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# Conducting Case Study Research: A Concise Practical Guidance for Management Students

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**Abstract**

This article demonstrates, with real world examples, the holistic approach to case study research as a concise practical guide for management research students. It attempts to encapsulate the basic components of qualitative case study research in management studies, with special emphasis on how to set a philosophical framework, articulate research problems and theorise research results. These components of research are identified, classified, and arranged into seven pillars (7Ps) namely; Paradigm, Perspective, Purpose, Plot, Practice, Procedures, and Persuasion. Instead of following the typical sequential execution of a chain of tasks, it is continuously intermingled amongst processes by revising/redoing them to ensure more credible results and produce cogent arguments. This paper shows how to align the research context with philosophical issues (ontological and epistemological paradigm); articulate research problems and choose a methodology; theorise research findings using classical reasoning methods of abduction, deduction, and induction and; expand the theorisation beyond the original research problem. This framework would be useful to research students to place themselves in appropriate ontological and epistemological stances, eliminate doubts, enhance clarity and sharpen the focus towards plausible conclusions.

***Keywords*** *:* Critical thinking; Methodology; Paradigm; Philosophy of research; Qualitative research.

# Conducting Case Study Research: A Concise Practical Guidance for Management Students

## Introduction

Publishing research results or, presenting a research project in a form of dissertation or thesis for an examination is just as important as producing research because not only for the sake of disseminating knowledge but also for the researchers' own benefits. This article demonstrates, with real world examples, the holistic approach to case study research as a concise practical guide for management research students. It attempts to encapsulate the basic components of qualitative case study research in management studies, with special emphasis on how to set a philosophical framework, articulate research problems and theorise research results.

There is little guidance on how to produce research which is consistent with ontological and epistemological assumptions throughout the research process and research students (i. e. up to PhD level) encounter many issues in terms of clarity and selection while doing research. This article attempts to demonstrate a holistic approach encapsulating the essential components of the research process, giving special emphasis on setting the philosophical framework, articulating research problems, integrating them with paradigm issues, choosing methods, and developing convincing arguments from research outcome etc. using a case-study methodology as an example. Drawing cases from a study of credit evaluation processes, it demonstrates an interactive process of articulating research problems and objectives in line with philosophical framework of critical paradigm and theorising the research findings according to the classical reasoning methods; abduction, deduction, and induction.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), research methodology involves selection, justification and sequential arranging of activities, procedures, and tasks in a research project. However, instead of following the typical stages of conducting research as a sequential chain of tasks, it suggests continuous interaction between processes backward and forward by revisiting, revising and/or redoing the activities towards more credible results in order to achieve the cogent status of arguments. Yet, justification of the choice of a methodology and methods pragmatically as well as philosophically, in a research report, is important because data collection, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions drawn thereon, are considered as heavily value-laden in non-positivist paradigms. Designing and conducting a research project involve several stages from clarifying the worldviews (philosophy) of the researcher to selection of methods of gathering, analysing and interpreting data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007) towards conclusions.

Qualitative researchers prefer inductive, hypothesis - generating inquiry methods (over hypothesis - testing models), focus more on investigations of meaning(s) rather than behaviour and, prefer thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008). The less structured methodologies reject many of the positivists' constructions over what constitutes rigour, instead, they favour flexibility, creativity and alternative routes of inquiry that embrace storytelling, recollection, and dialogue (Parker, 2003).

## Methodology

Vast literature is available for specific areas such as choosing methodologies and methods, samples and units of analysis, designing & constructing questionnaires, conducting interviews, and employing digital technology. However, not much literature is available on setting philosophical backgrounds, and how to integrate it with research problems and objectives, and also about the integrated cohesive nature of the essential components of a research project in a holistic manner. In this paper, these essential components of producing research are identified, classified, and arranged into seven pillars (7Ps) namely; Paradigm, Perspective, Purpose, Plot, Practice, Procedures, and Persuasion. This 7Ps structure shows the holistic picture of the research process in variety of contexts across several dimensions as illustrated in the Figure 1 below;

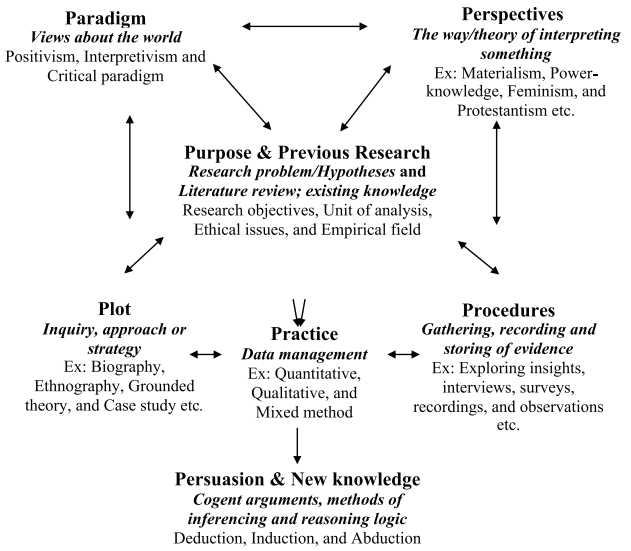


**Figure 1:** The seven pillars (7Ps) of case-study research structure

**Source:** Compiled by the author

This dynamic exercise is not a smooth process moving neatly from one stage to the other or an onion-type process which explores into the core by peeling-out layer by layer, or a tree-type process growing from ontological roots to methodological branches.

