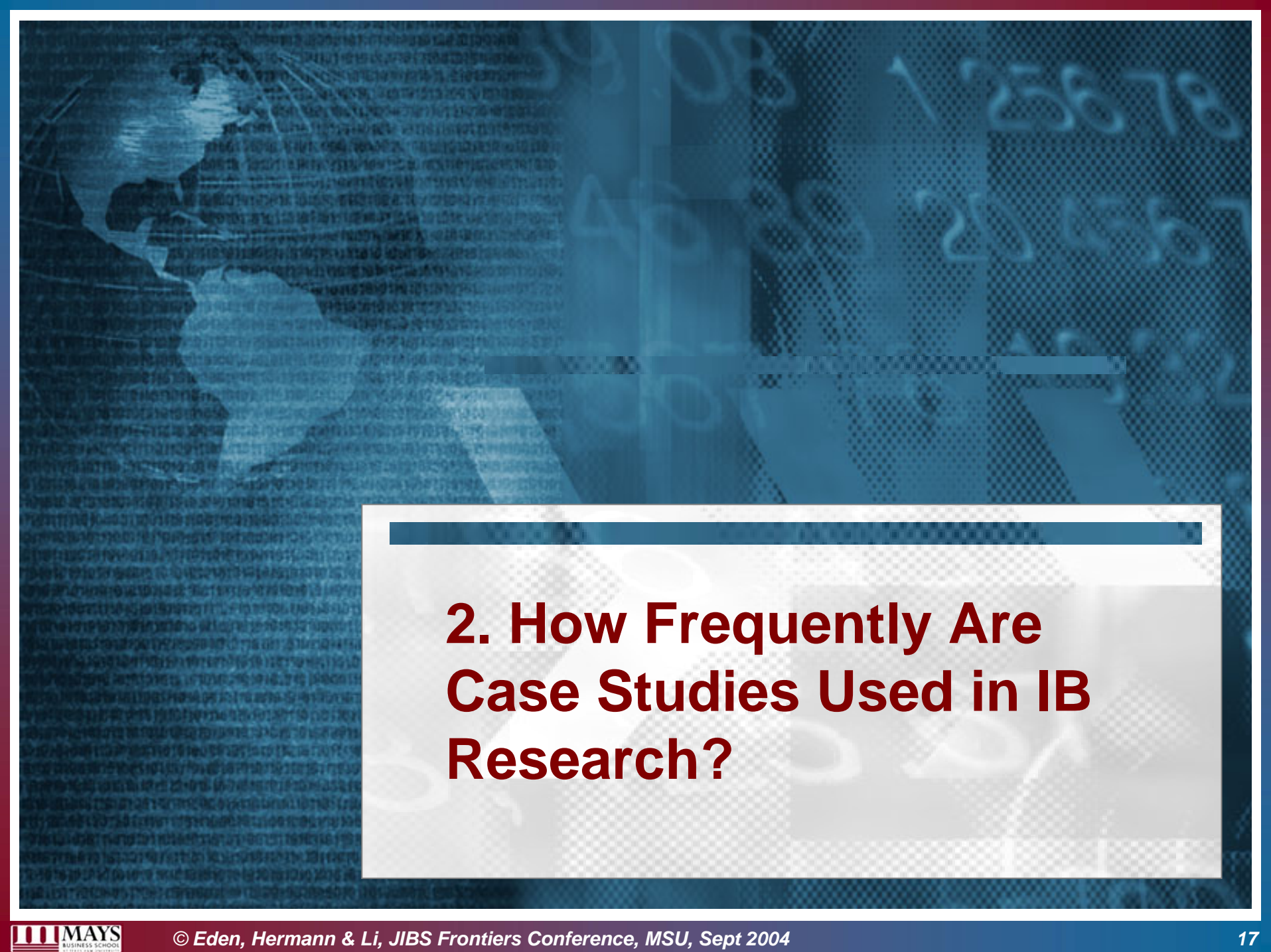
- the **cross-border activities of firms**, including but not limited to trade, finance, FDI, expatriate workers, technology flows, and so on. Examples are exporting activities of small and medium-sized enterprises, international technology transfers, FDI flows.
- The **international environment of business** in terms of its impact on firms, including, for example, national and international policies, institutions, and organizations that affect firms. Work on firms in emerging market economies with weak institutions is an example.
- The **multinational enterprise** as an organizational form, with its strategies, structures, activities and its interrelationships with other organizations and institutions; e.g., global strategy, organizational structures, governance patterns of MNEs and MNE-state relations.

