SAGE Research Methods Cases Submission for Consideration

Case Title

[Title should mention the method and research topic. For example, "Oral History Interviewing:

History in the Classroom in pre-war Britain"]

The role of context in qualitative case study research: understanding service innovation

Author Name(s)

Dr Vessela Warren

Dr Robin Bell

Author Affiliation & Country of Affiliation

University of Worcester, UK

Lead Author Email Address

Email: v.warren@worc.ac.uk

Discipline

Business & Management [D12]

Academic Level of intended readership

Postgraduate

Contributor Biographies

[Insert here. Please include a separate biography for each author, maximum 200 words per author.]

Dr Vessela Warren holds a BSc in Economics from the University of Bologna, MBA from the University of West England and DBA from the University of Gloucestershire. She is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Worcester. Previously she was a research associate with the University of Gloucestershire. Before entering the academia, Vessela held senior management positions in

international businesses in the field of engineering and hydropower plant construction. Her latest knowledge transfer projects involved the implementation of innovation processes, development and launching of new offerings in SMEs. Vessela's specialisation is in strategic innovation management, business process re-engineering and service innovation.

Robin Bell, PhD is a Senior Lecturer at the Worcester Business School. He led the development of the School's first online undergraduate and graduate programs. Previously, he spent four years as the Business School's Director of International Partnerships and was responsible for collaboration with partners and supporting inbound and outbound student and staff mobility to achieve the school's internationalization agenda. He is also an Associate Professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University, teaching entrepreneurship and innovation. As well as being an academic, he is an entrepreneur and has acted as a consultant for the development of numerous entrepreneurship programs across China.

Abstract

The abstract should reflect the essence of your case study. It should be short and succinct, and should incorporate key words and concepts discussed in the body of the text. Please do not *cite references within the abstract.*

Case study research designs are a popular approach in business and management and in work-based research projects. Case study as an umbrella research methodology, under which a researcher adopts different methods for data collection and analysis, is a particularly useful approach for research projects concerned with an in-depth investigation of a particular phenomenon within a specific real-life context. The context in case study research plays a key role and a researcher needs to carefully consider the choices of "case" or "cases" in terms of value and uniqueness. The role of the researcher as an embedded researcher is also important as case study research offers a degree of understanding of the context under study that can only come from personal experience and involvement. There are many approaches to case study research; this SAGE case study presents and discusses a case study research design using qualitative methods for data generation such as participant observation, direct observations and interviews (with individuals and in group) to investigate the implementation of a service innovation process. This research approach was found useful, as the outcome of the study was intended to be an in-depth understanding of the service innovation process (the phenomenon) that was embedded within the context-specific settings of a small business services firm (the context).

Learning Outcomes

Please refer back to these learning outcomes when writing your case study. Your case study must satisfy each proposed outcome. It is vital that you provide achievable and measurable learning outcomes. Please see the links below for guidance on writing effective learning outcomes:

- *[Writing learning outcomes](#)*
- *[Bloom's Taxonomy Action Verbs](#)*

[Insert 3–5 learning outcomes under the following statement: "By the end of this case study, students should be able to . . ."]

By the end of this case study, students should be able to…

- Define the characteristics of a case study research design.
- Critically evaluate the role of context and the embedded researcher in case study research design.
- Understand the benefits and challenges of undertaking case study research.
- Critically justify the appropriateness of a case study research design for achieving the research aim and answering the research questions.

Case Study *(2000-5000 words)*

Headings and sub-headings *add structure to the body of your case study, enhance online discoverability, and make your case easier to read on screen.*

*Each main section with a heading must be followed by a **Section Summary**. Each Section Summary should consist of 2-3 bullet points, written out as full sentences, succinctly encapsulating the preceding section.*

Please remember that the lessons learned from reading this case study should inform the reader's future research projects. Be explicit about the pedagogical value of the content for the reader.

Project Background
Includes information about the substantive focus of your research project. Why were you interested in studying this topic, particularly using the methods you chose? Are the methods you chose typical for researching your topic? If not, explain your choice of methods. This section should not read as a literature review, but should be a reflective exploration of your research interests.

