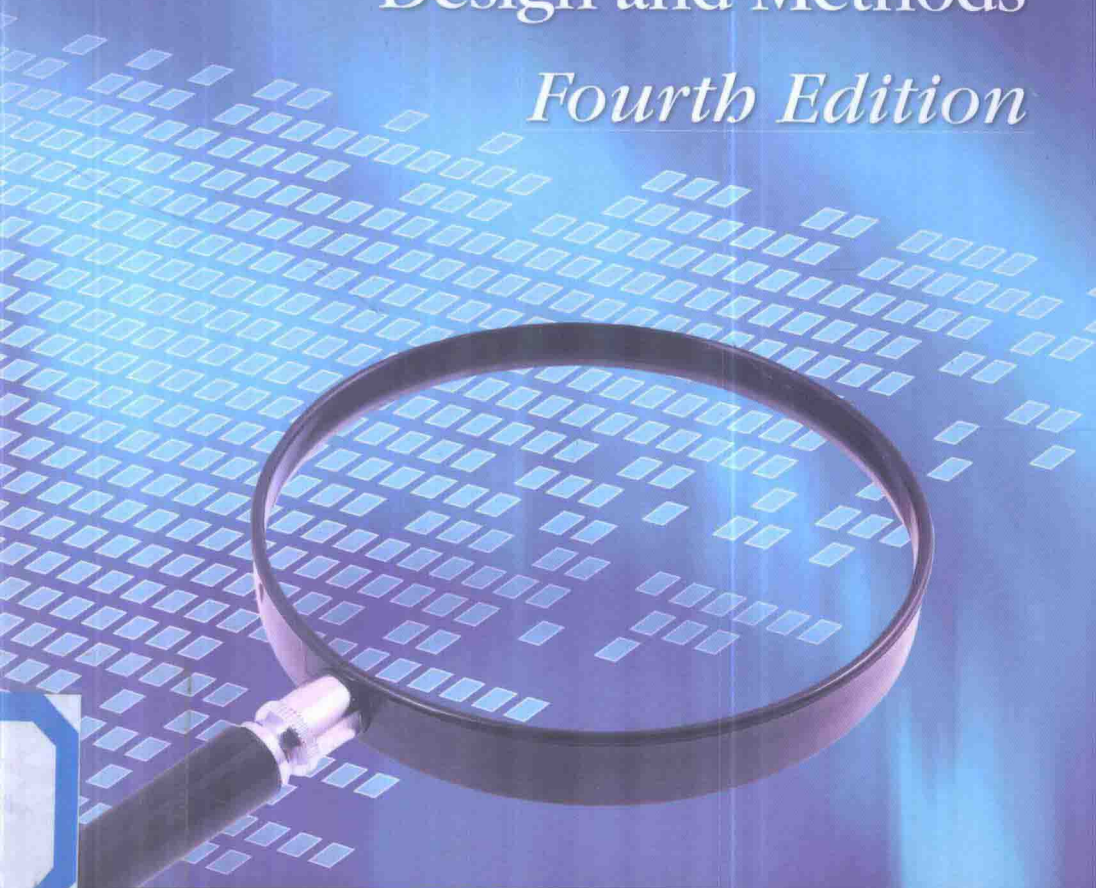

Robert K. Yin

Case Study Research

Design and Methods

Fourth Edition



APPLIED SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS SERIES

Volume 5

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Design and Methods

Fourth Edition

Robert K. Yin

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Case Study Research

Fourth Edition

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Foreword

It is a privilege to provide the foreword for this fine book. It epitomizes a research method for attempting valid inferences from events outside the laboratory while at the same time retaining the goals of knowledge shared with laboratory science.

More and more I have come to the conclusion that the core of the scientific method is not experimentation per se but rather the strategy connoted by the phrase "plausible rival hypotheses." This strategy may start its puzzle solving with evidence, or it may start with hypothesis. Rather than presenting this hypothesis or evidence in the context-independent manner of positivistic confirmation (or even of postpositivistic corroboration), it is presented instead in extended networks of implications that (although never complete) are nonetheless crucial to its scientific evaluation.

This strategy includes making explicit other implications of the hypotheses for other available data and reporting how these fit. It also includes seeking out rival explanations of the focal evidence and examining their plausibility. The plausibility of these rivals is usually reduced by ramification extinction, that is, by looking at their other implications on other data sets and seeing how well these fit. How far these two potentially endless tasks are carried depends on the scientific community of the time and what implications and plausible rival hypotheses have been made explicit. It is on such bases that successful scientific communities achieve effective consensus and cumulative achievements, without ever reaching foundational proof. Yet, these characteristics of the successful sciences were grossly neglected by the logical positivists and are underpracticed by the social sciences, quantitative or qualitative.

