

Theorising from case studies: Towards a pluralist future for international business research

Author(s): Catherine Welch, Rebecca Piekkari, Emmanuella Plakoyiannaki and Eriikka Paavilainen-Mäntymäki

Source: *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 5, Qualitative Research in International Business (June/July 2011), pp. 740-762

Published by: Palgrave Macmillan Journals

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29789455>

Accessed: 28-09-2016 11:32 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



Palgrave Macmillan Journals is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of International Business Studies*



Theorising from case studies: Towards a pluralist future for international business research

Catherine Welch¹,
Rebecca Piekkari²,
Emmanuella Plakoyiannaki³
and Eriikka
Paavilainen-Mäntymäki⁴

¹Faculty of Economics and Business, Discipline of International Business, The University of Sydney, Australia; ²Department of Management and International Business, School of Economics, Aalto University, Finland; ³Department of Business Administration, School of Economics, Aristotle's University of Thessaloniki, Greece; ⁴Department of Marketing, Turku University, School of Economics, Finland

Correspondence:

R Piekkari, Professor of International Business, Department of Management and International Business, Aalto University, School of Economics,
PO Box 21230, FI-00076 Aalto, Finland.
Tel: + 358 9 4313 8734;
Fax: + 358 9 4313 8880

Abstract

The literature on case studies, both in the field of international business (IB) and in the social sciences more generally, has tended to focus on the methods of data production and analysis suited to this research strategy. In contrast, in this paper we investigate methods of theorising from case studies. We seek to understand how case researchers theorise, and how future IB research might utilise case studies for theorising. By means of a qualitative content analysis of case studies published in *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Academy of Management Journal* and *Journal of Management Studies*, we construct a typology of theorising from case studies. Two dimensions of the case study, namely causal explanation and contextualisation, form the basis for our typology. We distinguish four methods of theorising – inductive theory-building, interpretive sensemaking, natural experiment and contextualised explanation – only the first of which has been widely used in *JIBS* in the period that we investigate. On the basis of our own qualitative analysis, we show the limitations of inductive theory-building, and argue that greater utilisation of the other methods of theorising would enhance the case study's explanatory power and potential for contextualisation. We argue for a more pluralist future for IB research.

Journal of International Business Studies (2011) 42, 740–762.
doi:10.1057/jibs.2010.55

Keywords: case theoretic approaches; secondary data source; theory–method intersection

INTRODUCTION

The case study has an established place in qualitative international business (IB) research.¹ A recent review of articles published in four core IB journals over a 10-year period found case studies to be the most popular qualitative research strategy (Piekkari, Welch, & Paavilainen, 2009). This prevalence of the case study is not surprising, given its potential to generate novel and ground-breaking theoretical insights. Yet our contention in this paper is that the theorising potential of case studies has not been fully realised in the field of IB. We attribute this to the entrenched belief that case research is suited only to inductive theory-building. In this paper, we seek to challenge this belief by offering alternatives to inductive theorising and broadening the possibilities in IB for theorising from case studies. In order to do so, we consider how the case study generates causal explanations and how it incorporates context – two features of the case study that are often regarded as

Received: 18 September 2009

Revised: 20 August 2010

Accepted: 25 August 2010

Online publication date: 16 December 2010

being incompatible. By challenging common preconceptions about case studies, we see our audience as comprising not just qualitative researchers, but also the wider community of scholars who are often called upon to evaluate the theoretical contribution of case research.

Our paper contributes to the debate over theorising in IB research, which recognises that alongside the perennial epistemological dilemma faced by social scientists – namely, how to develop robust explanations about phenomena in the social world – IB scholars have to contend with the question of how to ensure that their theories are sensitive to diverse national contexts. Consequently, we would argue that IB is a highly appropriate field in which to discuss the development of rigorous, yet context-sensitive, theory. There is growing concern that, in the pursuit of robust explanations, contextualisation has suffered. Greater use of qualitative research has been suggested as a remedy for this imbalance, thus placing approaches such as the case study squarely on the agenda for IB theory. Yet our contention in this paper is that, in IB research, the dominant view of the case study as a tool solely for *inductive theory-building* has restricted its theorising potential, both in terms of generating causal explanations and of contextualising theory.

In this paper, we challenge this dominant view by constructing a typology that offers alternatives to inductive theory-building. The first alternative views the case study as a *natural experiment* for confirming or modifying existing theory. This method attributes greater explanatory power to the case study than does inductive theory-building. The second alternative, by conceiving case research as a form of *interpretive sensemaking*, affirms the value of contextualisation to theorising. However, these two alternatives are both potentially limiting, we argue, because they set up a trade-off between the strengths of internal validity on the one hand and thick description on the other. In this paper, we outline a third alternative – a recent development in the methodological literature and new to IB – that rejects this trade-off, and instead emphasises the ability of the case study to generate *contextualised explanation*. By comparing these four approaches to theorising, we show that the differences between each type are fundamentally epistemological and philosophical (i.e., paradigmatic) in nature. Broadening the possibilities for theorising from the case study therefore requires an appreciation of how these underlying paradigmatic assumptions both enable and constrain empirical research.

We develop our arguments in this paper as follows. First, we review growing concerns about the decontextualised nature of theorising in IB research, arguing that inductive theory-building reinforces rather than resolves this dilemma. We then detail our analytical approach: a qualitative content analysis of case studies published in *Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)*, *Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)* and *Journal of Management Studies (JMS)* that allowed us to examine how researchers have conceptualised and utilised the contextualising and explanatory potential of the case study. This qualitative approach to textual analysis, while rarely used in IB research to date (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007), offers the strengths of iterative conceptual development, contextualised insights and access to the linguistic features of texts. We then present the typology generated from our content analysis, discussing first its foundations in theory (i.e., the methodological literature) and then its grounding in data (i.e., published case studies). We conclude by specifying how future IB researchers might enhance the theorising potential of the case study by combining contextual richness and explanatory rigour.

In this paper we will be using terms – notably context, theory, explanation and causation – that have been greatly contested in the social sciences, yet whose meaning is too often taken for granted by researchers. These terms will be developed during the course of our discussion, but we will offer our own definitions upfront. By context, we are referring to the contingent conditions that, in combination with a causal mechanism, produce an outcome. Explaining a phenomenon we take to mean showing what makes it what it is. Explanation need not necessarily be causal (Ruben, 1990: 233), but causal explanations are our focus in this paper given their centrality to the debate over the theorising potential of case studies. An explanation is causal if it makes claims about the capacities of objects and beings to make a difference to their world (adapted from Kakkuri-Knuutila, Lukka, & Kuorikoski, 2008; Sayer, 1992). We take theory to mean a form of explanation that offers a coherent, examined conceptualisation of a phenomenon (based on Sayer, 2000). Our subsequent discussion in this paper will reveal that these definitions are heavily influenced by critical realism, and that they have profound implications for our understanding of how to theorise from case research.

In the IB field, however, these foundational elements of the scientific endeavour receive little

scrutiny (for an exception, see Redding, 2005). We contend that a reassessment of these fundamental concepts is needed for the theorising potential of case studies to be realised. As Sayer (1992) has persuasively argued, methodology should not just be regarded as a matter of choosing among different methods of data production² and analysis; rather, it is about choosing among competing methods of theorising. Yet we contend that much of the methodological literature on case studies in IB, as well as in the social sciences generally, has focused on methods of data production and analysis rather than methods of theorising. In this paper, we show that alternative methods of theorising from case studies are available, and argue for their application to IB. Ultimately, by contrasting different theorising methods for case researchers, we are advocating paradigmatic pluralism (for a similar argument, see Brannen & Doz, 2010; Morgan, 1980; Van Maanen, 1995). We have been influenced by contemporary philosophers of science who argue that pluralism is a necessary precondition for scientific discovery and theoretical advances (Kellert, Longino, & Waters, 2006); accordingly, we argue that the IB field would benefit from diversity in approaches to theorising. To establish the need for greater diversity, we turn to the growing concern that context has been neglected in IB and management research.

CONTEXT AND THEORISING IN IB RESEARCH

We would argue that the ground we cover in this paper – the tension between scientific explanation and context – is a concern for any research, but that it is particularly visible and pressing in IB, given the field's cross-border nature. How to account for context has been a recurring, but unresolved, question for IB scholars (Brannen & Doz, 2010; Redding, 2005). For example, researchers on China, facing an institutional environment very different from the Western origins of most management theories, have been conducting a lively debate on the need for contextualised theories and research processes (e.g., Child, 2000; Shapiro, Von Glinow, & Xiao, 2007; Tsui, 2006). The internationalisation of the general management community has also sparked interest in contextualisation (see, e.g., Rousseau & Fried, 2001; Tsui, 2007). In this literature, context is typically defined as “the surroundings associated with phenomena which help to illuminate that phenomena [*sic*]” (Cappelli & Sherer, 1991: 56).

Advocates for “contextualized knowledge” (Tsui, 2004) concede that they face barriers to change in the scholarly community. Above all, they point to the entrenched belief that “context-free”, universalist knowledge is superior to that of “context-valid”, localised knowledge (Blair & Hunt, 1986; Tsui, 2004; Whetten, 2009). Bamberger (2008: 844) observes that dominant beliefs “may be forcing us to overweight generalizability and, in the process, underweight contextual sensitivity”. Suggestions of how to encourage contextualised research range from the modest – for example, adding context effects as moderating variables (Whetten, 2009) – to the more radical, such as Tsui's (2006) call to explore non-Western methodological tools. There is an emerging consensus that “context-oriented” qualitative research forms part of the answer (Bamberger, 2008; Johns, 2006; Rousseau & Fried, 2001; Tsui, 2004).

However, proposals for modest change do not confront the underlying reasons for the dominance of decontextualised research: namely, the positivist assumptions that are still taken for granted in the IB field (Brannen & Doz, 2010; Jack, Calás, Nkomo, & Peltonen, 2008; Redding, 2005). Any discussion of contextualisation is necessarily embedded in a complex web of beliefs concerning the nature of theorising in the social sciences: the question of how to contextualise is ultimately about how to theorise, and the answer depends on one's philosophical orientation. The arguments in favour of contextualising IB research are therefore well established, but the solutions are more contested, and ultimately highly value laden.

By seeking to investigate how contextualising and explaining can be brought together in the case study, our paper addresses a gap in the existing literature on contextualising IB research. To date, this literature, while placing the need for more qualitative research on the agenda, has not examined its theorising potential in any depth. Qualitative research is referred to in very general terms, with no differentiation among its many traditions, and its contribution is simply assumed to lie in rich description and exploratory, inductive theorising. However, in relation to the case study, there are two problems with these assumptions. The first is that because the generalisability of case study findings is low, its theorising potential is ultimately regarded as inferior to that of hypothesis-testing research. Case studies are therefore confined to the initial, exploratory phase of research, and their potential



for generating causal explanations is overlooked. Second, while all qualitative research is commonly assumed to be context sensitive, a strong trend towards decontextualisation has in fact prevailed in much case research. The rich context that is the essence of a case study is ultimately regarded as a hindrance to theorising. Since to theorise is to generalise away from context, “explaining” and “contextualising” are regarded as being fundamentally opposed. In this paper, we challenge these perceptions about theorising from case studies, and suggest how context and explanation might be reconciled. In this way, we are contributing not just an enhanced understanding of the theorising potential of the case study, but also a means of enriching the context orientation of IB research. In the next section, we detail how we ourselves used a qualitative approach to develop our conceptual understanding of the theorising potential of case studies in IB.

QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PUBLISHED CASE STUDY ARTICLES

We commenced this study with a broad research question, namely “How do IB case researchers theorise from case studies?” In this section, we detail how and why we took the approach of a qualitative content analysis, and how we selected our dataset. Our approach to qualitative content analysis would best be termed “directed”: that is, the analysis commences with an initial coding scheme (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In contrast to a quantitative content analysis, even though the codes are selected in advance, they do not remain fixed during the analysis, but rather are refined through successive iterations between theory and data (Berelson, 1971; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). One strength of this approach is therefore that it allows for fresh conceptual understanding that is also grounded in empirical data.

A key task in any form of textual analysis is to decide on the appropriate sample; in other words, which texts to analyse (Krippendorff, 2004). Our journal selection followed the qualitative principle of purposeful sampling, which allows the content analyst to select the units of investigation relevant to the study (Krippendorff, 2004). We initiated our analysis with *JIBS*; as the leading journal in IB, we can expect that the case studies it publishes, although few in number (see Appendix), will influence research standards in the field (Clark & Wright, 2007). We examined the period 1999–2008 in order to capture the most recent case study

practices. We found little diversity in the methods of theorising from case studies in *JIBS*. At this point, we added a research question, namely: “What are the alternatives to theorising from case studies, and what is their potential contribution to IB research?”

Consequently, we expanded our dataset to include two management journals – *AMJ* and *JMS* – that are comparable with, yet contrasting to, *JIBS*. Like *JIBS*, they are highly ranked journals that influence, and also publish articles on, IB; yet they have had different editorial policies towards qualitative research. In contrast to *JIBS*, *AMJ* has published numerous editorials (e.g., Gephart, 2004; Pratt, 2009; Suddaby, 2006) encouraging and providing advice on qualitative submissions. *JMS*, the most highly ranked European-based management journal,³ has also promoted discussion on qualitative research standards (e.g., Shah & Corley, 2006). The inclusion of these two journals provided us with greater diversity of theorising practices, while at the same time still limiting ourselves to publications that are of relevance to IB scholars.

A central challenge in assembling our dataset was to identify all case studies in the three journals. We categorised articles as case studies if they met the definition proposed by Piekkari et al. (2009: 569): “a research strategy that examines, through the use of a variety of data sources, a phenomenon in its naturalistic context, with the purpose of ‘confronting’ theory with the empirical world”. In order to identify a case study, we read the entire paper, not just its title and abstract. All articles were categorised independently by at least two members of the research team, and differences in opinion led us back to the “raw data”, the case study articles themselves. Classification of some of the articles was hampered by the omission of essential details – even a methodological section. Our analysis also confronted the issue that “case study” is a contested term, and difficult to distinguish from other qualitative approaches (Wolcott, 2001), so our categorisation of articles did not always agree with that of their authors.⁴

Having settled on a final dataset of 199 case studies (see Appendix), we then proceeded by analysing their contents qualitatively. In contrast to quantitative approaches, whose concern is the enumeration of categories, the aim is a holistic interpretation of the text that goes beyond its literal meaning. This enabled us to remain consistent with the objective of our paper, namely to analyse methods of theorising “in context” rather than “away from context”. A more quantitative content

analysis would not have been meaningful, because some authors used methodological terms very loosely. For example, “grounded theory” was commonly mentioned as a technique for data analysis and coding, but only rarely as a methodology for inductive theory-building. Therefore a frequency count of this term would have misrepresented the popularity of inductive theory-building approaches in the dataset. Instead of frequency counts, we used other techniques to aid our categorisation of texts (Berelson, 1971), chiefly intra-content comparison (i.e., comparing different parts of the same text, which allowed us to detect common themes as well as inconsistencies), comparisons between different texts (i.e., comparing across articles), and comparison of the textual content with a standard (in our case, our evolving typological categories).

As well as classifying the case studies according to their method of theorising, we wrote an analytical memo about each article, which helped us to proceed systematically and consistently (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The memo addressed the following questions.

- Do the authors of the case articles state the theoretical objectives of the study and, if so, how?
- How do they relate theory to empirical data?
- Do they integrate the research context into the theoretical explanation of the case?
- Do they refer to methodological sources, and which ones?
- Do they generalise from case data?
- Do they make causal claims?
- Do they analyse the case holistically, or construct process explanations?
- What theoretical language do they use?

Given the focus of this paper, we did not analyse other aspects of the case study design and write-up, such as the methods of data production or analysis. In sum, the memos encouraged us to take advantage of the strengths of qualitative research to focus on the linguistic elements of the texts, representations of the theorising process, and the assumptions made by their authors.

At least two of us coded each article, independently first and then jointly, and we conducted two separate rounds of coding. The repeated double-coding of all units (i.e., articles) is not a common practice in content analysis, because of the time and cost involved (see Kolbe & Burnett, 1991; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). We took this step because our objective, consistent with our

qualitative approach, was to enrich our analysis with multiple interpretations and achieve an inter-subjective understanding across coders (for a similar argument, see Barbour, 2001; Krippendorff, 2004; Yardley, 2000). Any divergence in coding was talked through, as qualitative content analysis values “the content of disagreements and the insights that discussion can provide for refining coding frames” (Barbour, 2001: 1116). Articles that seemed to challenge our existing coding scheme led us to further scrutinise and elaborate on our evolving categories (for a similar approach to coding, see Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997).

Accordingly, our approach to content analysis enabled successive iterations between theory (i.e., the methodological literature) and our dataset. Each iteration led to a modification to and enrichment of our conceptual understanding. Our initial review of the methodological literature generated two broad categories: *positivist* approaches to case studies vs *alternative* traditions. Close textual reading of the case studies in our dataset challenged this dichotomous view, and at one stage of our analytical process we worked with six distinct categories of theorising methods. These were eventually collapsed into four categories, which then required us to elucidate the commonalities and differences between them. The typology we present in this paper was progressively developed in the course of our analysis. After developing the first version of our typology, we conducted a final round of coding in order to refine the key dimensions of the typology and attributes of each category.

Content analysis faces the challenge that interpretivists and critical realists term the *double hermeneutic* (Giddens, 1984; Noorderhaven, 2004): all research is an interpretation of an already interpreted world. In our study, we were interpreting published studies without additional information about the authors’ original motivations or the modifications they made during the review process. Moreover, the four methods of theorising are, of necessity, ideal types: in actual research practice, we found that authors do not necessarily adhere to a consistent philosophical position, methodological approach or even research design. We neither claim that ours is the only possible classification of these articles, nor that our categorisation necessarily matched authorial intentionality.

Having discussed the qualitative, interpretive nature of our analysis, we now present the insights we gained into the four methods of theorising. We turn first to the support for our typology that we

found in the methodological literature (i.e., the theoretical foundations of our typology), followed by an analysis of how the four methods were used in research practice (i.e., the empirical foundations of our typology).

CONSTRUCTING THE TYPOLOGY: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

In this section we turn to the typology generated from our content analysis, and trace the foundation for each method of theorising to the extant methodological literature on case studies, and to distinctive philosophical traditions. Three of the methods – inductive theory-building, natural experiment and interpretive sensemaking – are well established, while the fourth – which we label contextualised explanation – is a more recent addition to the methodological literature. We provide an overview of each method and its

underlying philosophical orientation (see Table 1 for a summary), paying particular attention to how explanation and context are framed. Two dimensions of the case study, namely contextualisation and causal explanation, form the basis of our typology, which we bring together in a two-by-two matrix.

Case Study as Inductive Theory-building

Proponents of this method identify the main potential of the case study as lying in its capacity to induce new theory from empirical data. Eisenhardt (1989), the methodological authority most closely associated with this position (see also Bonoma, 1985; Leonard-Barton, 1990), explicitly grounds her defence of the case study's inductive strengths in a "positivist view" of science, whose aim is "the development of testable hypotheses and theory which are generalizable across settings" (Eisenhardt, 1989: 546; see also Eisenhardt &

Table 1 Comparing four methods of theorising from case studies

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Inductive theory building</i>	<i>Natural experiment</i>	<i>Interpretive sensemaking</i>	<i>Contextualised explanation</i>
Philosophical orientation	Positivist (empiricist)	Positivist (falsificationist)	Interpretive/ constructionist	Critical realist
Nature of research process	Objective search for generalities	Objective search for causes	Subjective search for meaning	Subjective search for causes
Case study outcome	Explanation in the form of testable propositions	Explanation in the form of cause–effect linkages	Understanding of actors' subjective experiences	Explanation in the form of causal mechanisms
Strength of case study	Induction	Internal validity	Thick description	Causes-of-effects explanations
Attitude to generalisation	Generalisation to population	Generalisation to theory (analytic generalisation)	"Particularisation" not generalisation	Contingent and limited generalisations
Nature of causality	Regularity model: proposing associations between events (weak form of causality)	Specifying cause–effect relationships (strong form of causality)	Too simplistic and deterministic a concept	Specifying causal mechanisms and the contextual conditions under which they work (strong form of causality)
Role of context	Contextual description a first step only	Causal relationships are isolated from the context of the case	Contextual description necessary for understanding	Context integrated into explanation
Main advocate	Eisenhardt	Yin	Stake	Ragin/Bhaskar

Graebner, 2007: 28).⁵ The dilemma is that the small-*N* case study would seem to be incompatible with this objective, which aspires to uncover regularities or laws of behaviour by emulating the methods of the natural sciences. Eisenhardt (1989) does not question this “law-explanation orthodoxy” (Outhwaite, 1987: 7) – namely, that to explain an event or phenomenon means to subsume it under a general law – rather, she creates a legitimate role for the case study by casting it as the “natural complement” to deductive theory-testing. While case studies cannot provide nomothetic, law-like generalisations, they can generate the theoretical propositions upon which large-scale quantitative testing is based.

Eisenhardt’s model of the theorising process is strongly positivist in terms of its empiricism, in that she regards observation as the basis for theory development, and theory induced from data is likely to be more valid as “it closely mirrors reality” (Eisenhardt, 1989: 547). She assumes that this process of observation can be objective, with the researcher achieving validity and reliability through the minimisation of bias. Eisenhardt distances her inductive theory-building approach from other qualitative traditions that avoid generalisability and universal claims in favour of “rich, complex description” (Eisenhardt, 1989: 546). She regards “contextual description” as “a necessary first step” in case research, but on its own it does not lead to generalisable theory (Eisenhardt, 1991: 626). Rather, case researchers need to escape the “idiosyncratic detail” of individual cases and conclude with “only the relationships that are replicated across most or all of the cases” (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007: 30). Thus there is a shift from context-bound detail to context-free propositions.

