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# Case Study: An Evaluation of the Use of the Method in the Dissertations of the FGV in the Triennium 2012-2014

## *Estudo de Caso: Uma Avaliação do Uso do Método nas Dissertações da FGV no Triênio 2012-2014*

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**Abstract**

Often considered to be easy to implement because it deals with one or a few units, the case study is one of the means of research used by social scientists in the area of Business Administration. In light of this fact, the objective of this quantitative-qualitative approach was, based on a research model, to verify whether the aspects related to planning, collection and analysis of data or of evidence were explicitly included manner in a sample of dissertations of Business Administration of the Mestrado Executivo em Gestão Empresarial da Escola Brasileira de Administração Pública e de Empresas (Ebape) of Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV) defended in 2012-14 triennium. The conclusion is that some of these aspects were fully accomplished, others were half accomplished, and still others were simply forgotten.

**Keywords:** Case Study; Scientific Method; Administration.

***Resumo***

*Frequentemente tido como de fácil execução pelo fato de lidar com uma ou com poucas unidades, o estudo de caso é um dos meios de pesquisa utilizados por cientistas sociais da área de Administração de Empresas. À luz desse fato, o objetivo deste artigo de abordagem quantitativa-qualitativa foi, com base em um modelo de investigação, verificar se foram contemplados, de forma explícita, os aspectos relacionados ao planejamento, à coleta e à análise dos dados em uma amostra de dissertações do Mestrado Executivo em Gestão Empresarial da Escola Brasileira de Administração Pública e de Empresas (Ebape) da Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV), defendidas no triênio 2012-14 e que se autoqualificaram como estudos de caso. A conclusão é de que alguns desses aspectos foram plenamente obedecidos, outros foram apenas tangenciados, e outros foram simplesmente esquecidos. Reflexões a respeito são colocadas e futuros estudos são sugeridos.*

***Palavras-chave:*** *Estudo de Caso; Método Científico; Administração.*

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## Introduction

> The university, research and access to knowledge and the production of new information are evolving in great strides. Previously addressed to vocational training for entry into the labor market, higher education courses today respond to multiple demands of the government and society of our time, and post-graduate courses explore practically all areas of knowledge (CERVO; BERVIAN; DA SILVA, 2007, p. XI).

It is in this scenario that the elaboration of dissertations and theses in stricto sensu postgraduate courses is a compulsory condition for the training of masters and doctors in Brazil. This is because these conclusion studies work, as they are called, are based on research and use the scientific method, aiming at the construction of new hypotheses and assumptions. They aim to deepen and critique theories about natural, social and human phenomena, in order to arrive at their truth; significant contribution to the academic community; and become reference for understanding and research base, besides pointing out the possibility of new studies for the researchers.

This commitment and responsibility on the part of these scientific investigations, in turn, make legitimate an assessment as to the reliability of the results achieved with the methods they use. After all, the fundamental goal of science is to arrive at the truthfulness of the facts through the use of the scientific method, ″(...) set of intellectual and technical procedures adopted to achieve knowledge.″ (GIL, 2014, p.8).

One of the means of research used for this purpose by social scientists in the area of Business Administration is the case study. Usually associated with the qualitative approach, it is:

> Understood as a methodology or as the choice of a study object defined by the interest in individual cases [and] aims at the investigation of a specific case, well delimited, contextualized in time and place for a detailed search of information (VENTURA, 2007, pp. 384).

However, there is a misconception in the academic environment of Business Administration (and perhaps also in other media), based on the understanding that a case study is an easy type of research, because it deals with one or a few units. Alves-Mazzotti (2006) believes that such deformation was initiated by the guidance of Bogdan and Biklen (1994) that beginning researchers should begin their learning with this strategy, given their intrinsic ″ease″.



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It may actually be a little more than that: in the researcher's imagination, a circumscription would signal a comfortable security, a shelter that would mitigate the natural inclemencies of scientific research. In other words, the case study would facilitate effort and reduce the risks of a research (CRESPO, 2014)

It turns out that the case study is a complex research strategy. Perhaps this is why it is not uncommon to observe that researchers who say they actually do this research do not do so, disdaining to follow the recommended procedures - for example, by Yin (2005) - as necessary for their achievement.