Many researchers insist that research methods and knowledge are co-evolving (Varga, 2018). In the early age of scientific research, the idealist-rationalists suggest that an absolute truth can exist uncontaminated by the experience of any observer but the more materialist-empiricists and naturalists argue that we have no ideas at all other than those which come to us via our senses (Laughlin, 1995). Later, the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857), who is generally recognised as the inventor of both 'positivism' and 'sociology' presented his thesis based on some key features such as; reality consists in what is available to senses; philosophy is parasitic on the findings of science; and there is a basic difference between fact and value, science deal with the fact and the value belongs to an entirely different order of discourse.

Anti-positivists believe that human actions are complex and have multiple meanings and argue that the concept of 'variable' used in modern quantitative analysis can only register quantifiable change, not its cause. Therefore, rather than survey-based large amount of data, anti-positivists rely on intensive studies of a small number of cases (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). Critical-dialecticians such as Karl Marx (1818-1883) and non-critical interpretivists such as Max Webber (1864-1920) did not believe in any specific set of rules of governing social sciences.

**Paradigms**

Answers to the questions such as 'do you really know what you think you know?' and if so, 'how do you know what you know?' (Denzin & Lincoln 2005) are heavily influenced by the paradigm (set of beliefs) to which the researcher and/or the research belongs. Awareness and understanding of paradigms are vital because their underlying assumptions affect most aspects of research. Kuhn (1970) defines a paradigm as the entire set of beliefs, values, techniques that are shared by members of a community. Objectives of paradigms vary from discovering 'the Truth' to constructing/building theories in proposing solutions. Three paradigms have been widely discussed in the realm of social research namely, positivists/post-positivist, interpretivists/constructivist, and critical realism.

**Paradigms compared**

A positivist paradigm is associated with scientific methods where the process of discovery begins with theory, using deductive logic, and the researcher tests hypotheses from the theory (Bailey 2007). Their ontological belief is that an objective reality exists independently of any theory or human observation and can be known through research in contrast to post-positivists who concede that 'we might never know reality perfectly but ... accumulated efforts will move us toward discovering what is real' (Bailey 2007, p. 52). Contrarily, interpretivists (including constructivists) argue that the truth is constructed within the minds of individuals and between people in a culture. Similar to the interpretive paradigm, critical paradigms follow the ontological belief that there is no single reality and they stress that 'social reality is shaped by historical, social, political, cultural, and economic factors, as well as ethnic, racial, and gendered structures among others' (Bailey 2007, p. 55). The epistemological position of positivists is that knowledge which can be gained does not depend on the researcher. Positivists believe that research should be objective and value-free which means "the researcher's feelings or values should have no place in the research results"(Bailey 2007, p. 52). Objectivity, reliability, validity and generalizability are the keywords used by positivists in their vocabulary whereas anti-positivists, often guide qualitative research, may employ terms such as 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability' and 'conformability' (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). Further, value-neutral or value-laden anti-positivist stance is preferred in social sciences because human activity and human society are never value-free and "possibility of any unbiased objectivity no longer appeared as realistic" (Bisztray, 1987, p. 40). While positivists follow deductive methods and seek certainty, anti-positivists mainly follow inductive generalization and abductive inferencing/reasoning.

**Subjectivism, objectivism and constructivism**

In explaining interpretation, Umberto Eco suggests that; To interpret means to react to the text of the world or to the world of a text by producing other texts...The problem is not to challenge the old idea that the world is a text which can be interpreted, but rather to decide whether it has a fixed meaning, many possible meanings, or none at all (Eco, 1990, p. 13).

Czarniawska classifies these different schools of thought concerning the modes of explanations or interpretation into three groups: Subjectivist (voluntarist), Objectivists (determinists) and Constructivists. She claims that subjectivism is the 'most traditional way of explaining texts...by deducing the intentions of the authors...comes from reading Bible, Talmud or Koran as authored by God' (p. 63). In contrast, she suggests "the meaning of a text is neither to be 'found' nor 'created' from nothing; it is constructed anew from what already exists" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 66). The common understanding is that researchers who subscribe to critical paradigm theory often want to document, understand and even change the way that powerful groups oppress powerless groups (Bailey 2007). The epistemological stance within the critical paradigm is that the researcher is not independent from what is researched and that the findings of research are negotiated through his or her values and desire to eradicate finance injustice (Bailey 2007). Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) also assert that all three philosophies of science: positivism and

post-positivism, social constructionism, and critical realism cut across the quantitative/qualitative dividing line and assert that;

Although the main thrust of positivism is quantitative, there have been cases of qualitative positivism, for example historiography. Conversely, social constructionism is mainly qualitative, but quantitative social constructionist studies do exist. Finally, critical realism bridges quantitative and qualitative studies – there is no tendency for critical realists to favour either of these type of studies (p. 15).

