SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Guidelines on Using Case Studies as an Evaluation Method

About

Search for Common Ground

Search for Common Ground is a non-governmental organization working to transform how societies deal with conflict. With over 30 years of experience in peacebuilding across 43 offices worldwide, Search strives to build sustainable peace for generations to come by working with all sides of a conflict, providing the tools needed to work together and find constructive solutions.

Search designs and implements multifaceted, culturally appropriate and conflict-sensitive programs using a diverse range of approaches, including media and training, to promote dialogue, increase knowledge and determine a positive shift in behaviors.

www.sfcg.org

Levante International Development

Levante International Development LTD is a specialist consultancy firm, working to strengthen humanitarian interventions and development projects globally. Levante's teams work across the MENA, sub-Saharan Africa, CIS and south-East Asia regions to support their clients – even in the most challenging contexts.

Levante provides strategic consultancy, M&E and Third-Party Monitoring services to international agencies and (I)NGOs. The firm regularly conducts research studies (Needs & Market Assessments, Feasibility Studies), as well as project design, proposal and resource development. These guidelines were developed for Search for Common Ground as part of Levante's ongoing work to support and strengthen research practices in the sector. The guidelines were written by Rio Jones with support from Sarulchana Viriyataveekul.

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Table of Contents

Using the Guidelines

These guidelines serve as a practical resource for program and MEAL teams seeking to develop evaluative case studies (or considering their use).

The guidelines first seek to introduce the reader to the concept of case studies - providing a clear definition outlining how they might be used for evaluation purposes. They aim to guide evaluator decision-making on whether case study methods will be beneficial and relevant to their objectives. The advantages and disadvantages of case study methodologies, as well as a short checklist to test the appropriateness of case study methods, are outlined in this document.

Once the reader is confident that a case study methodology is appropriate for their objectives, the guidelines provide instructions on how to use case studies for an evaluation, and touch on case selection, data collection, data analysis and report writing. Guideline sections are complementary, and can be used in tandem with one another; references to other guideline chapters are used to help the reader navigate the relevant categories.

Finally, where appropriate, the guidelines provide links to and suggestions for additional resources to assist the evaluator in case study development. These include short examples or extracts from existing case studies, a "Quality Checklist," and report samples.

What is an Evaluative Case Study?

Definition:

Case Studies[1]

A case study is a **method** of learning about **one specific 'instance' in detail**. This 'instance' could be as small as an individual person, or as large as a whole country (See **What is a Case?**).

The 'instances' selected for case study analysis are often **complex:** there are many different factors which influence them. These are hard to distinguish without **in-depth analysis** and understanding the case in its **context.** As a result, case studies are characterized by **extensive description** and analysis of the case, using different sources of information. The goal of a case study is to get a **complete picture** of what is happening in an 'instance' and why.

Evaluations

Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project or program, its design, implementation and results. Evaluations study the relationship between inputs into a program/project and outcomes. Good evaluations should inform programming decisions that will produce stronger outcomes.

Case Study Evaluations

In the context of an evaluation, a case study is different from other data collection and data analysis techniques. It does not try to understand what happened everywhere a project took place. Instead, it focuses on a particular part of that project in detail – allowing you to explore impacts (what occurred and why) and the different factors which influence an intervention.

One of the central advantages of case study evaluations is that they help you to understand in-depth **how an intervention is working in its context**. They provide powerful and accessible ways of communicating this to an audience.

[1]This explanation is based on the classic and widely accepted definition established by the US General Accounting Office. (US General Accounting Office, (1990) Case Study Evaluation)
[2] https://www.oecd.org/derec/austria/AUSTRIA%20ADA%20ADC%20Guidelines.pdf (Austrian Development Agency. (2009) Guidelines for Project and Program Evaluations)

What is a Case?:

Case studies focus on a **particular instance**: however, a 'case' could be as small as an individual person or as large as a country. A case might be (but not limited to):

- An event or training
- A single beneficiary or client
- A site, center, institution or organization
- A group of people
- A particular project activity
- A country

You will need to decide what unit of analysis is going to constitute a 'case' for your evaluation, and how many cases you will use. See **Sampling** for guidance on how to make this decision. Further, you need to decide how you will select the particular cases/units, and why – are you interested in looking at successes or failures? Typical or representative cases? See **Which Types of Case Study**.

