

Case Study Methods for Evaluators **AEA/CDC 2010 Summer Evaluation Institute**

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Description: Case Study Methods allow evaluators to approach program assessment from a powerful and flexible design palette. While often heavily steeped in the use of qualitative methods, case studies also may include the use of quantitative data. The approach is particularly rich for tinting and shading the effects of programs as well as investigating important program questions in depth.

This interactive, three-hour session will provide participants with an overview and examples of case study research methods as they apply to evaluation settings. Through the development and expansion of sample case studies, by the end of the session participants will:

- comprehend the role of case study methods within the context of other evaluation approaches;
- be able to describe the elements of case study research and identify the major strengths and weaknesses of case study methods;
- understand the sequential, operational guidelines for implementing case study research;
- review techniques for establishing the validity and reliability of case study data
- strengthen data gathering and analysis skills through use of techniques common to case study research

CASE STUDY METHODS DEFINITION:

Case study methods are a research approach that can be used to investigate issues relevant to a **bounded system**. This means that the focus of a case study is usually bounded by place, focus, and time. In terms of program evaluation, any program can be defined as a bounded system or case. Thus, technically all program evaluations are case studies and the selected evaluation questions comprise the relevant issues to be investigated.

More typically, however, case study methods are an important tool used in program evaluation to investigate essential aspects that require detailed explanations about the contextual dynamics in which program outcomes occur.

(See Wake County Case Study p. 6)

CASE STUDY CONFUSIONS

Case Study Methods are a research approach (Stake, 1995, 2005; Yin, 2002). However, some people use the term case study synonymously when they mean "example." So someone wants to investigate factors promoting good nutrition and use a particular agency as their "case." Still others will talk about using "case studies" for instructional purposes. These are real or constructed situations that are used to teach students important lessons. This approach is commonly used in medical education, which constructs cases to hone diagnostic skills.