Lincoln and Guba (2003) also stress that 'These differences in paradigm assumptions cannot be dismissed as mere philosophical differences; implicitly or explicitly, these positions have important consequences for the practical conduct of inquiry, as well as for the interpretation of findings and policy choices' (p. 112). Therefore, setting clear and strong philosophical and methodological grounds to the particular research is paramount to identify the relationship between the inquirer and the known, in selecting appropriate methods, in developing cogent arguments, and arriving at convincing conclusions. However, in the age of experimental philosophy (Anthony, 2007), it is the particular inquiry (not the inquirer) which has to be underpinned with appropriate philosophical stand-point and methodological approach in line with the context of the research. In the anti-positivist sphere, researchers choose their philosophical viewpoints and methodologies to match the nature of the research. A comparison of paradigms is presented in the following Table 1.

Conducting Case-Study Research

**Table 1:** A comparison of paradigms

| ***Paradigm*** **Features** | ***Positivist/Post-positivist*** | ***Interpretivist/Social constructivist*** | ***Critical*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Researcher** | Detached observer | Attached participant | Transformative intellectual |
| **Purpose** | To discover the laws governing the universe | To understand and describe human nature | To destroy myths and change society |
| **Objectives** | Explore, explain, evaluate, predict and to develop/test theories | Understand human behaviour | Criticize social reality, liberate people, and propose solutions to social problems |
| **Ontology** | Reality or 'truth' can be known and independently exists outside of perceptions. Post-positivists concede that reality can never be known perfectly. | Reality or 'truth' is unknown and constructed within the minds of individuals. Multiple realities exist. No direct access to the real world. | Reality is created and shaped by social, political, cultural, economic forces that have been historically crystallized over time. Relativism. |
| **Epistemology** | Objective knowledge does not depend on the researcher and value-free. | Subjective perceived knowledge and value-bound/neutral; no value is wrong. | The objective-subjective label is socially contrived. Value-mediated Findings. Some value positions are wrong, and some are right. |
| **Key concepts** | Scientific, Experimental, Objectivity, Reliability, Validity and Generalizability. | Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Conformability. | Virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values. |
| **Methods** | Quantitative methods are preferred. Deductive logic. Begins with theory. | Qualitative methods are dominant. Inductive generalization inferencing/reasoning. Abductive-dialectical reasoning. Hermeneutical, dialogical and dialectical. | |
| **Theories/ Perspectives and Contributors** | Rationalism: Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Rene Descartes (1596-1650) Empiricism: John Locke (1632-1704), Positivism: Auguste Comte (1798-1857) Post-positivism; Falsificationism: Karl Popper (1902-1994) | Idealism: Johann Fichte (1762-1814) Protestantism: Max Webber (1864-1920) Pragmatism: G. H. Mead (1863-1931) Symbolic interactionism: Herbert Blumer (1900-1987) | Materialism: Georg Hegel (1770-1831) Marxism: Karl Marx (1818-1883) Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Power-knowledge: Michael Foucault (1926-1984) Cultural capital: Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) Deconstructivism: Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) |
| | Idealism: Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804), Middle-range thinking: Robert Merton (1910-2003) | | |

Sources: Creswell, 2017; Denzin, & Lincoln, 2005; Laughlin, 1995

## Perspective

Perspective is a set of rules or a theory that one applies to interpret a phenomenon. For example, in a traffic accident, the driver of one car will have one view, another driver or a passenger will have yet another view and each onlooker who witnessed the accident will have some slightly different perspectives, depending on where they were, how far they were, how good a view they had, what else was going on, how much danger they felt they were in, how the accident affected them, what the accident means to them etc. (Different perspectives, 2019). Bearing a single strong perspective might steer the researcher to snub other perspectives while holding several perspectives could make too much noise, leading to ambiguity and even some inconsistency. For example, Snyder (2015) asserts that low wage labour or sweatshops is often described as self-evidently exploitative and immoral. But for defenders of sweatshops might describe it as the first rung on a ladder toward greater economic development. On the other hand, in another perspective, it can be described as enhancing productivity or wealth maximisation which would lead to too much noise.

Purpose; research problems, objectives and literature review Often, it is the researcher's insight and experience that direct

the researcher towards a problem that needs to be researched (O'Leary, 2005). However, figuring out a problem depends on ontological and epistemological stance of the researcher therefore, chosen paradigm and theoretical perspective provide the necessary guidance to articulate a research problem. The vital-issues addressed in this process are; the curiosity, the aspirations and/or goals, appropriate research paradigms/perspectives, researchers' expertise and experience, accessibility to data, the topic, the context, the issues/questions, the motivation and potential relationship that could be explored. Articulating a reasonably acceptable research problem could stem from curiosity such as 'a burning issue', 'a mystery' or 'nice to know passion' etc., however, the lucidity of the problem and objectives largely depends on the process; an interactive exercise through initial investigations, preliminary review of literature, matching with underpinning philosophical stances, and with continuous cross-reference to the vital-issues. Application of this process is explained below using an example; a real-world experience encountered in a workplace by a researcher;

- Curiosity: Poverty, high rate of unemployment/ underemployment, income/ wealth inequality in an emerging economy.