Thus, in a simplistic way, they understand that they have fulfilled the requirements only by complying with generic scientific norms and, above all, concentrating their research on any unit, be it an organization, a group of people, an industry or a country (CRESPO, 2004; Alves-Mazzotti, 2006).

It is based on this premise that this work is structured, focused on the evaluation of case study some aspects attendance in the elaboration of master dissertations presented as such. Thus, we try to answer the question: to what extent are being followed the protocols established for the construction of case study researches by the masters of one of the largest Business Administration schools in Brazil?

It is understood that the relevance of this curiosity lies in the fact that, in the sciences, the method is traditionally used for the investigation and demonstration of the truth, which implies that the basis for this must be rigorously followed (CERVO, BERVIAN, DA SILVA, 2007)

For this, the article is structured in five sections: introduction, theoretical reference, aspects of the method, results of the research and final considerations.

## Theoretical Reference

The case study consists on the investigation of isolated facts or small groups. Its basic purpose is to understand contemporary social facts and phenomena in their natural environment in real world, requiring very specific care in their preparation:

> Carrying out a case study appropriately means addressing five traditional concerns about case studies - conducting research rigorously, avoiding confusion with case studies, knowing how to reach generalized conclusions when desired, carefully managing the level of effort and understand the comparative advantage of case study research. The overall challenge makes case study research difficult, although it is classically considered a form of light research (YIN, 2005, p.2).

Originated in medicine and psychotherapy, areas where it is necessary to consider individual aspects of each person and the individual history of each being, the case study serves for analyzes where the perception of the other and the world interferes in the interpretation of events by the subject. It is, therefore, unique for each one (VENTURA, 2007).

The choice of this means of research may arise from the need for a broad and profound description of an undefined phenomenon, where the existing theories about it and about the context are insufficient to explain them (BENBASAT, GOLDSTEIN, MEAD, 1987). In this paper, we present the results obtained by McNEALY,

With the research question typically using the ″how″, ″why″ and ″what″ forms (DUBÉ; PARÉ, 2003; YIN, 2005), the case study form can be both quantitative and qualitative with respect to the aproach. It can be single or multiple, depending on the purpose of the research and the definition of the unit evaluated, the latter being able to refer to an individual, a social group, an organization, a community, a nation or a whole culture (GIL, 2010).

Complex phenomena are also researched through the adoption of the case study nowadays, mainly by sociologists, anthropologists and jurists: ″At one end, aggregate studies are identified, when the intention is to examine the universe itself, and in the other end, case studies, when one studies a unit or part of this whole ″(VENTURA, 2007, p.383). So, it is a technical choice in the name of scientism.

By its characteristics, case study allows the generation of both insights and ideas for future work, allowing to a deep penetration into social reality. This leads to interpretations of the reasons for the occurrence of a given phenomenon, allowing a model to be followed, a reference for future action (Tull and Hawkins, 1976; MICHEL, 2009).

On the other hand, like any other means of research, case study also presents difficulties, such as lack of specific parameters on its preparation. Not infrequently, this

induces carefulness investigators to understand that certain evidence findings may be true, when in fact they are mistaken (MICHEL, 2009; YIN, 2005). For this reason, the researcher must "show perseverance, creativity and critical reasoning to interpret and conclude on the evidences extracted from his research" (MARTINS, THEOPHILO, 2009, pp. 62-63).

This recommendation signals the importance of a researcher's adequate profile for the execution of this type of scientific investigation, which requires a questioning mind even during data collection, especially through the frequent use of interviews and bibliographical-documentary analysis. It is also necessary that a flexible author to change the planning and revise the original project, if necessary, which reinforces the need of theory knowledge on the research subject (YIN, 2005).

## Method

This research is a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach, and a bibliographical survey on the means, with its results being treated through descriptive statistics (GIL, 2014). As for the purpose, it is a descriptive research: it exposes the characteristics of a certain population or phenomenon, establishes correlations between variables and defines its nature (VERGARA, 2013).

