

Informing Science:

The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline

Call for Papers

The Role of Case Studies in Informing Systems

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Introduction

Case studies have long been an indispensable tool for qualitative research. For over a century, they have also been a central element of the pedagogy at many business schools, law schools, schools of education and medical schools. For this reason, the case study artifact is widely accepted as a tool for incorporating the “real world” of practice into our research and teaching. Viewed as informing systems, a simplified view of these two processes is presented as Figure 1.

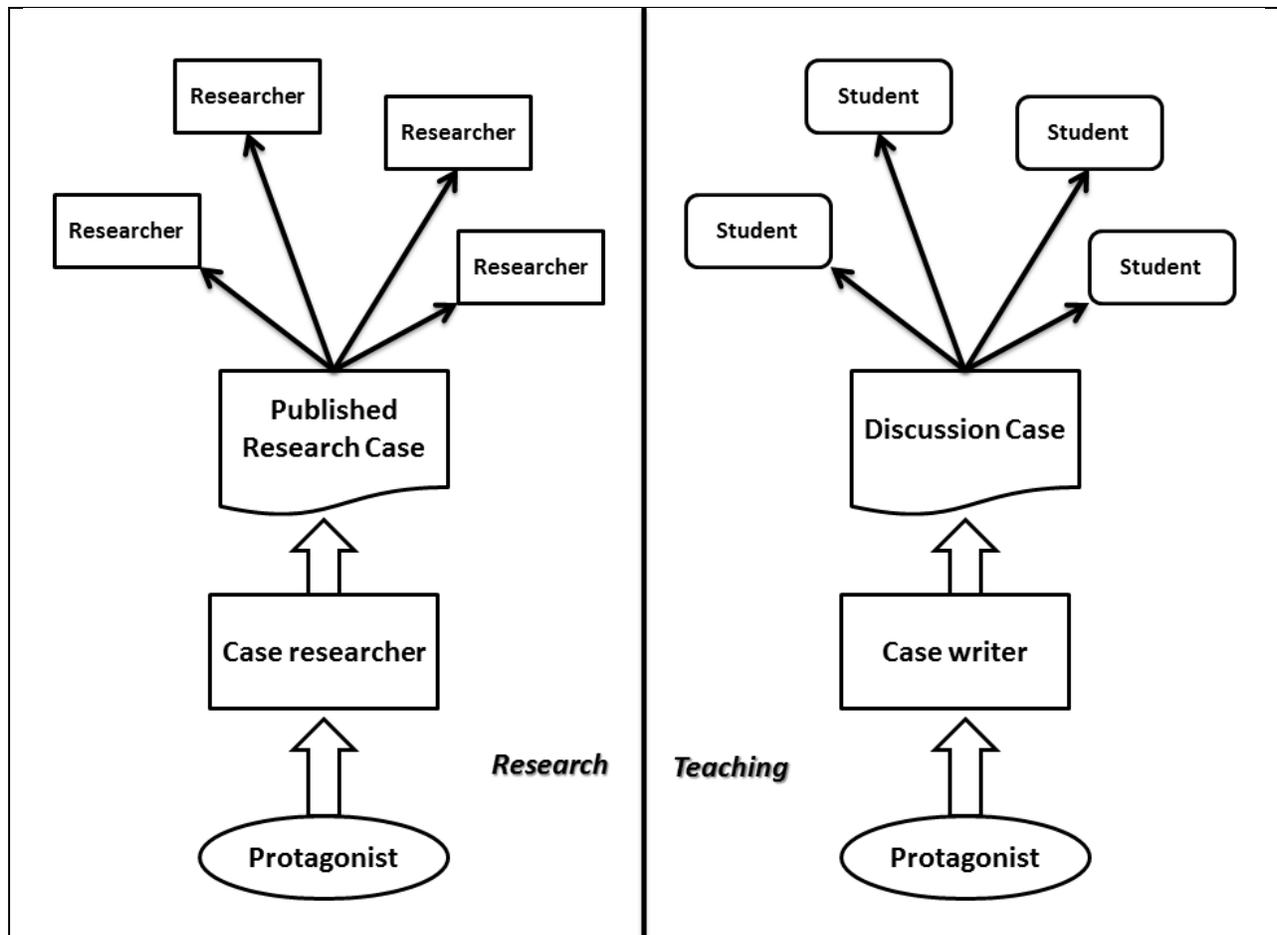


Figure 1: Case studies in research and teaching simplistically viewed as informing systems

