



ON CASE STUDY METHOD IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP RESEARCH

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Abstract: The analysis of literature indicates a wide range of the use of case study in management science to describe different areas of organizational realities. Case study is a useful method of solving not only scientific problems in the area of management but also practical problems, which is particularly important for solving problems originating in the economic practice of small companies managed by their owners. The objective of the paper is the presentation of the specificity of case study oriented towards its paradigmatic basis and selected practical aspects in the context of research on entrepreneurship.

Keywords: case study, qualitative research, methodology, paradigm, management, entrepreneurship, research problem

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Introduction

Case study research allows the exploration and understanding of complex issues. It can be considered a robust research method particularly when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required. Case study method enables a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context (Zainal 2007). The appreciation of case study as a research method derives from the fact that researchers have constantly been becoming more concerned about the limitations of quantitative methods in providing holistic and in-depth explanations of the social and behavioral problems. Case study methods enable researchers to go beyond the quantitative statistical results and understand the behavioral conditions through the actor's perspective. By including both quantitative and qualitative data, case study often enables explanation of both the process and the outcome of a phenomenon through complete observation, reconstruction and analysis of the cases under investigation (Tellis 1997).

The analysis of literature indicates a wide range of the use of case study in management science to describe different areas of organizational realities (Matejun 2012). As A. Karami et al. Emphasize, in some periods case study was used even in 40% of research works (Karami, Rowley, Analoui 2006, p. 49. After: Matejun 2012, p. 351). According to E. Patton and S. Appelbaum (Patton, Appelbaum 2003), one of the biggest advantages of using case study in management science is the ability to obtain results of great practical importance for managers, entrepreneurs or stakeholders.

It should be pinpointed that case study is a useful method of solving not only scientific problems in the area of management but also practical problems (Wójcik 2013), which is particularly important for solving problems originating in the economic practice of small companies managed by their owners.

The objective of the paper is the presentation of the specificity of case study oriented towards its paradigmatic basis and selected practical aspects in the context of research on entrepreneurship.

Specificity of *case study* as qualitative research method

In management science, the solution of the exploratory problem or the explaining one may require the use of qualitative research method. The objective of qualitative research is to understand the exceptionality of the situation, to comprehend the nature of the specific phenomenon, its context and interactions with other components, and not the attempt to predict what may happen in the future (Wójcik 2013). Qualitative research consists of the detailed contextual analysis of the specific number of events or conditions and their relationships (Yin 2009). They are usually in-depth, exploratory, based on experience, interpretive and subjective. They refer to research methods describing and explaining a person's experiences, behavior, interactions and social contexts (Fossey et al. 2002).

In qualitative research, there are often asked the questions: "how?", "why?" and "when?" (Yin 2009), highlighting the links between individual constructs (Orr, Menzies 2012, p. 22-23). In the opinion of J.W. Creswell (Creswell 2013), qualitative research is adequate to situations in which deduction is necessary, when the research includes new, complex phenomena and events which are different in different cases of their participants.

One of the fundamental traditions of qualitative research is case study. It is defined as qualitative research method consisting in studying one or more cases (of organizations, programs, events, relationships, social processes etc.) of high internal complexity and intensive relationships with the environment, with the simultaneous use of many sources of information, taking into account the context in which the specific case occurs (Creswell 1998, p. 61-63). The context of the phenomenon is the focus of attention of R. Yin (Yin 2009, p. 6), who defines case study as the empirical study the object of which is the investigation concerning the specific phenomenon in its real context. The use of case study often takes place in a situation when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not completely clear and in situations when it is possible to use data from many sources.

Case study is also defined as the research strategy. K.M. Eisenhardt (Eisenhardt 1989, p. 534) claims that case study is just the strategy which is focused on understanding the specificity of the specific configuration of factors. M. Strumińska-Kutra and I. Kołodkiewicz (Strumińska-Kutra, Kołodkiewicz 2012, p. 2-3) suggest the interchangeable use of the terms of "method" and "strategy" with reference to case study. While referring to the studies by R. Yin (Yin 2003,

2009) and N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Denzin, Lincoln 2009), it can be observed that the concept of strategy can be interpreted as the way of designing the research process and it is equivalent to the concept of method, used in the broad context after J. Sztumski (Sztumski 2005), understood as a group of directives and rules based on ontological assumptions indicating some ways of the examination procedure.

