

CASING INTEGRATIVE CASE RESEARCH: EXEMPLARS AND ICONOCLASTS

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ABSTRACT

Many organizational scholars begin their academic careers by evaluating prior research. Typically, this process involves extensive examination of the literature to determine areas of convergence and gaps that remain to be filled. Hypothesis-generation and -testing, based on observations from empirical survey, focus groups, or grounded field research tends to be supported or debunked by subsequent investigations. During this winnowing process, individual cases often stand out and provide normative examples of how organizations actually do or should behave, or as outliers that do not fit a predicted pattern. What are researchers supposed to make of these exemplars or iconoclasts?

While most organizations operate in dynamic environments, in which entities evolve, are compelled to respond to symmetric and asymmetric threats, or at worst, disappear entirely. Unlike event-based, cross-sectional surveys, case studies can provide robust longitudinal data for comparing organizational responses to dynamic (and sometimes unanticipated) change. Developing and comparing multiple case studies via content analysis for building theory is well established in the management literature. This study employs such methods enabling sense-making and identifying patterns or themes, as well as focusing on the products of human communication (i.e. the interview transcripts or un-audited financial reports themselves).

Major limitations associated with the comparative case research methodology include the tendency of the industry of businesses under investigation to be heterogeneous rather than homogeneous, and the lack of generalizability of samples restricted to respondents from family businesses. This study employs a methodology that: (1) controls industry to minimize environmental noise, and (2) provides comparisons across case studies of family and professionally owned and -managed businesses helps to increase robustness of findings from empirical surveys.

This investigation involves a triangulated methodology that supplements survey and anecdotal data with content analysis from case histories of organizations regarding their preparedness for crises and disasters, with a particular focus on the wine industry. Recent natural disasters have impacted entire regions and producers in the global wine industry. These include earthquakes in Napa Valley (2015) and South Island, New Zealand (2016), and devastating fires in Napa Valley, Portugal, Sonoma County, and Spain (2017).

Despite numerous theoretical investigations into crisis management and disaster preparedness, there is scant research on proactive activities such as institutionalized processes, executives' and employees' perceptions of risk, and adoptions of organizational crisis management preparations.

This investigation purports to overcome prior research limitations, such as (1) the lack of industry specificity and (2) potential biases due to the fact that data collection was limited to the United States; and develop testable hypotheses regarding the degree to which wine businesses are prepared for crises and disasters. This investigation also plans to determine whether there are differences in perception of disaster and crisis preparedness contingent upon level of employment within an organization, that is, top-level managers and owners evince a higher level of perceived preparedness than employees.

This study plans to survey some 1,400 alumni and industry supporters of our now 20 year-old wine business program. These individuals are working as owners, executives, or employees in the global wine industry. The survey will be supplemented by content analysis based on qualitative data from in-depth case histories of wine business organizations that typify the strategic approaches through perceived risk and crisis/disaster preparedness.

Keywords: social sustainability, environment, crisis/disaster preparedness, perceived risk, contingencies