

# Foreword

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In my childhood there was only one variety of sports shoe, whose sole was made of rubber and the upper part of cloth, either white or dark blue. This was used for all sports, from football to handball, both indoor and outdoor. Product development has led to differentiation so that there are now numerous varieties of shoes for – to take an example – jogging, depending on the track or the floor, the weight of the individual and the jogging style. Ultimately, a person can have individualized shoes adjusted to his or her specific needs. We are moving in a similar direction with regard to case study methodology, which is differentiated to fit the objective and the context of the research. When I started to do research, there was only one way of doing case studies and the only acceptable motivation for doing them was to ‘dig up’ issues on which to focus ‘serious’ research.

This attitude, I believe, was based on a little-brother complex *vis-à-vis* the sciences – such as physics and chemistry – where large-scale data collection under strictly controlled circumstances allowed statistical analyses. That was research! We tried to imitate. Over time I think we have gradually dropped bits of that inferiority complex, realizing that the objects of study in business and management are quite different from those of the sciences, based as the latter are on ‘eternal laws’. However, I think we, as the collective of researchers in international business and management, still have some distance to travel before we are able to think completely independently about what constitutes high-quality research in our areas. This book adds to the knowledge of the repertoire we have. That is a great contribution.

‘Pluralism’, the first word of the title to the introductory chapter, sets a wonderful tone to this book. It signals an openness towards new ideas while acknowledging that some older thinking on case study methodology has merit, and that quality levels must be upheld. I believe we must be generous to each other in judging the case methodologies that we apply. While there is a delicate balance between these two criteria, in my mind, we should err in the direction of generosity. I have attended conferences, not in international business I am eager to point out, where discussions have been destroyed by proponents for different methodologies accusing each other of ‘not sticking to the true faith’. So, sectarianism should not be mistaken for quality.

A number of years back, there was an evaluation made by American business and industry concerning activities performed by business school professors. It turned out that those in business, when responding to the survey, were pleased with the quality of the educational programmes offered. They were, on the other hand, very critical towards the relevance of the research produced at those schools. In my mind, there is something to that view and I believe that doing case study research will create an improved understanding of and interest in research into the realities of management, and stimulate more of us to think about relevance to practitioners. And the realities of management are exciting indeed!

At the annual meeting of the Academy of Management in 2004 I was asked to take part in a session to honour the memory of Sumantra Ghoshal by talking about how to produce pathbreaking research. Those of us who spoke were surprisingly united in suggesting that some of the secrets were: inductive case studies, working in a group of people rather than as individuals and staying with the research theme for a relatively long time. I take the opportunity to pass on this prescription, echoed in the objective of this book. Working inductively by no means implies that the researcher should be a-theoretical. On the contrary, in my opinion, the researcher should be well versed in the theory of the firm, and perhaps in some more specific theories, but staying open when interpreting what has been discovered.

This volume indeed brings insight into the large and complex area of case study methodologies. There will no doubt be numerous references to it, and it will raise the quality not only of the 'methodological chapter' of dissertations and reports but also of the research itself. Hopefully, that will be true also for articles in journals, which we must ensure publish case study research.

I would like to congratulate the editors as they have been able to find and enlist so many skilled authors to produce insightful chapters on various aspects of case study methodology.

Jan-Erik Vahlne  
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