Eisenhardt’s acceptance that explanation takes the form of law-like generalisations affects her view of causality, as well as of context. While she notes that qualitative data can provide insight into “why or why not” particular relationships occur, this is not the primary focus of enquiry, which is rather to identify generalisable patterns for further testing. She avoids the use of terms such as “causal” or “causation”, instead simply referring to “relationships” between variables and constructs. This evokes the regularity model of scientific explanation commonly traced back to the philosopher David Hume: namely, that the goal of scientific explanation is to uncover “constant conjunction” or covariation between variables (Brady, 2008). Positivist philosophers of science have frequently been uncomfortable

with the notion of causality, given that it is ultimately unobservable and therefore non-empirical: thus Eisenhardt’s avoidance of the concept of causality and preference for covariational terms is in keeping with this tradition (see Abbott, 1998, on the same trend in sociology). The main aim of inductive theory-building research is to propose associations between constructs and variables that can then be tested. This can be seen as a weak form of causality, in that it seeks to establish regularities rather than the reasons behind them.

Case Study as Natural Experiment

Yin (2009) agrees that case studies are well suited to exploratory theory-building, but unlike Eisenhardt he does not confine case studies to this early stage in the theorising process. Much of his influential book on case studies (Yin, 2009) is devoted to an account of how case studies can be used for “explanatory” rather than “exploratory” purposes. In fact, he regards case studies as best suited to “how and why” questions that “deal with operational links needing to be traced over time” (Yin, 2009: 9). “Explanatory” case studies use deductive logic to test propositions, adjudicate among rival explanations, revise existing theories and establish causal relationships; in other words, they are suited to verification and not just discovery of new theory (see also Eckstein, 2000). Flyvbjerg (2006: 227) goes so far as to claim that case studies are “ideal” for falsification, which Karl Popper regarded as central to theory development.

Although Yin (2009) is not explicit about his philosophical assumptions, he does not question the goals of generalisability, validity and reliability. However, despite sharing these core philosophical commitments with Eisenhardt, he nevertheless regards the possible contribution of the case study very differently (Table 1). In his view, the explanatory logic of the case study shares many features with the laboratory experiment. As a “natural experiment” (Lee, 1989), the strength of the case study lies in its high degree of internal validity, so long as appropriate procedures are followed in its design and implementation. Many of the procedures that Yin (2009) advocates – such as replication logic, pattern matching and time-series analysis – are adaptations of experimental techniques. Similarly, his reply to concerns about the case study’s generalisability is to argue that, like the experiment, the case study generalises to theoretical propositions and not to populations (Yin, 2009). Lack of statistical generalisability does

not preclude case studies from having a strong explanatory contribution to offer.

Yin (2009: 143) concedes that the process for developing causal explanations with a case study “has not been well documented in operational terms”. He also notes that “causal links may be complex” (2009: 141) and involve multiple independent and even dependent variables. Yet while case evidence is holistic and complex, attention to the research design and proper application of analytical techniques enable the researcher to converge on a set of causal relationships, isolating them from the broader context of the case. Other cases can then be investigated to establish whether the causal patterns occur as predicted, just as multiple experiments are used to refine and test theory. Given this experimental logic, Yin is comfortable with the use of explicit causal language (see also Hillebrand, Kok, & Biemans, 2001).

Case Study as Interpretive Sensemaking

The notion that case studies are a form of interpretive sensemaking is part of a rich tradition of “idiographic” rather than nomothetic social science; in other words, a social science that seeks to understand the particular rather than generate law-like explanations. Unlike positivist epistemology, which insists on the unity of the social and natural sciences, interpretive approaches⁶ emphasise the uniqueness of the social sciences, in which subjects ascribe meaning to their own behaviour, and researchers are part of the world they study (see Table 1). Given that human activity can be understood only by accessing how it is intended and experienced, case researchers in this tradition – echoing a controversy that dates back to the 19th century – argue that in the social sciences, the scientific ideal of *erklären* (explaining an action by attributing it to exogenous causal factors) needs to be replaced by *verstehen* (understanding an action through the actor’s subjective experience of it) (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). Stake (1995: 38), a prominent advocate of interpretive sensemaking (see also Feagin, Orum, & Sjöberg, 1991), insists on “the difference between case studies seeking to identify cause and effect relationships and those seeking understanding of human experience” (see also Prasad, 2005, for a similar view in management). Case studies are well suited to the latter, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue, because they enable the rich contextual description essential to understanding.

Given this philosophical commitment, Stake (1995) proceeds to question the ideals upheld in positivist case traditions, including generalisability, causality and objectivity. In his view, “particularization” is the goal of case studies: that is, an understanding of the uniqueness of the case in its entirety. In contrast to researchers aiming at generalisable explanations, who seek “to nullify context” and “to eliminate the merely situational”, researchers in the interpretive tradition embrace context, narratives and personal engagement on the part of the researcher (Stake, 1995: 39, 40). Establishing cause-effect relationships is regarded as “simplistic” in the face of this complexity (Stake, 2005: 449); instead, the aim is “thick description” – in other words, an appreciation of how the social context imbues human action with meaning (Table 1). Stake also disputes the notion that objectivity on the part of the researcher is possible, and argues that, when adjudicating among competing interpretations, “there is no way to establish, beyond contention, the best view” (Stake, 1995: 108).

Case Study as Contextualised Explanation: An Emerging Alternative

In this section, we introduce contextualised explanation to the IB field (see Table 1). Given this method is a more recent development, it exhibits less consistency and uniformity than can be found in the other three methods we have profiled. Critical realism forms the ontological basis for this method, but social scientists are still debating how to apply this philosophy in practice. Meanwhile, researchers have pioneered analytical procedures for generating contextualised explanations, such as process tracing and qualitative comparative analysis. However, these scholars do not necessarily show an explicit or consistent philosophical commitment. Accordingly, we discuss the philosophical and methodological innovations associated with contextualised explanation separately.

How to explain in context: philosophical insights from critical realism. The philosophical foundation for contextualised explanation is distinct from the other methods of theorising, as it lies in critical realism (see Table 1). There are multiple variants of critical realism, so the focus in this paper will be on the most influential: Roy Bhaskar (e.g., 1998), and those who have introduced his philosophies to practising social scientists (for applications to management see, e.g., Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2000; Reed, 2005; Tsoukas, 1989). Bhaskar is realist in the

sense that he acknowledges the existence of a reality that is independent of our perceptions of it, but he also regards our comprehension of reality as theory-laden and subjective, and social phenomena as concept-dependent (in other words, constituted by the meanings we attach to them). Bhaskar regards explanation of social phenomena as being “both causal (as does the positivist) and interpretive (as does the hermeneuticist)” (Collier, 1994: 167). In other words, Bhaskar provides a way to reconcile explanation (*erklären*) and understanding (*verstehen*).

Bhaskar rejects the empiricist assumption that sensory observation is the only basis for explanation, instead arguing that causality can be understood only with reference to “transcendental”, or unobservable, causal mechanisms. In Bhaskar’s philosophy, the concept of “causal mechanism” refers to the causal powers (or liabilities) of objects, structures and entities. Objects (whether physical, human or social) have causal powers by virtue of their intrinsic nature: an object and its causal powers are necessarily or internally related (Sayer, 1992). However, in an open system such as that of the social world, the relationship of causal mechanisms to their effects is contingent and external, rather than necessarily and internally related. That is to say, whether a causal mechanism is activated depends on the conditions in which it operates: mechanisms are tendencies that may not be actualised, and even if actualised, may not be empirically observable. Only in a closed system, which is carefully manufactured in an experimental situation, can a causal mechanism potentially be isolated from other generative processes, and regular effects produced and observed. In open systems, in contrast, there can be no symmetry between explanation and prediction: “The same causal power ... can produce different outcomes ... [or] different causal mechanisms can produce the same result” (Sayer, 2000: 15). This means that explanation needs to account for the spatio-temporal context in which causal mechanisms operate.

As a result, causation is not about the search for event regularities: social scientists need to go beyond events to understand the nature of objects, and cause–effect relationships do not consistently produce regularities in an open system. Causal explanation lies rather in understanding the constituent nature of objects: in other words, what objects are capable of doing. Causal explanations are developed not by *collecting* observations, but rather by *digging* beyond the realm of the observable

to understand the necessity inherent in objects (Collier, 1994). The appeal to empirical observation – either through inductive theory-building or through deductive theory-testing – does not satisfy a critical realist.

Bhaskar’s critical realism rejects the determinism and reductionism that are inherent in the regularity model. He ascribes causal power to human agency: that is, an actor’s reasons for acting can play a role in causing that action (Collier, 2005; Outhwaite, 1987). Yet, at the same time, explanations cannot be reduced solely to human intentionality and agency, because human actors operate within already existing social structures. Social structures condition our actions, yet through our actions we (re-)produce these very social conditions. Explanatory accounts therefore need to encompass human intentionality – the articulated reasons of social actors – as well as an actor’s position in the social structure. Therefore, while human action is inherently meaningful and purposeful, a causal explanation cannot be built solely from actors’ own understandings and interpretations.

In addition, critical realism challenges the possibility of a purely inductive or deductive process of theory development. Lawson (2003) proposes that an explanation often starts with a surprising contrast, triggered by the realisation that an observed outcome is different from what had been anticipated (provoking the question, “why not X?”). This suggests that a new causal factor is in operation, or the observation domain was not as well understood as initially thought, or existing understandings of causal mechanisms need to be refined. This is essentially an abductive process: the starting point is a perceived mismatch between an empirical observation and an existing theory, leading to a “redescription” or “recontextualisation” of the phenomenon (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002). In this view, theorising is a process not of discovery but of conceptualisation (Sayer, 1992).

While critical realism offers a distinctive ontology and epistemology, it does not align itself to a specific research methodology. However, Sayer (1992: 243) argues that enquiries into causes (as opposed to regularities) – typified by questions such as “What produces a certain change?” – require an “intensive” research strategy, typically involving a qualitative, in-depth study of “individual agents in their causal contexts”. Accordingly, case studies are well suited to developing causal explanations and “exposing” generative mechanisms (Danermark

et al., 2002), while conversely the “explanatory penetration” of “extensive” large-*N* studies is likely to be weak. Yet the application of critical realism to case studies remains “underdeveloped” (Elger, 2010: 256). In the meantime, recent years have seen methodological innovations in case research that question positivist forms of explanation and can be seen as consistent with a critical realist approach (Ragin, 2009).

How to explain in context: Methodological insights.

Consistent with critical realism as a philosophy, methodological approaches to contextualised explanation are concerned with accounting for why and how events are produced. Understanding how the outcome in a particular case was brought about (e.g., “A led to E through steps B, C, D”) entails working backwards from events (causes-of-effects explanations) rather than estimating the net effects of causes (effects-of-causes explanations) (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). The technique of working backwards – of identifying the intervening causal process between two “variables” – has been termed process tracing (George & Bennett, 2004; Gerring, 2007b; Hall, 2006). It involves a careful construction of a causal chain of evidence from observations that (unlike much data used in the social sciences) are non-comparable, because they are not from a uniform population (Gerring, 2007a). Such an approach to causality has been defended as providing stronger explanatory power than the “weak” correlational form (“if X changed by a certain amount, then Y will have changed by a related amount”) offered by the regularity model (Elliott, 2005; George & Bennett, 2004; Roberts, 1996).

