Reflections on Case Study Research in Operations and Supply Chain Management

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Most recently, Martin Spring work has been in business service operations and business models; this built on work in the other two areas, supply chain management and operations strategy. In all three areas he has worked across disciplines, connecting in particular with industrial marketing. He has held a range of scholarly service roles, including Co-Editor of the International Journal of Operations and Production Management (2000-2004), Associate Editor of Journal of Supply Chain Management (2011-present), Editorial Board Member, Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management (2013-present) and others.

[Abstract] Case study research has been established as an accepted method within operations management (OM) for over twenty years. This period has seen the stabilising of particular forms of case study research within the discipline, and emerging conventions for the conduct of rigorous case studies. Meanwhile, the subjects of interest within OM have changed, notably incorporating supply chain management as a dominant concern. Furthermore, the use of theory both from within and outside the OM discipline has become increasingly important. Both these developments have implications for the use of case studies – and qualitative research more generally – in OM/SCM. The emergence of SCM has, for example, raised important questions about the unit of analysis; the growing importance of theory re-animates discussions about what case study research is for. This paper will trace the evolution of these and other aspects of case study research in OM, drawing on examples from my own and others’ work. It will hopefully provide researchers with a way to think about and design their own research, as well as a basis for evaluating and interpreting the work of others.

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