Mixed Methods

It is important to understand that case studies are not specific tools, but rather an **approach** to carrying out evaluations. When creating your case study, you will use a combination of **different tools** and methods to develop your rich and detailed descriptions of the case. These include quantitative and qualitative tools, such as document & data review, interviews & focus group discussions, observations/site visits, short questionnaires, and visual evidence. By combining different tools, you will be able to piece together a reliable answer to your key evaluation questions (see **Triangulation**). See **Data Collection and Data Analysis** for further details.

Types of Case Study

Various types of case study exist and suit different purposes for your evaluation or research. They can serve as 'descriptive,' adding additional depth or color to other methods, or as 'explanatory' to answer questions about how an intervention is working. There are four types of case studies, namely:

1. Illustrative: In-depth information to support data gathered through other methods (i.e. surveys). Adding context and helping readers understand what is happening and why.
2. Exploratory: Identify themes for later investigation. Used when little is known about a context or intervention on the ground.
3. Critical instance: Deep dive into an interesting/unusual case to understand why something in partiuclar has occurred/is occurring.
4. Explanatory Answers questions about program implementation and/or program effects. These are most commonly used for project evaluation.

See **Which Types of Case Study?** for further details.

Why Use Case Studies in Evaluation?

Case studies can be a highly effective and powerful tool for evaluating humanitarian and development interventions – especially those where the relationship between inputs and outputs is not straightforward or obvious. They offer a number of **advantages** when used instead of, or in combination with other methods.

However, case studies are not always appropriate for program/project evaluations and have a number of **disadvantages**. Please study the values and limitations below, along with the practical checklist under **Should I Use Case Studies for My Evaluation?**

Value of Using Case Studies in Evaluation

+ **Understand Complex Situations & Contexts:** Case Studies are valuable for looking at complex contexts where there are many different factors influencing an intervention which cannot be controlled for.

  Sometimes, looking at specific cases gives us a more grounded understanding of how much an intervention is contributing to an impact than statistics.

  For this reason, they can be particularly useful for evaluating the impacts of peace-building interventions, where there are many variables that cannot be controlled for. By complementing the information that is not as easily observed in other kinds of evaluation, case studies help us zoom in and look at how an intervention is 'contributing' to change, rather, as well as account for other factors.

+ **Identify Unexpected/Unintended Consequences:** Studying a situation in-depth, without rigid research questions and undertaking data collection and analysis concurrently, allows you to identify impacts/factors which you might not have considered at the start of the project.

+ **Cost/Time Effective:** There is a perception that Case Studies take too much time and too many resources. However, this is not necessarily true. Case studies can be adapted to different forms and contexts.

  Logistically, you might find that a few in-depth case studies are easier to achieve than research methods which require access to many different locations.

+ **Analyze Multiple Interventions:** A Case Study can look at how various interventions might be working together/interacting with each other.

  For example: A Case Study might be effective way of looking in detail at how an individual beneficiary receives holistic support through referrals to different Mental Health/Psychosocial Support, legal or education services, which might be part of different projects or organisations.

+ **Accessible & Easy to Understand:** Case Studies are a good way of communicating the impacts and challenges of interventions to a wide range of audiences. They tell stories and provide context.

Limitations of Using Case Studies in Evaluation

− **Not Always Generalizable:** By definition, Case Studies only tell us about a specific instance, therefore we cannot use them to make broad conclusions – unless we combine them with other methods.

  Quantitative methods, such as surveys, are generalizable because they often have large, statistically significant samples. Case Studies can add depth to general findings, but they cannot be used on their own to tell us what is happening everywhere and in every other instance.

− Can only answer 'what', how' and 'why' questions. Note that case studies can answer 'what' questions - just not necessarily generalizable ones. Nonetheless, they can serve a descriptive purpose of telling us what is happening in a particular instance. See **Understand Your Objectives**.

− Case Studies rely on multiple data sources and detail; therefore, a degree of **access** is required to project locations/beneficiaries/stakeholders & staff/activities for observation/documentation etc.

− Case Studies are vulnerable to biases (see **Data Analysis** for ways of countering them).

Should I Use Case Studies?

Understand Your Objectives

The first step is to establish your **Key Objectives** and **Key Evaluation Questions**. These may already have been prescribed at the beginning of the project, or you may develop them based on the intervention's Theory of Change.