Individuals who routinely develop case studies, both for the purposes of research and teaching, are very aware that the perspective presented in Figure 1 is far too narrow to be useful, both in terms of the linkages and in their one-way directionality. In a recent book, *Informing with the Case Method* (Gill, 2011), for example, it was argued that excessive focus on the case study as a publication can cause us to ignore the very real informing system that emerges from the relationships between researcher and protagonist that develop during the case writing process. The network that forms during the process can be used to diffuse subsequent research and observations long after the case has been completed. Similarly, presentations during a recent *Special Track on Case Study Methodologies* highlighted a number of alternative informing outcomes that case studies could produce, such as providing a means for: 1) differing stakeholders to share their views through discussions, 2) students to interact directly with practice through the development of cases (later used by classes), 3) as a catalyst for establishing long-term networks between discussion participants, and 4) as a mechanism through which the decisions of practice can be informed by action research and student discussions. Broadly viewed, these systems look more like the one presented in Figure 2. It would not surprise us, however, to discover many more informing mechanisms engendered by the creation and discussion of case studies.

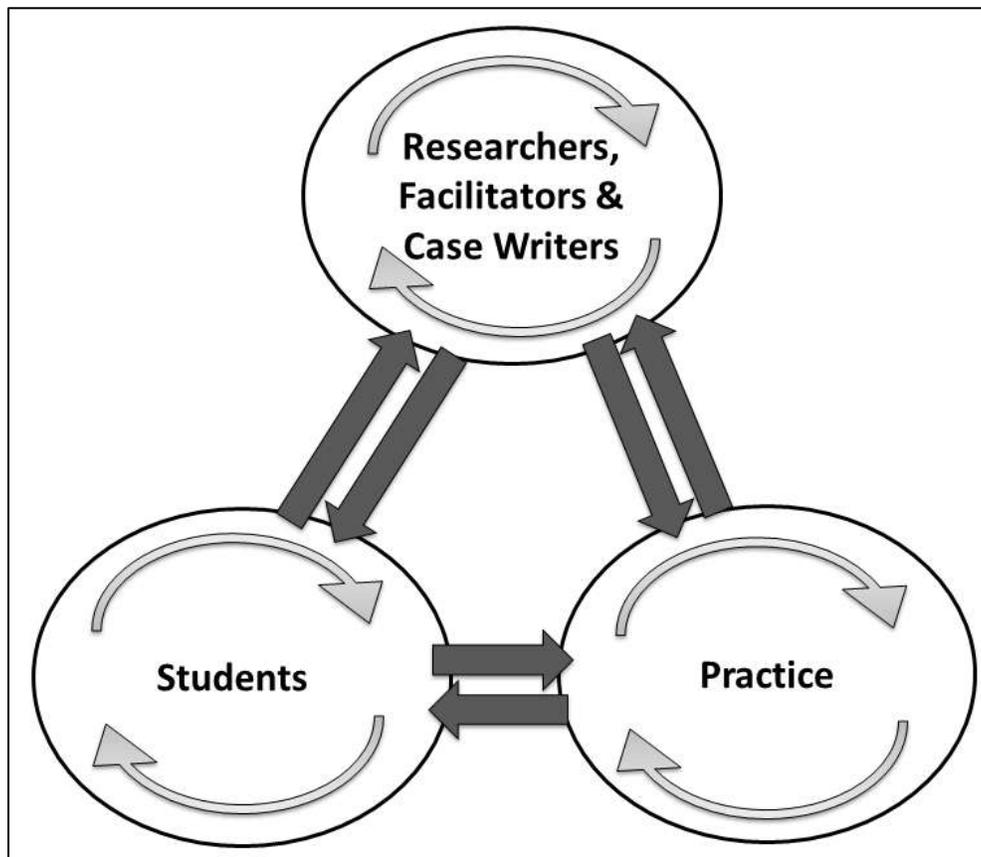


Figure 2: Potential informing pathways resulting from case studies

These observations would likely come as no surprise to institutions such as *Harvard Business School*, who have long viewed their use of the case method and case development activities as a source of competitive advantage. They may be less obvious to institutions that are only occasional users of case studies, however. The purpose of this special section of *Informing Science* is therefore to encourage submissions that help us to better understand the nature of the indirect benefits that accrue from the development and use of case studies.

