Case Study Research Design And Methods

Introduction

Case study research has become a cornerstone of contemporary scholarship across disciplines—from business and education to health sciences and public policy. When researchers aim to uncover the nuanced interplay of factors within a real-world context, a well-structured case study design and methodical approach can illuminate patterns that surveys or experiments might overlook. This article explores the essential components of case study research design and methods, offering a practical roadmap for scholars who want to conduct rigorous, insightful investigations.

Key Elements of Case Study Research Design

At its core, a case study is an in-depth examination of a single entity or a small group of entities. The design must answer three fundamental questions:

1. **What is the phenomenon?** Define the case and its boundaries.
2. **Why is it important?** Articulate the research problem and its significance.
3. **How will it be studied?** Outline the methodology, data sources, and analytical strategy.

These questions guide the selection of case type, sampling strategy, and data collection tools.

Choosing a Case Study Type

Researchers typically choose among four main types:

- **Exploratory** – preliminary investigations that identify key variables.
- **Explanatory** – focused on causal mechanisms and relationships.
- **Descriptive** – detailed documentation of a phenomenon.
- **Intrinsic** – studying a unique case for its own sake.

Aligning the case type with the research objective ensures that the design remains coherent and purposeful.

Sampling and Selection

Case study research often employs purposeful sampling, selecting cases that are most likely to illuminate the research questions. Common strategies include:

- **Extreme or deviant cases** – cases that exhibit unusual outcomes.
- **Typical cases** – representative of a broader population.

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- **Critical cases**