The research on the extent to which the protocols established for the construction of case study research are followed in the case of master's dissertations in Business Administration was carried out together with the sample of the Executive Master in Business Management from Brazilian School of Administration (Ebape) at Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV) final works defended in the 2012-14 triennium.

The choice of this school was derived from its qualification in the stricto sensu postgraduate courses market, guaranteed by the maximum grade achieved in the 2011-13 triennium as a professional level course with the Higher Education Personnel Improvement Commission (CAPES). The choice of the dissertations as the object of this analysis was due to its importance in the academic market, as already indicated in Cervo, Bervian and Da Silva (2007).

The article by Oliveira, Maçada and Goldoni (2006) was used as an investigation model, starting from the premise that its publication in a first-line periodical qualifies it as a guide. Referring to Dubé and Paré (2003), this research model informs the criteria - divided into four levels, with their respective components - that must be obeyed for a case study to truly qualify as such:

1) Type of research: descriptive, exploratory or explanatory;

2) Case study planning: protocol existence; reliability; research question; type of research question; theory presentation; specification of constructs; number of cases; single case nature; literal replication; theoretical replication; external validity; unit of analysis; built-in analysis unit; pilot case; number of pilot cases; criteria for pilot selection; place of research conduction; period in time; collection at different times; access to information; spent time on site; collection period; use of staff; number of authors; researchers role; research design;

3) Data collection or case study evidence survey: description of procedures; type of data or evidence (qualitative, quantitative, both and none); multiple evidence sources or data; interview; documents; note; other collection technique; triangulation; triangulation type; data base; construct validity; and

4) Data analysis or case study evidences: procedures description ; field notes; coding scheme; flexibility; evidence logical chain; cases comparison; theoretical proposition; concurrent explanation; case description; standard compliance; explanation construction; time series analysis; logical models; cross-case synthesis; internal validity; citations; project review; comparison with literature; validity of the construct.

The material to be analyzed was obtained by accessing FGV website, where the dissertations were searched for the chosen triennium. Next, the Windows ″find″ specific selections feature was used to identify and separate those that bring the word ″case″ into their title or ″case study″ in the summary.

Initially 36 dissertations were located, one of which can not be analyzed because it is not available for public access. This limited the final sample to 35 dissertations, which were downloaded from the site and divided among three researchers. These researchers then sought explicit references to those elements listed by Oliveira, Maçada and Goldoni

(2006) as necessary for the qualification of a case study. That is, nothing was deduced, however much it might seem evident.

This search was done using the technique of analysis content, by means of the full abstract reading, the introduction, section of methods and the dissertation conclusions. In parallel, perpendicular reading was performed in the other chapters, and then the available in the ″.pdf″ extension documents word search tool was used. The average time invested in each dissertation research was 60 minutes.

Then, to certify the convergence of understandings among the research team, each of them randomly selected three dissertations from the sub-sample and shared interpretations with the other researchers. It allowed the reasons for possible divergences to be critically analyzed for consensus.

As a last step, the consolidated information was transcribed in Excel spreadsheet, where numerical information and respective calculations of descriptive statistics tables were elaborated. For the results presentation, it was used the division proposed by Oliveira, Maçada and Goldoni (2006).

## Survey Results

### Search Types Results

This information was absent in 20% of the sample, whereas, among the dissertations that explained it, the preference occurred with exploratory-descriptive research, followed by only exploratory research. The least executed were exploratory-explanatory research (see Table 1).

**Table 1 -** Ebape / FGV Dissertations qualified as case studies in 2012-14 - Annual and total distribution of the period - Partial and total quantities, and respective classifications for research purposes - 2012-14

| Ano | Exploratório | Explanatório | Exploratório-Descritivo | Exploratório-Explanatório | Sem informação | Total | Participação percentual no total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2012 | 4 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 3 | **12** | **34%** |
| 2013 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | **14** | **40%** |
| 2014 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 2 | **9** | **26%** |
| **Total** | **11** | **3** | **13** | **1** | **7** | **35** | **100%** |
| **Participação percentual no total** | **31,4%** | **8,6%** | **37,1%** | **2,9%** | **20,0%** | **100%** | |

**Source:** Prepared by the authors.

## Results Regarding Case Study Planning

The survey results of the aspects that Oliveira, Maçada and Goldoni (2006) considered relevant when planning a case study are in Table 2, together with the quantitative ones for the explicit verifications.