Paradigmatic basis for case study

Generally speaking, the reference points for case study are two paradigms existing in social science – positivist and phenomenological (constituting the group of phenomenological paradigms among which there may be listed, most of all, critical theory, constructivism and realism). These paradigms are reflected in the case study method whereas its nature is subjected to changes depending on the adopted paradigm. It may take the form between the inductive approach (phenomenological paradigm) and the deductive one (positivism). An important fact is that case study escapes unambiguous classification (Wójcik 2013). As P. Wójcik (Wójcik 2013) underlines, when referring to the work of R. Piekkari, C. Welch and E. Paavilainen (Piekkari, Welch, Paavilainen 2009), 80% of the published research results in management science carried out with the *case study* method have the properties of the positivist paradigm, which was defined as tacit or qualitative positivism. J. Karpacz and B. Nogalski (Karpacz, Nogalski 2012, p. 206) also paid attention to the positivist grounds for case study.

However, the legitimation of *case study* is associated with crossing methodological barriers whereas, in practice, the research is often based on combining approaches and scientific paradigms. For this reason, case study is defined by R. Piekkari, C. Welch and E. Paavilainen (Piekkari, Welch, Paavilainen 2009) as the research strategy which, through the use of different sources of data, analyzes phenomena in their natural context, with the orientation towards the confrontation of theory with the empirical world. This confrontation may take the form of identification of constructs for further testing theory or searching for the holistic explanation how processes and reasons “match each other” in each individual case (Ragin 1992).

The research using mixed methods has developed significantly recently. With significant substantial support of the approach supporters such as: J. Creswell, A. Tashakkori, B. Johnson, A. Onwuegbuzie, J. Greene, C. Teddlie, D. Morgan, mixed methods emerged as a research movement of the variable name and identity (Denscombe 2008). They evolved to the state in which they are increasingly clear, combined with the research practice and, importantly, perceived as the third main research approach or even the third paradigm (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, Turner 2007).

The background of the research using mixed methods is associated with the fieldwork performed by sociologists and cultural anthropologists in the early twentieth century (Creswell 1999; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, Turner 2007). Mixed methods have been treated as the third paradigm since the nineties of the 20th

century. This fact is simultaneously associated with equal situating them next to the existing paradigms (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, Turner 2007). Generally, the philosophical partner of the research approach based on mixed methods is pragmatism. It provides the set of assumptions concerning knowledge and research which constitute the foundation based on mixed methods. Pragmatism also allows for distinguishing this approach from purely quantitative approaches based on the (post) positivist philosophy and purely qualitative ones, based on worldviews such as interpretive paradigm and constructivism (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie 2004; Maxcy 2003; Rallis, Rossman 2003).

Paradigmatic pacifists, such as T. Goles and R. Hirschheim (Goles, Hirschheim 2000), name the theoreticians and researchers promoting the end of paradigmatic wars and argue that there are strengths and weaknesses of both positivist and anti-positivists approaches. They emphasize that the mutually conflicted paradigms currently have reached the state of coexistence. In support of this statement, it is worth referring to the arguments indicated by L.E. Datta (Datta 1994):

- both groups of paradigms have been used for many years,
- there is significant, permanently growing number of researchers who are in favor of the use of multiple paradigms and methods,
- financing institutions support the research conducted in accordance with both groups of paradigms,
- both groups of paradigms have significant impact on science,
- each of both groups of paradigms has contributed greatly to the enrichment of the current state of knowledge.

It is actually the coexistence of paradigms that has contributed to the occurrence of a new view on the research. This perspective, with its source in the achievements of the philosophical school, known as previously mentioned pragmatism, is based on the proposal relating to the fact that researchers should use “any philosophical and/or methodological approach which best refers to the specific research problem currently being the subject to the analysis” (Tashakkori, Teddlie 1998, p. 5). The sources of pragmatism date back to the works from the late 19th century and the early 20th century by scientists and philosophers such as: W. James, C.S. Pierce, J. Dewey and O.W. Holmes, as well as the contemporary philosophers such as R. Rorty and D. Davidson (Menard 1997). Pragmatism reflects the distinctive American approach to philosophy and as such from the beginning it was just oriented towards the statement of “everything works” and refraining from the use of metaphysical concepts such as “truth” and “reality” (Tashakkori, Teddlie 1998). The pragmatic approach is at the same time contrary to the belief by G. Burrell and G. Morgan (Burrell, Morgan 1979) on the impossibility of combining paradigms (*incommensurability*) and the necessity for clear selection of a paradigm, simultaneously implicating the lack of possibility of combining and reconciling it with others.

As J.W. Creswell underlines (Creswell 2013, p. 36-37), pragmatism, as a world view, has been developing on the basis of actions, situations and their consequences, not the adopted assumptions (like post-positivism). Researchers are

not interested in methods but research problems which they attempt to explain using all possible actions. Pragmatism in these conditions is very important in social science due to the pluralist approach to research problems. It opens the gate to the diversity of methods, multiple world views and varied assumptions as well as different ways of collecting and analyzing data. Its role also refers to management science which is extremely prone to the use of diversified approaches, while absorbing methodological pluralism and eclecticism (Sułkowski 2011, p. 30-44).

