Perspectives on Doing Case Study Research in Organizations

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In M@n@gement 2006/3 Vol. 9 , pages 81 to 94
Publisher AIMS

ISSN 1286-4692

DOI 10.3917/mana.093.0081

M@n@gement, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2006, 81-94
Special Issue: Doing Case Study Research in Organizations

Perspectives on Doing Case Study Research in Organizations

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In this preface to the special issue on "Doing Case Study Research in Organizations" we define case study research, review common themes and discuss future directions. We note the value of personal research stories and reflexivity in enriching understanding of case study research practice and draw attention to the opportunities associated with broadening the definition of what may constitute valuable data. We also discuss approaches to obtaining access and review some ethical dilemmas of case study research. Finally, we underline the need for further reflection on the role of computer analysis aids, on modes of writing and communication, and on ensuring quality in a context of epistemological diversity.

INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF CASE STUDY RESEARCH

According to Stake (2000: 345), «case studies have become one of the most common ways to do qualitative inquiry». Case studies are the source of some of the foundational work in organization theory. Classic examples include *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy* (Gouldner, 1954), *Union Democracy* (Lipset, Trow and Coleman, 1956) and *Men Who Manage* (Dalton, 1959). These case studies are considered exemplary by contemporary writers holding quite different epistemological preferences (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1991; and Dyer and Wilkins, 1991). After a decline in the late 1960s, there has been renewed interest in case study research since the 1980's both in the US and Europe (Stablein, 2006). Despite renewed popularity, case study «is a well-used term that has many meanings» (Stablein, 2006: 359). The notion of case itself is multiple and debated (e.g., Dyer and Wilkins, 1991; Eisenhardt, 1991) and has even motivated a book *What Is a Case?* (Ragin and Becker, 1992).

In the context of this special issue, we use a broad definition of case study research as the study of at least one case, a case being a bounded system. This definition does not exclude any data collection techniques and is less restrictive than that proposed by Yin (2003) who excludes archival analyses and historical studies because they do not include data from living people. Thus, from our perspective, case studies can be ethnographies, as well as historical studies (Vaughan, 1992). Moreover, although qualitative inquiry dominates (Stake, 2000),

case study research can also include quantitative data from surveys or archival records. Although the use of multiple methods is considered one of the strengths of case study research (Yin, 2003), a single data collection method is also possible. The definition of a case as a bounded system simply requires a researcher to focus on the details of a case and to analyze its context —it does not a priori restrict the methods used to achieve this.

Case study research can also be conducted within a positivist (e.g. Eisenhardt, 1989, 1991; Yin, 2003) or an interpretive (e.g., Lincoln and Guba, 1985) tradition and may serve a variety of purposes. Stake (2000) distinguishes between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. An intrinsic case study aims to provide a better understanding of one particular case. An instrumental case study is designed to provide insight into an issue or to develop generalizations. When several instrumental case studies are involved, Stake (2000) labels the design a collective case study. Thus, cases can be studied for intrinsic or instrumental purposes, and they can be aimed at interpretive understanding of multiple social realities (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), at theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003) or theory testing (Campbell, 1975; Yin, 2003; Bitekhtine, forthcoming).

The key element of our definition, like that of Stake (2000), is the focus on the case —the specific entity under study. This can be a person, a group, an organization, a relationship, an event, a process, a problem or any other specific entity. It is a bounded system (Stake, 2000) although it may not always be easy to determine where the case ends and the context begins (Goode and Hatt, 1952, in Stake, 2000). Whether multiple or not, aimed at theorizing or not, the logic of case study research is idiographic. Even for multiple case studies aimed at theorizing, the logic involves drawing inferences from similarities or differences in patterns between pairs of cases. This differs from both survey and experiments where inferences are made by comparing central tendencies. The logic also differs from qualitative research that uses data unrelated to a specific context. One consequence of this type of research is that each case can be at least partially described as a whole through one or more stories or narratives that will constitute either the main published output of the study (Stake, 2000), or at the very least, an unpublished step in the analysis (Yin, 2003).

Finally, our definition does not require that all cases within a collective set be conducted in exactly the same way. Some cases can be included in the research design for specific purposes and conducted with less intensity than others. For example, Leonard-Barton (1990) suggests the use of retrospective cases to complement a longitudinal ethnographical approach. Glaser and Strauss (1967) also recommend partial investigation to enrich some categories.