- Aspiration: Fair and just income/wealth distribution system

This curiosity and aspiration bear an epistemological position of subjectivist value-mediated reality, stemming from an ontological position of historically crystallised situation, hence dialectical type methodology is preferred. Therefore, the suitable paradigm would be;

- Critical paradigm: Social justice and emancipation
  Capacity of the inquirer in gathering and analysing data depends largely on the expertise and exposure to the research field, for example;

- Expertise: Accounting, finance and strategic management.

- Experience: Auditing, accounting, management, and banking (treasury and credit management).

Meanwhile, review of literature reveals that;

SMEs make diverse contributions to economic and social well-being, which could be further enhanced SMEs play a key role in national economies around the world, generating employment and value added…provide the main source of employment, accounting for about 70% of jobs on average… (OECD, 2017, p.6).

- The Topic: Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and employment.

According to the researchers' expertise, experience and accessibility to data;

- The context: Financial capital; loans and advances to SMEs by commercial banks in the country.

In this example, the preliminary investigations and large amount of literature revealed that there is a disadvantaged group of entrepreneurs who are deprived from credit capital; Access to the appropriate finance is one of the most crucial resources for business survival, development and growth. The literature on this is expansive and suggests that disadvantaged entrepreneurs may experience specific challenges to gaining external finance for a variety of reasons…limited know-how and network connectivity – this is compounded by relative low levels of finance capital - … disadvantaged group may be less likely to have a track record of running a business... (Blackburn and Smallbone, 2014, p. 7).

- The questions: How and why SMEs are financed. Are certain credit applicants treated favourably while some other applicants are discriminated against?

- The potential associations are identified in two aspects: (i) Social power and favourable credit decisions, and (ii) poor-powerless and denial of credit.

- The motivation: Analyse and document the factors driving discriminatory credit decisions made by credit officers in a lending institution.

Therefore, the final research problem is arrived at, as follows;

Is social power and credit approval a mutually reinforcing function while poor-powerless and denial of credit, creates a vicious cycle in the Sri Lankan society?

In other words, the purpose of this particular study is to explore the role of loan capital with regard to power relationships and access to credit for businesses in the country. In this investigation, the researcher attempts to explain how certain credit decisions are made and whether such credit decisions contribute to create a mutually reinforcing cycles and what is the impact of such credit decisions on the unemployment and poverty in the society. The following questions could also be raised as a guidance for the literature review:

(1) Are credit decisions made in favour of influential businesspeople?

(2) Are certain demographic groups at a disadvantage in obtaining credit?

(3) As a result of favourable credit decisions, could influential groups of people get richer and more influential?

(4) Are "ability to obtain credit" and "becoming more influential" mutually reinforcing?

Such multiple research questions could provide useful insights about where to look for relevant literature and evidence, especially when the researcher's approach is critical and, when structural changes are expected towards a more fair and just financial capital mobility system as the end goal (Lincoln & Guba 2003). Therefore, such research questions could provide a strong foundation to theorize the research findings more effectively and meaningfully.

This particular example research problem belongs to the critical paradigm because it focuses on critique and transformation and the issues addressed are on social power relations and inequality. Therefore, it can guide the researcher to aim at documenting, understanding and even suggesting changing the negative implications of unequal power relationships and promoting justice. The questions asked in this example research are 'why do certain bank lending processes appear discriminatory?' and 'what methods are used by the decision makers to make preferential or discriminatory credit decisions?'; therefore, the answers (and potential relationships such as 'reinforcing?' and 'co-integrated?') could be inferred from the views of research participants' experience and values.
The Figure 2 below shows a holistic picture of the research problem and potential relationships with their interconnectivity to the variables identified through the literature review.