You should have between 5-7 broad Evaluation Questions (and perhaps some more specific ones within these), focused on the impact, effectiveness, relevance/sustainability of your project.

Further Resources for Developing Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Questions Checklist for Program Evaluation, Wingate & Schroeter - Western Michigan University, 2016
https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/eval-questions-wingate%26schroeter.pdf

Case Study methods are best for answering '**how**' and '**why**' evaluation questions, because they focus on particular instances in detail. If you need to answer questions such as 'how many', 'to what extent' or 'how often', then you will need to use other methods.

Example Key Evaluation Questions

- How successfully is the intervention contributing to impact, following the Theory of Change?
- Are there any unintended consequences (positive or negative)? Why are these taking place?
- Why are there differences in outcomes for different locations/activities/individual beneficiaries?

Case studies cannot assess to what extent an intervention is addressing the different Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) needs of all vulnerable individuals in a community or how many of them your organization has reached, for example.

However, they can help understand how an individual beneficiary interacts with an intervention and which factors might influence impact. Case studies may also be an effective approach for determining why an intervention might be more useful for some beneficiaries than others (for reasons which are not immediately apparent).

Understanding your objectives is also crucial to knowing **which type** of case study you will employ for your evaluation, and the subsequent techniques that you will use (see **Which Type of Case Study?**).

Checklist

Below is a quick decision-making checklist to help you understand whether Evaluative Case Studies are appropriate for your objectives. You should be able to answer 'Yes' to the following four questions to proceed:

Criteria	Yes	No
You want to answer 'how' or 'why' evaluation questions – or even simply 'what happened?'	☑	☒
The project you are evaluating is ongoing or recently completed. *This is necessary to ensure that you can speak to relevant stakeholders and make observations, rather than relying on historical data.*	☑	☒
There is time/possibility for in-depth data collection. *This will depend on the type of Case Studies you are using in your evaluation and choose as your 'case.' Questions of time and resources are relative to your organisation and the capacity of your team.* *However, Case Studies do not need to take a long time. 2-3 days for in-depth interviews and observations could be enough (See **Data Collection**).* *Think carefully about the scope of your Evaluation and whether it is feasible. Use the rest of the information in this document to guide you.*	☑	☒
You are familiar with qualitative research methods like Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews and Observations	☑	☒

Which Types of Case Study?

Once you have completed the Checklist and decided that a case study might be appropriate, the next step is to understand which type of case study you will use. This is important as it will determine your data collection, analysis and report writing approaches. Having a clear idea of your case study type(s) will help you navigate your next decisions.

Take a look at the statements below and consider which most closely match your evaluation objectives. You may even wish to use more than just one type.

Should I Use Case Studies?

Which Types of Case Study?

I want to add in-depth information and examples to support data gathered through different methods as part of an evaluation. This is to help **add context** and help readers understand. This type of case study describes what is happening in 1-2 instances and why.	**Illustrative**
I am preparing for a large study/ evaluation and I want to identify themes for later investigation. Your case study will be used to help create evaluation questions, strategies and tools. It is useful when little it known about how things are working in practice on the ground.	**Exploratory**
I want to look at a **particular case** which is interesting or unusual. For example, I want to understand more about **why** the project is working/ not working for a particular individual / location. Critical instance case studies look at questions of cause and effect.	**Critical Instance**
I I want to understand more about how the project has been implemented and answer questions about **efficiency** and **effectiveness** (Program Implementation) **And / Or** I want to examine the effects of the project and the intervention **impact** (Program Effects)	**Explanatory**

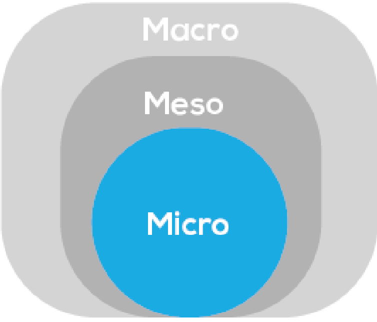
How to Use Case Studies in Evaluation

Which Cases Should I choose? (Sampling)

Unit of Analysis

One of the fundamental decisions is to decide how 'big' or 'small' your individual case will be. Think about your objectives and research questions, as well as your team's capacity, when making this decision. Your cases could be:

- Micro-level: e.g. looking at individual beneficiaries/ communities where a project was implemented
- Meso-level: e.g. looking at specific project activities/services delivered/policies
- Macro-level: e.g. taking a whole project or context/ country as a case and comparing with others



Your cases could also be 'embedded' – you could choose to look at micro cases (for example, certain practitioners who received training) within a larger overall case (for example, a particular center or institution which has received capacity building/ intervention).