Thus, our definition of case study research does not aim to hide the variety in strategy, design, purpose or epistemology, nor the possible conflict between perspectives. Neither does it aim for unification. Yet, we believe that there is sufficient commonality in practices and interests among all case study researchers that they can learn from and appreciate other work that falls under the broad umbrella we have defined.

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The six articles in this special issue reflect our broad definition of case study research. Some authors are more positivist, while others belong rather to interpretative or constructivist traditions. The six articles do not cluster around a particular theme, nor do they provide a comprehensive panorama of current case study issues. This is rather a collection of articles that highlights particular issues that are often faced, but that are perhaps less frequently discussed explicitly in methods texts. In full compatibility with the case study tradition, many of these articles build on unique personal experiences to draw their lessons. We believe that these articles will resonate with the experiences of senior organizational researchers, and we hope they will also offer assistance to newer researchers.

In the remainder of this paper, we will first briefly introduce the six articles individually. We will then draw attention to some common themes that emerge from a consideration of the entire collection before concluding with some suggestions for future thinking on doing case study research in organizations.

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The first article by Simon Down, Karin Garrety and Richard Badham and the second article by Veronika Kisfalvi both analyse the consequences of researchers' emotions. In their paper «Fear and Loathing in the Field: Emotional Dissonance and Identity Work in Ethnographic Research», Down and colleagues discuss the varying reactions of different members of the research team to people and episodes encountered on their research site. The analysis of the researchers' field notes and personal reflections provides striking evidence of the influence of identity and emotions on fieldwork, and of the advantages of surfacing and discussing these issues.

Despite a shared interest in emotions, Kisfalvi comes to this issue from a different angle. Whereas Down and colleagues build on the sociology and social psychology literatures to examine emotional dissonance during field work, Kisfalvi builds on literature from psychoanalysis and neuroscience to establish how feelings interact positively with reasoning. In a lively «confessional tale» (Van Maanen, 1988: 73), she then describes how anxiety and later mourning accompanied her ethnographic journey from first access to final draft. Kisfalvi argues that subjectivity and emotions, once examined, bring a deeper level of understanding and objectivity to her findings. Together, these two articles provide very interesting and complementary contributions on the role of emotions.

The article by Attila Bruni also draws attention to the researcher's position in the field but focuses exclusively on the process of entry. In his article, «Access as Trajectory: Entering the Field in Organizational Ethnography», Bruni builds on an unusual experience to reframe the negotiation of access. He first argues that the way in which the researcher plays along with site expectations is more important than image per se for obtaining access. He notes further that the process of

negotiating access can itself become an important moment of observation that reveals organizational processes since it reflects actors' logics and practices. Access is thus considered as a trajectory in which each encounter is both an occasion for new negotiations and an opportunity for observation.

Geneviève Musca's paper on longitudinal embedded case study designs also describes access as an ongoing process, but adopts a different perspective on the researcher's position in the field. While Bruni immediately slipped into the job of medical secretary that he did not know, Musca avoided intervening in an activity she knew very well. Although adopting a different perspective from previous authors, Musca also reflects on her research practice and provides some interesting descriptions of her fieldwork experience. She offers some useful guidelines for conducting longitudinal embedded case study research, covering the advantages and limits of this design, the negotiation of access, the definition of units of analysis, data collection, data analysis and presentation, and approaches to ensuring validity.

The last two articles focus on the potential of unusual data sources for organizational research: visual data in the article by Aylin Kunter and Emma Bell, and secondary qualitative data in the article by Didier Chabaud and Olivier Germain. The articles present the advantages of these data sources, provide typologies of ways of using them, and offer recommendations for their appropriate use. For example, Kunter and Bell point out that visual data are able to capture elements of culture that are very difficult to express in words. However, they identify several challenges relating to access, ethical considerations and modes of analysis. They further show that visual data can be used for reflexive practice and illustrate this with photographs from their own research.

The lack of a direct relationship with the field is one concern raised by critics of the reutilization of qualitative data, the approach proposed by Chabaud and Germain. These authors first show that the boundaries between the reutilization of qualitative data and more well-established practices can be ambiguous (e.g., the delegation of data collection to assistants), and that a large variety of forms of reutilization of qualitative data exist, including some that are rarely debated (e.g., the development of theory from data collected for another purpose by the researcher). They conclude that from most epistemological perspectives, the reutilization of qualitative data is a legitimate practice. However, a detailed evaluation is required to determine whether the available data is relevant and complete enough to address the research question.

COMMON THEMES

A variety of common themes emerge from a horizontal look across the articles in this special issue. We have identified four that seem to be of particular interest: personal stories and reflexivity, the nature of case study data, access, and the ethical dimension of case study research.