Reconstructing causal chains of events suggests a historical approach, yet history is open to the charge that it only provides an explanation of the particular. Proponents of contextualised explanation question this neat separation between the particular/historical and general/theoretical: “Case studies typically partake of both worlds” (Gerring, 2007a: 76). As George and Bennett (2004) contend, generalities are routinely used – and refined – to make sense of the particular (see also Hall, 2006). Researchers make sense of particular events by classifying them as belonging to a class or broader phenomenon, and by making reference to existing theories, generalities and known patterns in order to “connect the discrete steps in an explanatory narrative” (Roberts, 1996: 54). In the process of iterating between the particular and the general,

theories can be refined and reassessed, or even rival explanations proposed. Equally, just as researchers require an understanding of the general to make sense of the particular, so too is the latter essential to explanatory accounts. History, then, is not opposed to general theory; rather, “theory cannot escape history” (Calhoun, 1998: 860), in that explanations of actions require them to be situated in “social time” and “social place” (Abbott, 1998).

So far, our discussion has assumed that there is a single causal chain or pathway to be investigated. However, case-oriented researchers question the assumption of causal homogeneity made by positivist research traditions; in other words, “the idea that causal factors operate in the same way for all cases” (Ragin, 2000: 51). Instead of regarding causation as uniform, Ragin (2000; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009) proposes a “multiple conjunctural” view as the foundation for case-based research. By “conjunctural”, he means that case researchers explain by factoring in the combination of conditions found in the case rather than seeking to measure the net effect of an isolated variable. This is because a single variable may have a very different effect, depending on the configuration of variables with which it is combined in a case. Thus, for example, in combination with A and C, B may cause Y, but in other circumstances Y may occur only in B’s absence (expressible in Boolean algebra as $Y = (A \text{ AND } B \text{ AND } C) \text{ OR } ((\text{NOT } B) \text{ AND } D \text{ AND } E)$). Understanding the effect of B therefore requires putting it in its spatial-temporal context. Because B may produce one effect in a particular context, but a different effect in another situation, “it is not useful to generalize about the overall effect of B without saying something about the context (i.e., other variable values) in which B appears” (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006: 235). Ragin (e.g., Rihoux & Ragin, 2009) has proposed a formal method based on set theory, qualitative comparative analysis, in order to analyse cases holistically as combinations of conditions. Ragin (2000) positions this “configurational view” as having a fundamentally different explanatory logic from that of the positivist approach, which assumes away causal heterogeneity.

As well as being “conjunctural” in nature, causality is “multiple”, given that the same outcome may be produced by different causal pathways (also known as equifinality) (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). Again, Ragin argues that causality should be conceived in set-theoretic rather than probabilistic terms. In Boolean algebra, multiple causation can be expressed in terms such as $Y = (A \text{ AND } B) \text{ OR}$

(C AND D) (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). Given the heterogeneous nature of causation, case researchers have concluded that generalisations are not universalities; they are always necessarily limited. Generalisation therefore involves “careful setting of scope” (Byrne, 2009: 9): causal explanations require an understanding of the conditions under which they do – and do not – operate. Researchers can aim for no more than “contingent generalizations”; in other words, propositions such as “if circumstances A, then outcome O” (Gerring, 2007a). In this way, what Eisenhardt regards as “idiosyncratic detail”, to be removed from the explanation, now becomes part of the causal fabric of an explanatory account.

The Four Methods Compared

Figure 1 is a visual representation of our typology of case study theorising. The four methods of theorising are positioned in relation to each other on the basis of whether their emphasis is on causal explanation (y -axis) and/or contextualisation (x -axis). The figure encapsulates our argument as to why contextualised explanation offers potential. In the inductive theory-building approach (Quadrant 1), the emphasis on both causal explanation and contextualisation is weak. This avoidance of causal claims and context can be traced back to the pursuit of nomothetic, law-like generalisations, which privileges the search for regularities rather than causes, and for context-free rather than context-sensitive knowledge. The established alternatives to inductive theorising redress these limitations, but only by accepting the traditional trade-off between causality and contextualisation. The method of the natural experiment (Quadrant 2) is a welcome development, in that it provides a defence of the case study’s ability to generate causal, internally valid explanations. However, as we have seen, the emphasis on contextualisation is

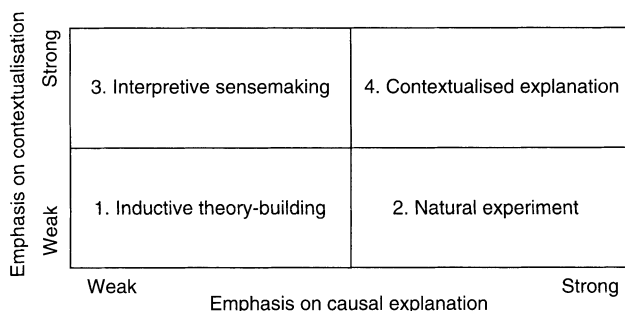


Figure 1 Four methods of theorising from case studies.

still weak. In the sensemaking tradition (Quadrant 3), the “rich story” that troubles Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) is transformed into the case study’s main strength, but at the cost of any claims to causal explanation. All three methods reinforce rather than question longstanding divisions in the social sciences: between *erklären* and *verstehen*, explanation and understanding, nomothetic and idiographic, objective and subjective, inductive and deductive, general and particular, context-free and context-specific.

The fourth method of theorising, contextualised explanation (Quadrant 4), represents an escape from the explanation–contextualisation trade-off. This method of theorising is based on the assertion that case studies can generate causal explanations that preserve rather than eradicate contextual richness. Proponents insist that explanatory accounts are necessarily context-bound: as Sayer (1992: 60) has written, “making sense of events requires that we ‘contextualize’ them in some way”. While positivist traditions abstract away from time and place, contextualised explanation is a way of explaining “without laws” (see, e.g., Abbott, 1997). The regularity model of causation is rejected in favour of a more complex understanding that recognises the contingent nature of cause–effect relationships.

In this section, we have confined our attention to how the four methods of theorising have been developed in the methodological literature on case studies, as well as their philosophical foundations. The question still remains, however, as to how the four methods in our typology are used in research practice. Accordingly, we now shift our focus from the ideal types discussed by methodologists and philosophers (how researchers *should* use case studies to theorise) to theorising practices (how researchers *do* use case studies to theorise). We will argue that grounding our typology in research practice allows for a more nuanced understanding of each method and its potential in future IB research.

CONSTRUCTING THE TYPOLOGY: EMPIRICAL FOUNDATIONS

In this section, we will discuss the insights from our case study dataset into each method of theorising, reporting on findings about each category in our typology (see Figure 1). Inductive theory-building was clearly the most popular of the four methods of theorising, as Table 2 shows. *JMS* was the exception among the journals, in having both the highest number of case studies and the highest percentage

**Table 2** Number of case studies in *AMJ*, *JIBS* and *JMS*, 1999–2008

Theorising typology	<i>AMJ</i>	<i>JIBS</i>	<i>JMS</i>	Total
Inductive theory-building	23	12	61	96
Natural experiment	1	5	21	27
Interpretive sensemaking	8	0	44	52
Contextualised explanation	5	2	17	24
Total	37	19	143	199

of case studies that used alternatives to theory-building. For each method of theorising we highlight the key elements of the theorising process that have been central to our discussion throughout the paper: philosophical assumptions (while authors' philosophical orientation was typically not made explicit, it was reflected in how they represented the theorising process), causality, context and generalisability.

Quadrant 1: Inductive Theory-building (N=96)

The case studies that we classified as falling into this quadrant were all positivist in their assumptions, and identified their theoretical contribution as being exploratory. Despite these similarities, this category was the most diverse of the four. In particular, articles differed in the extent of theory development that they reported had occurred prior to entering the field. At one extreme, we identified articles characterised by a grounded theory approach, in which the introduction would often be followed by the methods section instead of the literature review to underline the inductive nature of theorising (e.g., Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). While most papers in this category were written up deductively, authors would demonstrate the inductive nature of their work by presenting a model or a set of propositions as an outcome rather than as a starting point of the research (e.g., Harvey, Pettigrew, & Ferlie, 2002; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003). At the other extreme were those, such as Danis and Parkhe (2002), who while positioning their contribution as theory-building, nonetheless included *a priori* propositions. In between were authors such as Gilbert (2005), who refined existing theory. While he adhered to the Eisenhardt approach in a faithful way, it was more common for authors to "cherry-pick": that is, apply some guidelines from Eisenhardt, but not use her model as a template. While Yin (2009) was also heavily cited by Gilbert (2005) and others in this quadrant, the references were to his exploratory (rather than explanatory) case study.

We would argue that most articles in this quadrant used the term "inductive" very loosely. Moreover, only a few articles made the process of "inductive" theory-building explicit and transparent. We found an exception in Tolich, Kenney, and Biggart (1999: 594), who "from their interviews ... were able to draw out inductively what [they] believe were four variables that had a significant effect [on X] ..." Similarly, Denis, Langley, and Pineault (2000) distinguished between the "skeletal conceptual framework" with which they commenced the study, and the insights they gained from their fieldwork. Otherwise, it seemed that the majority of the authors were not explicit in specifying which of their insights were inductively derived from their fieldwork and which were more theory-driven.

While inductive theory-building articles typically did not explicitly aim to study causal chains or relationships, they nevertheless used causal vocabulary, as can be judged from expressions such as "influenced", "interacts with", "critical determinants of", "centrally facilitative in", "leads to", "trigger" (e.g., Côté, Langley, & Pasquero, 1999; Faems, Janssens, Madhok, & van Looy, 2008; Harvey, Pettigrew, & Ferlie, 2002; Tolich et al., 1999). This causal vocabulary typically conformed to that of the regularity model, with authors using terms such as "associated with" and "moderating influence" (Wilkinson, Gamble, Humphrey, Morris, & Anthony, 2001; Wong & Ellis, 2002), while propositions were framed in correlational terms such as "the higher ... the greater" (Büchel, 2000).

The articles in this category were united in their descriptive treatment of the research context as a first step before analysing data. Thus these authors tended to have a separate section outlining the research setting, but the discussion of it remained at a descriptive rather than analytical level (e.g., Boxall & Steeneveld, 1999). Context is a feature of these studies, but not as a means of providing explanation. Despite this dominant trend, we did identify authors who showed greater sensitivity towards context. They tended to pursue process research (e.g., Côté et al., 1999) or grounded theorising (e.g., Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Rodrigues & Child, 2008). However, in these studies the rich process data did not translate into process theorising: for example, Maritan (2001) concludes with propositions that are correlational rather than processual in nature.

A common concluding point for articles in this quadrant was the standard warning about the lack

of generalisability due to the small-*N* nature of the study and the context-specific nature of the findings. Like Eisenhardt, many authors in this quadrant portray their contribution as being a “bridge” to theory-testing, and end with a series of propositions (e.g., Coviello, 2006; Orr & Scott, 2008). In such articles, the setting of the study can be portrayed as a limitation: thus Noda and Collis (2001) describe the “context ... of the study” as potentially introducing bias (see also Beverland, 2005). Some case researchers were less apologetic, and merely made the transferability of their findings a matter for discussion (e.g., Boxall & Steeneveld, 1999). However, few case researchers in this quadrant specified the contexts to which the findings could be transferred, or why. An exception can be found in Pratt et al. (2006: 259), who, while presenting the “unique nature” of the setting as a weakness in their quest for generalisability, nevertheless argue that “careful” transferability is possible, and specify the settings that offer “easy-to-see parallels” to their own study.