The research project was designed to explore in-depth the early steps of the implementation of a novel New Service Development (NSD) (or service innovation) process for the development of new

services within a small business services firm. The review of the literature suggested that there is a plethora of research about the New Product Development (NPD) process for new goods (Papastathopoulou and Hultink, 2012; Holzweissig and Rundquist, 2017) implemented in the manufacturing sector. However, research about NSD process in the service sector was yet fragmented and underdeveloped (Kuester et al., 2013; Biemans et al., 2016). The literature did not offer adequate guidance on how NSD processes can be implemented within service firms (Tether, 2005; Biemans et al., 2016). Much of the literature relied on large-scale surveys to study the innovation process in the manufacturing firms whereas there was a lack of in-depth studies into how service firms actually develop new services. The research project was developed to address calls for research requiring the adoption of a (longitudinal) single case study research design (Papastathopoulou & Hultink, 2012; Kuester et al., 2013) and moreover chose a particular context of under-researched area of small services firms serving business-to-business (B2B) markets (Biemans, et al., 2016). A case study research design is an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). The choice of case study design felt appropriate as the context was relevant to the phenomenon. The research sought to investigate the NSD implementation (the phenomenon) within a small business services firm (the context). In other words, the specific context of the case organization within which the specific problem existed was a key consideration in the research. Therefore, the case study research design was a useful approach to study the NSD implementation and the role of the organizational context in terms of the critical factors affecting the implementation and how the challenges were overcome by the participants, in order to manage the implementation. Research has shown that NPD processes are largely implemented in the manufacturing sector leading to an increased innovation productivity, whereas there is little empirical evidence about how small and medium enterprises (SMEs) organize and manage their innovation process. Given the SMEs' economic importance, the research questions addressed: *"What are the critical factors affecting the implementation of a systematic NSD process?"* and *"How can a B2B service SME manage NSD process implementation"?* (Davies & Warren, 2019). In focusing on these questions, the particular context-setting allowed longitudinal observations (18 months) of the implementation of the NSD process and the case study research design allowed the research to generate a multiple source of evidence through the application of different qualitative methods and to draw on the experiences and perspectives of different participants in terms of how to organize and manage service innovation.

Section summary
- *New Service Development in the service sector is an under-researched area.*

- *The study addresses two of the under-researched aspects of New Service Development research concerning the nature of the firms (services sector) and the markets served (business services).*
- *A case study research is useful when the context within which the problem or phenomenon under investigation exists is relevant and requires a careful consideration in the research.*

Case Study Research Design
Includes an investigation into how you designed your study, taking into account any fundamental decisions you had to make. You should ensure that you define and explain any key terms for student readers.

Some authors describe case study research as a research method (Baskarada, 2014; Rashid et al., 2019) however a case study is more commonly described as a research strategy, methodology or design (Yin, 1994; Stake, 1995; Hartley, 2006; Yin, 2011; Saunders et al., 2019). A case study is an approach to research which a researcher needs to design, and through which they use a range of methods for data generation and analysis to answer the research question (s). The case study research focuses on understanding a particular "case" by accessing data from a range of different sources of evidence generated through a multi-methods approach and from multiple perspectives which are the key defining characteristics of case study research (Yin, 2011). Another important feature of case study research is related to the study of a contemporary phenomenon which is not detached from the context (Hartley, 2006; Yin, 1995, 2011). In particular, the case study research is directed towards understanding of a specific phenomenon which is rooted in a specific and real-life context (Yin, 1995). This may mean that a researcher may be looking at a phenomenon (issue or problem) within a single organization or a specific issue across several organizations. A researcher can choose between a single case or multiple cases, however the decision should consider their research aim (s) and research question (s). A case study research is used to generate empirical evidence to investigate a problem within its real-life context. Therefore, another important consideration that needs to be made is related to access to evidence and participants as often the researcher plays the role of an embedded researcher to generate contextualized data and provide an insight from the in-depth investigation of a particular phenomenon (issue or problem).

The starting point of conceptualizing a case study research is the phenomenon itself rather than the methods, thus a case study design acts as a broad umbrella under which different methods for data generation and analysis can be used. The reason for the need to use multiple data sources for evidence (Yin, 2018) is related to another defining characteristic of case study design which implies that the boundaries between a phenomenon and its context are not well defined (Yin, 2018).

The research project was designed to obtain insights by conducting research close to a case study organization's normal operations, through interactions with the participants (Davies & Warren, 2019). The choice of case study research design allowed the research to include arrays of data-generating qualitative methods such as participant-observation, direct observation, interviewing participants, interviews in groups, online questionnaire and documentation (Gummesson, 2000, Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Saunders et al, 2019; Yin, 2009) that were useful in answering the research questions. The emphasis was on the choice and appropriateness of methods selected to investigate the phenomenon in its context as each method allowed the exploration of different aspects leading to the answering of the research questions.