When you write up your case study, you should clearly define your unit of analysis.

Example:

Governorate Level:

This case study is an explanatory, program effect type. It explores the reasons behind short and long-term improvements for female participation in politics in Governorate X of Country Y.

Our **unit of analysis** in this case study is **Governorate X**. This case has been **selected because** it appears to have seen the most success in female participation of the Governorates where Project Z has been implemented. This is the result of our Evaluation's overall sampling approach to look at Best/Worst Cases. The study seeks to understand the role of Project Z and its contribution to these improvements, **within the wider context** of changes in Governorate X over the last 5 years, and any other factors which may have contributed to change.

Types of Bias

As with all kinds of evaluation methods, evaluative case studies are vulnerable to different types of bias, which might affect the credibility of your evidence and conclusions:

- Evaluator Bias - Given the evaluator's central role throughout the process of designing and conducting a case study, any pre-conceived ideas or perceptions this person has (even unconscious ones) have the potential to influence the results. This is why it is important to consider alternate explanations and theories.

- Selection Bias – Choosing cases for the wrong reasons (i.e. convenience) can undermine the conclusions of your evaluation. (See **Sampling Methods**)

Bias can occur at every stage of case study development, from formulating a hypothesis to data analysis. Fortunately, there are ways to minimize these biases – as explained throughout the rest of the guidelines.

Example:

Individual Level:

This is a **critical instance** case study. It provides in-depth qualitative data to examine the factors contributing to the deterioration of trauma symptoms among refugees in Camp X in Governorate Y.

Our **unit of analysis** in this case study is **an individual** receiving our MHPSS service in refugee camp X. This case has been selected because the beneficiary represents a small group of clients who reported a marked increase in 'feeling as if you don't have a future' in the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ) at Endline. This is the result of our Evaluation's overall sampling approach to look at unique cases. The study seeks to **understand the gap in the MHPSS service and the potential role of external factors** in contributing to the lower HTQ score.

How to Use Case Studies in Evaluation

Sampling Methods

Once you have decided on the size of your unit of your case, you need to decide **which cases** you will pick. You should provide clear reasons why you have chosen these cases, by specifying your sampling strategy – this is important for guarding against selection bias (which can undermine the conclusions of your evaluation if cases are chosen for the wrong reasons.

For case study evaluations, sampling is nearly always '**purposive**.' This means that cases are not selected randomly, but rather chosen by you because they can tell you something in particular:

- **Bracketing:** Choose cases at the extremes of an intervention, in order to examine what explains the differences

- **Best/Worst Cases:** Choose these to look at the factors which influenced successes or failures to generate lessons learned

- **Representative Cases**: Choose these to ensure cases which represent different variations (i.e. different project locations, different types of beneficiary).

- **Typical Cases**: Choose these to understand what is happening in a typical in stance and why (i.e. to provide depth to a wider evaluation using other methods).

How Many Cases?

The number of cases should remain **limited** so that you can focus on understanding cases in-depth. Your choice will depend on the type of sampling you choose:

Examples:

- You are evaluating a capacity building program implemented in districts within five different regions. You might choose to sample five 'representative cases', one from a 'typical' district in each region

- You are evaluating holistic mental health and human rights support to vulnerable beneficiaries and want to examine why some beneficiary cases have been successfully closed while others remain open (i.e. have not graduated from support). You might choose to select two successful cases and two unsuccessful cases for our evaluation.

When Should I Select the Cases?

Not all of the cases have to be selected up front. Case Study approaches are constantly evolving as we undertake Data Collection and Analysis at the same time. Some cases might be selected later in your evaluation as evidence comes available, or later in the project as factors become clearer and theories develop.

How to Use Case Studies in Evaluation

Data Collection

It is often assumed that case studies solely rely on qualitative data. However, quantitative methods of data collection can also be used for case study development. Therefore, many case study evaluations use mixed methods approaches and comprise detailed descriptions made up of data collected from a number of different sources, using different tools.