## *IB Research May Be Well Suited for Qualitative Methods*

- IB is a **relatively new discipline** with fewer, well-established theories than other social science disciplines.
- **IB research is “cross-everything”**; that is, cross-border, cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural, cross-functional. Each of these requires the research to understand the “terrain” on both sides of the “border”. Few scholars are willing to invest the time and effort required to have deep knowledge of more than one discipline.
- IB research is **“messy” and complex** in terms of relationships, linkages, organizations, processes.
- IB is about **relaxing “time, space and context”**.

## *Conclusion*

- **IB research may be particularly well suited to qualitative methods, especially case studies.**
- **The issue is how to design and perform high-quality case studies that can test and build IB theory.**



## **2. How Frequently Are Case Studies Used in IB Research?**

# *Journal Selection*

- **We started with DuBois & Reeb's (JIBS, 2000) list of IB journals.**
- **We selected journals with articles falling in the general scope of international business and excluded journals rooted in a single discipline (e.g. *Journal of International Marketing*).**
- **Our sample consisted of five IB journals:**
  - **The Journal of International Business Studies**
  - **Management International Review**
  - **The Journal of World Business (formerly the Columbia Journal of World Business)**
  - **International Business Review, and**
  - **Multinational Business Review.**
- **We included all issues from 1993 through 2003.**
- **Calls for Papers, Editorial Statements, Book Reviews, and similar items, were excluded.**

# *Method v. Evidence*

Previous studies of research methods in IB/IM focus on the three basic types of methods (conceptual, qualitative and quantitative). (See, for example, the Andersen & Skaates and Welch & Welch chapters in Marschan-Piekkari and Welch, 2004.)

We differentiate **method** from **evidence**.

**METHODS:** conceptual (CCP), qualitative (QUAL), quantitative (QUANT) and joint (QUAL + QUANT).

**EVIDENCE :** Qualitative (words); quantitative (numbers).

# Methods v Evidence

CONCEPTUAL PAPERS		PAPERS USING QUALITATIVE OR QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGIES		
		Methodology		
		QL (QUALITATIVE)	JOINT (QL & QN)	QN (QUANTITATIVE)
PAPERS USING QUALITATIVE OR QUANTITATIVE DATA	QL (QUALITATIVE)	<b>Cell 1: QL*QL</b>  Qualitative studies with text interpretation	n/a	n/a
	QN (QUANTITATIVE)	<b>Cell 2: QL*QN</b>  Qualitative studies with quantitative evidence	<b>Cell 3: JT*QN</b>  Studies with joint methodologies and quantitative evidence	<b>Cell 4: QN*QN</b>  Quantitative studies with quantitative evidence

## *Distribution of Papers by Year, 1993-2003*

year	JIBS	MIR	CJWB/JWB	IBR	MBR	Total
1993	<b>36</b>	35	42	20	16	<b>149</b>
1994	<b>28</b>	32	32	28	21	<b>141</b>
1995	<b>39</b>	30	36	28	25	<b>158</b>
1996	<b>43</b>	19	32	33	27	<b>154</b>
1997	<b>31</b>	17	22	33	20	<b>123</b>
1998	<b>39</b>	23	24	32	19	<b>137</b>
1999	<b>41</b>	41	25	29	24	<b>160</b>
2000	<b>41</b>	16	23	37	25	<b>142</b>
2001	<b>47</b>	16	22	35	20	<b>140</b>
2002	<b>43</b>	20	27	36	29	<b>155</b>
2003	<b>37</b>	25	27	37	19	<b>145</b>
Total	<b>425</b>	274	312	348	245	<b>1,604</b>