As deals with several items and as the observation respective percentage are varied, the results of this phase are placed as follows: initially the cases with percentages considered more expressive, subjectively understood as being equal or greater than 40% are highlighted. Then, the others are described, with one caveat: the percentages related to literal and theoretical replications, being specific to multiple cases, have very small participations in relation to the total of the sample, which explains why they are commented together on the participation of the multiples cases.

**Table 2** - Ebape / FGV Dissertations qualified as case studies in 2012-14 - Presence of planning elements in case studies.

| Elemento | N° de ocorrências | Participação percentual em relação ao total da amostra |
|---|---|---|
| Questão de pesquisa | 35 | 100% |
| Tipo de questão de pesquisa | | |
| Como | 12 | 34,3% |
| O Que | 3 | 8,6% |
| Quais | 2 | 5,7% |
| Outra | 10 | 28,6% |
| Como/por que | 4 | 11,4% |
| Por que | 4 | 11,4% |
| Teoria | 35 | 100% |
| Especificação de construtos | 9 | 25,7% |
| Desenho de pesquisa | 16 | 45,7% |
| Caso único | 33 | 94,3% |
| Natureza do caso único | 1 | 3,0% |
| Caso Múltiplo | 2 | 5,7% |
| Replicação literal | 1 | 2,9% |
| Replicação teórica | 1 | 2,9% |
| Validade externa | 18 | 51,4% |
| Unidade de análise | 18 | 51,4% |
| Unidade de análise incorporada | 5 | 14,3% |
| Estudo de caso piloto | 1 | 2,9% |
| Critérios para seleção do piloto | 1 | 100% |
| Local de condução da pesquisa | 27 | 77,1% |
| Período no tempo | 23 | 65,7% |
| Coleta em diferentes momentos | 11 | 31,4% |
| Adequado acesso | 23 | 65,7% |
| Tempo gasto no local | 14 | 40,0% |
| Período de coleta | 18 | 51,4% |
| Equipe | 7 | 20,0% |
| Papel dos investigadores | 2 | 5,7% |
| Existência de Protocolo | 14 | 40,0% |
| Confiabilidade | 14 | 40,0% |

**Source:** Own elaboration, based on Oliveira, Maçada and Goldoni (2006).
**Note:** Lighter letters written lines bring information from a subset belonging to the darker letter written element that is immediately above.

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**Items with Percentages Equal or Greater than 40%**

- Research question: all dissertations of the sample brought a problem question. The preferred way to put this question started with the word ″as″: alone or accompanied by a second ″why″ question was responsible for 45.7% of the sample choices. The least used occurred in the form ″which″;

- Theory presentation: all the analysed dissertations brought theoretical reference;

- Research Design: this phase, ″(...) logical sequence that connects empirical data to the initial research question and its conclusions″ (YIN, 1997, p.236) was detected in 45.7% of the sample;

- Option by case type: all dissertations specified the case studied type, and most opted for the single case study, with 94.3% of the sample. However, the nature of the single case was presented by only one of these dissertations, representing 3% of this sub-sample, referring to what based the option for the strategy of a single element for the case study (critical, typical, revealing);

- External validity: referring to the extent to which the conclusions obtained through the case study can be generalized, it was explained in 51.4% of the sample;

- Unit of analysis: as the ″phenomenon most elementary part to be studied″ (FRANKFORT-NACHMIAS, 1996: 53), the definition of unit of analysis assists in delimiting the theory when it comes to exploratory study , or confirms adequacy with the theory being tested when it comes to explanatory study. In the evaluated sample, 51.4% of the dissertations identified their respective units of analysis;

- Research conduct local: a large part of the sample (77.1%) indicated this location, a relevant identification for understanding the conditions under which the information was obtained;

- Time period: also relevant to understanding the conditions under which the information was obtained, the temporality of the investigation was detected in 65.7% of the sample;

- Adequate access: referring to the degree of facility found by the researcher in the search for necessary information to structure the case, this element could be verified in 65.7% of the sample;

- Time spent on site: the lenght of this phase in the field survey was indicated in 40% of the sample;

- Collection period: the identification of the period when the information from the case studies was performed, whether during or after the events, occurred in 51.4% of the sample;

- Protocol existence: this element is necessary to ensure case study reliability, besides being important when it is desired to guarantee unicity in the research procedures performed by more than one researcher, or in multiple case studies (YIN, 2005). The protocol execution was explained in 40% of the sample;

- Reliability: considering the capacity of the study replication by another researcher, in case studies is directly linked to the existence and compliance of a research protocol. Cater to ensure this indicator was mentioned in 40% of the sample.

