

**[E89] Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. Academy of management review, 14(4), 532-550.**

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This paper is about case study research. Specifically, it talks about the challenges that a researcher has to overcome when building theory from case studies. It also addresses the opportunities that arise from that kind of research.

The first challenge is concerned with the justification for doing theory building rather than theory testing. A common strategy to apply here is to question the one in doubt why there is not already a theory covering most or all phenomena. Most of the time the lack of theories is the exact reason for doing theory building rather than testing existing ones.

Case selection is another challenge the paper discusses. In general, case study research is used to develop theories. Therefore it is required to have some case studies to work with. The more case studies a theory is based upon, the stronger the theory of that phenomenon will be. Then however, the theory will also be less deep and will not cover all details of all case studies. If one tries to include all edge cases of the case studies, the theory will just get more complicated. The opposite effect occurs when using only a single case study to base a theory on.

Interview data is one of the most common techniques of collecting data in case studies. The quality of gathered data is very high, however, the data will be biased. It is recommended to use multiple knowledgeable persons with a good understanding of the overall phenomenon circumstances. Cross-checking multiple interviews will most probably remove a large chunk of biases. To complement the interviews, doing observations is advised. They too will provide the researcher with more data as well as remove some biases from interviews (people think differently when outside of an interview situation).

The presentation of the empirical evidence is the next challenge. Depending on the number of case studies used, the stories in them cannot be added to the publication. To address this issue, it is advised to try to blend story and theory in a so called “construct table” containing theory constructs and text from multiple cases to each construct.

Then an opportunity is presented regarding the composal of the theory. In the publication, one should present it in three different ways: (1) a sketch of the theory in the introduction, (2) each construct of the theory in the body with empirical evidence, (3) use “boxes and arrows” to present the theory visually.

Despite these challenges, case study research remains popular and important. The challenges presented can be met through sound design and precise language.