Appropriate Topics

The particular focus of the special section will be on expanding our knowledge of how case studies can inform beyond the narrowly described patterns presented in Figure 1, along the lines of the richer patterns of Figure 2. Examples of suitable topics could include:

- Can research and discussion cases exert a visible impact on practice?
- Can case study development lead to informing relationships between academia and practice that persist after the case has been written? If so, what is the nature of those relationships (e.g., consulting, networking)?
- What role can case studies play in bringing students together with practice, either through bringing practitioners into the classroom or through involving students in case development?
- What is the impact of participating in case development on case protagonists?
- Can engaging in a series of case discussions lead to the formation of enduring informing networks between participants beyond what might be experienced in more conventional lectures?
- Can case development and discussions be used to facilitate informing between diverse groups of practitioners or students?
- Can facilitating case discussions lead to research insights for the facilitator?

In addition, we would also consider submissions that address more frequently asked—yet largely unanswered—questions about the *nature of informing* that occurs in the development and discussion of case studies. For example:

- What are the pros and cons of a case researcher actively informing protagonists while, at the same time, trying to describe the situation for a case?
- What are the informing costs and benefits of a case study-driven versus theory-driven curriculum in a particular discipline?
- What general approaches might be used to assess the core skills acquired through participating in case discussions—such as improved critical thinking and judgment—as opposed to the specific knowledge of industry and organizational practices that are described within the cases?

These lists are not intended to be limiting. *As long as the submission involves case studies and seeks to better understand how they can play a role within informing systems, the research is likely to fit.*

Types of Submission

Because *Informing Science* was specifically established to facilitate communication of research across a wide number of disciplines, we tend to be open to nearly all research methodologies and forms of research presentation. For the special section on the *Role of Case Studies in Informing Systems* some examples of research methods that we would welcome might include:

- Traditional case research that view a situation through the lens of a particular theory or serves as a basis for comparing theories (e.g., Graham Allison's *Essence of Decision*)
- Multiple case research methods in which alternative situations are contrasted to build, expand or qualify theory related to how cases
- Purely descriptive case studies that report, in detail, a situation in which the development or use of case studies led to observable informing outcomes
- Empirical research that employs statistical methods
- Grounded research that attempts to build theory with respect to the informing consequences of developing or discussing case studies
- Conceptual research involving the current or potential role of case studies in informing systems

Whatever form the research takes, it should be written in a style that will be approachable to readers from the many disciplines that contribute to the *informing science* transdiscipline. Specialized jargon or concepts need to be explained, but only avoided when doing so does not impose a serious cost. Our goal needs to be one of sharing our research findings across disciplinary boundaries; in doing so, we must take care not to “dumb it down”.

Submission Instructions

Manuscripts will be submitted to *Informing Science: The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline* through its online system. To ensure that it is identified as a special issue submission, please begin the abstract with:

The Role of Case Studies in Informing Systems

Regular submissions must be anonymous and should otherwise conform to the guidelines for submission included on the *Informing Science* website (<http://inform.nu>). Invited submissions will receive special guidelines from the Special Editor and Editor-in-Chief.

All submissions will be examined by, Grandon Gill, the journal’s Editor-in-Chief for appropriateness of fit with the special issue. In the event that fit appears to be insufficient, the submission will be returned unreviewed but typically with editorial suggestions relating to how the submission might be revised to achieve better fit. If a potential author is unsure whether a draft fits the criteria, he or she is welcome to email the Editor-in-Chief directly (eic.informscij@gmail.com) for feedback and clarification.

Once regular submissions have been editorially screened, they will be assigned to reviewers for double-blind peer review. John Ickis, the Special Editor for these series, and the Editor-in-Chief will jointly make the decision to accept or reject a manuscript.

Publication

The special issue will consist of a series of articles grouped together within the online and print editions of *Informing Science: The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline*. If the quality and quantity of submissions warrant so doing, the edited collection of these articles may also appear in as a book published by the *Informing Science Press*.

Key Dates

The following deadlines have been established for the special issue. Authors unable to make these deadlines should contact the Editor-in-Chief for instructions:

- 15 January 2013: Manuscripts should be submitted by this date
- 28 February 2013: Initial review recommendations completed and accept/reject decisions made
- 15 April 2013: Author revisions completed and revised manuscripts returned to editors
- 15 May 2013: Authors proof and return final copies
- 15 June 2013: Special issue is available online

These dates are designed to be consistent with the dates for InSITE 2013, to be held in Porto, Portugal. Accepted papers will have the opportunity to present at that conference, should at least one author desire to attend.

In the event that the decision is made to publish the collected articles in book form, we anticipate publication in late spring or early summer 2013.