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We begin with the issue of reflexivity because it underlies to some extent many of the other themes identified by the authors represented in this special issue.

PERSONAL STORIES AND REFLEXIVITY

Five out of six articles in this collection build explicitly on stories rooted in the authors' own research experience. Some of these personal stories are illustrations of how different methodological tools can be used in specific situations (e.g., Musca's instructive insets; Kunter and Bell's photographs). Other stories are closer to what Van Maanen (1988: 73) has called «confessional tales» because they give us a glimpse of how the authors actually lived through their research process, reaching behind the formulaic descriptions of design, data-collection and analysis usually found in the methods sections of standard research articles. The papers by Bruni, Down and colleagues, Kisfalvi and to some extent also those by Musca, and Kunter and Bell all provide this privileged look behind the scenes at events, thoughts and feelings that might not usually appear in a regular empirical article.

As a teacher of qualitative research methods to doctoral students, the first guest co-editor has always been on the lookout for such papers. Indeed her course-pack includes a whole series of article pairs —one article presenting a published empirical study, the other presenting a reflexive personal account of how that research actually happened. (For a fascinating set of such article pairs, see Frost and Stablein, [1992]; other pairs include Barley [1986; 1990] and Smith and Zeithaml [1999; Smith, 2002]). The accounts provided by each article in the pair are complementary —they reveal different things about the research process. The personal stories are particularly welcome as a means to reveal the everyday joys and complications of the research craft, and indeed to reassure students that research is not an abstract activity set apart from normal life. When read in conjunction with the companion empirical pieces, they usually deepen understanding and appreciation of the research process. We encourage readers of the present collection to look for and read the authors' previously published empirical work to obtain a complementary perspective on some of the stories provided here (see for example, Kisfalvi, 2000, 2002; Badham and Garrety, 2003; Badham, Garrety, Morrigan, Zanko and Dawson, 2003; Musca, 2004).

Note however, that the stories are not just stories. The authors represented in this collection have in different ways reached beyond simply telling a tale to considering what that tale might mean for the research process, and for the nature of the knowledge being generated. For example, Bruni draws on an unusual personal story to reflect on the nature of the access process. Kisfalvi uses her story to show how emotional reactions may become resources for the researcher.

This reflexive turn follows a growing trend in contemporary research writing on organizations (e.g., Linstead, 1994; Hardy, Phillips and

Clegg, 2001; Cunliffe, 2003; Johnson and Duberley, 2003; Alvesson, Hardy and Harley, 2004). Reflexivity varies in form and depth depending on the degree to which authors simply describe their experiences or reach beyond this to question their own roles as researchers (Cunliffe, 2003). Although reflecting on what one is doing is surely important for any researcher, the nature of qualitative or ethnographic case study research tends to demand it as an element of method. Revealing one self within the research report has long been seen as a way to deal with concerns about how individual biases, emotions, and potential political or social alignments might or might not affect the quality of the empirical materials collected as well as their interpretation.

Several of the authors in this collection have developed deliberate strategies for systematically enabling reflexivity. Kisfalvi keeps a research journal that includes not only her own emotional reactions but her dreams about her field experience. Kunter and Bell suggest and illustrate the use of photography as a means to observe and reflect on ones' own relationship with research sites. Down and colleagues compare their respective field-notes, and engage in team discussions about these experiences in an attempt to understand how their feelings and identities influenced the types of data each collected. These strategies enable the researchers to stand back from the intensity of their field experience, to examine it based on recorded data, and to use that understanding to improve their interpretations.

While many of the articles in this collection emphasize the strengths and importance of a reflexive approach, Down and colleagues along with other writers on reflexivity (Linstead, 1994; Cunliffe, 2003; Alvesson et al., 2004) warn us of its potential illusions. When researchers turn the spotlight onto themselves and their relationships with the field, their analysis can never be entirely free from the needs for positive self-representation that undoubtedly affect all research writing and that stimulate exercises of self-examination in the first place. Weick (2002) further warns that over-emphasis on self can sometimes divert attention from the object of the research. Reflexivity is thus not a magic solution.

However, the personal stories within this collection of articles are refreshing, revealing and often courageous in their focus on the relationships between researchers and the researched. Like good case studies, each of them offers rich descriptive detail on a specific event or phenomenon (a research project) while providing lessons and insights that readers may potentially transfer to their own research experience.