CASE STUDY METHODS ELEMENTS

Describe the Case

Provide the Context for the Case

Propose Relevant Issues & Select Data Gathering Strategies

Select Samples

Gather Data

Summarize Findings

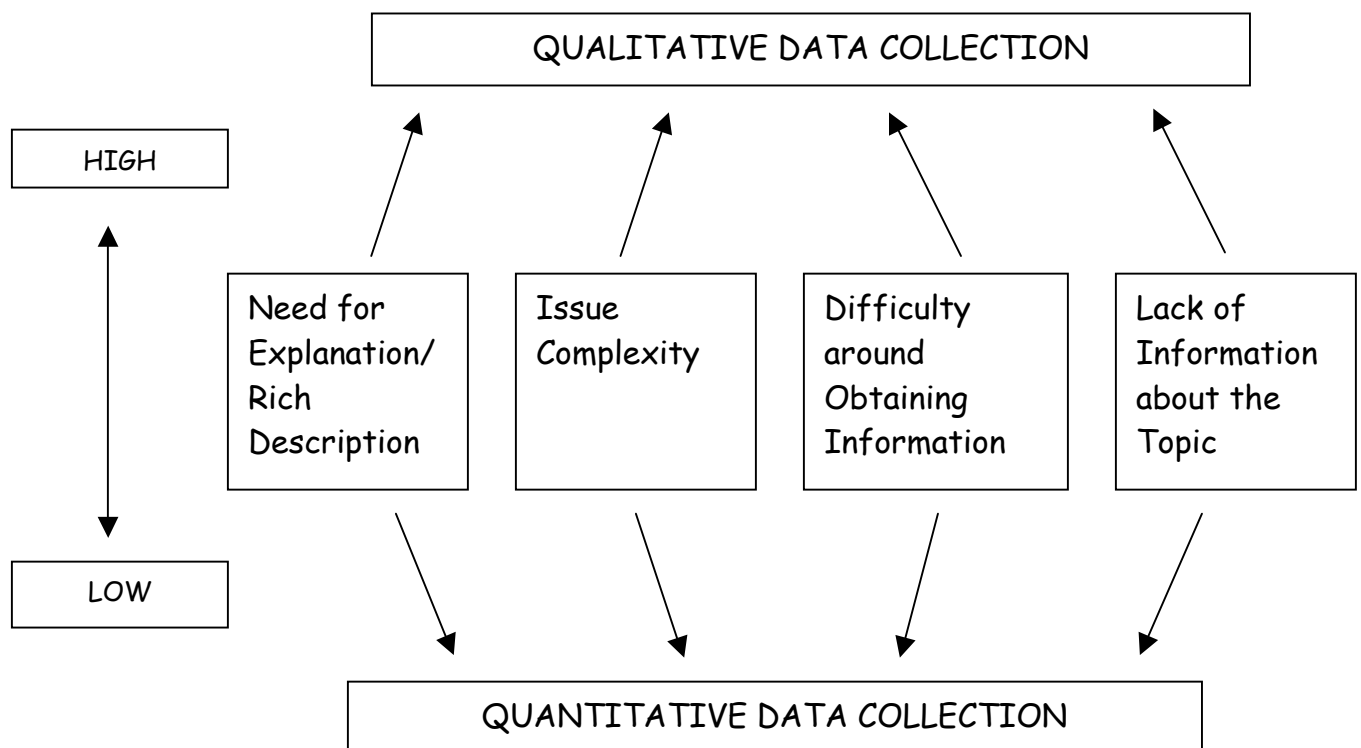
Report Findings

EXERCISE 1 - Use the space below to describe a case that might be of interest:

Case Study Design & Information Gathering (O'Sullivan, 2004, pp. 85-88)

Gathering information is a balance between needs and resources. The evaluator usually has limited resources to gather the evaluation information needed. The more people who are asked to provide information and the more information asked for, the more data to be analyzed and reported. Resources, which usually translate into some form of time, money, and/or pain moderate sampling strategies.

Generally, qualitative data (interviews, focus groups, open ended survey items, etc.) require more resources to collect and analyze. Quantitative data (test scores, attendance, rating scales, frequency of occurrences, etc.) are less resource intensive to collect per individual. Because of the resource question, the number of people to be sampled is influenced by the type of data collected. As the table below demonstrates four considerations will influence the decision to collect qualitative or quantitative data.:



The type of information needed drives the key decisions between the representativeness possible with larger samples that can provide quantitative data and the richness possible from smaller samples with qualitative data.

Common Qualitative Research Approaches

(O'Sullivan, 2004, pp. 115-117)

DISCIPLINE	APPROACH	POSSIBLE QUESTIONS	POSSIBLE METHODS
Clinical Medicine	Case Study Methods	What are the issues relevant to this program?	observations interviews field notes vignettes
Philosophy	Phenomenology	What is the nature of the program?	observations interviews symbolic interactions
Anthropology	Ethnography	How does the program's culture influence success?	participant observations knowledgeable informants oral traditions interviews field notes
History	Historiography	How do current events fit with previous ones?	primary archival documents oral history interviews narratives
Education	Naturalistic Inquiry	What occurs daily in the program?	observations interviews field notes
Sociology	Grounded Theory	What social systems are operating within this program?	observations interviews sociograms theory formulation
Journalism	Investigative Reporting	What's the real story behind why this program is so successful?	interviews telephone inquiries protected sources background research

EXERCISE 2 - DRAFT A CASE STUDY EVALUATION CROSSWALK:

	Data Sources					
ISSUES:	1	2	3	4	5	6
I.						
II.						
III.						

Guide to Instrument Selection
(O'Sullivan, 2004, pp. 92-97)

Data Collection Strategy	Examples	Key Advantages	Limitations
Databases:	Excel, Access, Web-Based Systems	Track of program events/participants	Harder to tract outcome attainment
Knowledge tests:	Pre/Post (retrospective option)	Assess content knowledge	
Limited response	Multiple Choice, True-False	Can cover large amount of content domain	Difficult to assess higher order cognitive skills
Open-ended	Essays, Short Answer	Can assess higher order cognitive skills	Limited amount of content coverage
Performance Assessment	Drivers License Test	Can assess actual behaviors	Resource intensive Limited amount of content coverage
Surveys:		Assess opinions	
Written:	Zoomerang, Survey Monkey, Qualtrics, REMARK, Perseus WebSurveyor	Written record	Need literate respondents
On-Site		Usually good response rates	Miss those not in attendance
Mail		Can contact people from different geographic areas	Poor response rates
Email		Ease of survey distribution	Respondents must have email
Web-Based		Ease of survey distribution and data summary	Respondents must be able to use the internet
Telephone		People from different geographic areas	Simple questions needed People reluctant to answer
Group	Focus Group	Cost effective Can assess degree of consensus	Limited number of participants in groups
Face-to-Face	Interviews	Can probe for more detail Respondents can ask questions	Resource intensive
Attitude Surveys:	Likert Scales Semantic Differential	Rate attitude or interest Easy to score	Little in-depth probing possible
Checklists	Rubrics Program Audit	Lots of Coverage	Scope limited to elements identified
Observations	Structured Semi-structured	Actual third party verification	Resource intensive

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