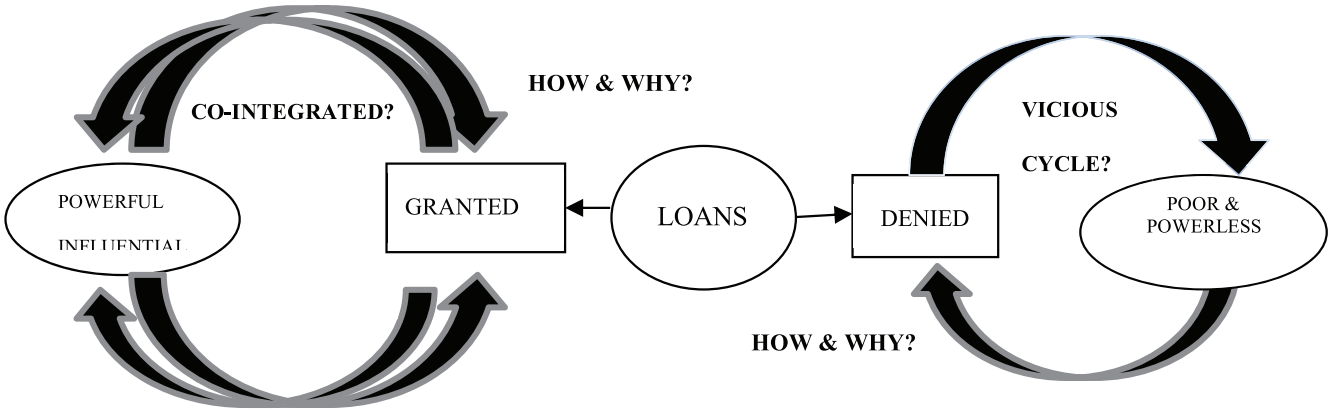


**Figure 2:** Illustrated Integrated Research Questions and Proposition
**Source:** Compiled by the author

This approach would help the researcher to review further literature, identify appropriate research fields, data gathering methods and focus on data description, analysis and interpretation (D-A-I formula of Wolcott, 1994) in developing cogent arguments and plausible conclusions.

**Plot**

***Approaches, strategies and traditions***

Creswell (2017) classifies types of inquiry into five categories namely; biography or narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. O'Leary (2005) suggests that 'one approach is not necessarily better than the other and methodological design is about informed decision-making that involves weighing up pros and cons and deciding what is best given your specific context' (p. 87).

Yin (1993) stresses the suitability of case study research method especially when researchers define topics broadly to cover contextual conditions (not just the phenomenon of study) and rely on multiple sources of evidence. Case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, therefore, the case study approach is especially useful in situations where contextual conditions of the events being studied are critical and where the researcher has no control over the events as they unfold (Yin, 1993). In business and management research, case study research is considered as useful especially for practical real-world problems where experience of the actors is important and the context of the situation is critical (O'Leary, 2005). Therefore, case-study methodology seems more suitable for the research problem, objectives and questions of this particular study.

**Example cases and participants**

Access to data seems as an obstacle but is a critical part of conducting research (Feldman, Bell and Berger, 2003). Many scholars complain about the hardships that the researchers undergo in obtaining access to private organizations, especially banks as this could expose motives of certain powerful individuals (Lee, 2000). Therefore, obtaining access through friendships has become more common in organizational research where these barriers exist for researchers. According to O'Leary (2005), 'a prerequisite to all case selection should be access' (p. 78).

The participants of this example cases were senior bank officers having more than 20 years' banking experience and known to the researcher personally. The three cases, which have been considered for this inquiry, are typical in nature in the context of this emerging economy (why they are considered typical should also be explained in detail in the research report). Potential researchers may follow some appropriate conditional criteria, in addition to access, to select more suitable cases. For example, the Table 2 below describes conditional criteria followed to select the cases in this study. The researcher and the participants had substantial access to all the cases considered and they also complied with guidelines suggested by various scholars.

Table 2: Five conditional criteria covered by the cases selected

**Table 2:** Five conditional criteria covered by the cases selected

| ***Criteria*** | **Cases** | **Case I** | **Case II** | **Case III** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Level of the Decision-Maker*** | Chairperson | √ | √ | |
| | Middle | | | √ |
| ***Decision-making Process*** | Formal | | | √ |
| | Informal | √ | √ | √ |
| ***Size of the applicant*** | Medium | √ | √ | |
| | Small | | | √ |
| ***Nature of the applicant*** | Influential | √ | √ | |
| | Not influential | | | √ |
| ***Decisions*** | Credit granted | √ | √ | |
| | Credit denied | | | √ |

**Source:** Compiled by the author

**Procedures of gathering and describing data**

Procedures are the tools and techniques used for data gathering and storing. Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) uses the phrase 'insight gathering' instead of 'data collection' to encompass wider sources such as recalling memories and reconstruction of experiences. Quantitative data collection methods are much more structured than qualitative data collection methods such as interviews, open ended questionnaires, participant observations and reconstructions of experiences. Quantitative data collection methods include various forms of surveys – online surveys, paper surveys, mobile & kiosk surveys, longitudinal studies, website interceptors, online polls & forms, and systematic observations. For this example, data gathering was done through both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are the main participants, including the researcher and secondary data consist of published documents and archival records. Data saturation is achieved by continuous gathering of data and integrating them in the analysis process in building links between events, tracing commonalities, patterns and relationships or/and posing critical questions such as 'was the decision made for personal gratification?' etc. towards interpretations and theorization. In this example, managing the three credit-client accounts for more than five years, a lot of data

was generated and the volume was adequate to achieve saturation point. Saturation of data collection can be ensured by obtaining independent feedback from peer reviewers and colleagues when there is satisfaction or deadlock of posing further why and how questions. Now it is argued that gaining traditional 'rich/thick description' alone is not enough to ensure the validity and reliability of a case study research because, it may be limited to different levels of depth and detail (Woodside and Wilson, 2003). On the other hand whether the description is 'thick' or 'thin', if it provides adequate evidence to the claim, the description is considered as dependable (Bailey, 2007).