Quadrant 2: Natural Experiment (N=27)

Authors in this quadrant subscribed to positivist assumptions, but they positioned their theoretical contribution as being theory-testing, applying an established theory or providing rival explanations (although they typically did not explicitly use the metaphor of a natural experiment). Buck and Shahrim (2005) test a causal proposition by using a “least likely” case (as recommended by George & Bennett, 2004), which they selected “in order to maximise the possibility of refutation” (Buck & Shahrim, 2005: 58). At the same time, Markóczy (2000) is a clear example of articles that offer a rival explanation to that favoured by existing theory. She concludes with a very bold statement – namely, that cultural differences are overrated as an explanatory factor – and offers what she terms “novel factors” in accounting for beliefs. A “rival explanation” study can also take the form of a re-evaluation of a previously reported case that questions how it has been interpreted in existing literature (e.g., Howells, 2002). These different forms of challenging existing theory were not widely used in our dataset. Nor were articles that sought to apply existing theory in order to provide a causal account, Collinson and Rugman (2008) being an exception. Accordingly, we would argue that the ability of the case study to modify, verify, test and challenge existing theory and offer rival explanations has been underexploited.

In this quadrant we detected the frequent use of causal language, which was often more explicit and pronounced compared with inductive theory-building articles. For example, Taylor (1999: 858) states as his objective “to determine what affects the degree of control ... and to what extent control is related to [X] ...”. The correlational associations between variables are the dominant approach to causal relationships in this paper, but the author also concedes that “there is a complex pattern” at play, “one in which a combination of factors ... affect the outcome” (Taylor, 1999: 866). While Taylor’s (1999) variable-oriented approach to causality was typical of this category, the authors of one paper developed a more nuanced argument regarding the level of “path-effects”, concluding that while “historical patterns of development” were relevant, they “do not fully explain the present” (Hill, Martin, & Harris, 2000).

Authors whose studies were classified into this category dealt with context in different ways. In some articles, the empirical context was seen to offer the advantage of a “natural” laboratory setting, as suggested by our label for this quadrant. In light of this aim, researchers took great care to select the naturally occurring conditions that were the most appropriate test of the theory, given that, unlike in an artificial laboratory setting, the environment cannot be controlled by the researcher. For example, De Boer, Van den Bosch, and Volberda (1999: 389) chose publishing firms moving into multimedia because they are “right at the heart of the evolutionary process in which technologies stemming from various industries are converging into hybrid forms”. While we found almost decontextualised case studies in this category (e.g., Stiles, 2001), we identified others which drew on contextual factors to generate explanation. For example, Ogbonna and Harris (2002) succeed in enriching a case study of two change initiatives by offering a context-sensitive account as to why the cross-case differences had occurred. In their study, context enhances the internal validity of the study, since it controls for environmental effects and promotes a replication logic. Yet, even in these articles, context was decomposed into a set of variables that had an effect on the phenomenon under study, rather than capturing the influence of context more holistically. Moreover, context tended to be de-emphasised or even isolated from the findings and conclusions, given that authors made generalising claims and provided context-free models as their contribution (e.g., Johnson-Cramer, Cross, & Yan, 2003).

Quadrant 3: Interpretive Sensemaking (N=52)

Researchers in this quadrant, particularly those adhering to a social constructivist approach (Hodgson, 2002; McCabe, 2000; Watson & Watson, 1999), were typically very explicit about their philosophical stance and their rejection of positivist assumptions. A distinct approach to reflecting on and representing the theorising process could often be found in these papers. While some authors used descriptors such as “exploratory” and “theory-building”, in many other articles, a rigid distinction between theory and evidence was not upheld; instead these two elements were interwoven throughout the paper, in keeping with the belief that theory and observation cannot be separated (Chreim, 2005; McInerney, 2008). The authors of one paper explicitly described the theorising process as “a mixture of both deductive and inductive methods” (Noon, Jenkins, & Lucio, 2000: 504). More commonly, authors did not use either “induction” or “deduction” to denote their theorising. However, there were articles that claimed to be interpretive but nevertheless revealed traces of the positivist theory-building tradition, for example by acknowledging the shortcomings of a single case study in developing generalisable theory (e.g., Coupland & Brown, 2004).

Authors presented their theoretical objectives in terms of illuminating and providing insight, for example: “we are interested in the worldviews of organizational members” (Maguire & Phillips, 2008: 380). Portraying worldviews is not just a descriptive effort; Ram (1999) provides a rich narrative which is infused with theoretical concepts. These authors would often start their article with a vignette or a personal encounter from the field. Researchers with a more social constructivist approach sought not only to understand participants’ meaning, but also how these meanings were constructed. For example, Yakura (2002) shows how time is “constructed” in multiple ways in a consulting firm, while Lindgren and Packendorff (2006: 841) view project work “as an ongoing construction of patterns of femininity and masculinity in society”.

We found no explicit reference to causes, unless authors were referring to the causal models employed or constructed by research participants. However, we encountered extensive use of causal and explanatory language (e.g., Heracleous & Barrett, 2001), despite the absence (in the main) of positivist language. Instead, another vocabulary was in use: managers “enact”, power has “effects”,

hegemony is “produced” and meaning is “constructed” (Barry, Chandler, & Clark, 2001; Benjamin & Goclaw, 2005). Salaman and Storey (2002: 163) conclude that the managers they studied “are both producers as well as products of the corporate culture”: in other words, they address the agency-structure question discussed above in relation to critical realism. Narratives, which were a commonly used device, were also much more than descriptions; rather they had deep, explanatory purposes, as Ng and de Cock (2002: 40) state explicitly: “Story interpretation requires an answer to the deceptively simple question: ‘Why did things turn out the way it did?’” In this way, as Kakkuri-Knuutila et al. (2008) have observed, “to understand” and “to explain” are not as opposed as they may seem.

Researchers in this quadrant tended to include themselves as part of the context, rather than taking an objective stance. In particular, authors adopting a social constructivist approach often did not just seek to examine how research participants constructed meaning, but also scrutinised their own sensemaking: “we unashamedly present our paper as our own construction and are happy to make explicit the discursive resources which we bring both to our research design and data analysis” (Watson & Watson, 1999: 485). Similarly, Dick and Cassell (2002: 958) add that “the researcher’s own role in the production of knowledge needs to be accounted for”. Authors who took this approach did not seek to claim neutrality: “we rejected the idea that an objectively verifiable reality can be accessed through research” (Dick & Cassell, 2002: 960–961), and presented theirs as just one possible “reading” (Chreim, 2005: 589). Generalisability was often not discussed or even, in the case of Ng and de Cock (2002: 43), rejected explicitly: they state there is no need “to provide law-like theories with their attractive elegance and highly glossed accounts”.

Quadrant 4: Contextualised Explanation (N=24)

Overall, case studies that emphasised causal explanation (Quadrants 2 and 4 in Figure 1) were in the minority. In our content analysis, we paid attention to how authors in this quadrant were able to combine the inherent strength of the case study to contextualise with its explanatory potential. Compared with the “natural experiment” quadrant, these articles aimed to generate explanation, but without strong adherence to positivist assumptions. While most of the authors did not explicitly

reveal their philosophical assumptions, we found evidence of social constructivism/interpretivism (e.g., Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003), and mild positivism (e.g., Wilkinson et al., 2001), as well as three papers whose authors were explicitly drawing on the critical realist tradition (Chung, 2001; O'Mahoney, 2007; Pajunen, 2006).

Although there was variation in terms of how authors presented their theorising process, they tended not to separate theory-building and theory-testing. For example, Jacobides (2005: 486) – one of the few articles with the ambitious scope of directly challenging an established theory – searched for new analytical insights inductively, “without being bound by existing theory”. Sminia (2003) aims to explain why a TV channel failed. This seemingly atheoretical purpose is countered by a discussion of how existing explanations are insufficient to shed light on failed ventures. The author takes a more deductive approach in combining insights from existing theoretical perspectives to arrive at a novel, more convincing explanation. Several papers fall in between these two extremes, as they recognise both inductive and deductive elements in theorising. Denis, Lamothe, and Langley (2001: 812), for example, write that “[o]ur approach was and is also partly deductive (theory inspired) and partly inductive (data inspired)”.

In this quadrant, authors were more open about the explanatory aims of their paper (e.g., Sminia, 2003; White & Liu, 2001). Clark and Soulsby (1999: 537) set out to “offer a feasible and credible explanation of the spread of the [multidivisional organisation] in the Czech Republic”. In a similar vein, Farjoun (2002: 848) builds “an explanatory model of institutional development”. The explanatory aim is also made clear by West (2008: 1508), who “sought to explain the commercialization of Shannon’s theory during its first quarter century”. In other articles “explanation” was not used, with authors (Mota & Castro, 2004; O'Mahoney, 2007) instead referring to “opposing and driving forces”, “nonlinear relationships” and “multiple pathways” – all terms suggesting a complex view of causality.

Despite these differences, what typifies the authors’ language is a very particular view of causality as a complex and dynamic set of interactions that are treated holistically. For example, Perlow, Okhuysen, and Repenning (2002) introduce “mutual causality” and “causal loop diagrams” to capture the connections between speed and decision-making in an Internet start-up. Jacobides (2005: 492), in turn, states that “[t]his is a study of a particular industry

and ... it focuses on understanding the causal dynamics of a particular setting”. White and Liu (2001) offer “alternative transition trajectories” for firms operating within the industry under study. As we have shown, there is a well-established causal vocabulary in the critical realist tradition, but references to this literature are rarely made. O'Mahoney (2007: 1345) is one of the few to adhere explicitly to the critical realist tradition in developing an “explanatory theory”. Another author, Chung (2001), uses Ragin’s Boolean algebra to systematically compare cases.

For the authors of these articles context was a necessity, not a problem, in constructing rich explanations. As Perlow et al. (2002: 949) write, “[o]ur findings suggest the importance of examining decisions and their relationship within the context in which they happen”. In this category theorising was viewed primarily as a localised explanation. Similarly, Clark and Soulsby (1999: 555) weave context into their theoretical interpretation: “the roles of institutional and strategic choice factors could only be understood in their mutual interaction”. In their paper, explaining in context took the form of a real-time processual analysis that was very different from the process studies found in the inductive theory-building quadrant. The context was used to generate an explanation for the motives of the managers in the study. They argue that factors typically treated in other studies as “independent variables” should rather be understood as a “recursive process” (Clark & Soulsby, 1999: 556). In this quadrant, history and process become essential to developing a causal account. In defending her historical methodology, Farjoun (2002: 871) argues that “by its nature, historical analysis particularly attends to continuity and process, to diverse influences and to context”. Denis et al. (2001: 815) emphasise that the time periods they identify are not predictable stages, but allow for more complex explanations such as “multidirectional causality”.

Based on their in-depth knowledge of the context, authors in this category discuss the scope of the generalisable claims they are making, and identify specific contextual aspects that would expand – rather than reduce – the transferability of their findings. For example, White and Liu (2001: 122) conclude that “[d]eregulating or privatizing industries and breaking up monopolies represent environmental contexts that are conceptually similar to China’s transitional economy in which the central plan has been discarded”. Other



authors warn against “overgeneralizing”, such as Jacobides (2005), who emphasises the industry-specificity of his study. Finally, some authors in this category did not seek generalisability at all. Instead, they “sought to embrace all the richness and complexity of a real ... setting” to generate a localised explanation and invite the reader to evaluate the applicability of their results in other situations (Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003: 1159).