### Items with Percentages Less than 40%

This verification was divided into two groups: one with a frequency between 40% and 20%, and another with mentions below 20% (see Table 2). This subdivision was based on the subjective principle that less than 20% would mean very low frequency, and these cases should be highlighted.

### Items with Percentages Below 40% and up to 20%

- Specification of the constructs: being an element that can aid in the analysis of the results obtained with the research, there was this type of specification in 25.7% of the sample;

- Collection at different moments: explained in 31.4% of the sample, the longitudinal cut aims to investigate the dynamics of a problem, investigating it several times, or continuously, during a certain period of time. The longer the duration of the investigation, the greater the chances that patterns and (dis) continuities will be identified. This allows a greater depth to the understanding of the case (DUBÉ; PARÉ, 2003), as becomes possible to identify the referential clipping under which the phenomena are being investigated (PETTIGREW, 1989);

- Staff: only 20% of the dissertations in the sample explicitly provided information about the dissertations authors assistants in various phases of the research.

### Items with Percentages Below 20%

- Multiple cases: as 94.3% of the articles were set up as a single case, the remaining 5.7%, equivalent to two dissertations, obviously constituted multiple cases. This option is related to literal replication - resource that leads to similar results for predictable reasons - or theoretical, a resource that leads to contrasting results by known characteristics of the case (DUBÉ; PARÉ, 2003; YIN, 1997, 2005). This explains why each type of replication was detected in only one dissertation of the sample;

- Embedded analysis unit: refers to the possibility of case studies, both multiple and unique, to be either incorporated or holistic. The holistic ones - that can be composed of a single case or of multiple cases - the unit of analysis is considered in a certain context. In the incorporated ones, there are subunits of analysis for each case. Oliveira, Maçada and Goldoni (2006, p.5) illustrate: "For example, in a holistic case study, the case that equates to the unit of analysis is a Postgraduate Program, while in the incorporated case study, the case is the Graduate Program, but the built-in units of analysis are the concentration areas of this program. " In the evaluated sample, 14.3% of the total explained their respective subunits of analysis;

- Pilot case study: this type of resource serves at several purposes, such as the identification of the unit of analysis and the refinement of the data collection instruments, in addition to providing the researcher greater familiarity with the phenomenon that is investigating (BENBASAT; GOLDSTEIN, MEAD, 1987). In the surveyed sample, only one dissertation - equivalent to 2.9% of the total - stated that it had performed this stage;

- Criteria for choosing the pilot case: the criteria for choosing the pilot case do not need to be the same used to select the other cases, it could be, for example, informants accessibility, convenient geographical location, and richness of documents (YIN, 2005). The only dissertation that used a pilot case presented the criterion for its choice, equivalent to 100% of this sub-sample.

- Role of researchers: it has to do with the activities assigned to the case study researchers, and when these are diverse, different research strategies can be used simultaneously, enriching the results. In the surveyed sample, 5.7% of the dissertations explained these roles.

## Results Regarding Data Collection or Evidence Survey

The aspects that Oliveira, Maçada and Goldoni (2006) consider relevant when analyzing data or evidence in a case study are found in Table 4, together with the quantitative ones for the explicit verifications.

