



## *Methods of Analysis*

### **Case Analysis**

Stephen Petrina (2014/2019)

I feel a real need for some concrete direction in case study analysis and to date this has been neglected.  
(Student quoted in Ostrander, 1972, p. 292)

Over the course of time, everyone and everything ostensibly becomes a case. Coincidental with the construct of *data* becoming indispensable, through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the construct of *case* became indispensable to, chronologically, historical, medical and psychiatric, legal, criminological, ethical, educational, business, and social research and teaching. Yet the process of becoming a case—how a person, event, situation, or thing is made a case or how researchers transform a being or thing into case into case study—is often implicit, opaque, or unclear. Beings and things become data through a process of datafication or by datafying, phenomena by phenomenalizing, subjects by subjectifying, and cases by casing. Healy's (1915) details for “working up” a case” into a case study suggest a process of “working up” a person, event, situation, or thing into a case. As Ragin (1992) clarifies, the problem resolves into whether the researcher asserts that “cases are found” more or less as objects or “cases are made” more or less as conventions (p. 9).

In the late 1800s, legal educators developed the case study method of instruction to induct students into modes of reasoning and thinking germane to proceedings of the law. Compared to textbooks, casebooks were more analytic and concrete (Richards, 1892). By studying a case, students more readily learn the reasoning in preparing, presenting, or deciding a case. Like medicine and law, which dealt in cases of patients and diseases, “psycho-analysis” developed in the 1890s and early 1900s through a range of exemplary cases. For example, the “Case of Miss Lucy R.” and “Case of Miss Elisabeth v. R.” demonstrated analysis as a mode of thinking *and* treating. Case psycho-analysis implies an interaction of analyst, analysand, and object (e.g., complex, disorder) and creation of records and representations. Freud's analytical skills were matched by skills in representation and case narrative, which partially explain the continental and international popularization of psychoanalysis.

Before “breaking down” or disaggregating a case through analysis, an initial step is “working up” or aggregating a case through synthesis. Case study was partially introduced to counter atomism and reductionism in attempting to maintain large units of reality for analysis. Early definitions recognized this concern: “Case study method emphasizes the total situation or combination of factors, the description of the process or sequence of events in which the behavior occurs, the study of individual behavior in its total social setting” (Shaw, 1927, p. 149). Analyzing a case and studying a case can be very different activities but most use “case analysis” and “case study” interchangeably. To be sure, “what is finally described as a result of case analysis is a partially-total situation, limited by the available records and the observer's various gradients of perception” (Hader & Lindeman, 1933/1999, pp. 175-176).

Case analysis is dependent on reality-record relationships and characterized by representing or reworking the case through what is commonly called a case history or case narrative. “The

records we possess relate a story, and relate that story in a particular way,” Roth (2001) reminds us. “Certain facts, people, and events are selected over others, in order to convey one particular narrative in preference to some other” (p. 255). In case analysis, she recommends attending to:

(1) the external form and structure of the narrative— how is the case organized and formed in order to allow the relevant facts to emerge?— and (2) the internal presentation of events— why are certain facts and not others presented, and in which ways, to make the situation come out the way that it does, to tell the story that it tells? (p. 256)

Analysts are fond of noting that by retelling or narrating, they are restoring relations and making a case coherent or whole rather than leaving the data or records to incidental reconstruction (Dumez, 2015). Case-based instruction or case-based learning may leave reconstruction to students while the method of case analysis typically implies a researcher writing case narratives.

Which is to reiterate, case analysis and, in turn, case narrative, are problems of representation. Analysts take pride in representing reality with fidelity, in factual rather than fictional accounts of cases. Yet case narratives are much more likely to be a few images and 500 words than four hour documentary videos and 500 pages, representing parts, not wholes, of reality. Dumez (2015, p. 43) lists three questions to ask of case analyses: “What is my case a case of? What is the stuff that my case is made of? What can my case do? (or what do cases do?)” Understandably, a fourth should be added: What parts of reality does my case represent?

A case narrative does not mimic or mirror reality inasmuch as it corresponds to, coheres with, or is consequential to somebody or something having done something. Data or records and notes mediate between representation and reality along with a series of implicit and explicit decisions on the who, what, when, why, and how of representation. Indeed, historians consistently note that a case narrative or representation is always descriptive *and* analytical. Similarly, creating dramatic or fictional accounts remains an option.