The more sources , the better understanding you will have of what has happened, how it has happened and why. The data from these sources should be analyzed together in order to answer your key evaluation questions.

Tools

The following tools are commonly used as data sources in Case Study Evaluation:

Document & Data Review	Data collection should begin with a detailed reading & analysis of existing documentation and data regarding a case. This will inform the development of other tools. However, as with everything in a Case Study Evaluation, your analysis and collection of relevant documents should be **ongoing**.
Interviews & Focus Group Discussions	In-depth interviews and discussions usually form the basis of Case Study research. These should typically be semi-structured, with open-ended questions around topics of interest (Based on your key research questions). See Further Resources below for information on how to design Focus Group Discussions and interviews.
Observations/ Site Visits	Ways of gathering rich data on how an intervention is working on the ground – these tools allow the researcher to see and experience what is happening and are well suited to Case Study Evaluations. Field notes and direct quotes are useful data for developing your Case Study. For example: You could observe training sessions/events, making observations about engagement, body language etc. Visits, however, should not be too brief. Observations require the researcher to spend some time.
Short Questionnaires	Short, structured questionnaires can be useful for collecting targeted quantitative data (including demographic information) or relevant statistics – to be analyses alongside qualitative data.
Visual Evidence	Visual evidence such as photographs, illustrations (perhaps produced by children in child-centered research) can add depth to Case Studies and increase accessibility to external readers. These are more likely with Illustrative Case Studies where you are looking to add depth/colour to information collected through other methods.

You should describe the techniques and data sources for your study:

Example:

The case study analysis comes from multiple data sources and adopts a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data was gathered from available official statistics in Governorate X, in addition to surveys with male and female participants in the political landscape. The report also makes extensive use of qualitative evidence such as Key Informant Interviews with political, administrative and party officials, Focus Group Discussions with Project Z beneficiaries and project, governorate and national level documentation and research. Researchers used triangulation before drawing conclusions and maintained a chain of evidence.

Further Resources for Designing & Undertaking Focus Group

'Practical Guide: Focus Group Discussions', Velida Dzino-Silajdzic, Catholic Relief Services, 2017
https://www.alnap.org/help-library/practical-guide-focus-group-discussions

'Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews', Richard A. Krueger, 2002
https://www.eiu.edu/ihec/Krueger-FocusGroupInterviews.pdf

Recording Data

Case studies are made up of many different kinds of data, so you must ensure you have ways of recording and storing the data in a way which will make it easy for you to analyze and make comparisons across the different data sources. As case studies often include collection of personal information from beneficiaries, the data you collect must be stored safely to protect the privacy and the rights of those involved. See **Ethical Approaches** for more detail.

Create a folder, spreadsheet or other database for your cases, where you can include interview transcripts, observations, survey data and other materials for easy **searching** and **filtering**. Coding the data (See **Data Analysis**) makes it easier to search and categorize. You should also include copies of the documents you have reviewed, with a brief list and summary of these documents.

This data should be clearly labeled and easy to follow, so that somebody else can take a look at the information and see how you reached your conclusions. Building a '**chain of evidence**' in this way increases the reliability of your Case Study.

How to Use Case Studies in Evaluation

Data Analysis

Developing Theories

Unlike some other evaluation approaches, data analysis for a case study evaluation is **ongoing** and starts at the same time as data collection.

This is because, with case study research, the data collector, analyst and report writer are often the same person or the same small team of people. Naturally, as you undertake data collection (reading documents or interviewing sources) you will start to develop your own theories and answers to the research questions.

You might notice, for example, that the same factors are mentioned as important by different interviewees – as such, **themes** or **patterns** will emerge.

Pattern Matching Techniques

Pattern matching involves comparing a 'predicted' or expected pattern of events, such as one described by an intervention's Theory of Change, with the patterns which emerge from your Case Studies. You are asking: is what we expected to happen actually taking place or not?

As your research continues, you might seek to match patterns which emerged from your initial data collection with others which are revealed later on. If these patterns confirm each other, then the validity of your research is strengthened.

Coding

'Coding' is a means of **marking and categorizing themes** which emerge as you are analyzing your data. Creating codes for common instances in the data makes it easy to recognize and search for these themes in your database.