The pragmatic approach is successfully applied both in foreign and Polish studies in the area of entrepreneurship (compare: Jałocha 2014). When detailing the components of the mixed approach, used in the research in the field of entrepreneurship (Tomski 2016; Lemańska-Majdzik 2014; Sipa 2012), the efficient approach may be based on the use of the research inspired by ethnography (more: Kostera 2013, p. 24-29), in which the main actors are social actors and the investigated phenomena are analyzed through the lens of perception by their participants. In these conditions, the research into entrepreneurship can be placed in the stream of the interpretive and symbolic paradigm.

The sources of inspiration in the area of this paradigm are social and human sciences such as: sociology, psychology, political science and cultural anthropology. The attempt to reconstruct the assumptions of the interpretive and symbolic paradigm in management leads to several points including: social constructivism, cognitive role of a language in creating social reality and involvement of cognitive activity in practice (Sułkowski 2012, p. 116). The scientific research in the interpretive and symbolic stream focuses on understanding phenomena from a broader perspective of actors themselves whereas the description of the research is primarily the interpretation of processes from the point of view of their participants, told by the researcher. The superior objective of the research is describing and understanding, not explaining the reality (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992).

The use of the pragmatic approach allows for using methods compliant with the beliefs of the researcher, and also attempting to cover the content and satisfy the research “curiosity” in the problem analysis. This type of *case study* is also inscribed in the humanistic stream in management science (Kociatkiewicz, Kostera 2013), with its methodology and the research subject – the problems of entrepreneurial management from the perspective of the human being – the entrepreneur.

The practice of case study in entrepreneurship research

It should be underlined that case study in its essence is not linear in its nature, in which the approved tools and protocols of collecting data are not subjected to changes but it is an iterative activity. In such proceedings, there is repeated the stage of developing tools and collecting data due to the obtained information or encountered difficulties (Czakon 2012). The source of data in *case study* can be observations, interviews, company’s documents, press articles, surveys, databases conducted by different institutions. Also, there are not methodological constraints

as for the method of data analysis (Wójcik 2013). In accordance with the results of the research conducted by M. Matejuna (Matejun 2012) on a sample of 48 researchers from the Polish scientific centers, using the strategy of case study in the field of management science, there is mostly used the interview method (88% of the research), within the framework of which the applied tools are questionnaires or instructions for interviews. A frequently used method is also the examination of documents (75% of the research). The research based on ethnographic inspirations is mostly based on open interviews (more: Gudkova 2012; Glinka, Gudkova 2014, p. 47). In such circumstances, interlocutors have an opportunity to share stories concerning different aspects of entrepreneurial management.

Some of the interview can be certainly structured in accordance with the positivist belief on the need to order and standardize some of the threads and measure the selected parameters. Also, in the spirit of positivist assumptions, one may search for clues to formulate research hypotheses, aimed at solving the research problem, set in the subsequent quantitative research. The impact of positivism can also be materialized in the content of the research results description by referring to the existing theories and making attempts to make the feelings and events described by entrepreneurs more real as well as discussions and references to the existing theories. In relation to this fact, it is worth referring to the statement by M. Strumińska-Kutra and I. Kołodkiewicz (Strumińska-Kutra, Kołodkiewicz 2012, p. 1) that the representatives of post-positivism based on *case study* attempt to create broader generalizations and even modify the existing theories.

Grounds for the selection of cases for the analysis

As J. Seawright and J. Gerring (Seawright, Gerring 2008) emphasize, the selection of cases is even the basis for the activities of the researcher using the *case study* strategy. At the same time, they pay attention to the fact that random selection is not an appropriate solution under conditions where the target number of cases subjected to the analysis is too small. In such conditions, purposive sampling is necessary, which is pinpointed by W. Czakon (Czakon 2011, p. 55) simultaneously stating that case study in most of its usage is conducted just in the mode of purposive sampling.

If the method used is aimed at deepening understanding and not prediction, the selection of participants of the research is focused on individuals that become catalyzers of the dialogue concerning their life experiences (Jemielniak, Kociatkiewicz 2009). However, adequately, in the opinion of J. Gerring (Gerring 2006), the final selection of appropriate cases is a particular challenge when their number is to be very limited. In the selection of cases, undoubtedly, an important fact is that, in most studies, *case study* is oriented towards explaining the properties of a greater population. The cases selected for the analysis are therefore something more than the specific case itself, even if generalizations are formulated in a non-binding manner (Gerring 2004). The selected cases are therefore to perform just a heroic function – the representation of the whole population of cases, which is usually much larger than a single analyzed case itself. A truly representative case

is not therefore easy to recognize in any way. An additional challenge for the researcher is also to achieve the diversity of cases in the area of significant dimensions (Seawright, Gerring 2008).