Such checking by other implications and the ramification-extinction of rival hypotheses also characterizes validity-seeking research in the humanities, including the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Hirst, Habermas, and current scholarship on the interpretation of ancient texts. Similarly, the strategy is as available for a historian's conjectures about a specific event as for a scientist's assertion of a causal law. It is tragic that major movements in the social sciences are using the term *hermeneutics* to connote giving up on the goal of validity and abandoning disputation as to who has got it right. Thus, in addition to the quantitative and quasi-experimental case study approach that Yin teaches, our social science methodological armamentarium also needs a humanistic validity-seeking case study methodology that, although making no use of quantification or tests of significance, would still work on the same questions and share the same goals of knowledge.

As versions of this plausible rival hypotheses strategy, there are two paradigms of the experimental method that social scientists may emulate. By training, we

are apt to think first of the randomized-assignment-to-treatments model coming to us from agricultural experimentation stations, psychological laboratories, randomized trials of medical and pharmaceutical research, and the statistician's mathematical models. Randomization purports to control an infinite number of rival hypotheses *without specifying what any of them are*. Randomized assignment never completely controls these rivals but renders them implausible to a degree estimated by the statistical model.

The other and older paradigm comes from physical science laboratories and is epitomized by experimental isolation and laboratory control. Here are the insulated and lead-shielded walls; the controls for pressure, temperature, and moisture; the achievement of vacuums; and so on. This older tradition controls for a relatively few but explicitly specified rival hypotheses. These are never controlled perfectly, but well enough to render them implausible. Which rival hypotheses are controlled for is a function of the disputations current in the scientific community at the time. Later, in retrospect, it may be seen that other controls were needed.

The case study approach as presented here, and quasi-experimentation more generally, is more similar to the experimental isolation paradigm than to the randomized-assignment-to-treatments model in that each rival hypothesis must be specified and specifically controlled for. The degree of certainty or consensus that the scientific community is able to achieve will usually be less in out-of-doors social science, due to the lesser degree of plausibility-reduction of rival hypotheses that is likely to be achieved. The inability to replicate at will (and with variations designed to rule out specific rivals) is part of the problem. We should use those singular-event case studies (which can never be replicated) to their fullest, but we should also be alert for opportunities to do intentionally replicated case studies.

Given Robert Yin's background (Ph.D. in experimental psychology, with a dozen publications in that field), his insistence that the case study method be done in conformity with science's goals and methods is perhaps not surprising. But such training and career choice are usually accompanied by an intolerance of the ambiguities of nonlaboratory settings. I like to believe that this shift was facilitated by his laboratory research on that most hard-to-specify stimulus, the human face, and that this experience provided awareness of the crucial role of pattern and context in achieving knowledge.

This valuable background has not kept him from thoroughly immersing himself in the classic social science case studies and becoming in the process a leader of nonlaboratory social science methodology. I know of no comparable text. It meets a longstanding need. I am confident that it will become a standard text in social science research methods courses.

—Donald T. Campbell
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Preface

Congratulations! You are reading the best edition of *Case Study Research* to date. This fourth edition contains more material, is more readable, and has more practical value than previous editions. The book was first published 25 years ago, and this fourth edition is actually the book's fifth published version, because there was a revised edition (1989) in addition to the three earlier editions (1984, 1994, and 2003).

The book's enduring objective is to guide you and other investigators and students to do case study research rigorously. The book claims to be distinctive in several ways. First, it presents the breadth of the case study method, but also at a detailed level. Other texts do not offer this same combination. Thus, the earlier versions of this book have been used as a complete portal to the world of case study research. Among its most distinctive features, the book provides

- ◆ a workable technical definition of the case study method and its differentiation from other social science research methods (Chapter 1),
- ◆ an extensive discussion of case study design (Chapter 2), and
- ◆ a continually expanding presentation of case study analytic techniques (Chapter 5).

These features are important because case study design and analysis tend to create the greatest challenges for people doing case studies.¹ Sandwiched between Chapters 2 and 5, the book also has two extensive and important chapters pertaining to preparing for and then collecting case study evidence.

Second, the book refers to numerous case studies, in different academic and applied fields. These references will increase your access to existing and (often) exemplary case studies. Most of the citations are contemporary, making the works easy to retrieve. However, to avoid losing connectivity with "roots," the citations also include older works that might be out of print but still deserving of being recognized. The specific references are found in BOXES sprinkled throughout the chapters. Each BOX contains one or more concrete examples of published case studies, to illustrate points made in the text. In this fourth edition, the BOXES now cover more than 50 different case studies, about a quarter of them newly cited in comparison to the earlier editions of this book.