**Table 3 -** 2012-14 Ebape / FGV Dissertations qualified as case studies - Data collection elements presence in case studies.

| Elementos | N° de ocorrências | Participação percentual em relação ao total da amostra |
|---|---|---|
| Descrição dos procedimentos de coleta | 35 | 100% |
| Abordagem | Qualitativa: 26 | 74,3% |
| | Quantitativa: 2 | 5,7% |
| | Ambas: 2 | 5,7% |
| | Sem informação: 5 | 14,3% |
| Múltiplas fontes de evidência | 22 | 62,9% |
| Entrevista | 30 | 85,7% |
| Análise bibliográfico-documental | 32 | 91,4% |
| Observação | 17 | 48,6% |
| Outra técnica coleta de dados | 2 | 5,7% |
| Triangulação | 18 | 51,4% |
| Tipo de triangulação | 8 | 22,9% |
| Base de dados | 13 | 37,1% |
| Validade do construto | 12 | 34,3% |

**Source:** Prepared by the authors, based on Oliveira, Maçada and Goldoni (2006)

The forms of data collection getting were reported in all dissertations. At the same time, even though it was deductible through reading, 14.3% of these studies did not explain what approach they used; already in those that did, the frank preference was given to the qualitative approach, with 74.3% of the observations.

Multiple sources of evidence were used by 62.9% of the researchers in the sample. Regarding the techniques for obtaining primary information, the interview was the favorite, with 85.7% of the observations. The bibliographic-documentary analysis was detected in 91.4% of the sample, the observation occupied 48.6% and other techniques were limited to 5.7% of the observations. The achievement of triangulation was made explicit in 51.4% of the articles, although only eight of these 18 researches have specified the type of triangulation adopted (OLIVEIRA & MAÇADA; GOLDONI, 2006, page 13) .

The database construction, an important element for the case study reliability (YIN, 2005), was explained in 37.1% of the dissertations. Finally, the construct validity, through the relationship of multiple evidence sources, was clearly reported in 34.3% of the dissertations.

## Results Regarding Data Analysis or Evidence

The aspects that Oliveira, Maçada and Goldoni (2006) consider as relevant in this stage of the case study elaboration are in Table 4, together with the quantitative ones regarding the explicit verifications.

**Table 4** - 2012-14 Ebape / FGV Dissertations Qualified as Case Studies - Data analysis elements presence in case studies

| Elementos | N° de ocorrências | Participação percentual em relação ao total da amostra |
|---|---|---|
| Descrição dos procedimentos de análise | 33 | 94,3% |
| Anotações de campo | 19 | 54,3% |
| Esquema de codificação | 16 | 45,7% |
| Flexibilidade | 7 | 20,0% |
| Encadeamento de evidências | 19 | 54,3% |
| Comparação dos casos | 4 | 11,4% |
| Proposição teórica | 13 | 37,1% |
| Explanação concorrente | 0 | 0,0% |
| Descrição do caso | 22 | 62,9% |
| Adequação ao padrão | 20 | 57,1% |
| Construção de explanação | 21 | 60,0% |
| Análise de séries temporais | 7 | 20,0% |
| Modelos lógicos | 9 | 25,7% |
| Síntese de casos cruzados | 14 | 40,0% |
| Validade interna | 3 | 8,6% |
| Citações | 21 | 60,0% |
| Revisão do projeto | 1 | 2,9% |
| Comparação com a literatura | 22 | 62,9% |
| Validade do construto | 13 | 37,1% |

**Source:** Prepared by the authors, based on Oliveira, Maçada and Goldoni (2006).

Regarding what was done in the case of Table 2, as there is also several items here and as the respective percentage of observation are varied, the results are placed as follows: initially are highlighted the cases with more expressive percentages, subjectively understood as being equal to or greater than 40%; then the others are described.

## Items with Percentages Equal or Greater than 40%

- Description of the analysis procedures: referring to the data analysis procedures, this analysis allows the results to be better understood, besides indicating that the process was systematic and rigorous. It was explained in 94.3% of the sample;

- Field notes: essential for building database or evidence from the primary survey, should be as complete as possible, including both verbal and non-verbal communications, as well as a description of the discussions context (DUBÉ; PARÉ, 2003). They were explained in 54.3% of the dissertations in the sample;



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- Coding scheme: this is the way the coding is defined, a provision that allows identification of the logic adopted in this definition and that guarantees the study replication. It reached 45.7% of the sample;