Overall, our content analysis revealed considerable versatility in theorising practices, and has pointed to variations within each typological category. We identified articles with greater context sensitivity, even in the positivist quadrants that typically have a weak emphasis on contextualisation. Equally, case studies using inductive theory-building and interpretive sensemaking methods might make causal claims, despite not acknowledging this explicitly, and despite differences in the causal vocabulary in use. Overall, our findings suggest that case researchers lack an established vocabulary to express the theorising process or its outcome. In the following section we will consider the wider implications of these findings.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this paper, we have sought to expand the possibilities for theorising from case studies in IB research by constructing a typology of theorising methods. To enrich the future of qualitative research in IB, we have employed qualitative research ourselves – an in-depth qualitative content analysis of 199 case study articles published in three journals during 1999–2008. Our typology – which contrasts inductive theory-building, interpretive sensemaking, natural experiment and contextualised explanation – was developed by iterating between the existing methodological literature and a dataset of published case studies. We would argue that this typology enriches the potential of the case study, both for contextualising and for producing causal explanations. In this concluding section we draw out these possibilities, and the implications for future case research in IB. Consistent with the aims of our paper, our focus is on theorising, even though we recognise there are other dimensions to the case studies we analysed.

We commenced this paper by arguing that the current dominance of inductive theory-building in *JIBS* (as indeed, in the other journals we analysed) may be hindering the potential for case studies to contextualise theory and generate causal explanations. As we have discussed, the call for greater

contextualisation of IB theory has been repeatedly made by scholars in the field (Brannen & Doz, 2010). However, we have argued that the dominant method of inductive theorising places little emphasis on context: articles in this tradition treated context descriptively rather than analytically. In this method, context is seen as a limitation, given that the goal is law-like explanation. Simply conducting more case studies – which has been advocated in the literature on contextualising IB theory – would therefore not necessarily lead to more context-sensitive theorising. Rather, scholars need to consider the implications of their choice of theorising method carefully, because these methods differ in their emphasis on contextualisation.

As we have seen, the decontextualised nature of inductive theory-building studies is not the only concern. In addition, the widespread assumption that the role of the case study lies only in the exploratory, theory-building phase of research downplays its potential to propose causal mechanisms and linkages, and test existing theories. The danger is that these legitimate uses of the case study are underutilised or even questioned. In IB, Yin (2009) has been used largely to justify the exploratory role of case studies, overlooking the strong emphasis he places on explanatory case studies. In this paper we have highlighted this neglected dimension of Yin’s work, and have argued that the case study has an important role to play in refining, verifying, testing and challenging existing theory. Our content analysis revealed examples of case studies that effectively performed this role and placed a strong emphasis on causal explanation, although they were in the minority. This application of the case study is worth further examination, given its potential to interrogate existing theories.

Set against this background, we have proposed that the method of contextualised explanation, while rarely found in our dataset of published case studies, holds promise in that it offers a high degree of contextualisation without sacrificing the goal of causal explanation. We would argue that, above all, the value of this approach lies in its different view of how to generate theories about the social world: the rejection of the regularity model of causation, scepticism towards the possibility of meaningful law-like generalisations, and a defence of context as being an essential component of, rather than a hindrance to, explanation. As a result of redefining the theorising process in this way, proponents of contextualised explanation seek to explain “without laws”. They offer a way of

reconciling context and explanation by acknowledging the complexity of the social world, the bounded scope and contingency of causal relationships, and the simultaneous operation of multiple interaction effects. The possibility of such a reconciliation is also an abiding theme in IB, given that as a field its *raison d'être* is to explain phenomena in diverse national, cultural and institutional contexts.

While we suggest that greater application of contextualised explanation would benefit the IB field, we are not, however, advocating it as *the* sole method for theorising from case studies. We are not seeking to replace one method (i.e., inductive theory-building) with another (i.e., contextualised explanation). Rather, we have adopted a pluralist stance: that a field benefits from the diversity of, and even tension between, different approaches. A broad paradigmatic consensus restricts methodological innovation and limits the range of methods, research problems, choice of topics – and ultimately theories. Yet while the research phenomena in IB are diverse in nature, we have not detected the same degree of diversity in theorising about these phenomena. The pursuit of law-like explanations remains the taken-for-granted approach to theorising in IB, leading to decontextualised research methods and consequently decontextualised theories (Brannen & Doz, 2010). In this paper we have argued that the goal of more contextualised theories requires IB scholars to rethink their assumptions about the role of the case study. The search for greater pluralism led us beyond IB to examine key journals in the general management field, allowing us to gain insights into theorising from other research traditions.

Our paper contributes to a more pluralist future for IB by offering alternative methods of theorising from case studies. We have demonstrated that case researchers have a choice about how to theorise, just as they have a choice about how to produce and analyse data. Our typology encourages researchers to reflect critically upon their own and others' preconceived views of how to theorise from case studies; to explore possibilities for theorising that go beyond that of inductive theory-building; and to escape the trade-off between internal validity and thick description that is found in positivist and interpretive paradigms. From the perspective of those reviewing case research, the typology provides the means to evaluate theoretical contributions. By articulating and more explicitly specifying their method of theorising,

researchers can foster greater mutual understanding of the theoretical purpose of their studies.

Yet at the same time as illustrating the flexibility that the case study methodology offers with respect to theorising, we have also suggested the need for coherence when reporting the theorising process. Each method of theorising entails distinct philosophical assumptions, research objectives and outcomes, as well as a vocabulary for describing the theorising process and articulating a study's theoretical contribution. By scrutinising the linguistic elements of texts, we found that case researchers were not always clear and consistent in the way they wrote up their theorising purpose and process. Methodological rigour has traditionally been reflected in selecting methods and research designs that fit the research question of the study. Based on our content analysis, we would argue that methodological rigour is also evidenced by methodological self-awareness, transparency and careful linguistic choices in reporting the theorising process.⁷ We hope that one contribution of our paper is to encourage case researchers to (re)consider their own approach to theorising from case studies, and be consistent in following their choice throughout their study.

In a pluralist field of research, greater methodological consistency and adherence to a particular method of theorising need not restrict authors from engaging with, learning from and being influenced by other methods. Thus, while we have highlighted the benefits for IB of exploring critical realism, our content analysis has implications for researchers operating within positivist and interpretive traditions as well. For those researchers taking a more positivist approach, we would suggest that considerable potential lies in exploiting the range of "natural experiments" that we identified in our content analysis: testing theory, proposing rival explanations, reanalysing cases, and applying or challenging existing theory. Such case studies go beyond the posing of covariational propositions, to providing explanations for causal relationships. In addition to strengthening the emphasis on causal explanation, there is also potential for researchers operating within positivist traditions to be sensitised to context when theorising from case studies. In our content analysis we found that authors achieved this by detailing how contextual factors produced the outcome, and how their findings might be transferred to other settings. These authors were able to use context to specify the boundary conditions of their explanations.



For researchers taking an interpretive approach, we would stress the advantages to recognising and making more explicit the explanatory fabric that permeates their contributions. In our content analysis we found that, while researchers in this tradition used a causal language different from that associated with the other methods of theorising, interpreting and understanding the social world also involves offering an explanation as to why events occur in the way they do. Some authors did succeed in sensitively combining contextualised explanation with a range of philosophical traditions, including interpretivism and even a moderate form of positivism that seeks limited, contingent generalisations rather than universalities. Therefore we feel there is potential in exploring how insights from contextualised explanation could inform research more broadly.

In the years since the publication of Eisenhardt's (1989) article on theorising from case studies, greater appreciation has emerged in the methodological literature as to how authors can explain in context. At its best, contextualised explanation can provide novel theoretical accounts that incorporate rather than deny complexity. While IB scholars have so far not contributed to the emerging methodological debate on case studies, we would hope that the next ten years of *JIBS* will see a growing diversity and innovation in approaches to theorising. In a more pluralist field, case researchers would approach theorising differently. They would move beyond the conformity to the inductive theory-building that prevailed in the *JIBS* case studies of the previous decade. At the same time, they would question the trade-off between internal validity and thick description that characterises both positivist and interpretive paradigms. In this more pluralist scenario, case researchers, regardless of their paradigmatic stance, would be able to combine context sensitivity with explanatory rigour in their theorising. By arguing that contextualisation and rigorous explanation can be complementary rather than contradictory outcomes, we have proposed a future for the case study in IB that stands in contrast to the limited role to which it has traditionally been assigned.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Snežina Michailova, Marja-Liisa Kakkuri-Knuuttila, Kalle Pajunen, Kristina Rolin, Ben Tipton, Denise Welch, Lawrence Welch, Ian Wilkinson and

Yorgos Zotos for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this manuscript; as well as students in our PhD case research classes at Aalto University and University of Sydney. Particular thanks are due to Geoff Easton and Ricardo Morais, who have been responsible for our interest in critical realism. Early versions of the paper benefited from feedback at the 2009 European International Business Academy annual conference, and at Academy of Management symposia in 2009 and 2010. We are extremely grateful for the constructive and thoughtful guidance provided by Mary Yoko Brannen as special issue editor, as well as the anonymous *JIBS* reviewers.

NOTES

¹Although we recognise that case studies can be mixed and even quantitative (for a discussion in IB see, e.g., Nummela & Hurmerinta-Peltomäki, 2006), in this paper we are concerned with case studies as a qualitative research strategy.

²In this paper we follow interpretivists and critical realists in acknowledging that research is an act of interpretation. We use terms such as data "production" and typology "construction", rather than seeking to conceal the role of the researcher.

³We decided to include a journal originating in Europe because it has been suggested that case study traditions are more firmly established there than in the US (Bengtsson, Elg, & Lind, 1997).

⁴An illustrative example is the article by Nutt (2000), who positioned his study as a multiple case investigation ($N=376$) of strategic decisions. This paper was not included in our analysis, since it treated the cases as observations, rather than investigating the phenomenon in its natural setting.

⁵There are many variants of positivism (Halfpenny, 1982), including logical positivism, logical empiricism and falsificationism. The similarities rather than the differences among these traditions are our focus in this paper. However, it is worth noting that we would characterise Eisenhardt's empiricism as distinct from the assumptions behind the "natural experiment" approach, which rather follows a falsification logic, as advocated by Karl Popper (for a discussion of empiricism vs falsificationism, see Johnson & Duberley, 2000).

⁶In this paper we will use "interpretive" in a broad sense to refer to research traditions that include postmodernism, postcolonialism, critical theory and social constructivism.