Third, the new material in the BOXES complements other new technical material located throughout the book. The new information demonstrates how the case study as a research method appears to be advancing, despite vigorous attention to (and disproportionate funding support for) other methods, such as experimental designs.

In fact, Chapter 1 discusses the complementarity between case studies and experiments, including an important new reference to the centrality of case studies in clinical psychology (Veerman & van Yperen, 2007). Chapter 1 also contains a more elaborate discussion of the limitations of randomized field trials when the unit of analysis is a collective rather than an individual. Similarly, this new edition points out several features that parallel Paul Rosenbaum's (2002) important work in *nonexperimental* research designs. The parallel features include the desirability of having elaborate theories as starting points; the use of "case control" or "retrospective" designs; the importance of collecting and presenting data to support or reject rival explanations, as if to represent theories of their own; the value of the nonequivalent, dependent variables design as a form of pattern matching; and replication strategies as an essential approach to multiple-case analysis.

This edition also gives greater attention to two critical topics now addressed more fully in Chapter 2. The first is the definition of the "case" being studied (a concrete entity, event, occurrence, action, but not an abstract topic such as a concept, argument, hypothesis, or theory). The second is more guidance on the substance (not just the form) of a case study's initial questions and a suggested three-stage approach that may help readers to define their initial questions.

Similarly, the new edition devotes more attention to the mixing of quantitative and qualitative data as part of the same case study. The possibilities and variations in mixed methods designs gain explicit attention at the end of Chapter 2, and Chapter 6 has modest guidance on composing case studies in relation to mixed methods research. New examples of quantitative analyses, including the use of hierarchical linear models and structural equation models as applied to certain facets of a case study, appear in Chapter 5. These examples reinforce this book's original and continuing position regarding the case study method as one that can embrace both quantitative and qualitative data.²

Finally, new material in Chapter 3 discusses human subjects protection, the role of institutional review boards (IRBs), and the interplay between obtaining IRB approval and the final development of the case study protocol and conduct of a pilot case.

Aside from these technical enhancements, this fourth edition contains several features aimed at making the book more useful and practical. First, each chapter starts with a "tip." The tip poses key questions and answers for the core material in the entire chapter. The tips therefore enable readers to know quickly how hard they will want to focus on any given chapter. An easily understood tip might suggest that the chapter only needs brief perusal. Conversely, a tip that appears confusing or obscure might suggest the need for a close reading.

Second, the practical exercises for each chapter have been upgraded. Previous editions also had five such exercises for each chapter, but the fourth

edition revises some of them and then locates them throughout each chapter, rather than at the end of the chapter as in the past. Each exercise therefore appears next to the chapter section that is most pertinent to the exercise. The upgrading and relocation of the exercises should increase their practical value.

Third, the end of each chapter, besides having one or more endnotes, now has a new cross-referencing table. The table indicates where readers may seek more extensive excerpts or fuller renditions of the case studies referenced in the chapter's BOXES and text. Although readers always can refer to the original case study publication, the table indicates whether excerpts also appear in either of two anthologies that deliberately collected these materials (Yin, 2003, 2004). The anthologies only contain excerpts, but they nevertheless serve to broaden the exposure to the case studies for readers who may not be ready (or willing) to work with the original literature.

Finally, the chapter titles and subtitles have been revised to be more friendly. They should still communicate the basic coverage of each chapter but also suggest what readers will gain by studying the chapter. Likewise, this preface is entirely new and attempts to point out the new edition's important features. As with previous editions, the chapter titles are followed with a brief abstract that summarizes the chapter's contents.

One possible motivation for all these changes, expanding technical topics and making the book more practical, may derive from an observation that I (and many others) have long had (but cannot explain): the remarkable ability of young people to conduct computer and video game operations easily and with little apparent instructional guidance. The young learn fast. However, they also may come equipped with more skills and intuitions than previous generations.

This observation has, curiously, influenced the revisions in the fourth edition. As being suggested by this preface, I have not hesitated to add some more difficult concepts in doing case study research. As a result of these changes, readers should be forewarned that I think this edition is "harder" (hopefully not more arcane) than earlier editions. However, successful adoption of this edition's techniques and guidance also means that case study research will be better than in the past. The ultimate goal, as always, is to improve our social science methods and practices over those of previous generations. Only in this manner can every generation make its own mark, much less establish its own competitive niche.

Given this context, two places where the book has not changed very much deserve attention. Reviewers of the third edition suggested reducing the material in Chapter 6, because many of the compositional issues seem to be related to the writing of research more generally, not limited to the writing of case studies. However, my experience has been that the writing of case studies is more critical to their communication than the writing of other types of research. Furthermore, those who have done exemplary case studies appear

also to have a flair for writing (and may have been attracted to the case study method in the first place because they wanted to have the opportunity to do some good writing). Thus, Chapter 6 serves as a reminder about the importance of writing and the investigator's skills, when doing case study research.