**Practices of data analysis**

Practices are the choices of quantitative, qualitative or mix methods in gathering data and tools and techniques of analysis. Smith and Hodkinson (2005) point out that, 'no special epistemic privilege can be attached to any particular method or set of methods' (p. 917) but they insist that,

If the proper procedures are applied, the subjectivities (e.g. opinions, ideologies) of the knowing subject would be constrained and the knower could thereby gain an accurate and objective depiction of reality. Those researchers who adhered to method would thereby possess, in contrast to all others, what one might call the well-polished Cartesian mirror of the mind (p. 916).

Qualitative research is primarily exploratory research and used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas. Quantitative research is used to quantify the problem. It is used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and other defined variables – and generalise results from a larger sample population. Data analysis methods for quantitative and qualitative data follow distinct strategies. They are known as statistical analysis and thematic analysis. O'Leary (2004) explains these methods as follows:

Statistical analysis – can be descriptive (to summarize the data), to inferential (to draw conclusions that extend beyond the immediate data) and,

Thematic analysis – can include analysis of words, concepts, literary devices, and/or non-verbal cues. Includes content, discourse, narrative, and conversation analysis; semiotics; hermeneutics; and grounded theory techniques (P. 11).

Thematic analysis; 'narrative analysis' (Riessman, 1993) or narrative mode of knowing also referred to as the paradigmatic mode of knowing (Bruner, 1986) seems more appropriate analytical strategy applicable to this example study because; first, as Llewellyn (1999) claims 'narrating is a mode of thinking and persuading that is as legitimate as calculating' (p. 220); second, as Czarniawska points out "the narrative mode of knowing consists in organizing experience with the help of a scheme assuming the intentionality of human action" and "'narrative' in Latin probably comes from gnarus ('knowing')" (p. 7).

***Narrative approach leads to story building***

The primary analysing techniques applicable within this narrative analysing strategy would be 'story building' (Riessman, 1993) and 'cross-case synthesis' (Yin, 2003) because this research is a multiple case study research. Wolcott (1994) suggests the narrative technique could be used as 'a fleshing out process of the analytical framework' (p. 21). Therefore, after data gathering (see Table 3, Description), the following questions could be raised to construct an analytical framework for those 'stories' in order to provide for more plausible and credible (Hammersley, 1992) interpretation and answering questions such as:

- Why did the borrower approach the decision-maker of the bank informally?
- Why did the top-level decision-maker accommodate the client arbitrarily?
- How and why did the middle level decision-makers approve facilities without authority?
- How and why do bankers avoid 'unimportant' credit applications?
- Why the lower-level credit officers carry out instructions coming from unauthorised sources?
- How was the transaction concluded?

**Results**

This analytical process supports to build the cases as stories and therefore, in this example case study research, the data description and data analysis activities are complimentarily linked together. The thick descriptions of data, detail analyses and plausible interpretations of the three case-studies mentioned above are comprised of more than 20,000 words supported with many tables as well. Therefore, it may be useful to provide a summary of the D-A-I of the cases before theorisation begins as provided in the Tables 3 below.

**Table 3**: Summary of the analysis of case studies data and interpretations

| D-A-I | | *Case Study I* | *Case Study II* | *Case Study III* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DESCRIPTION | **The Client** | A Garment manufacturing company struggling with lack of orders and liquidity problems. | An automobile assembling company, struggling with regulatory authorities and financing problems. | A janitorial-service enterprise struggling with loss of business and with financing problems. |
| | **Credit Application** | At an informal personal meeting. Both the credit decision-maker and the client are socially powerful businesspersons. | At a social meeting, outside the bank. Both the credit decision-maker and the client are socially powerful. | Formal, within the normal banking practices and credit rules. Later informal methods used by the credit decision-maker. |
| | **Issues** | Under threat of foreclosure and huge redundancy. The highest single foreign exchange earner. Affected by the recent change of regime. | Investment promotion signal. Import substitution; foreign reserves. Employment generation. Rejected registration on safety issues. | Entry of influential competitor. Soured relationship with credit officers. No access to the higher decision-making authority of the bank. |
| ANALYSIS | **Negotiation** | Friendly. Informal. Unofficial. Quick. | | Official. Dragged. |
| | **Decision** | Without formal evaluation. Granted, over the table. | | Formal granted. Formal denied. Informal granted. |
| INTER-PRETATIONS | **How** | 'Patriotic' grounds. Enterprise promotion oriented. Without proper credit evaluation. Prevailing systems are weak. Abuse of authority. Soft application of rules. | | Normal practice. Personal benefits, Error rectifying. Strict credit rules. |
| | **Why** | Known rich powerful applicants, Marxist concept of *class-consciousness.* Perceived low risk | | Not influential. Powerless applicants. High risk. |