To allow wider interpretations and insights to be drawn, the research involved all those participating in the innovation practices in the organisation, including decision-makers, middle managers and employees at lower hierarchical levels and the firm's external networks. In total 45 participants were involved. During the research, around 100 meetings were observed and the entire implementation of the innovation process, from the start to the launch of a new service, was studied. The aim was to understand and explain participants' perspectives and take account of the different experiences and actions to innovation events and situations, and unearth different insights by trying to understand what was happening within the context of the organization's setting (Warren, 2015). The role of the researcher as an embedded researcher was important as the case study research offered a degree of understanding of the context under study that can only come from personal experience and involvement (Gummesson, 2000).

Section summary
- *Case study research is a research strategy and attention should be paid to understanding the key characteristics defining the case study research design.*
- *A case study research design allows a researcher to conceptualize the phenomenon rather than the methods, and then use array of different methods to unearth the phenomenon within its context.*
- *A researcher can choose between single or multiple cases according to the research aim.*

Case Study Research Design in Action
Includes a discussion of any planning and practicalities you had to navigate when conducting your research. For example, how did you recruit participants of your study, or access secondary data? Did you work within a wider research team? What ethical considerations were essential?

There are many approaches to case study research, this SAGE Case Study focuses on an example of case study research design that uses qualitative methods. The decision around the choices of methods should be based around the aim of research and a researcher should bear in mind that the

phenomenon and its context come before the choice of methods. Stake (1995, p. 435) states: "*Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. … We concentrate, at least for the time being, on the case*". This implies that the defining characteristic of a case study is the specific "unit of study", also known as the "unit of analysis". Therefore, one may argue that the starting point of selecting a case study begins with a research problem, which involves the identification of a lack a knowledge about a particular phenomenon (issue or problem). Identification of the phenomenon then leads to the development of appropriate research aim (s) and question (s). The research aim (s) and question (s) then allow the researcher to determine whether a case study research is an appropriate design for their research project.

Yin (1984) defines a case study as *"an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. It is particularly valuable in answering who, why and how questions in management research"* (p. 4). Yin (2018) suggests that research questions focusing on "*how*" or "*why*" offer an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Once a researcher has made the decision to carry out a case study research design, the attention is turned into decisions around selecting the case itself. Yin (2018, p. 30) mentions two requirements: "defining the case and bounding the case". The decisions around these two requirements are related firstly to clearly defining the case, which can be a person, event, location, organization or phenomenon and secondly to clearly establishing the boundaries of what will be studied and what will not be studied, which leads to establishing the "unit of analysis". Once the case has been identified, a researcher can move onto making decisions around the types of evidence needed and how those evidence will be generated.

In our experience, identifying the unit of analysis is the most challenging aspect of case study research design. This relates to the need to define the characteristics of the case study, but commonly the boundaries between a phenomenon and its context are not well defined (Yin, 2018). If a researcher conducts a case study within the organization they work for, they may consider the whole organization as a case study and loosely define the case or unit of analysis. One way to deal with this situation is to carefully consider what it is they are actually trying to study and achieve. This iterates back to the choice of research aim (s) and question (s) which drive the research design.

The research project sought to investigate the NSD implementation, which was defined as the phenomenon or case, whereas the phenomenon was taking place within a small business services firm which was defined as the context of research. The case was bounded around studying the stages of

the NSD process from the perspectives of those involved in the innovation activities. Other organizational processes, projects, activities and people, were left out of the scope of study.

The essence of the case study design is to focus on the understanding of a phenomenon and its context. Therefore, the research context plays an important role in case study design. The reason for this is that the organizational context is as important and relevant to the research outcomes as the theoretical underpinnings. A case study allows researchers to analyse the context and the processes which illuminate the theoretical issues being studied (Hartley, 2006). Therefore, the decisions around the choice of case study should be made around the value and uniqueness of studying the case and the context itself, in addition to some practical decisions around the access to a case and the participants.

The research project selected an organization which represented an *extreme* case and context that it was worth documenting and analyzing (Yin, 2009). The unique circumstance of the case was related to the fact that the organisation delivered services on behalf of the public sector and did not have experience in developing its own business services (Warren, 2015). The organizational context also offered an opportunity to observe and participate in the implementation of a new business process for the development of new services, of which there is little research account evidence in the innovation management literature. Therefore, the case and the context itself provided a rationale for *"if it can work here it will work anywhere"* scenario (Robson, 2000, p. 182). Moreover, the research demonstrated that by investigating the organizational context and the implementation of the service innovation process, and the changes that such an activity can bring to a specific organization's practices, contributed considerably to practice and illuminated the theoretical issues being studied as suggested by Hartley (2006).