# Separating Methods from Evidence in IB Journals

CONCEPTUAL PAPERS		PAPERS USING QUALITATIVE OR QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGIES		
		Methodology		
		QL (QUALITATIVE)	JOINT (QL & QN)	QN (QUANTITATIVE)
<b>All: 374 (23.32%)</b> <b>JIBS: 73 (17.18%)</b> <b>Cases: 0 (0%)</b>				
PAPERS USING QUALITATIVE OR QUANTITATIVE DATA	QL (QUALITATIVE)	<b>Cell 1: QL*QL</b> <b>Qualitative studies with text interpretation</b>  <b>All: 181 (11.28%)</b> <b>JIBS: 15 (3.53%)</b> <b>Cases: 131 (66.16%)</b>	n/a	n/a
	QN (QUANTITATIVE)	<b>Cell 2: QL*QN</b> <b>Qualitative studies with quantitative evidence</b>  <b>All: 97 (6.05%)</b> <b>JIBS: 13 (3.06%)</b> <b>Cases: 60 (30.30%)</b>	<b>Cell 3: JT*QN</b> <b>Studies with joint methodologies and quantitative evidence</b>  <b>All: 24 (1.5%)</b> <b>JIBS: 3 (0.07%)</b> <b>Cases: 7 (3.54%)</b>	<b>Cell 4: QN*QN</b> <b>Quantitative studies with quantitative evidence</b>  <b>All: 928 (57.86%)</b> <b>JIBS: 321 (75.53%)</b> <b>Cases: 0 (0%)</b>

# *JIBS Publishes Fewer Qualitative and More Quantitative Papers than the Average across the Five Journals*

Paper Category		Journal					Total
		JIBS	MIR	CJWB/JWB	IBR	MBR	
QUAL	No	28	26	114	56	54	278
	% row	10.07	9.35	41.01	20.14	19.42	100
	% column	6.59	9.49	36.54	16.09	22	17.33
QUANT	No	321	167	89	212	139	928
	% row	34.59	18	9.59	22.84	14.98	100
	% column	75.53	60.95	28.53	60.92	56.73	57.86
JOINT(QUAL & QUANT)	No	3	5	2	11	3	24
	% row	12.5	20.83	8.33	45.83	12.5	100
	% column	0.71	1.82	0.64	3.16	1	1.5
CONCEPTUAL	No	73	76	107	69	49	374
	% row	19.52	20.32	28.61	18.45	13.1	100
	% column	17.18	27.74	34.29	19.83	20	23.32
TOTAL	No	425	274	312	348	245	1,604
	% row	26.5	17.08	19.45	21.7	15.27	100
	% column	100	100	100	100	100	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(12) = 216.6180$  Pr = 0.000  
likelihood-ratio  $\chi^2(12) = 217.5821$  Pr = 0.000

# But the Distribution of Papers by Discipline Is Typical

Discipline		Journal					Total
		JIBS	MIR	CJWB/JWB	IBR	MBR	
ECON	No	83	40	73	44	59	299
	% row	27.76	13.38	24.41	14.72	19.73	100
	% column	19.53	14.6	23.4	12.64	24.08	18.64
FINANCE	No	40	23	24	16	77	180
	% row	22.22	12.78	13.33	8.89	42.78	100
	% column	9.41	8.39	7.69	4.6	31.43	11.22
MGMT	No	166	140	124	155	63	648
	% row	25.62	21.6	19.14	23.92	9.72	100
	% column	39.06	51.09	39.74	44.54	25.71	40.4
HRM	No	46	26	55	29	10	166
	% row	27.71	15.66	33.13	17.47	6.02	100
	% column	10.82	9.49	17.63	8.33	4.08	10.35
MKTG	No	63	30	34	96	34	257
	% row	24.51	11.67	13.23	37.35	13.23	100
	% column	14.82	10.95	10.9	27.59	13.88	16.02
OTHER	No	27	15	2	8	2	54
	% row	50	27.78	3.7	14.81	3.7	100
	% column	6.35	5.47	0.64	2.3	0.82	3.37
Total	No	425	274	312	348	245	1,604
	% row	26.5	17.08	19.45	21.7	15.27	100
	% column	100	100	100	100	100	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(20) = 243.1605$ , Pr = 0.000