Second, Donald Campbell's insightful foreword remains unchanged. His succinct text, written nearly 30 years ago, still stands as a masterpiece about social science methods. Within the context of today's research debates, Campbell's work continues, remarkably, to speak with freshness and direct relevance. His foreword also positions well the role of case study research as portrayed in this book. I am deeply honored by the inclusion of this foreword and have attempted to provide but a modest repayment in a subsequent publication (Yin, 2000).

Over the years, the initiation and continued evolution of this book have benefited from the advice and support of many people. I will resist creating a cumulative list acknowledging all of these people from, in some cases, many years ago. However, Prof. Leonard Bickman and Dr. Debra Rog invited me to submit the first manuscript of this book as part of their (then) new series on *Applied Social Research Methods*. Under their editorship, the series has become a bellwether among all of Sage's publications. I will be forever grateful to them for providing the opportunity as well as the initial feedback and encouragement in completing the manuscript. Similarly, in relation to the book's still-early editions, colleagues such as Larry Susskind at the Department of Urban Studies and Planning (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Nanette Levinson at the Department of Computer Sciences (The American University), and Eric Maaloe (the Aarhus School of Business in Denmark) all provided opportunities to teach and learn about the case study method in different settings.

Flashing forward to this fourth edition, and as part of its preparation, Sage Publications invited seven persons to share in writing their experience in using the third edition. I did not expect Sage to divulge their identities, and they remained anonymous until well after I had integrated the comments, reworked the manuscript, and started the production process with Sage's editors. At that point, Sage chose to make the identities known. Though surprised, I nevertheless can now thank these reviewers by name. I hope they will see that their comments have influenced the edition's enhancements and updating, although I could not respond to all of the suggestions. The reviewers' diverse array of teaching experiences also appears to reflect the breadth of courses and disciplines that have found the book to be relevant:

- qualitative research methods to Ph.D. nursing students (Martha Ann Carey, Azusa Pacific University);
- doctoral course in IT research methodologies, for degree in management (Alan McCord, Lawrence Technological University);

- foundation and capstone seminars for master's in public administration (Nolan J. Argyle, Valdosta State University);
- political science (Jeffrey L. Bernstein, Eastern Michigan University);
- case study research for doctoral students in educational administration (Vincent A. Anfara Jr., University of Tennessee);
- first-year doctoral seminar in education (Pam Bishop, University of Calgary); and
- qualitative research for graduate-level course in public policy (William S. Lynn, Tufts University).

Research methods editors at Sage Publications also have, over the years, been extremely helpful in identifying ways of making the book more useful and usable for readers. For this most recent edition, I have had the pleasure of working first with Lisa Cuevas Shaw and then with Vicki Knight and Catherine Chilton. Lisa set us on a straight and productive course, and Vicki and Catherine then made sure that the final manuscript would be converted into a distinctive book, even as a fourth edition. As you can guess, we all have worked hard to make the book have its own identity, beyond being a mere retread of earlier work. Nonetheless, as with the earlier versions, I alone bear the responsibility for this fourth edition.

At the same time, I conclude this preface by repeating a portion from the preface to the third edition. In it, I suggested that anyone's ideas about case studies—and about social science methods more generally—must have deeper roots. Mine go back to the two disciplines in which I was trained: history as an undergraduate and brain and cognitive sciences as a graduate. History and historiography first raised my consciousness regarding the importance (and challenge) of methodology in the social sciences. The unique brand of basic research in brain and cognitive science that I learned at MIT then taught me that empirical research advances only when it is accompanied by theory and logical inquiry, and not when treated as a mechanistic data collection endeavor. This lesson turns out to be a basic theme of the case study method. I have therefore dedicated this book to the person at MIT who taught me this best and under whom I completed a dissertation on face recognition, though he might only barely recognize the resemblances between past and present, were he alive today.

NOTES

1. Readers familiar with earlier versions of this book will find that a discussion of pattern matching that formerly appeared as part of a design discussion in Chapter 2 is now found in its more appropriate place under pattern matching in Chapter 5.

2. Esteemed quantitative researchers may even agree with this. One of them has been the lead author of an article using “case study” in its title (Cook & Foray, 2007). Readers should not take this as an example of how to do case study research, however. The article mainly contains the authors’ rendition of a set of events (which apparently could not be told with quantitative methods) but does not present much evidence to support that rendition. (The rendition may be important, but whether it should be accepted as an example of case study research remains an open question.)

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*This book is dedicated to Hans-Lukas Teuber,
who made research a lifelong goal for
all who studied with him.*

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**Doing Case Study Research:
A linear but iterative process**