According to the classification by B. Flyvbjerg (Flyvbjerg 2006), the cases maximally diversified, aimed at obtaining information concerning the significance of different conditions for the specific process or phenomenon and its result, are adequate to the problem of entrepreneurship. The criterion of diversity is also pinpointed by W. Czakon (Czakon 2011, p. 55), who claims that it requires the study of many cases selected in a way allowing for presenting at least different circumstances or contradictory cases. Those different circumstances in the case of entrepreneurship research are e.g. different stages of the entrepreneurship cycle. According to the classification by R. Yin (Yin 2003), it is worth selecting cases enabling the implementation of the exploratory case study which, as a result of the research conduct, allows for the formulation of general questions and hypotheses for the future research or the assessment of the feasibility of the research procedures planned in the future studies.

In other considerations on the methodological grounds for the selection of cases for the analysis, J. Seawright and J. Gerring (Seawright, Gerring 2008) indicate the existence of their seven types. Adequately to the classification suggested by them, the cases selected for the analysis of problems of entrepreneurship are the ones inscribed in the group of typical, diversified cases. A typical case is the one being the representative of a kind, reflecting best its specificity. The study based on this type of cases focuses on the exemplification of a stable relationship occurring in a greater number of cases. Finding a typical case of the occurrence of a phenomenon allows for fulfilling the basic condition required in the process of the selection of cases. Due to its structure, a typical case can be perceived as a representative case (Hersen, Barlow 1976, p. 24). The strategy for the selection of cases by J. Seawright and J. Gerring (Seawright, Gerring 2008) focuses on the achievement of maximum diversity of significant dimensions. This method is known as the diversified case method. This approach refers to the concept of maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling by M.Q. Patton (Patton 2002, p. 234). It requires the selection of at least two cases for the analysis the target role of which is to present the full range of values or their relationships. When the researcher focuses on values, the analysis is exploratory in nature, oriented towards searching for hypotheses whereas when they are concentrated on the relationships between variables the analysis is confirmative in nature (testing hypotheses) (Seawright, Gerring 2008). The variable, which can be found significant for the selection of cases is the stage of the cycle of entrepreneurship. Apart from the stage of the cycle of entrepreneurship, it can also be the stage of the enterprise development cycle. This stage can be determined e.g. on the basis of the tool developed by J. Machaczka (Machaczka 1998, p. 136-139).

The presentation of the research should be materialized in the form of the descriptive report. The core of the discussion on individual cases should be indicated by the formulated research question or research questions.

Conclusions

Case study is the research strategy perfectly inscribed in the specificity of management science. Its multi-dimensional and multi-threaded nature corresponds with the multi-paradigmatic nature and methodological pluralism of the science. These facts are certainly in favor of a strong position of case study as a way leading to the exploration of the complex organizational reality, including the issues in the field of entrepreneurship.

As a final, concluding remark it is worth stating that *case study* is definitely a scientific research method but it also can be seen as a craft, which requires practice supported by theoretical findings and directions. As H.R. Bernard stated “Research is a craft. I’m not talking *analogy* here. Research isn’t *like* a craft. It *is* a craft. If you know what people have to go through to become skilled carpenters or makers of clothes, you have some idea of what it takes to learn the skills for doing research. It takes practice, practice, and more practice” (Bernard 2017, p. 1).

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O METODZIE CASE STUDY W BADANIACH Z ZAKRESU PRZEDSIĘBIORCZOŚCI

Streszczenie: Analiza literatury wskazuje na szeroki zakres wykorzystania studium przypadku w naukach o zarządzaniu do opisu bardzo różnorodnych obszarów rzeczywistości organizacyjnych. Na podkreślenie zasługuje także fakt, iż studium przypadku jest przydatnym sposobem rozwiązywania nie tylko problemów naukowych w obszarze nauk o zarządzaniu, ale również problemów praktycznych, co ma szczególne znaczenie dla rozwiązywania problemów mających źródło w praktyce gospodarczej małych firm zarządzanych przez właścicieli. Celem opracowania jest prezentacja specyfiki case study ukierunkowana na jej podstawy paradygmatyczne oraz wybrane aspekty praktyczne w kontekście badań nad przedsiębiorczością.

Słowa kluczowe: studium przypadku, badania jakościowe, metodologia, paradygmat, zarządzanie, przedsiębiorczość, problem badawczy