likelihood-ratio  $\chi^2(20) = 218.9250$ , Pr = 0.000

# There Are Differences in Methodologies across Disciplines

Paper Category		Discipline						Total
		ECON	FINANCE	MGMT	HRM	MKTG	OTHER	
QUAL	No	73	22	115	31	29	8	278
	% row	26.26	7.91	41.37	11.15	10.43	2.88	100
	% column	24.41	12.22	17.75	18.67	11.28	14.81	17.33
QUANT	No	143	119	386	94	166	20	928
	% row	15.41	12.82	41.59	10.13	17.89	2.16	100
	% column	47.83	66.11	59.57	56.63	64.59	37.04	57.86
JOINT (QUAL & QUANT)	No	1	1	12	4	6	0	24
	% row	4.17	4.17	50	16.67	25	0	100
	% column	0.33	0.56	1.85	2.41	2.33	0	1.5
CONCEPT- UAL	No	82	38	135	37	56	26	374
	% row	21.93	10.16	36.1	9.89	14.97	6.95	100
	% column	27.42	21.11	20.83	22.29	21.79	48.15	23.32
TOTAL	No	299	180	648	166	257	54	1,604
	% row	18.64	11.22	40.4	10.35	16.02	3.37	100
	% column	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

# What about the Distribution of Qualitative Studies in IB?

## JIBS Publishes Fewer Case Studies especially QL\*QN

		Journal					
		JIBS	MIR	CJWB/JWB	IBR	MBR	Total
QL*QL (cell 1) Case Studies	No	13	7	52	28	31	131
	% row	9.92	5.34	39.69	21.37	23.66	100
	% column	44.83	23.33	45.22	43.75	54.39	44.41
QL*QN (cell 2) Case Studies	No	1	8	25	6	20	60
	% row	1.67	13.33	41.67	10	33.33	100
	% column	3.45	26.67	21.74	9.38	35.09	20.34
Archival	No	5	2	5	0	0	12
	% row	41.67	16.67	41.67	0	0	100
	% column	17.24	6.67	4.35	0	0	4.07
Other Qualitative Methods	No	10	13	33	30	6	92
	% row	10.87	14.13	35.87	32.61	6.52	100
	% column	34.48	43.33	28.7	46.88	10.53	31.19
Total	No	29	30	115	64	57	295
	% row	9.83	10.17	38.98	21.69	19.32	100
	% column	100	100	100	100	100	100

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Pearson chi2(12) = 51.3669, Pr = 0.000



### **3. Are There Lessons from other Disciplines that Do Case Study Research?**

## **Eisenhardt, Building Theories from Case Study Research (AMR 1989)**

- The best-known approach to research case studies in the management field.
- The case study is a “research strategy for understanding the dynamics present within single settings”.
- Inductive, theory building - “begun as close as possible to the idea of no theory under consideration and no hypotheses to test”.
- Grounded in rich data analysis.
- Look for within-case and cross-case patterns to build theory.
- The goal is to “develop testable hypotheses and theory that are generalizable across settings”.

# *Case Studies in Organization Research*

**But despite the training in Eisenhardt's work and in the three editions of Yin's Case Study Research, qualitative methods are scarce in our management and organization journals.**

**So, few folks practise what Eisenhardt and Yin preach.....**

# Case Studies in Political Science

## Qualitative methods are also problematic in political science - the Perestroika movement (2000).

*“At the heart of this latest uprising is a decades-old split in the field over the best way to study politics. On one side are quantitative researchers who favor rigorous mathematical techniques and on the other are more traditional qualitative researchers who look at history and culture, using case studies, written documents and firsthand observations.*