⁷We thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, A. 1997. Of time and space: The contemporary relevance of the Chicago school. *Social Forces*, 75(4): 1149–1182.
- Abbott, A. 1998. The causal devolution. *Sociological Methods Research*, 27(2): 148–181.
- Ackroyd, S., & Fleetwood, S. (Eds) 2000. *Realist perspectives on management and organisations*. London: Routledge.
- Bamberger, P. 2008. Beyond contextualization: Using context theories to narrow the micro-macro gap in management research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 51(5): 839–846.
- Barbour, R. 2001. Checklists for improving rigour in qualitative research: A case of the tail wagging the dog? *British Medical Journal*, 322(May 5): 1115–1117.
- Barry, J., Chandler, J., & Clark, H. 2001. Between the ivory tower and the academic assembly line. *Journal of Management Studies*, 38(1): 87–101.
- Bengtsson, L., Elg, U., & Lind, J.-I. 1997. Bridging the transatlantic publishing gap: How North American reviewers evaluate European idiographic research. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 13(4): 473–492.
- Benjamin, O., & Goclaw, R. 2005. Narrating the power of non-standard employment: The case of the Israeli public sector. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(4): 737–759.
- Berelson, B. 1971. *Content analysis in communication research*, (2nd ed.) Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Beverland, M. B. 2005. Crafting brand authenticity: The case of luxury wines. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(5): 1003–1029.
- Bhaskar, R. 1998. *The possibility of naturalism: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences*, (3rd ed.) London: Routledge.
- Blair, J. D., & Hunt, J. G. 1986. Getting inside the head of the management researcher one more time: Context-free and context-specific orientations in research. *Journal of Management*, 12(2): 147–166.
- Bonoma, T. V. 1985. Case research in marketing: Opportunities, problems, and a process. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 22(2): 199–208.
- Boxall, P., & Steeneveld, M. 1999. Human resource strategy and competitive advantage: A longitudinal study of engineering consultancies. *Journal of Management Studies*, 36(4): 443–454.
- Brady, H. E. 2008. Causation and explanation in social science. In B. Steffenmeier, H.E. Brady, & D. Collier (Eds), *The Oxford handbook of political methodology*: 217–270. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brannen, M. Y., & Doz, Y. 2010. From a distance and detached to up close and personal: Bridging strategic and cross-cultural perspectives in international management research and practice. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 26(3): 236–247.
- Büchel, B. 2000. Framework of joint venture development: Theory-building through qualitative research. *Journal of Management Studies*, 37(5): 637–661.
- Buck, T., & Shahrim, A. 2005. The translation of corporate governance changes across national cultures: The case of Germany. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 36(1): 42–61.
- Byrne, D. 2009. Case-based methods: Why we need them; what they are; how to do them. In D. Byrne & C.C. Ragin (Eds), *The Sage handbook of case-based methods*: 1–10. London: Sage.
- Calhoun, C. 1998. Explanation in historical sociology: Narrative, general theory, and historically specific theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, 104(3): 846–871.
- Cappelli, P., & Sherer, P. D. 1991. The missing role of context in OB: The need for a meso-level approach. In B.M. Staw (Ed.), *Research in organizational behavior*, (Vol. 13): 55–110. Stanford: JAI Press.
- Child, J. 2000. Theorizing about organization cross-nationally. In J.L.C. Cheng & R.B. Peterson (Eds), *Advances in international comparative management*, (Vol. 13): 27–75. Stanford: JAI Press.
- Chreim, S. 2005. The continuity–change duality in narrative texts of organizational identity. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(3): 567–593.
- Chung, C. 2001. Markets, culture and institutions: The emergence of large business groups in Taiwan, 1950s–1970s. *Journal of Management Studies*, 38(5): 719–745.
- Clark, E., & Soulsby, A. 1999. The adoption of the multi-divisional form in large Czech enterprises: The role of economic, institutional and strategic choice factors. *Journal of Management Studies*, 36(4): 535–559.
- Clark, T., & Wright, M. 2007. Reviewing journal rankings and revisiting peer reviews: Editorial perspectives. *Journal on Management Studies*, 44(4): 612–621.
- Collier, A. 1994. *Critical realism: An introduction to Roy Bhaskar's philosophy*. London: Verso.
- Collier, A. 2005. Critical realism. In G. Steinmetz (Ed.), *The politics of method in the human sciences: Positivism and its epistemological others*: 327–345. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Collinson, S., & Rugman, A. M. 2008. The regional nature of Japanese multinational business. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 39(2): 215–230.
- Côté, L., Langley, A., & Pasquero, J. 1999. Acquisition strategy and dominant logic in an engineering firm. *Journal of Management Studies*, 36(7): 919–952.
- Coupland, C., & Brown, A. D. 2004. Constructing organizational identities on the web: A case study of Royal Dutch/Shell. *Journal of Management Studies*, 41(8): 1325–1347.
- Coviello, N. E. 2006. The network dynamics of international new ventures. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 37(5): 713–731.
- Danermark, B., Ekström, M., Jakobsen, L., & Karlsson, J. C. 2002. *Explaining society: Critical realism in the social sciences*. London: Routledge.
- Danis, W. M., & Parkhe, A. 2002. Hungarian–Western partnerships: A grounded theoretical model of integration processes and outcomes. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 33(3): 423–455.
- De Boer, M., Van den Bosch, F. A. J., & Volberda, H. W. 1999. Managing organizational knowledge integration in the emerging multimedia complex. *Journal of Management Studies*, 36(3): 379–398.
- Denis, J.-L., Lamothe, L., & Langley, A. 2001. The dynamics of collective leadership and strategic change in pluralistic organizations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4): 809–837.
- Denis, J.-L., Langley, A., & Pineault, M. 2000. Becoming a leader in a complex organization. *Journal of Management Studies*, 37(8): 1063–1099.
- Dick, P., & Cassell, C. 2002. Barriers to managing diversity in a UK constabulary: The role of discourse. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(7): 953–976.
- Duriau, V. J., Reger, R., & Pfarrer, M. D. 2007. A content analysis of the content analysis literature in organization studies: Research themes, data sources, and methodological refinements. *Organizational Research Methods*, 10(5): 5–34.
- Eckstein, H. 2000. Case study and theory in political science. In R. Gomm, M. Hammersley, & P. Foster (Eds), *Case study method*: 119–164. London: Sage.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. 1989. Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4): 532–550.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. 1991. Better stories and better constructs: The case for rigor and comparative logic. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(3): 620–627.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. 2007. Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1): 25–32.
- Elger, T. 2010. Critical realism. In A.J. Mills, G. Durepos, & E. Wiebe (Eds), *Encyclopedia of case study research*, (Vol. 1): 253–557. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.



- Elliott, J. 2005. *Using narratives in social research*. London: Sage.
- Faems, D., Janssens, M., Madhok, A., & van Looy, B. 2008. Toward an integrative perspective on alliance governance: Connecting contract design, trust dynamics, and contract application. *Academy of Management Journal*, 51(6): 1053–1078.
- Farjoun, M. 2002. The dialectics of institutional development in emerging and turbulent fields: The history of pricing conventions in the on-line database industry. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(5): 848–874.
- Feagin, J. R., Orum, A. M., & Sjoberg, G. 1991. *A case for the case study*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Flyvbjerg, B. 2006. Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2): 219–245.
- George, A. L., & Bennett, A. 2004. *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Gephart, R. 2004. From the editors: Qualitative research and the *Academy of Management Journal*. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(4): 454–462.
- Gerring, J. 2007a. *Case study research: Principles and practices*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gerring, J. 2007b. The mechanistic worldview: Thinking inside the box. *British Journal of Political Science*, 38: 161–179.
- Giddens, A. 1984. *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Gilbert, C. 2005. Unbundling the structure of inertia: Resource versus routine rigidity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(5): 741–763.
- Halfpenny, P. 1982. *Positivism and sociology: Explaining social life*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Hall, P. A. 2006. Systematic process analysis: When and how to use it. *European Management Review*, 3(1): 24–31.
- Harvey, J., Pettigrew, A., & Ferlie, E. 2002. The determinants of research group performance: Towards mode 2? *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(6): 747–774.
- Heracleous, L., & Barrett, M. 2001. Organizational change as discourse: Communicative actions and deep structures in the context of information technology implementation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4): 755–778.
- Hill, S., Martin, R., & Harris, M. 2000. Decentralization, integration and the post-bureaucratic organization: The case of R&D. *Journal of Management Studies*, 37(4): 563–585.
- Hillebrand, B., Kok, R. A. W., & Biemans, W. G. 2001. Theory-testing using case studies: A comment on Johnston, Leach, and Liu. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 30(8): 651–657.
- Hodgson, D. 2002. Disciplining the professional: The case of project management. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(6): 803–821.
- Howells, J. 2002. The response of old technology incumbents to technological competition: Does the sailing ship effect exist? *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(7): 887–906.
- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. 2005. Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9): 1277–1288.
- Jack, G. A., Calás, M. B., Nkomo, S. M., & Peltonen, T. 2008. Critique and international management: An uneasy relationship? *Academy of Management Review*, 33(4): 870–884.
- Jacobides, M. G. 2005. Industry change through vertical disintegration: How and why markets emerged in mortgage banking. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(3): 465–498.
- Johns, G. 2006. The essential impact of context on organizational behavior. *Academy of Management Review*, 31(2): 386–408.
- Johnson, P., & Duberley, J. 2000. *Understanding management research*. London: Sage.
- Johnson-Cramer, M. E., Cross, R. L., & Yan, A. 2003. Sources of fidelity in purposive organizational change: Lessons from a re-engineering case. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(7): 1837–1870.
- Kakkuri-Knuutila, M. L., Lukka, K., & Kuorikoski, J. 2008. Straddling between paradigms: A naturalistic philosophical case study on interpretive research in management accounting. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 33(2–3): 267–291.
- Kellert, S. H., Longino, H. E., & Waters, C. K. (Eds) 2006. *Scientific pluralism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kolbe, R. H., & Burnett, M. S. 1991. Content analysis research: An examination of applications with directives for improving research reliability and objectivity. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 18(2): 243–250.
- Krippendorff, K. 2004. *Content analysis. An introduction to its methodology*, (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lawson, T. 2003. *Reorienting economics*. London: Routledge.
- Lee, A. S. 1989. Case studies as natural experiments. *Human Relations*, 42(2): 117–137.
- Leonard-Barton, D. 1990. A dual methodology for case studies: Synergistic use of a longitudinal single site with replicated multiple sites. *Organization Science*, 1(3): 248–266.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lindgren, M., & Packendorff, J. 2006. What's new in new forms of organizing? On the construction of gender in project-based work. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(4): 841–866.
- Locke, K., & Golden-Biddle, K. 1997. Constructing opportunities for contribution: Structuring intertextual coherence and “problemizing” in organizational studies. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40(5): 1023–1062.
- Maguire, S., & Phillips, N. 2008. Citibankers at Citigroup: A study of the loss of institutional trust after a merger. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(2): 372–401.
- Mahoney, J., & Goertz, G. 2006. A tale of two cultures: Contrasting qualitative and quantitative research. *Political Analysis*, 14(3): 227–249.
- Maitlis, S., & Lawrence, T. B. 2003. Orchestral manoeuvres in the dark: Understanding failure in organizational strategizing. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(1): 109–139.
- Maritan, C. A. 2001. Capital investment as investing in organizational capabilities: An empirically grounded process model. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(3): 513–531.
- Markóczy, L. 2000. National culture and strategic change in belief formation. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 31(3): 427–442.
- McCabe, D. 2000. Factory innovations and management machinations: The productive and repressive relations of power. *Journal of Management Studies*, 37(7): 931–953.
- McInerney, P.-B. 2008. Showdown at Kykuit: Field-configuring events as loci for conventionalizing accounts. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(6): 1089–1116.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. 1994. *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*, (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Morgan, G. 1980. Paradigms, metaphors, and puzzle solving in organization theory. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 25(4): 605–622.
- Mota, J., & Castro, L. M. 2004. A capabilities perspective on the evolution of firm boundaries: A comparative case example from the Portuguese moulds industry. *Journal of Management Studies*, 41(2): 295–316.
- Ng, W., & de Cock, C. 2002. Battle in the boardroom: A discursive perspective. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(1): 23–49.
- Noda, T., & Collis, D. J. 2001. The evolution of intraindustry firm heterogeneity: Insights from a process study. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4): 897–925.
- Noon, M., Jenkins, S., & Lucio, M. M. 2000. Fads, techniques and control: The competing agendas of TPM and TECEX at the Royal Mail (UK). *Journal of Management Studies*, 37(4): 499–520.
- Noorderhaven, N. G. 2004. Hermeneutic methodology and international business research. In R. Marschan-Piekkari & C. Welch (Eds), *Handbook of qualitative research methods for international business*: 84–108. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