- Chain of evidence: this element has as principle "(...) to allow the external reviewer or observer to follow the derivations of any evidence from the initial question of the research to the final conclusions of the case study" (DUBÉ, PARÉ, 2003, p.618). It was explained in 54.3% of the sample;

- The case description: 62.9% of the analyzed dissertations explicitly fulfilled this stage, which implies developing a descriptive structure to organize the case study;

- Adequacy to the standard: In the sample, 57.1% of the dissertations compared their results with a previous theories standard based;

- Explanation construction: meaning the explanation of the case from data analysis or obtained evidence, by means of "(...) a presumed set of causal links in relation to it" (YIN, 2005, p. 149), was explained in 60.0% of the sample;

- Synthesis of cross-cases: an effort that seeks to increase the validity of the case study results, this synthesis is performed by comparing data from individual cases, according to the same structure. It was performed in 40% of the dissertations of the sample;

- Citations: 60.0% of the dissertations explicitly referred to literature citations in order to help corroborate the results;

- Comparison with literature: 62.9% of the analyzed dissertations performed this stage, which is especially useful for the theory construction by making it possible to compare new concepts or hypotheses with the existing literature.

### Items with Percentages Below 40%

- Flexibility: it serves to better take advantage of opportunities that may arise during the investigation of the case, such as the incorporation of new questions to the interview script. It was explained in 20% of the sample;

- Comparison of cases: common in multisite studies, was explained in 11.4% of the dissertations analyzed;

- Theoretical proposal: understood as the proposition of a new theory based on the findings of the case study, it occurred explicitly in 37.1% of the dissertations;

- Concurrent explanation: meaning comparison of results with competing theoretical propositions, indicates that if one explanation is valid, the others can not be. It was not identified in the sample;

- Time series analysis: it has to do with the strategy used in the quantitative approach that uses set of observations on a variable, ordered in time, and recorded in regular periods. Its explanation occurred in 20% of the analyzed sample;

- Logical models: refers to the strategy used in the quantitative approach aimed at comparing empirically observed events with theoretically predicted events. Its explanation occurred in 25.7% of the analyzed sample;

- Internal validity: refers to the accuracy or precision of the results obtained, that is, to how much the conclusions obtained represent and / or explain the reality studied (PUNCH, 1998), and explicitly existed in 8.6% of the sample;

- Project review: it occurs when analyzed subjects or research participants are invited to give their opinion on the interpretations and conclusions of the case study, which helps to corroborate the facts and the evidences brought about by the research (Patters, 1999). It was explicitly executed in only one of the dissertations;

- Validity of the construct: related to the logical link of evidence and key informant, refers to the establishment of "correct operational measures for the concepts under study" (YIN, 2005, p.55), and was detected explicitly in 37.1% of the sample.

## Final Considerations

Typically, the triennium 2012-14 defended dissertations of EBAPE FGV Executive Masters in Business Management that qualified as case studies are unique qualitative cases; bring theoretical reference, clearly state where they were made and the period in the time in which it occurred; preferably use interviews and bibliographical-documentary analysis to collect evidence, as well as systematically and rigorously report the analysis procedures followed.

On the other hand, these same course completion papers were less attentive to the explicitness of compliance with several procedures that Oliveira, Maçada and Goldoni (2006) indicate as necessary for the qualification of a case study - disregardments that were observed, in greater or in the three moments that these authors indicated in their analysis: in the case study planning, and in the phases of data or evidence collection and analysis.

Thus, when planning, the case external validity and its unit of analysis was little explored, as the data collection period or field evidence. In data collection phase, there was also no greater effort to explain the evidence multiple sources that a case study traditionally requires, much less triangulation, which is also considered intrinsic to this research strategy.

Finally, in the the data or evidence analysis, several specifications were absent in most of the dissertations analyzed: field annotations and linkage of the evidence were not found in 45.7% of the sample, 37.1% of the sample did not describe the case neither comparisons were not made with literature, 42.9% did not compare the results with a previous theories based standard, and 40% did not construct explanations or use citations.