- You might create codes to categorize similar interview responses or common themes which come in responses
- You might notice, through reading project documentation, that problems/challenges of a certain type occur regularly, and create a code to categorize these so that you can count them or identify them more clearly in subsequent data analysis

Coding can either be done manually, or through software packages. For your evaluation purposes (unless you are undertaking large-scale research with multiple cases) manual coding is likely more practical/affordable and will also help develop a deep understanding of the data.

Coding will be an ongoing process as you undertake data collection. If you are collecting data for your case studies in phases, you might develop codes in the first phase of data collection that you will apply in following phases.

Example of Coding Responses:

Positive testimonies of change from service users

All FGDs highlighted the following factors as part of their Theory of Change:

(1) The center representing a physical and emotional safe space

(2) The staff being respectful, helpful and 'like family'

(3) Being occupied helped them forget about traumatic memories of the past

(4) The center fostered positive relationships among the community, allowing a space for women to socialize outside of the home

(5) The sense of empowerment related to being able to read and write.

[Extract: 'Collective Trauma among displaced populations in Northern Iraq: A case study evaluating the therapeutic interventions of the Free Yezidi Foundation', 2020]

How to Use Case Studies in Evaluation

Data Analysis

Triangulation

'Triangulation' means combining different types of data from different sources (i.e. looking at short survey, Focus Group Discussions, Observation data and documentation together). This process will produce different perspectives which can **strengthen your analysis** and **deepen understanding of the complexities** of a case. Triangulation also strengthens the **validity** of your conclusions and helps overcome some forms of bias.

If different sources of data produce similar conclusions (for example, similar conclusions come from interviews, observations from researchers and documentary evidence) then you can be confident of the reliability of your theories and answers to the Key Evaluation Questions.

Triangulation may also highlight areas that require further data collection or analysis. For example, different sources may produce different conclusions about the same topic or event. Keeping a clear and accessible **database** will help you return to the raw data to see how conclusions were reached or give you ideas on where to find out more.

You can also 'triangulate' between different data collectors in your team, examining varying perspectives of instances or events. This can be helpful for strengthening conclusions or gaining a more nuanced understanding of what is happening and why. The process could also alert you to issues of bias and quality assurance.

The way different data sources overlap, confirm or contradict each other should result in giving a richer, and 'true', picture of your case. When selecting and designing the tools for your research, you should consider how the different tools will complement each other and **have a plan** for how they might be combined. The process of coding data, as explored above, will also help you make comparisons between different data sources and identify themes in your research.

Further Resources for Triangulation

'How to combine multiple research methods: Practical Triangulation', Patrick Kennedy, (2009). http://johnnyholland.org/2009/08/practical-triangulation/

Cross-Case Analysis

You have likely chosen to undertake more than one case study for your Evaluation (See **How Many Cases?** and **Sampling Methods)** for the purposes of comparing and contrasting cases (i.e. looking at best/worst cases, extreme cases, representative cases etc.). This process will also strengthen your conclusions as well as the validity of your findings.

It is important to point out that each case should be treated first as a separate study, before cross-case analysis is undertaken.

Cross-case analysis usually features tables to organize relevant data and case characteristics side by side, arranged by relevant data outcomes/research questions.

You can then look across the tables to make your analysis easier and draw your conclusions. The process of coding, ensuring that common responses/themes are categorized, will help you with this process. Below is an example of how cases might be organized in a table (e.g. for individual MHPSS intervention beneficiaries in a particular center):

Example:

Case	Demog. Info.	Dates within Programi	Needs Identified	Support Provided	Key Outcomes	Referrals Made
A	Male, 35	05/19-	" "	""	""	""
B	Female, 28	08/18-09/20	""	""	""	""
C	Male, 42	02/20-10-20	""	""	""	""

Further Resources for Comparing Case Studies

Comparative Case Studies, Methodological Briefs Impact Evaluation No.9, Delwyn Goodrick, UNICEF, 2014

How to Use Case Studies in Evaluation

Data Analysis

Consider Alternate Explanations

As we have shown in the section, case studies are analyzed by using the different data sources to **build** and **match** theories about how an intervention is working and why. This is achieved through a **continual coding process** (identifying themes and patterns), triangulation (increasing validity by using different sources) and cross-case analysis.