*For shorthand, you can think of the feud as the **pronumber versus the nonnumber folks** (terminology that could no doubt spur a protest of its own). And **what's at stake are jobs, power and prestige.***

*Indeed, after receiving Mr. Perestroika's original e-mail message, dozens of scholars wrote back saying they had seen colleagues denied jobs and tenure and have trouble publishing their work because their research methods did not conform with the quantitative approach championed by the powerful minority that controls the association and the journal.”*

*(New York Times, Nov 4, 2000)*

# Case Studies in Political Science

## **Alexander George – The Method of Structured Focused Comparison (1979,.. (and Andrew Bennett (1997a-f, 2004))**

- **The best-known approach to research case studies in the political science field.**
- **The case study is a research strategy for understanding the dynamics present across multiple settings.**
- **Deductive theory testing and building.**
- **Look for within-case and cross-case patterns to test theory, in particular, process tracing methods for time series data and comparative analysis for cross-section data.**
- **Use multiple methods to triangulate.**
- **The goal is to “test hypotheses and develop new theory that is generalizable across settings”.**

# *The Method of Structured Focused Comparison*

- The method is “**structured**” because the researcher asks the same set of standardized, general questions of each case study. This forces the researcher to acquire information on the same constructs from each case, thus facilitating comparison across the cases and accumulation of the findings.
- The method is “**focused**” in that the analysis of the cases is selective; the researcher uses his/her theoretical lens to select what is relevant about each of the cases and highlights the relevant points. Selection of what is “relevant” about a case, in order to avoid bias, must be theoretically driven by the researcher’s underlying theoretical model and hypotheses.
- Thus, one can view SFC as primarily **grounded in underlying theory rather than grounded in the reality of the case(s)**.
- SFC requires a **tight overall top-down framework**, rather than a loose, bottom-up framework characteristic of inductive theory building case studies.

# The Method of Structured Focused Comparison

	CASE 1	CASE 2	CASE 3	TOTAL
H1	↓	↓	↓	↓
H2	→	→	→	→
H3	→	→	→	→
H4	→	→	→	→
OVERALL	→	→	→	→

The researcher first goes DOWN, evaluating each case in terms of the hypotheses, and then goes ACROSS, evaluating each hypothesis in terms of the cases.

# *Eisenhardt or George?*

- It depends – the research question should influence the methodology chosen.
- But....
- Deductive methods are more acceptable and well understood by IB researchers.
- Deductive methods are more appropriate for building theory “on the shoulders” of earlier researchers.
- Moreover, the method of Structured Focused Comparison lends itself to multi-method research that combines qualitative and quantitative methods.
- Thus, **following George rather than Eisenhardt** may lead to higher publication success in our journals and to stronger, better developed IB theories.



## 4. What Is a “Good” Case Study in IB Research?

# Case Study Recommendations

- Follow George's method of **structured focused comparison**.
- Have an **explicit research objective**.
- Conduct a **thorough literature review** that includes explicit discussion of relevant theories and propositions.
- **Build a theory** with constructs, relationships, and causation.
- **Build testable and falsifiable hypotheses** and state the empirical and/or logical tests of the hypotheses.
- Explain the **rationale for using qualitative methods** in the study.
- **Conduct multiple case studies** unless the single case lends itself to separation into unique or sequenced cases.
- Be explicit about **data selection procedures for the cases**.

# Case Study Recommendations (cont'd)

- Be as **rigorous** as possible in executing the study.
- Maintain an **accurate and complete database** that someone else could use to replicate your study.
- Explain how **type 1, 2 and 3 errors** were avoided in the study.
- Use available **analytical aids** for data analysis.
- **Triangulate data using process tracing and other techniques.**
- Where feasible, use **multiple research methods.**
- In the discussion, be explicit about the **limitations of the research.**
- Outline **suggested questions** that future researchers should examine.

# *CONCLUSION*

**We need to bring case studies back into IB research because they can be a valuable tool in our tool box of research methods.**

**But, they must be rigorously done.**

**And, as scholars, reviewers and editors, we need to know a good case study when we see one.**

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