However, this picture is more disturbing when the focus is directed at the signs of epistemological ignorance about the case study. These signs would be present in procedures that, also at those three moments, were performed incorrectly or despised by a considerable portion of the authors. Four such events were highlighted:

1) Less than half of the dissertations presented their research problem initiated by ″how″ or ″what″. Yin (2005) warns for the importance of identifying the search strategy through the way its question is posed. That is, when the author of a research that proposes a case study starts with ″which″ or ″why″ - as observed in part of the sample analyzed here - it can be said that he is sentencing his work to a serious methodological incongruence, capable of leading experienced readers to doubt its quality.

2) Less than a third of the dissertations explicitly stated the constructs specification. Without this provision, a case study can not aim to contribute to the theory (EISENHARDT, 1989), which leads to the deduction that the other two-thirds of the sample in fact did not have this intention. In turn, this would indicate the master′s dissertations low scientific breath of a school considered of high academic level.

3) Only one-fifth of the 35 dissertations reported on the team that assisted their authors in conducting their studies, and only two of them specified the activities assigned to these case study coadjuvants. These omissions are mainly relevant to the analysis of the data or evidence raised by the case. This is because not infrequently this information comes from a multiplicity of sources and presents itself in several forms, representing a challenge even for the most experienced researcher (MILES; HUBERMAN 1994). Thus, if a team is not aided, the analysis of a large and rich volume of data can become difficult and may imply that the research brings conclusions and contributions that are faulty or at least limited ( (1999).

4) Triangulation was not explicitly quoted by nearly half of the sample, and 55% of those dissertations that said to have executed it did not bother to define what kind of triangulation was actually undertaken. ″Any finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be more convincing or accurate based on different sources of information″ (DUBÉ, PARÉ, 2003, p.615). In other words, apparently ignoring the importance of making clear how this resource was used, a considerable part of the dissertations executed in the 2012-14 triennium ended up offering to the society academic researches lacking in methodological robustness. This reinforces that ″most postgraduate courses prepare students for the use of one or another method, but not for the combined use of multimethods″ (AZEVEDO et al., 2013, p.2).

This phenomenon refers to Mariz et al. (2005) when they call attention to popularization in the use of the term case study, with authors often actually conducting basic qualitative studies (MERRIAM, 1988). In this way, Administration research starts to present a lack of coherence of its philosophical base, which results in the confusion between those that would be the ″essential problems″ and the ″secondary questions″ (TRIVIÑOS, 1987, apud MARIZ et al., 2005, 13), hiding intellectual weakness behind an obscure eclecticism. This would ultimately explain the fact that ″so many master′s dissertations or doctoral theses remain untouched on the shelves of our libraries″ (MARIZ et al., 2005, p.13).

As a final conclusion, it can be affirmed that the contempt, to a greater or lesser degree, of so many points explicit mention in these case studies can always be countered



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by its authors with the argument that ″the elements were there just did not explicitly appear. ″

In this case, it must be countered that any scientific work must be objective. In it, nothing should be left to the liking of the interpretations - if not more, to enable its replication by other researchers. Supported by monosemy, the scientific genre should prevail for clarity and objectivity, so as to avoid duplicity of interpretation (MICHEL, 2009).

Therefore, close the eyes to the recommendation of clarity as to the method suggests a worrying ignorance about the scientific research itself, and, in the case of the dissertations analyzed here, signals the epistemological disinformation on the part of the authors, specifically on the case study.

The contribution of this article to the area of Business Administration resides in the suggestion that academic teaching environments research methods be strengthened. Greater rigor in research methodology classes would help not only the final course papers, but also the scientific articles derived from them, which would contain fewer methodological errors. In parallel, it would also contribute to the fact that the final examining boards and the researchers who propose to be evaluators of scientific articles would pay more attention in method section rather than concentrating on what is usually considered the most important of a primary research: the results section. The research has limitations, the largest of which is the restriction of the convenience sample, which is relatively small and concentrated in only one post-graduate school.

Therefore, future research can replicate it, analyzing master′s degree dissertations in other Brazilian schools, both of the same standard as of upper and lower qualifications. The same can be done in relation to doctoral theses and foreign schools. We could also follow the suggestion of Oliveira, Maçada and Goldoni (2006) to discuss the quality with which the focused elements were approached in the articles, so that the readers can understand how they were considered or developed in the research.

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