Case Studies

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Evaluator’s Lunch & Learn, Ottawa
May 27, 2008
Agenda

• What is it?
• Case Study Methods
• Link to Evaluation
• Discussion & Questions
• Other Items (time permitting): Booking space
Definitions

• Case study is an in-depth examination of a single instance or event: a case
• A systematic way of looking at a phenomena, collecting data, analyzing information and reporting results
• Case study has been defined as a methodology, a research strategy or an object of study
• Popular in psychology, medicine, law, political science and evaluation
• Stake (2005) states that case study research is not a methodology but a choice of what is to be studied
• Others including Yin (2003) present it as a strategy of inquiry or methodology
Yin’s definition is the most widely used: case study as an *empirical inquiry* that

- *Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when*

- *The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident*

- *Is an all encompassing method covering data collection techniques, logic of the design and specific approaches to data analysis*
• Although similar, the case study approach is not ethnography ...... it is not narrative research
The Purpose of the Case Study is to:

• To study intensely one set (or unit) of something – programs, cities, worksites – as a distinct whole
• To reveal in depth experience of program users
• Reveals a lot about the process and outcome at certain sites and the way in which these interrelate
• Can clarify impacts that your program either had or did not have
• Can provide useful information for program revisions
Types of Case Studies

• Case studies are distinguished by the size of the bounded case
  – One individual
  – Several individuals
  – A group
  – An entire program or an activity
• Can also be distinguished in terms of the intent of the case analysis
  – Single instrumental case study
  – Collective or multiple case study
  – Intrinsic case study: the focus is on the case itself (e.g. evaluating a program)
• Single instrumental case study
  – the researcher focuses on an issue or concern and selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue

• Collective or multiple case study
  – one issue or case concern is selected but the researcher selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue

• Intrinsic case study
  – The focus is on the case itself e.g. evaluating a program because the case presents an unusual or unique situation
Case Study Methodology
Case Study Methods
Overview

1. Decide if a case study approach is appropriate for the evaluation/research problem
2. Identify your case(s)
3. Collect the data
4. Analyze & interpret the data
5. Report the findings
Step 1: Decide if CS is the right approach

- Do you deliberately want to cover the contextual conditions?
- Do you want to study something intensely, in-depth?
- Do you want to answer “what happened” questions?
Step 2: Identify your case(s)

- Depends on the research question/type of evaluation
- A case can be an individual, a classroom, a program, an organization or an event
- Can be single or multiple units e.g., a program or multiple organizations providing an intervention; one person or many people
- Is a subset of a distinct whole
Identify your case(s) (continued)

- Can have a single case study or multiple case studies
- Multiple case studies: compare/contrast the findings
- Have to establish a rationale for your purposeful sampling strategy for having selected that case (Case studies almost always use purposive samples)
Step 3: Collect Data

• Is usually very extensive
• Draws on multiple sources:
  - Primary data (interviews, observations, survey data) AND
  - Secondary data (program documents, archival records, program related materials e.g, promotional materials, procedures)
• While is considered a qualitative methodology, can collect both qualitative and quantitative data (Mixed Methods)
Step 4: Analyze Data

Stake (1995) lists different forms of data analysis (as described in Creswell, 2007):

• **Categorical aggregation**: look for multiple “instances” from the data, hoping that “issue relevant” meanings will emerge

• **Direct interpretation**: look for a single instance and draw meaning from it
Data analysis (continued)

- **Patterns**: establish patterns and look for a correspondence between 2 or more categories (can develop 2x2 tables to show relationship between 2 categories)
- Yin talks about cross-case analysis, looking for similarities and differences among cases
- **Naturalistic generalizations**: “learnings” from the case, either to apply for your situation or to a population of cases
Data analysis

• Write the “case report”: Provide a detailed description of the case and the context in which it occurred
• Give an aggregation of the data which are then collapsed into themes
• Write the “Case Study”: Provide generalizations about the case in terms of themes and how they compare/contrast with the published literature on the subject under investigation
Step 5: Report the CS findings

Stake’s approach

• Open with a vignette to draw the reader in
• Identify the issue, purpose & method
• Describe extensively – the case & context
• Present the issues, so that the reader understands the complexities. Can add in links to other research. Can also probe several issues further.
• Summarize your understanding of the case
• End with a closing vignette
Using Case Study in Evaluation
Using Case Study in Evaluation

- Evaluation is different from other types of research:
  - Case can be the program – often no need to generalize beyond it
  - Evaluation is applied, so *use* is an important consideration
Using Case Study in Evaluation

Useful types of case study for evaluation (Davey, 1991):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Case Study</th>
<th>Use in Evaluation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illustrative</td>
<td>Describe context, introduce program through specific example</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exploratory</td>
<td>Identify questions, select measurement constructs, develop measures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical instance</td>
<td>Examine situation of unique interest</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Call a generalized theory into question</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program implementation</td>
<td>Discern whether implementation is in accordance with intent</td>
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<td>Program effects</td>
<td>Determine impact of programs, reasons for success or failure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cumulative</td>
<td>Aggregate information from several sites</td>
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Using Case Study in Evaluation

• When to use case study approach:
  – Certain types of evaluation uses
  – Certain program characteristics
## Using Case Study in Evaluation

- **Types of evaluation use:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Evaluation Use</th>
<th>Evaluation Approach</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accountability: Did it work?</td>
<td>Standards-based evaluation (Multi-site) program effects case study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accountability: Was it implemented according to plan?</td>
<td>Program implementation case study Audit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal learning / improvement</td>
<td>Case study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generation of knowledge</td>
<td>Depends</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Using Case Study in Evaluation

• Characteristics of programs:
  – Unique program
  – New setting
  – Unique outcome
  – Unpredictable environment
  – Lack of agreement among stakeholders about program
  – Program interacts with environment
  – Variations in implementation across sites
  – Low incidence programs
Using Case Study in Evaluation

• Benefits of the case study approach:
  – Versus quantitative approaches*:
    • Does not require control over program
    • Greater level of detail on context & implementation
  – Versus qualitative approaches*:
    • Answers the “how” and “why” questions
  – Opportunities for mixed methods
  – Empowerment and relationship-building**
  – Specification of measurable outcomes**

* Yin, 1986
** Spath & Pine, 2004
Using Case Study in Evaluation

• Tips to using case study approach in evaluation:
  – Ensuring common understanding of “case study”
    • Methodology
    • Rationale and use
  – Getting agreement on which cases to select
  – Ongoing communication to minimize surprises
Challenges to Case Study Approach

- Complex
- Overwhelming amount of data
- Time-consuming & requires a lot of resources
- Defining the case
- Setting the “boundaries” of the case – some cases do not have clear beginning and ending points, so you have to set boundaries to adequately surround the case
Challenges to Case Study Approach

• External validity:
  – Defending a single example as sufficient evidence

• Internal validity:
  – Having only partial data
  – Reviewers challenging the meaning you ascribe

• Aggregation of data
# Case Studies and Design Tests

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Case Study Tactics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construct validity</td>
<td>Triangulation</td>
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<td>Chain of evidence</td>
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<td>Critical review</td>
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<td>Internal validity</td>
<td>Pattern matching</td>
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<td>Explanation building</td>
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<td>Time series analysis</td>
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<td>External validity</td>
<td>Multiple case studies</td>
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<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Case study protocol</td>
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<td>Case study database</td>
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Yin, 1986
Discussion
Reflection/Discussion Questions

• Is a Case Study a process or a product?
• Given the challenges of the CS approach, how would you 'sell' it to a client?
• Should case studies be more “objective” (as with Yin) or “responsive” (as with Stake and others)?
References