However, given that you are looking at specific instances, and not large or statistically representative datasets, it is very important that you **challenge** the theories you develop by considering **different explanations** for the patterns you observe.

One of the big advantages of case study evaluation is that it allows you to assess how other **contextual factors** are contributing to the success or failure of an intervention – as well as tease out in detail the specific way in which your project activities are working and identify any unintended consequences.

You can **increase the confidence** in your conclusions by exploring and potentially **rejecting alternate explanations.** You must show in your analysis that you have done so. For example, if your conclusions are that Project Z has directly contributed to increased female political participation in Governorate X, you should explore alternative explanations (i.e. political participation has improved for everyone, regardless of gender, independently of Project Z as a result of new legislation etc.).

Ethical Approaches

Development project evaluation must account for potential risks. Because case studies often are intensely personal and hands-on exercises, there are several ethical and do-no-harm considerations to keep in mind at each stage of case study development. **Protecting the privacy and the rights** of those involved is particularly relevant and important. The most pressing issue is that the level of description required to portray the richness of the cases may mean that the cases, and the participants within the cases, are **identifiable**. As such, this issue must be clearly discussed and negotiated with those participating.

When preparing for data collection or training facilitators, evaluation managers should include an explanation of the procedures an evaluator will use to protect human subjects. In the **conflict context**, special attention should be given to the composition of the evaluation team, ensuring that the team itself possesses deep contextual knowledge and can access stakeholders on different sides of the conflict divide. When **collecting the most reliable and valid information**, data collection technique(s) should account for the **safety of the researcher and target group**. Lastly, when **writing the case studies**, disguise may be necessary to preserve the participant's confidentiality. Details that are not essential to an understanding of the case may be modified and an explanatory note included in the report to indicate this has been done to protect participant identities.

How to Use Case Studies in Evaluation

Report Writing

Overall, your Case Study Evaluation report should be a combination of:

'Thick' Factual Description + **Interpretation of Events & Findings**

The exact structure will depend on the **Type of Case Study** you have chosen and whether the case studies are part of a broader evaluation (i.e. if you are using them for illustrative purposes) or the central method themselves.

Report Structure Guide

Introduction & Summary of Key Issues

Provide a short Introduction/Executive Summary briefly outlining the context and key findings of the report.

Evaluation Objectives & Questions

Clearly outline the purpose of your Evaluation and what you aim to achieve, as well as the Key Evaluation Questions you have developed. (See **Understand Your Objectives**).

Methodology

Justify why you are adopting a case study approach
Clearly state and justify what type of case study you are using
Define your unit of analysis and how the units were selected (see Sampling)
State the timespan of the study (and put it in context with the overall project)
Describe the tools & methods used
Provide information about the process (who are the evaluators, how were they trained and supervised)
Provide information about how and where the information is stored (see Recording Data). Some data might be provided in the appendices (i.e. transcripts)
Describe data analysis methods
Discuss challenge & limitations

Body of the Report

There are different ways to structure the main body of your report. If you are using a number of Cases and engaging in cross-case analysis, then it will be best to structure your report around key themes identified and your Key Evaluation Questions.

You should carefully consider the Type of Case Study you have chosen and what will be appropriate. For example, for an explanatory case study report could be structured along 3 broad sections:

1. Specific context of the project i.e. needs/issues of certain groups, background to cases
2. The project and how it is implemented in the contexts you are examining (nature, scope, details)
3. The results of the intervention, the responses of case to it and the other factors involved

Conclusions	Provide clear conclusions, linking to evidence provided in the body of the report and your cases. Make sure you have explored alternative explanations and accounted for these to the best of your ability.
Appendices: Case Descriptions	Provide **full summaries** of the individual cases you have used in your evaluation, which the reader can refer to when reading the body of the report. These should be **self-contained** case studies which show how you have first studied each case in isolation and reaching conclusions before making comparisons.
Appendices: Raw Data, Tools, Bibliography	Where appropriate/relevant, you may wish to include copies of your data (i.e. interview transcripts, observations), examples of tools used, and a list of documents reviewed over the course of the evaluation.