Yin (1994) stresses clarity in the unit of analysis, which shapes and is evident in the narrative (pp. 20-22). He refers to *The Soul of a New Machine* (Kidder, 1981), and asks:

Is the case study about the minicomputer, or is it about the dynamics of a small group—the engineering team? The answer is critical if we want to understand how the case study relates to a broader body of knowledge— that is, whether to generalize to a technology topic or to a group dynamics topic. Because the book is not an academic study, it does not need to, nor does it, provide an answer. (p. 23)

Yin accurately notes that case records lend themselves to any range of methods of analysis but the point made here is that case analysis is itself unique in the how and why of narration from data. In this sense, it is adequate to simply define case analysis as “recasting of the ‘case record’” (Bloom, 1969, p. 23). Is it enough to ask of case analysis, “does it tell a good story?” As Miles (1979, p. 600) asks of qualitative methods in general, can case study “transcend storytelling?” Ought we ask, “what do all these case studies add up to?”

1. What is a Case?
  - a. Gupta (1994, p. 111): A case is a set of features, attributes, and relations of a given situation and its associated outcome(s). A case is situation-specific, unlike a rule, which is a unit of generalized knowledge.
  - b. Shulman (1992, p. 21): a case has a narrative, a story, a set of events that unfolds over time in a particular place.
  - c. Ragin (1992, p. 3): To the question "What is a case?" most social scientists would have to give multiple answers. A case may be theoretical or empirical or both; it may be a relatively bounded object or a process; and it may be generic and universal or specific in some way. Asking "What is a case?" questions many different aspects of empirical social science.
    - i. p. 9:

**Table I.1. Conceptual map for answers to "What is a case?"**

Understanding of cases	Case conceptions	
	Specific	General
As empirical units	1. Cases are found (Harper)	2. Cases are objects (Vaughan)
As theoretical constructs	3. Cases are made (Wieviorka)	4. Cases are conventions (Platt)

2. What is Case Analysis?
  - a. Bloom (1969, p. 23): conceptual recasting of the "case record."
  - b. Case Narrative
    - i. Jocher (1928, p. 206): Facts and circumstances having no bearing on the case should be omitted, yet great caution must be exercised that nothing significant, which might by any chance modify the conclusions or assist in the interpretation, be overlooked. There should be a logical sequence, as well as continuity and coherence throughout the entire narrative. Although the language should be simple, technical terminology which has become generally accepted is not only permissible but preferable, since this will facilitate the legitimate comparison of cases and the subsequent formulation of hypotheses. Although there is a tacit assumption that every case is unique, that there never has been nor ever could be another case exactly like it, yet it may be presumed that there are points of similarity as well as of difference.
3. What is (a) Case Study?
  - a. Shaw (1927, p. 149): Case study method emphasizes the total situation or combination of factors, the description of the process or sequence of events in which the behavior occurs, the study of individual behavior in its total social setting, and comparison of cases leading to formulation of hypotheses.

- b. Hader & Lindeman (1933/1999, p. 173): The following terms frequently are used indiscriminately and must therefore be distinguished: *case study*, *case method*, *case record*, *case history*.... *Case Study*: The analysis of an abstracted phase of experience, usually performed in the interest of describing some quality in the experiential whole.
  - c. Good (1956, p. 150): Case study is essentially intensive investigation of the particular unit represented, whereas case work refers especially to the remedial, corrective, or developmental procedures that appropriately follow diagnosis of the causes of maladjustment or of approved behavior. Case study and case work, therefore, are complementary processes, even though they may not be performed by the same person or agency.
  - d. McCartney (1970, p. 30): a descriptive report analyzing a social unit as a whole.
  - e. Yin (1984, p. 23): empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.
  - f. Yin (1994, p. 13): inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.
  - g. Bogdan & Biklan (1998, p. 54): a detailed examination of one setting or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event.
4. Case-based Learning (CBL)
- a. Rosenstand (2012, p. 503): Case-based learning is oriented toward a case, which from different perspectives generates different and equally correct problems. Case-based learning is about choosing, deciding priorities, and combining different disciplines, and as such is best practiced in a multidisciplinary context.
5. Case-Based Instruction (CBI)
- a. Shulman (1991, p. 251): [Cases] are embedded with many problems that can be framed and analyzed from various perspectives, and they include the thoughts and feelings of the teacher-writers as they describe the accounts. Some case writers describe problems that remain unresolved and end their stories with a series of questions about what to do. Others include solutions that may or may not have worked.... All stories are not cases. To call something a case is to make a theoretical claim that it is "a case of something"; or an instance of a larger class of experiences.
6. Case-based Reasoning (CBR)
- a. Kolodner (1992, p. 4): Case-based reasoning can mean adapting old solutions to meet new demands; using old cases to explain new situations; using old cases to critique new solutions; or reasoning from precedents to interpret a new situation (much like lawyers do) or create an equitable solution to a new problem (much like labor mediators do).
  - b. Gupta (1994, p. 110): Case-based reasoning (CBR) is an AI based, problem-solving approach that relies on past, similar cases to find solutions to problems, to modify and critique existing solutions, and to explain anomalous situations.
7. Characteristics, Purposes, and Types of Cases
- a. A case basically has the following characteristics:

