Lecture 3

Case Study and Ethnography

Case Study Research

What is a Case?

- "A case is a sample of one."

- A case is spatially delimited and studied either at one point or over a bounded period.

- Cases can be individual, group, project, policy, institution, or program.

Definition of Case Study Research:

- A qualitative approach where the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.

- Conditions leading to more variables than data points:

1. Making an in-depth inquiry.
2. Studying conditions over long period of time.
3. Covering contextual conditions.

- Long established in healthcare, medicine, anthropology, and psychology research.

- Effective for investigating and understanding complex issues in real-world settings.

- Often considered a qualitative research method, but can also be quantitative or mixed-methods.

- Not exclusively concerned with qualitative methods.

- Describes a series of events reflecting the activity or problem as it happened.

- Power lies in using multiple sources and techniques for comprehensive depth and breadth of inquiry.

- Main data sources: Document analysis, archival records, interviews, surveys, and participant observation.

- Variety in research methods results in diverse published case studies.

Types of Triangulations:

- Data collected through different methods, commonly both qualitative and quantitative, combined in the study.

- Four distinct types:

  - Data triangulation

- Investigator triangulation

- Theory triangulation

- Methodological triangulation

- Importance of maintaining empirical intimacy.

- Triangulation means verifying your results by cross-checking with other methods of research.

Generalization (Quantitative vs. Case Study Research):

- Case studies do not necessarily include only one case; they can involve multiple cases.

- Single-case study: Describes an existing phenomenon.

- Multiple-case studies: Better for building theory; phenomenon becomes more generalizable if it occurs in multiple cases (Analytical/theoretical generalization).

- Case studies are useful for making analytical (theoretical) generalizations.

Types of Case Studies:

1. Descriptive: Describes the phenomenon of interest within its context.

2. Exploratory (Pilot): Defines questions and hypotheses or tests research procedures for further research, such as large-scale surveys. Exploratory case studies are performed before implementing a large-scale investigation.

3. Explanatory: Reveals cause-effect associations of the studied phenomena and/or how events happen.

Exploratory vs. Explanatory Case Study:

- Exploratory: Investigates complex unique phenomena lacking previous literature to guide research.

- Explanatory: Uses background literature to provide clearer research direction and pose explanatory questions.

How to Perform a Case Study:

1. Determine and Define the Research Questions:

- Establish focus/intention after intensive literature review and problem identification.

- Frame research direction in the form of questions.

- Good research questions enable achieving aims and are answerable in the research setting.

- Research questions evolve over time, but broad aims remain constant.

- Pre-defined boundaries clarify the nature, period, organization, geographical area, types of data, and data collection priorities.

2. Select the Cases and Determine Data-Gathering and Analysis Techniques:

- Select single or multiple cases reflecting research questions.

- Multiple cases allow comparisons and replication; typical cases enable findings to be generalized to theory (analytical generalization).

- Select instruments and strategies for data gathering.

- Ensure access to study sites and consider participation risks.

3. Prepare to Collect Data:

- Plan for large data volumes from multiple sources.

- Organize databases and set categories for sorting/managing data.

- Pilot studies reveal necessary changes in research design or data collection. Piloting relates to preparing to collect the data.

4. Collect Data in the Field:

- Data collection is emergent.

- Field notes are crucial.

- End data collection when sources are exhausted, categories are definitively established, or overextension occurs. Overextension is when new knowledge is far removed from the central core of viable categories initially emerged.

5. Evaluate and Analyze the Data:

- Use triangulation.

6. Prepare the Report:

- Provide contextual information and ensure anonymity of participants.

Limitations of Case Study:

- Large data volume and limited timeframe can impact depth of analysis.

- Challenging to define case boundaries in terms of time, events, and processes.

- Data volume may diverge from research focus.

- A key challenge is that large data volumes may veer away from the research focus.

- Limited generalizability.

Case Study Example:

- Study on nurses' pediatric pain management practices:

- Collected observational data, questionnaires on knowledge and task criticality.

- Analyzed datasets separately and compared.

- Found discrepancies between self-reported and observed practices.

Ethnography

Definition:

- Study of social interactions, behaviors, and perceptions within groups, teams, organizations, and communities.

- Aims to provide rich, holistic insights into people's views and actions through detailed observations and interviews.

Other Definitions:

- First-hand study of what people do and say in a specific context.

- Uses unstructured data to explore social phenomena.

- Focuses on specific culture, characteristics, and embedded information.

- Qualitative methodology using observation, interviews, and textual analysis.

- Well-established anthropological method for writing holistic cultural descriptions. Ethnography is the study of a group of people and their culture, providing a detailed picture from the perspective of natives of the given culture.

- Overcomes limitations of relying solely on interview data through triangulation. Collecting data from two clinics at the same time is considered triangulation.

Data Collection:

- Ethnographers observe and engage actively with social groups/settings.

- Use participant observation, interviews, and historical records (ethno-historic research).

- Long-term field exposure builds relationships and understanding.

- Audio and video recordings provide substantial data.

Concepts:

- Immersion: Continuous observations over time to understand evolving phenomena.

- Reflexivity: Awareness of the researcher's influence on the study and vice versa.

Steps of Ethnographic Research:

1. Planning:

- Obtain access and ethical approvals.

- Establish rapport and address ethical issues (avoidance of harm, informed consent, privacy & confidentiality).

2. Sampling:

- Use purposive sampling to select specific groups/settings.

- Study multiple individuals and actions within a setting for insightful accounts.

3. Data Collection:

- Combine document analysis, interviews, and direct participation.

- Develop close connections between fieldworkers and subjects.

- Use triangulation to compare multiple methods for deeper understanding.

4. Data Analysis:

- Analyze and compare field notes and interview transcripts for themes and meanings (Thematic analysis).

- Use descriptive analysis.

5. Write Up:

- Ensure trustworthiness by illustrating data collection and analysis steps.

- Address both emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives.

Limitations of Ethnography:

- Small sample size due to extensive involvement.

- Hawthorne Effect (altered behavior due to observation).

- Difficulty in generalizing findings to other populations.

- Acceptance of the culture being studied.

Use in Healthcare:

- Increasingly popular for studying behavior and social interactions in healthcare.

- Hospitals as unique cultures benefit from ethnographic insights into patient care and decision-making processes.

*Notes :

- Hermeneutic is not a type of ethnography.

- Ethnography uses the largest samples among qualitative methods.

- Ethnography studies phenomena in cultural context.

- It entails an interest in cultures and cultural understanding, which is a hallmark of ethnographic research.

- Case study is bounded in time and context.