A strength of the case study approach is considered to be the possibility to *"catch"* (Stake, 1995, xi) a single case's particularity and complexity, and to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real life context (Yin, 2009). Case study can be particularly useful in the applied social sciences (Gummesson, 2000). Alloway, (1977, p. 3), cited in Gummesson (2000) stated that: *"research addressed to practitioners…carries the additional burden of drawing recommendation from the findings which are, one, understandable and two, implementable. The familiarity of a managerial audience with the language, data format and analyses used in case research is, alone, a major advantage. Further, the conceptual and descriptive richness of the data gathered enables the practitioner to assess for himself* [sic] *the applicability of the findings to his* [sic] *circumstances".* In that sense, the case study methodology fits well with pragmatism as a research philosophy, as this

supports the belief that knowledge is appraised according to its usefulness by the practitioners who will reject propositions that they find of no use.

In the research project, an existing but limited theory on NSD processes was explored by applying it to and within a specific single case study. The choice of the research design enabled the existing theory to be challenged and offered an opportunity to build a new theory, through the application of an innovation process developed initially for goods and then applied to a service firm context (Warren, 2015). The research project was not directly concerned with generating theory per se as a primary goal, or confirming established theory, but was rather problem and real-world practice oriented.

Section summary
- *The research project explored the NSD process implementation in the context of a small business services firm.*
- *Consideration should be given to the choice of case and context in terms of value and uniqueness.*
- *Multiple methods and multiple perspectives allow an in-depth investigation of an issue in its context, leading to the answering of the research questions.*
- *Case study research that is concerned with specific problem and is real-world orientated offers a contribution to both theory and practice.*

Practical Lessons Learned
This is perhaps the most important section of your research methods case study. It should be an in-depth reflection on the specific method(s) used in the research project being discussed, detailing the important lessons you learned while using this method. Student readers should be able to use these generalizable lessons to inform their own research projects.

A researcher needs to consider the appropriateness of case study design to their specific research project. Case study research design is particularly appropriate if a researcher wants to explore, understand or explain "how" or "why" a phenomenon within a particular context is happening. The case study research design has further benefits especially if the literature on the topic is limited in a particular field. Since the literature offered little guidance about the implementation of a NSD process within service firm settings, the case study design offered an opportunity for the researcher to provide a novel account of what happens with the introduction of a new NSD process (Warren, 2015).

Case study strategy has a particular advantage as it offers an opportunity to view process facets and use the researcher's unique capacity to make sense of what is happening: *"the detailed observations entailed in the case study method enable us to study many different aspects, examine them in relation to each other, view the process within its total environment and also utilize the researcher's*

capacity for "Verstehen" [understanding]. Consequently, case study research provides us with a greater opportunity than other available methods to obtain a holistic view of a specific research project" (Valdelin, 1974, p.47, cited in Gummesson, 2000).

One of the authors of this SAGE case study, was allowed as a researcher to "interact closely" with the case study participants and acted as an "active participant" in solving problems and challenges related to the implementation of the NSD process. Other researchers if they are granted access to a context-specific setting over an extended period of time would be able to translate existing but limited literature into the context of their choice. The role of the researcher as an embedded researcher can be challenging yet rewarding. Gummesson's (2000) description of the action scientist can be similarly related to the embedded researcher and could be quite illuminating: *"[Action scientist] must be able to balance a schizophrenic personality and get the best out of Dr. Jekyll as well as Mr. Hyde. It means that they must handle both the client's interests and the interests of science"*. (Gummesson, 2000, p. 119). The research project allowed the embedded researcher to develop theoretical and empirical insights through the exploration of early stages of the implementation of a NSD process and contributed to both the organization by helping the participants to adapt and improve the usefulness of the process, and extended the theoretical knowledge about the new NSD process itself and its implementation.