Indeed, it becomes clear from these accounts that a case study is a product that emerges from the interaction between a researcher and a research site and that both contribute in unique ways to that project. To the extent that this is true, Chabaud and Germain's analysis of the potential and limitations of reusing qualitative data collected by others is particularly interesting and relevant. This article and others in the collection illustrate another common concern: the nature of case study data.

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THE NATURE OF CASE STUDY DATA

All six articles discuss the role of data, and four of the six directly or indirectly raise the question of: "What is data?" or more empirically what can be considered as data in case study research? Stablein (2006: 349) indicates that «data imply empirical things that are represented, and a process of representing». Case study data are thus representations that depend on the data collector as well as on the case study site (Stablein, 2006).

Two of the articles explicitly explore the potential of unusual sources of data in organizational research: the reutilization of qualitative data (Chabaud and Germain) and visual data (Kunter and Bell). Note that visual data is as dependent on the researcher's role as are other sources of data: pictures depend on who pushes the button (Kunter and Bell).

Although some authors represented in this issue have a broad conception of what can be understood as data (e.g., Kisfalvi), Stablein (2006) argues that not all representations are data. «Data are characterized by a two-way correspondence between the data and the organizational reality the data represent» (Stablein, 2006: 351). This leads to question as to whether what researchers see, read, hear, touch or feel are data, and if so when they become data. This question appears central in the reutilization of case study data as described by Chabaud and Germain. Reusing data collected for other purposes, by other people, and already formally interpreted is the subject of increasing debate. Data already interpreted is controversial for varying reasons: bias of the interpreter for positivists, and lack of co-construction of social reality for constructivists (Chabaud and Germain).

Other authors (Kisfalvi; Bruni) extend the usual boundaries of ethnographic data that represent the empirical reality experienced by organizational participants (Stablein, 2006). Because they become to some degree organizational participants, Kisfalvi, and Bruni use the reality they experience themselves as data. For example, Bruni suggests that the very process of gaining access to the field may constitute data for the analysis of the organization. Kisfalvi considers her relationship with her subject, and more particularly, her feelings toward him, as data. Indeed, to the extent that those feelings are also an indicator of how others may be feeling and relating to the subject, they provide a potentially useful and frequently neglected source of understanding.

In summary, taken together, these articles suggest that case study researchers might benefit by opening their eyes to a wider range of possibilities in terms of what might constitute valuable sources of data. We would argue that to become data, representations must be recorded, and they must be grounded in the case study situation. Within this definition however, many creative opportunities are available, each with its own limitations that need to be explicitly and fully recognized, as is the case of course, with more traditional sources.

ACCESS IN CASE STUDY RESEARCH

Access to data also appears as a common concern among the six articles. For example, although the internet may help to locate and access certain qualitative databases, Chabaud and Germain consider it to be an important difficulty in the reutilization of qualitative data.

Like secondary data, access to primary qualitative data is not always easy but for different reasons. A first difficulty to be overcome is to obtain authorization to collect data, and the second is to continue to develop and maintain good relationships with the people researched. Kunter and Bell indicate that visual research increases the difficulty of obtaining access, especially because of a reluctance to being caught on camera. In addition to the type of data, sensitive research topics may also increase the difficulties. In such situations, the match between the researcher's identity and that of the people researched may be helpful (Kisflavi). Although the literature recommends that ethnographers should convey an image that does not clash with the organization studied (Silverman, 2000), Bruni suggests that the capacity to handle one's image and to play along is as or more important than image per se.

Later in the research process, keeping good relationships with participants until enough data has been accumulated is a major concern for fieldworkers that generates anxiety and can affect behavior in the field (Kisfalvi; Down and colleagues; Musca). To facilitate relationships, fieldworkers may make more salient the part of their identity that matches that of the people with whom they have relationships. Matching can be based on previous professional experience (Down and colleagues; Musca), local culture (Garrety), or religion (Kisfalvi). Most of the authors instinctively adopted the behaviors and roles that people expected from them, often reaching beyond what is usually included in the role of a researcher. For example, Bruni spontaneously participated in organizational activities as requested when he saw that the distant stance of the professional researcher would create dissonance. Expectations may also differ according to gender. Down and colleagues showed that the male researcher in their team tended to swear more than usual, while his female colleague did not, conforming to what was expected in the steel industry they researched.