**Source:** Saliya, 2009, 2019a, 2019b; Saliya & Hooper, 2020

**Persuasion**

Persuasion is the preferred method of arriving at conclusions, developing ideas and theories from research findings. Generalisation, in research, refers to extending research findings of a particular study to other settings than those directly studied. Deductive reasoning, or deduction, is used mainly in positivist-quantitative research where definite conclusions are derived. Inductive reasoning, or induction, is more uncertain and probabilistic conclusion but attempts to generalise from evidence to say something should be the case. Abductive reasoning draws inferences from observations in order to make something might be the case means conclusions may not be certain/definite. Therefore, induction and abduction belong to non-positivist (interpretivists, constructivists or critical) paradigms.

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), in his famous methodology of 'abductive inferencing' saw a way beyond inductive security of generalization and deductive certainty of derivation, as Bude (2004) describes 'deduction proves that, for logical reasons, something must be the case; induction demonstrates that there is empirical evidence that something is truly so; abduction, by contrast, merely supposes that something might be the case. It therefore abandons the solid ground of prediction and testing in order to introduce a new idea or to understand a new phenomenon' (p. 322). Bellucci and Pietarinen (2019), quoting from certain unpublished work of Peirce, reveal that Peirce (later in 1903) had argued that the three kinds of reasoning are three stages of arriving at conclusions, starting from abduction (retroduction), by which a hypothesis or conjecture is set for a deduction, which traces the outcomes of the hypothesis and finally an induction, which puts those results to test and generalizes its conclusions. Peirce took deduction to be the most secure and the least fertile, while abduction is the most fertile and the least secure (Bellucci and Pietarinen, 2019). These premises can be further elucidated with examples as shown in the Figure 3 below;

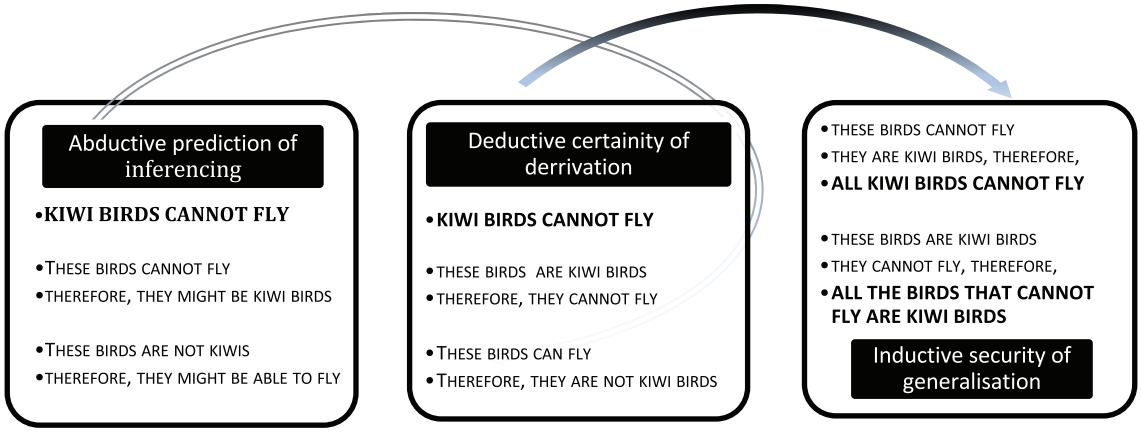


**Figure 3:** Abductive inferencing, deductive certainty and inductive generalisation

**Source:** Compiled by the author

Abductive inference suggests going beyond the data themselves and the researcher should not have to be restricted to fit themselves into existing ideas. Therefore, Abductive inference is more appropriate for qualitative inquiry, especially an open-minded intellectual approach is normally advocated. However, inductive approach is more applicable to answer 'how' questions because the conclusions are generalized from empirical evidences.
After an extensive discussion on the research results (using D-A-I formula; data description, analysis and interpretation) the following conclusions have been drawn to the example case-study research problem and potential relationships discussed above.

**Theorisation**

Exploring from Marxian critical theory, Lapavistas (2003) explains the motive behind such arbitrary lending decisions as follows;

Social power, privilege and inclusion in various activities are intertwined with possession of money in capitalist society. Equally, lack of money translates into powerlessness, deprivation and exclusion from several social activities for the majority of the poor in capitalism. In capitalist society, successful participation in social affairs depends less on a person's abilities and skills, and more on possession of money (p. 64).

According to Marxist theory, class-consciousness is an awareness of a social class and economic rank and their class interests, it enables members of that social class to come

together (Borland, 2008) and therefore, economically powerful social class would act together for mutual benefits. This Marxist premise 'class consciousnesses' can explain the question 'why' these powerful credit applicants were accommodated favourably (Saliya, 2019a; 2019b).

**Discussion**

***Abductive inferences***

• The economic power afforded by bank loans could eventually lead to social power and in turn, such power plays a critical role in influencing credit decision makers in the country.

