

# Developing a methodological framework for organisational case studies: a rapid review and consensus development process

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## BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVE

Organisational case study proposals can be poorly articulated and methodologically weak, raising the possible need for publication standards in this area.

We aimed to develop reporting standards for organisational case study research, using a rapid evidence synthesis and Delphi consensus process.

## METHODS

### Three stages of development:

- rapid review of the existing literature to identify items
- modified Delphi consensus process to develop and refine content and structure
- application of the high-consensus Delphi items to two samples of organisational case studies to assess their feasibility as reporting standards

Items for the Delphi were identified from published organisational case studies and related methodological texts.

Identified items were sent to a Delphi expert panel for rating over two rounds. Participants were also asked whether the provisional framework in which items were presented was appropriate, and were given the opportunity to adapt this alongside the content. In both rounds, the “high consensus” threshold was set at 70% agreement among respondents for each item.

High-consensus items from the Delphi consultation were then applied to previously identified case study publications, to determine their relevance to the reporting of ‘real world’ organisational case studies, and to better understand how the results of the Delphi consultation might best be implemented as a reporting standard.

## RESULTS

103 unique reporting items were identified from 25 methodological texts; eight example case studies and 12 exemplar case studies did not provide any additional unique items.

Thirteen items were ultimately rated as “Should be reported for all organisational case studies” by at least 70% of respondents, with

the degree of consensus ranging from 73% to 100%.

As a whole, exemplar case studies (which had been provided by HS&DR as examples of methodologically strong projects) more consistently met the high-consensus Delphi items than did case studies drawn from the literature more broadly.

## Consensus standards for reporting organisational case studies

Reporting item	Reported on page no.	Justification for not reporting given on page no.
<b>Describing the design</b>		
1 Define the research as a case study		
2 State the broad aims of the study		
3 State the research question(s)/hypotheses		
4 Identify the specific case(s) and justify the selection		
<b>Describing the data collection</b>		
5 Describe how data were collected		
6 Describe the sources of evidence used		
7 Describe any ethical considerations and obtainment of relevant approvals, access and permissions		
<b>Describing the data analysis</b>		
8 Describe the analysis methods		
<b>Interpreting the results</b>		
9 Describe any inherent shortcomings in the design and analysis and how these might have influenced the findings		
10 Consider the appropriateness of methods used for the question and subject matter and why it was that qualitative methods were appropriate		
11 Discuss the data analysis		
12 Ensure that the assertions are sound, neither over- nor under-interpreting the data		
13 State any caveats about the study		

## CONCLUSIONS

The high-consensus items were translated into a set of 13 reporting standards that aim to improve the consistency and rigour and reporting of organisational case study research, thereby making it more accessible and useful to different audiences (**see table**).

The reporting standards themselves are intended primarily as a tool for authors of organisational case studies. They briefly outline broad requirements for rigorous and consistent reporting, without constraining methodological freedom.

### Limitations

Time and resource constraints prevented an initial “item-generation” round in the Delphi consensus process. Items are therefore likely to have been influenced by the content, wording, and assumptions of available literature.

## FUTURE WORK

These reporting standards should be included as part of the submission requirements for all organisational case studies seeking funding.

Though these reporting standards do not mandate specific methods, if a reporting item is not met for legitimate methodological reasons, the onus is on the author to outline their rationale for the reader.