Several of the authors represented nevertheless draw attention to the dilemmas associated with positioning oneself in the field. For example, Musca underlines dilemmas associated with the relationship between access, identity and data quality. She notes that her previous experience working in the same industry as her case study firm helped her understand what was going on and gave her credibility. Yet, she felt that she perhaps missed details that would have been more striking to strangers. We also see her hesitating between maintaining professional distance as a researcher and intervening more intensely, questioning whether this would improve the quality and richness of her data or alternatively distort it. Dilemmas associated with relationships to the people researched find further resonance in the papers on emotions (Kisfalvi; Down and colleagues). Emotional relationships with the sub-

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jects researched can be a source of insight, deeper understanding and greater objectivity (Kisfalvi). However, negative feelings such as fear or disgust can lead researchers to avoid contact or reduce interaction, as well as censoring potential data, and reducing the overall quality of data collected (Down and colleagues).

Answers to the dilemmas associated with distance differ according to authors. While some recommend dropping the academic armor to obtain access to the subjective dimension (Lerum, 2001), Down and colleagues, as well as Kisfalvi, suggest rather to behave consistently with one's identity and reflect on it. Beyond the fact that it is not so easy to drop one's armor, they point out the risks of developing close relationships that could be damaging (e.g., Irwin, 2006). Down and colleagues further argue that it is legitimate to protect one's own identity and to use detachment as a way of dealing with negative emotion such as aversion to a particular subject or situation. This makes individual researchers unequal when it comes to obtaining access to specific fields of study and specific data. However the variety of researcher identities may generate different and complementary insights across research and within a study when several researchers are involved (Kisfalvi; Down and colleagues).

In summary, access to case study data raises some complex issues. Although, Down and colleagues are most explicit about this, almost all the articles illustrate how the identity of researchers (who the researcher is or would like to be) and the identity work they engage in (how researchers project their identity in their interactions with the research site) can influence the access obtained and the quality of the data collected. There are no simple answers, however, as to which approach is always better in any absolute sense. These observations do however lead us to stress once again the importance of openness and reflexivity.

Positioning oneself in the field also raises other types of questions. Downplaying the researcher identity and integrating on the basis of personal affinities or spontaneous participation allows the researcher to become accepted as one of the group, but the data may be richer only because the researcher's observer role has been forgotten by site members and even on occasion, by the researcher. The lines between covert and overt observation are thus very fine as noted by both Bruni, and Down and colleagues. This brings us to some of the ethical implications of case study research.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Ethical questions are perhaps not central issues in most of the articles in this special issue. However, they are present to a degree in at least four of them (Kunter and Bell; Chabaud and Germain; Bruni; Down and colleagues). Although always important, ethical issues associated with case study research are becoming increasingly salient because of the emergence of more rigorous ethics guidelines and review procedures for research involving human subjects in universities and granting agencies, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Important ethical principles generally included in ethics guidelines include for example: doing no harm —and preferably doing good— protecting respondents' rights to privacy and confidentiality, informing them clearly of the benefits and risks of the research, and ensuring that they are given an opportunity to decide whether or not to participate ("informed consent") (Glesne, 1999; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2006). Case study research engages deeply with these issues for several reasons.

First, the methods used by case study researchers and ethnographers are founded on the idea that valid knowledge is best acquired through direct contact, proximity, detail, and specificity. Thus, the knowledge acquired about particular people and situations is deeper and more sensitive than in a survey for example, demanding a great deal of respondents and rendering them potentially more vulnerable. At the same time, the challenges of maintaining confidentiality and anonymity are also higher. The researcher is usually working with a small sample of cases, so it can be hard to hide the identity of the site. In addition, effective reporting of case material requires rich description. Thus, participants in the research may be able to recognize each other, even when the overall case is anonymized. Finally, as noted above, there is a fine line between overt and covert observation. It may be challenging, especially with observational methods, to ensure that every individual encountered is fully informed about the research and has given their explicit consent. In addition, as Down and colleagues note, while researchers may have laudable long-term objectives of knowledge development, the immediate returns of their work to organization members may be intangible at best.

The article by Kunter and Bell shows that while the traditional sources of data used in case studies (observations, interviews, documents) pose ethical questions, these issues tend to be multiplied when it comes to visual methods. Photographic data is particularly rich in detail and for that very reason, it is both harder to access and harder to manage ethically. The people and places represented in photographs are immediately identifiable. Taking and displaying photographic material requires care. In fact, because of their recognisability, the presence of pictures may inhibit the presentation of other detailed data on happenings on the site that could otherwise be revealed. We are very fortunate that this special issue includes two articles in which these access and ethical dilemmas have been successfully addressed.

The article by Chabaud and Germain dealing with the reutilization of case data raises another set of ethical issues. The issue of informed consent clearly becomes more complex when reusing case study data, especially when the objectives of the new research are different or when new researchers become involved.

