

REVIEW ESSAY

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods (4th Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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Yin begins the fourth edition of his 6 chapter book by explaining that case study research is a “linear, but iterative process.” This statement is supported by a visual which is displayed on the first page of each chapter. Each chapter contains one step in the linear process of case design (planning, designing, preparing, collecting, analyzing, and sharing) as well as it highlights how each step requires the researcher to review and re-examine former decisions. As Yin points out, each chapter can stand alone, yet it is linked to the other stages of the research process.

In Chapter One, *How to know whether and when to use case studies as a research method*, Yin compares case study methods with other forms of research: experimental, survey, archival, analytic, and historical. The decision to use each of these methods is explained in a chart on page 8 which compares researchers’ control of events and the degree of currency of the data collected. The author explains that case study research focuses on answering questions that ask how or why, and where the researcher has little control of events that are happening at present. He elaborates that case study is much more than this; it must have a logical design, pre-described data collection techniques, and pre-determined data-analysis methods.

Chapter Two, *Identifying your case(s) and establishing the logic of your case study*, describes optional case study designs and the choices that the researcher makes when deciding. The form of the case study is reflected in decisions about 5 components: the nature of the research questions, the propositions, the analyses of the data that will take place, the logic plan which links the data to the propositions, and the criteria for analysis. Yin points out

that a major goal at this stage of the case study is to identify the theory that will be examined in the case study, and to list rival hypothesis that might account for the data. This, Yin argues, helps to build a strong case study plan and improves the internal validity of the study. The four case study designs that Yin describes are holistic (single unit of analysis) single case designs, embedded (multiple unit of analysis) single case designs, holistic multiple-case designs, and embedded multiple-case designs. Five reasons why single case designs might be selected are due to their criticalness, extremeness, typicalness, revelatory power, or longitudinal possibility. The reason for the selection of a multiple-case study design is replication, or for understanding the factors that allowed for successful outcomes in one case, but less successful outcomes in another.

In addition to creating a design for the study, Yin explains that much preparation must occur before the case study can begin. In chapter Three, *What you need to prepare before starting to collect case study data*, Yin describes in detail how to recognize the skills needed by a researcher, how to train investigators, how to create a case study protocol, how to select potential cases for investigation, and how to conduct pilot studies. It is especially important for the reader of this book to take note of the section on how to create a case study protocol as this influences the outcome of the case study.

Yin describes data collection in chapter Four, *The principles you should follow in working with six sources of evidence*. The six sources include: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. Unlike many other books which simply describe data sources, Yin also describes three principles of data collection: using multiple sources, creating a database of materials for later use by the researcher or interested others, and maintaining a chain of evidence. These three principles are linked to concepts frequently studied in the literature: triangulation, reliability, and quality control.

In chapter Five, *How to start your analyses, your analytic choices, and how they work*, Yin explains that a common mistake made by young researchers is that they collect evidence with little understanding of how they are going to analyze it. He argues that the researcher should establish this at the very early stages of conducting a research plan when writing the case study protocol. By establishing data analysis early, the research is accomplishing many important tasks which will help with the final written product. Rather than elaborately discussing how to use current qualitative research software, Yin tells of the four main strategies for analysis: examining theoretical propositions, creating a description, using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data, and examining rival theories. In addition to this, he also covers analytic techniques and logic models.

When researchers need to report findings of a case study, they must keep many important variables in mind. Yin explains in chapter Six, *How and what to compose*, case studies, although less likely to be professionally published than other kinds of research, can also address a wider audience. He recommends that researchers begin with the end in mind; they should start drafting the outline of the final report before the case study has begun. Yin tells his readers that his goal in the chapter is not to provide general information on writing style that is available in other textbooks, but rather to specifically outline special

issues in writing case studies. Awareness of one's audience is essential in disseminating one's case study results. In chapter six, Yin describes various formats of publications as well as how to incorporate the case study into a larger mixed-methods study. Yin also debates the use of pseudonyms in case study research. Finally, he describes factors which make some case studies exemplary.

There are three counsels that I have for this book. First, although Yin tells the reader throughout the book that they must consider propositions at every stage of the case study, he does not give a definition of this term. I would have appreciated if Yin had offered some suggestions on how to write appropriate propositions. Secondly, I would have liked Yin to describe better how to integrate theory within case study methodology. Thirdly, Yin only outlines one ethical consideration specific to case study research: the use of pseudonyms. However, he also tells the reader that case study methodology is unique in that it can appeal to a wider variety of audiences than other research methods. Therefore, there must be other ethical considerations for researchers than just the use of pseudonyms.

I have few critiques of this book, but many commendations. First, it is very reader-friendly. The style of writing is clear and engaging. The material is very easy to follow and is presented in a logical format. This occurs at every stage from the simple visuals, to the selection of the material, to the subject headings. Second, I appreciate the links that were made between the chapters. Yin does not simply mention one topic and then ignore it for the remainder of the book. Clearly, case study is an iterative process and this is apparent when one reads this book. Third, I enjoy how Yin compares case study to other forms of research. I understand much more clearly now how this form of research is similar to, but also different from other methods. Finally, I applaud Yin's decision to only include information that is specific to case study, and leave general information to general methodology textbooks. ■