Since case study research investigates a contemporary phenomenon, a researcher should expect an element of uncertainty as at times they will have little control over what happens in the phenomenon. Choosing a flexible qualitative design should enable a researcher to provide a detailed description of the phenomenon and offer an enhanced overall understanding of it as the purpose of a qualitative case study research is not to understand the effectiveness or cause. Other researchers should be aware that a case study research begins with an overall research aim and a clear research problem, followed by research questions that focus on "how" and/or "why" which will allow them to provide "*an extensive and 'in-depth' description of some social phenomenon"*. (Yin, 2018, p. 4)

Section summary
- *Consideration should be given to the appropriateness of the case study design to the specific research project.*
- *Case study strategy offers an opportunity for an embedded researcher to study a particular phenomenon and use their unique capacity to make sense of what is happening in the specific context.*
- *Researchers should be aware that a case study research begins and is driven by the research aims and questions, and the research problem; and research questions starting with "how" and/or "why" are more appropriate.*

Conclusions

Includes a round-up of the issues discussed in your case study. This should not *be a discussion of conclusions drawn solely from the research findings, but should focus reflectively on the research methodology. Include just enough detail of your findings to enable the reader to understand how the method you used could be utilized by others in the same research area. Would you recommend using the particular method or, on reflection, would another method be more appropriate? What can readers learn from your experience and apply to their own research?*

The research project adopted a single case study approach using multiple qualitative methods for data generation and analysis. Case study research has the advantage of investigating issues that are embedded within a specific real-life context. This approach was found useful, as the research project sought to understand the phenomenon of service innovation that was embedded within the context-specific setting of a business services firm. The qualitative multiple methods used under the case study design supported the generation of data from a range of sources and from multiple perspectives which allowed for rich and in-depth data. The longitudinal case study investigation (18 months) was conducted from "inside" the small business services firm by one of the authors of this SAGE case study as an embedded researcher, allowed for the entire innovation process from the start to the launch of the new service to be studied. The case study approach allowed seeing how issues developed, how participants' perspectives evolved, what were the current practices and how the new practices changed and become established. The focus was to construct a holistic picture by identifying different aspects of complexity and issues that were embedded in the organizational context. Then, trying to make sense of the phenomenon occurring within the organization, while providing a detailed account of what is happening, drawing on evidence from multiple sources.

The case study research generated useful data and it is a recommended approach for research in other organizational settings. In particular, the case study research approach provided a detailed understanding of the innovation processes and their organization and management. Generally, case study research has become a predominant methodology used by researchers, and increasingly, other researchers call for more research using a case study approach. One reason to explain this is that often organizational problems, or issues, are context-bound, therefore a case study design can support the investigation and provide insight that is valuable to both theory and practice.

Section summary
- *Case study are difficult research designs to undertake but generate useful data and evidence.*
- *Most organizational problems are context-bound, and case study design can be a valuable approach to investigation.*
- *Work-based research projects may be particularly suited to qualitative case study design.*

Discussion Questions

[Insert three to five discussion questions on the methods/approaches described in your case study]

Discussion questions should be suitable for eliciting debate and critical thinking. Avoid questions which require only a single-word answer such as "yes" or "no."

1. What are the benefits of the case study research design?

2. What are the challenges of the case study research design?

3. Why would case study design appeal to you for your research project?

4. What would your research questions look like if you were to adopt a case study research design?

Multiple Choice Quiz Questions

Multiple Choice Quiz Questions should test readers' understanding of your case study, and should not require any previous knowledge. They should relate to the research methodology, rather that the research findings.

[Insert three to five multiple choice quiz questions here. Each question should have only three

possible answers (A, B, or C). Please indicate the correct answer by writing CORRECT.]

1. What should drive the choice of a case study research design?

    a. The phenomenon in its context. [CORRECT]

    b. The methods.

    c. Researcher's personal preferences.

2. Which of the following are key methods used in a case study research design?

    a. Survey.

    b. Multiple methods of data collection and analysis. [CORRECT]

    c. Semi-structured interview.

3. Which of the following are essential features of case study research design?

    a. A study of a phenomenon happened in the past.

    b. A study of a phenomenon happened in the past within a real-life context.

    c. A study of a contemporary phenomenon within a specific real-life context.

       [CORRECT]

Further Reading

[Insert list of up to six further readings here, in APA style]

Davies, B. & Warren, V. (2019). Implementing a New Service Development Process. *International Journal of Management Cases*. 21 (4). 19-33. ISSN 1741-6264

Web Resources

[Insert links to up to six relevant web resources here, in APA style]

References

References should conform to American Psychological Association (APA) style, 7th edition, and should contain the digital object identifier (DOI) where available. SAGE will not accept cases that are incorrectly referenced. Please ensure accuracy before submission. For help on reference styling see https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines*.*

[Insert bibliography of references cited in text here]

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