Overall, because of its richness and depth, case study research often raises ethical issues and may sometimes test the limits of formal ethics guidelines. There are those who argue that such formal guidelines may not be compatible with the objectives of non-positivist research (Van den Hoonaard, 2001). Others believe that the moral dilemmas of case study research need to be more explicitly recognized and discussed

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(Fine, 1993). We would argue that researchers of all stripes need to encourage dialogue on ethical questions, and to be wary of equating ethical behaviour merely with ethics review board approval.

LOOKING FORWARD

The set of articles in this special issue offer a range of perspectives on doing case study research in organizations. They review different sources of data, they offer ideas about obtaining access to that data, and they reflect on how the researcher's positioning in the field may influence the quality of that data. Doing case study research also raises a number of other questions that are perhaps less well-covered by the present collection but that warrant further discussion. We will briefly draw attention to three of these here.

The first issue concerns analysis and interpretation. Among the articles in this issue, Musca looks at the analysis strategies available for embedded longitudinal studies, and Kunter and Bell examine the challenges of analyzing visual data. In a more personal vein, Kisfalvi describes how the computer-aided coding process she engaged in distanced her from the emotional impact of her field observations. She found that she needed to recapture those emotions in order to translate the codes into a valuable interpretation.

However, there is certainly room for more reflection about the role and impact of computerized aids in qualitative data analysis. Increasingly, case study articles are reporting the use of tools such as NVivo and Atlas.ti. Yet, with rare exceptions (e.g., Malina and Selto, 2001), these reports do not provide much detail on whether and how the tools contributed distinctively to the interpretation. The assumption seems to be that computer aids merely mechanize and simplify manual coding but that the underlying cognitive and interpretive processes of analysis are unchanged. This may perhaps be the case. On the other hand, literature on the use of technology for other tasks (e.g., Bilda and Demirkan [2003] for computer-aided design) suggests that the impact could be more profound. One might ask for example whether the structures and capabilities of software programs alter the way in which analysts consider their data. While there have been a number of comparative evaluations of different software tools published (Weitzman and Miles, 1995; Bournois, Point et Voynnet-Fourboul, 2002), there has been little study of the effects of their use on the interpretations that are generated.

Second, the articles in this special issue pay relatively little direct attention to the challenges of writing up case study research. The need to present enough data to carry conviction while respecting normal page limits poses particular problems for publication in traditional academic journal outlets. These are compounded with multiple case study designs. Golden-Biddle and Locke's (2007) book, *Composing Qualitative Research,* offers a very interesting and instructive analysis of successful exemplars of qualitative research articles published in the major management journals. While case study researchers can learn

from these practices, there is room for innovation beyond the models established by others. For example, as Kunter and Bell suggest, electronic media (like this journal) may offer scope for creativity unavailable from more traditional outlets[1]. Kunter and Bell give the example of Ruby's (2006) web-based ethnographic study of the Oak Park community that innovatively combines text and visual materials such as photography and video.

Finally, a preoccupation that is only indirectly touched on in the articles in this special issue concerns the appropriate criteria for evaluating the quality of case study research. The journal *Organizational Research Methods* has a forthcoming special issue on this topic that will be very welcome. The concern about criteria is delicate in a domain where multiple epistemological paradigms coexist. Our own experience suggests that some of the traditional difficulties that case study researchers may have had in publishing their work in the more highly rated journals may be partly due to disagreement among case study researchers themselves about what criteria are relevant.

This is not to argue that case study researchers should all agree. However, it would be helpful if they were more explicit about what their epistemological beliefs are and how these beliefs affect their understanding of appropriate quality criteria. The journal *MIS Quarterly* (Markus and Lee, 1999, 2000a, 2000b) innovated by publishing a series of qualitative research articles in which authors were asked to pay particular attention to defining the evaluation criteria they considered appropriate in the light of their perspective. Indeed, the consistency between epistemological perspectives, quality criteria and research methods is probably more important than a given perspective or method per se. A broad variety of approaches to case study research can thus be recognized as legitimate if done well in their own terms, including those offering rich and insightful stories (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991) as well as those aiming to generate strong theoretical propositions (Eisenhardt, 1991).

1. Note however that in an encouraging development, the *Academy of Management Journal* has indicated that a higher than usual page limit may be acceptable for articles based on qualitative methods (see the journal's Information for Contributors at http://aom.pace.edu/amjnew/contributor_information.html, accessed on 20th December 2006).

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