Make Your Case Compelling

A well-crafted story can communicate abstract and complex ideas in ways that will ensure your case study is accessible for outside audiences:

- **Understand the audience** - Identify your case study readers. What can you assume they will already know, and what needs to be explained?
- **Identify the "take home message"** - Ask yourself what key takeaway you are trying to share
- **Present your case findings** – At minimum, a case study report should include details on background information (set out an issue that was being addressed), narrative of the case (what happened along the way), change and results, and lessons learned. To make a case study compelling, there are several presentation strategies you can choose:
  - Natural history - Chronological presentation of the case, similar to a narrative story
  - Critical incident – The report is built around a single incident that captures the evaluative message of the report
  - Thematic – The report is organized around the key themes that have emerged from the case study
  - Within and between – This is used for reporting multiple case studies. The report should contain both the individual case study summaries ('within') and results of the cross-case analysis ('between')
- **Enhance the story -** Use description to tell the story, use quotes to capture meaningful moments and/or use pictures to express feelings and change
- **Test the case study –** Ask someone not involved in the project to tell what key messages they understand from the draft case study. If what they describe does not match your plan, then you may need to adjust the draft.

How to Use Case Studies in Evaluation

Report Writing

Presentation of Data & Analysis

Both in writing your individual case studies and in presenting your theories and analysis, it is important to make sure that your report is **readable** and **accessible**.

Remember that a key advantage of case studies is that they provide **context** and **color** to a project Evaluation. While case studies are rich in detail, they should not be a long block of text:

- Use summary **tables and diagrams** which show the **key elements** of cases
- Use **direct quotes** to allow the subjects of the case study to speak for themselves
- Use **visual evidence** where possible and appropriate (i.e. photographs from observation tools, examples of training/event materials etc.)

Your report should be a **story** which allows the reader to understand how and why you have come to your conclusions – and which also explores alternative narratives.

Tools & Resources

Quality Checklist

Adapted from: 'Technical Note on Evaluative Case Studies', USAID, 2013 (With additions)

	Question
☑	*Are the objectives and research questions clearly stated?*
☑	*Is there a clear justification of why the Case Study approach has been chosen?*
☑	*Are the types of Case Study chosen clearly defined, along with the units of analysis?*
☑	*Is there a justification for the number of cases chosen and the sampling?*
☑	*Has the context of the intervention and Evaluation been clearly described?*
☑	*Are the Data Collection and Data Analysis methods clearly described?*
☑	*Are the challenges and limitations discussed (including potential biases)?*
☑	*Are alternative explanations explored for the conclusions?*

Example Case Studies

1.

Collective Trauma among displaced populations in Northern Iraq: A case study evaluating the therapeutic interventions of the Free Yezidi Foundation', 2019

This Case Study focuses on the specific interventions of the Free Yezidi Foundation in the Kurdish Region of Iraq as their unit of analysis. It makes use of quantitative data from Questionnaires and Scales, as well as qualitative data from interviews and Focus Group Discussions.

The report is structured around key themes to emerge from the different data sources and makes extensive use of direct quotes. It makes recommendations for further Mental Health and Psychosocial Support work in Northern Iraq.

Link: https://www.interventionjournal.org/downloadpdf.asp?issn=1571-8883;year=2019;volume=17;issue=1;spage=3;epage=12;aulast=Womersley;type=2

2.

Sample Case Study: Sierra Golden Kids Program, 2002

This case study focusses on an individual beneficiary (a child soldier) as the unit of analysis, purposively selected as a success story example. Methods employed are almost entirely qualitative, focussing on in-depth interviews with stakeholders and the beneficiary themselves. The case study is one of four used in a study to explore the impact of Search for Common Ground's Talking Drum Studio project in Sierra Leone.

Information is organized by source and extensive use is made of direct quotes to illustrate the story. The case study is less methodologically rigorous than other examples, however, combined with other methods it provides an illustrative example of how the project worked in practice

This Case Study is taken from 'Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning For Fragile States & Peacebuilding Programs: Practical Tools for Improving Program Performance and Results'. (Social Impact). Pages 44-47

3.

Multiple Examples, 'Case Study Evaluations', World Bank

This paper by Mora & Friedlander provides multiple examples of Case Studies from World Bank studies, with a breadth of different case types. The sampling strategies and data collection/analysis methods are clearly spelt out and are useful for examples for report writing and considering which types of case study might be appropriate for your evaluation.

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