• When the informal decisions involved the decision-makers at the highest level in the bank, it is more likely that the decision maker is influenced by the motive of favouritism (Marxist class-consciousness).

• Lack of money and social capital translate into powerlessness and result in deprivation of credit and could create a vicious cycle.

Advancing further in line with the researchers' curiosity and motivation, the following assertion can also be made beyond the original research problem;

• Powerful social class acquires more power through privileged credit and become more powerful. On the other hand, because the powerless entrepreneurs are neglected, opportunities could be lost to the society/country as a whole, so the poor remains poor. Therefore, socially powerful rich class get richer and richer while power-less poor class remains stagnant.

**Deductive derivations**

• When both credit seekers and credit decision-makers are socially powerful, credit is granted by abusing the authority overruling the normal banking practices for credit evaluation in this case.

• Powerless credit applicants are at disadvantage as they do not have access to powerful credit decision-makers in this case.

**Inductive generalisations**

Based on the evidences, it could be generalised that,

• Loans are approved favourably by credit officers of banks in this country when the credit applicant and/or credit decision-makers are socially powerful.

• Since the economic power afforded by money leads to social power, the socio-economic power and access to credit could form two co-integrated reinforcing functions.

• Powerless credit applicants in this country are at disadvantage as they do not have access to powerful credit decision-makers.

• Since lack of financial and social capital translate into powerlessness, credit denial and powerlessness create a vicious cycle.

Further theorisation beyond the original research problem.

In general, apart from the legitimate authority and the formal credit evaluating factors (such as risks, cash flows, feasibility and historical factors) the following factors have also been identified as critical in approving credit; the weight of socio-economic power of the parties involved, the strength of the credit policies & procedures and the vigour of the class-consciousness of the social classes. These factors are summarised and presented as a model illustrated in the Figure 4: Discriminatory credit decision-making model below.

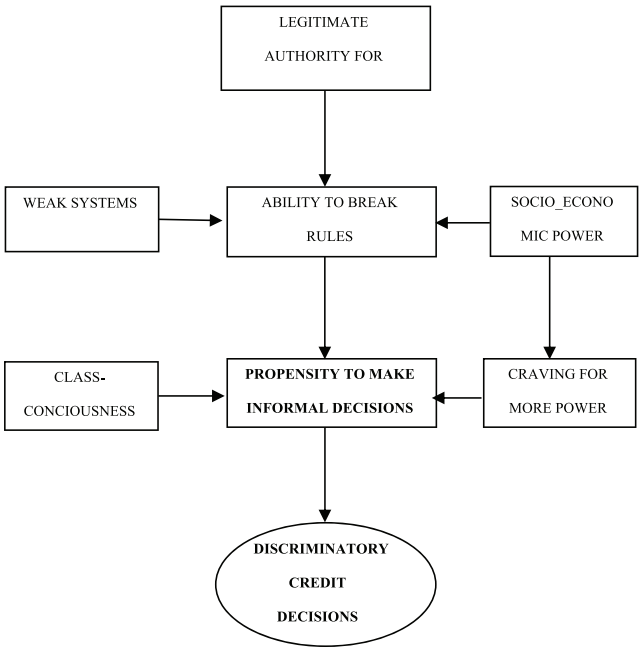


**Figure 3:** Discriminatory credit decision-making model
**Source:** Compiled by the author

## Conclusions

Research methodology can no longer be confined to a set of universally applicable rules, conventions and traditions. The essential components of case-study research in management are identified, classified and, arranged into seven pillars (7Ps) namely; Paradigm, Perspective, Purpose, Plot, Practice, Procedures and, Persuasion. This 7Ps structure shows the holistic picture of research process in variety of contexts across several dimensions.

Practices and procedures are the choices of quantitative, qualitative or mix methods in gathering data but no special epistemic privilege can be attached to any particular practice or set of methods. Data analysis methods for quantitative and qualitative data are known as statistical analysis and thematic/narrative analysis.

The three kinds of reasoning are three stages of arriving at conclusions, starting from abduction (retroduction), by which a hypothesis or conjecture is set for a deduction, which traces the outcomes of the hypothesis and finally an induction, which puts those results to test and generalises its conclusions. Peirce took deduction to be the most secure and the least fertile, while abduction is the most fertile and the least secure. But abductive inference suggests going beyond the data themselves and the researcher should not have to be restricted to fit themselves into existing ideas. Therefore, Abductive inference is more appropriate, especially an open-minded intellectual approach is normally advocated. However, inductive approach is more applicable to answer 'how' questions because the conclusions are generalised from empirical evidences.

There are also gaps in guidelines provided in this paper, which should be addressed separately, on how to ensure validity and credibility in defending and generalising the research outcomes etc. Also, because many administrative protocols often seem challenging for potential case-study researchers (for example; preparing research proposals, submissions for ethical compliances and funding applications etc., if applicable) and therefore, providing further clarifications and directions in these areas would be useful to eliminate ambiguities and manage the time schedules efficiently.

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