- Nummela, N., & Hurmerinta-Peltomäki, L. 2006. Mixed methods in international business research: A value-added perspective. *Management International Review*, 46(4): 439–459.
- Nutt, P. C. 2000. Decision-making success in public, private and the third sector organizations: Finding sector dependent best practice. *Journal of Management Studies*, 37(1): 77–108.
- Ogbonna, E., & Harris, L. C. 2002. Organizational culture: A ten year, two-phase study of change in the UK food retailing sector. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(5): 673–706.
- Ogbonna, E., & Wilkinson, B. 2003. The false promise of organizational culture change: A case study of middle managers in grocery retailing. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(5): 1151–1178.
- O'Mahoney, J. 2007. The diffusion of management innovations: The possibilities and limitations of memetics. *Journal of Management Studies*, 44(8): 1324–1348.
- Orr, R. J., & Scott, W. R. 2008. Institutional exceptions on global projects: A process model. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 39(4): 562–588.
- Outhwaite, W. 1987. *New philosophies of social science: Realism, hermeneutics and critical theory*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Pajunen, K. 2006. Stakeholder influences in organizational survival. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(6): 1261–1288.
- Perlow, L. A., Okhuysen, G. A., & Repenning, N. P. 2002. The speed trap: Exploring the relationship between decision making and temporal context. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(5): 931–955.
- Piekkari, R., Welch, C., & Paavilainen, E. 2009. The case study as disciplinary convention: Evidence from international business journals. *Organizational Research Methods*, 12(3): 567–589.
- Potter, W. J., & Levine-Donnerstein, D. 1999. Rethinking validity and reliability in content analysis. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 27(3): 258–284.
- Prasad, P. 2005. *Crafting qualitative research: Working in the postpositivist traditions*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Pratt, M. 2009. From the editors: For the lack of a boilerplate: Tips on writing up and (reviewing) qualitative research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(5): 856–862.
- Pratt, M. G., Rockmann, K. W., & Kaufmann, J. B. 2006. Constructing professional identity learning cycles in the customization of identity among medical residents. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(2): 235–262.
- Ragin, C. C. 2000. *Fuzzy-set social science*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Ragin, C. C. 2009. Reflection of casing and case-oriented research. In D. Byrne & C.C. Ragin (Eds), *The Sage handbook of case-based methods*: 522–534. London: Sage.
- Ram, M. 1999. Managing consultants in a small firm: A case study. *Journal of Management Studies*, 36(6): 875–897.
- Ravasi, D., & Schultz, M. 2006. Responding to organizational identity threats: Exploring the role of organizational culture. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(3): 433–458.
- Redding, G. 2005. The thick description and comparison of societal systems of capitalism. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 36(2): 123–155.
- Reed, M. 2005. Reflections on the “realist turn” in organization and management studies. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(8): 1621–1644.
- Rihoux, B., & Ragin, C. C. (Eds) 2009. *Configurational comparative methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Roberts, C. 1996. *The logic of historical explanation*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Rodrigues, S., & Child, J. 2008. The development of corporate identity: A political perspective. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(5): 885–911.
- Rousseau, D. M., & Fried, Y. 2001. Location, location, location: Contextualizing organizational research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 22(1): 1–13.
- Rubén, D. H. 1990. *Explaining explanation*. London: Routledge.
- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. 2000. Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of qualitative research*, (2nd ed.) 769–802. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Salaman, G., & Storey, J. 2002. Managers' theories about the process of innovation. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(2): 147–165.
- Sayer, A. 1992. *Method in social science: A realist approach*, (2nd ed.) London: Routledge.
- Sayer, A. 2000. *Realism and social science*. London: Sage.
- Shah, S., & Corley, K. G. 2006. Building better theory by bridging the quantitative-qualitative divide. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(8): 1821–1835.
- Shapiro, D. L., Von Glinow, M. A., & Xiao, Z. 2007. Toward polycontextually sensitive research methods. *Management and Organization Review*, 3(1): 129–152.
- Sminia, H. 2003. The failure of the Sport7 TV-channel: Controversies in a business network. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(7): 1621–1649.
- Stake, R. E. 1995. *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R. E. 2005. Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of qualitative research*, (3rd ed.) 443–466. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stiles, P. 2001. The impact of the board on strategy: An empirical examination. *Journal of Management Studies*, 38(5): 627–650.
- Suddaby, R. 2006. From the editors: What grounded theory is not. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4): 633–642.
- Taylor, B. 1999. Patterns of control within Japanese manufacturing plants in China: Doubts about Japanization in Asia. *Journal of Management Studies*, 36(6): 853–873.
- Tolich, M., Kenney, M., & Biggart, N. 1999. Managing the managers: Japanese management strategies in the USA. *Journal of Management Studies*, 36(5): 587–607.
- Tsoukas, H. 1989. The validity of idiographic research explanations. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4): 551–561.
- Tsui, A. S. 2004. Contributing to global management knowledge: A case for high quality indigenous research. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 21(4): 491–513.
- Tsui, A. S. 2006. Contextualization in Chinese management research. *Management and Organization Review*, 2(1): 1–13.
- Tsui, A. S. 2007. From homogenization to pluralism: International management research in the academy and beyond. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(6): 1353–1364.
- Van Maanen, J. 1995. Fear and loathing in organization studies. *Organization Science*, 6(6): 687–692.
- Watson, T., & Watson, D. 1999. Human resourcing in practice: Managing employment issues in the university. *Journal of Management Studies*, 36(4): 483–504.
- West, J. 2008. Commercializing open science: Deep space communications as the lead market for Shannon Theory, 1960–73. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(8): 1506–1532.
- Whetten, D. A. 2009. An examination of the interface between context and theory applied to the study of Chinese organizations. *Management and Organization Reviews*, 5(1): 29–55.
- White, S., & Liu, X. 2001. Transition trajectories for market structure and firm strategy in China. *Journal of Management Studies*, 38(1): 103–124.
- Wilkinson, B., Gamble, J., Humphrey, J., Morris, J., & Anthony, D. 2001. The new international division of labour in Asian electronics: Work organization and human resources in Japan and Malaysia. *Journal of Management Studies*, 38(5): 675–695.
- Wolcott, H. F. 2001. *Writing up qualitative research*, (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wong, P. L.-K., & Ellis, P. 2002. Social ties and partner identification in Sino-Hong Kong international joint ventures. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 33(2): 265–289.
- Yakura, E. K. 2002. Charting time: Timelines as temporal boundary objects. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(5): 956–970.
- Yardley, L. 2000. Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology and Health*, 15(2): 215–228.
- Yin, R. K. 2009. *Case study research*, (4th ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

APPENDIX

Table A1 Categorisation of journal articles 1999–2008

Journal	Year	Quantitative	Mixed	Qualitative ^a	Case	Cases % of empirical ^b	Cases % of total ^b	Articles per volume ^c	NE ^d
AMJ	1999	40	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	43	3
AMJ	2000	60	4	4	2	2.9	2.8	72	2
AMJ	2001	57	2	3	9	12.7	12.7	71	0
AMJ	2002	59	1	1	8	11.6	11.6	69	0
AMJ	2003	44	0	1	2	4.3	4.2	48	1
AMJ	2004	50	1	0	3	5.6	5.5	55	1
AMJ	2005	52	0	0	5	8.8	6.9	72	15
AMJ	2006	47	0	5	3	5.5	4.9	61	6
AMJ	2007	52	1	3	3	5.1	3.5	85	26
AMJ	2008	49	1	3	2	3.6	3.6	55	0
Total		510	10	20	37	6.4	5.9	631	54
JIBS	1999	22	0	0	2	8.3	6.5	31	7
JIBS	2000	26	3	0	1	3.3	3.3	30	0
JIBS	2001	27	1	1	1	3.3	2.6	39	9
JIBS	2002	25	0	0	4	13.8	12.5	32	3
JIBS	2003	26	0	0	1	3.7	2.9	35	8
JIBS	2004	16	0	0	2	11.1	8.7	23	5
JIBS	2005	24	0	0	2	7.7	6.1	33	7
JIBS	2006	35	1	0	1	2.5	1.9	52	12
JIBS	2007	47	1	1	2	3.7	3.0	66	12
JIBS	2008	56	0	2	3	5.0	3.9	76	16
Total		304	6	4	19	5.6	4.6	417	79
JMS	1999	9	0	4	13	50.0	30.2	43	17
JMS	2000	13	1	8	9	29.0	19.1	47	16
JMS	2001	15	2	5	11	33.3	22.9	48	15
JMS	2002	14	0	4	13	41.9	27.1	48	17
JMS	2003	20	1	11	25	43.9	31.3	80	23
JMS	2004	16	0	8	15	38.5	22.4	67	28
JMS	2005	19	1	5	19	43.2	27.9	68	24
JMS	2006	21	2	5	13	31.7	20.0	65	24
JMS	2007	20	0	7	12	30.8	17.1	70	31
JMS	2008	30	1	5	13	26.5	22.0	59	10
Total		177	8	62	143	36.7	24.0	595	205
Grand total		991	24	86	199	15.2	12.1	1643	338

^aExcluding case studies.^bAverage values.^cExcluding editorials, commentaries and notes.^dNon-empirical.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Catherine Welch is an Australian citizen with a PhD from the University of Western Sydney. She is currently a senior lecturer at the University of Sydney, Australia. Her current research interests lie in the areas of qualitative research methodology and the internationalisation of the firm. She can be contacted at catherine.welch@sydney.edu.au.

Rebecca Piekkari is a Finnish citizen with a PhD from the Helsinki School of Economics. She is Professor of International Business at the Aalto University, School of Economics, Finland. Her research interests focus on qualitative case studies and language issues in multinational management. She can be contacted at rebecca.piekkari@aalto.fi.



Emmanuella Plakoyiannaki is a Greek citizen with a PhD from the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. She is an assistant professor of Marketing at the Aristotle's University of Thessaloniki, Greece, and was a visiting researcher at Aalto University, School of Economics, Finland, when this paper was written. Her research interests lie in the areas of qualitative case studies, relationship marketing, entrepreneurship and advertising. She can be contacted at emplak@econ.auth.gr.

Eriikka Paavilainen-Mäntymäki is a Finnish citizen with a PhD from the Turku School of Economics. She is currently a senior research associate/assistant professor at the Turku University School of Economics, Finland. Her current research interests lie in qualitative research methodology and visual, longitudinal and narrative methods, the internationalisation processes of the firm and entrepreneurship. She can be contacted at erikka.paavilainen-mantymaki@utu.fi.

Accepted by Mary Yoko Brannen, Guest Editor, 25 August 2010. This paper has been with the authors for two revisions.