- i. Empirical (natural setting) with primary and secondary, qualitative or quantitative sources
      - ii. Relevant and Resonant (may be common or novel, outlier example)
      - iii. Complex of theory and practice
      - iv. Problematic at least somewhat ill-defined (e.g., fuzzy boundaries between phenomenon and context)
      - v. Multiplicity in evidence and sources
      - vi. Cohesive in spatial and temporal terms
      - vii. Dimensioned in breadth and depth
      - viii. See (Khan, 2008).
    - b. The purpose of a case study is to represent the object of study or case as a bounded system or event.
      - i. **Exemplifying, Proofing, Testing:** A case can empiricize or ground theory, exemplify or test a theoretical construct, or simply be an example.
      - ii. **Demonstrating Dynamics:** Miles and Huberman (1984) note that a case is effective for understanding dynamics within single settings.
      - iii. **Catching Complexity:** Stake (1995) suggests that a case study can “catch the complexity” of things.
      - iv. **Extending or Resonating:** Findings from a single case can be “related to” (Bassey, 1999), “transferred to” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), or “recontextualised” (Morse, 1991) for similar contexts.
      - v. See Merriam (1998), Miles & Huberman (1984), Stake (1995), and Yin (2003b).
    - c. Types of Case Studies
      - i. Cases can be either intrinsic or instrumental: 1) a case may be ‘intrinsically’ interesting in that in its particularity and ordinariness the case is of interest; 2) or a case may be instrumental in that it represents other cases, illustrates a particular problem, or is effective in identifying what can be learned about and applied to other like cases.
      - ii. Yin (1981, 1984, 1994) classifies case studies as exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory.
        - 1. An exploratory case is an intuitive investigation prior to refining a research question (Yin, 1994).
        - 2. A descriptive case study is a complete description of a phenomenon within a specific context (Yin, 2003).
        - 3. Explanatory case studies are used to explain the how and why of particular problems, forces, processes, etc.
      - iii. Yin (2003) also differentiates between single or multiple cases.
8. Critique of case studies
- a. See Lowi (1964) for pre-eminent critique
    - i. Lowi (1964, p. 677): But what do all the case-studies, including *American Business and Public Policy*, add up to? As a result of these case materials, how much farther along the road of political theory are we? What questions have the authors of these studies raised, and what non-obvious hypotheses and generalizations about "who rules and why" would we have lacked without them? Because of what it does, what it implies and what it

does not do, *American Business and Public Policy* provides a proper occasion for asking these questions.

- b. Can one build theory from cases— how do we transform the discrete facts of cases into theory or normative ethics? Are cases just simply taxonomic or a form of cataloguing that can only amount to an accumulation of cases (case study after case study)? What do all the cases add up to? What are the meta-analytic challenges or resolutions for case studies?
- c. Fuller (2000, pp. 8, 28): The impasse between Collins and Latour is symbolized by the Janus-faced character of STS's much vaunted case study methodology. On the one hand, in Collins's view, case studies create intellectual entitlements for the STS practitioner that effectively restrict the "community of inquirers" simply to those with similar training and experience. On the other hand, in Latour's view, because case studies are typically evaluated merely in terms of their descriptive adequacy ("Does it tell a good story?"), and not some larger normative context, they can be of potential use to a wide range of users, most notably those who do not share the STS researcher's personal or professional commitments. But regardless of whether Collins's or Latour's view prevails, the dynamic spirit of critical inquiry loses [i.e., "What is the normative conclusion that should be drawn from" each particular case study?].
- d. Forrester (2007)

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