

Developing a Qualitative Single Case Study in the Strategic Management Realm: An Appropriate Research Design?

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to critically look at and advocate for the use of an in-depth single case study design linked to qualitative research as a more practical and appropriate approach in the realm of strategic management for testing, extending or generation of theory. This article asserts that the combined use of a qualitative single case study research design and methodology not only complement research in the realm of strategic management but also offer rich data for in-depth analysis and understanding of issues in their natural life context. This article is based on the successful testing of a new theoretical model of the activity-resource based view (ARBV) of a consistent market leader in the motor service industry in Kenya, leading to the extension and generation of new theory. The article justifies and outlines the actual qualitative single case study research design and methodology used, including the place of theory and a study rationale to build rigour and to guide the research. In the study, a total of nine top managers at a consistently high performing firm were purposefully selected to be the key informants as they were deemed to be reliable and knowledgeable about the competitive and market conditions in the industry within which the case study firm operates. These key informants were the chairman of the Board, CEO, five divisional managers and two senior managers in supervisory positions. The article concludes by outlining some implications for policy-makers, researchers and academics regarding the use of a single case qualitative study in the realm of strategic management research as an appropriate methodology of choice.

"It may be that many of the insights of the resource-based view ... can only be explored using a case study design or approach ... which involves trading off the concept of generalisability obtainable from large-sample econometric work for an in depth understanding of the complexity of firms." (Lockett & Thompson 2001)

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This article reviews a qualitative single case study where the combined research methodology was used successfully to generate a new theory; the activity-resource-based view (ARBV) theory of a consistently high performing firm in the motor service industry in Kenya (Gaya, Struwig and Smith 2013). In Gaya et al, (2013) the resource-based view and the activity-based view theories were integrated through additional theory and a conceptual framework, to explain how tangible resources actually created and sustained competitive advantage for the firm (Ray, Barney and Muhanna 2004).

Following this new theory generation, this article aims to vigorously advocate for a single case study and qualitative research design and methodology as one of the most appropriate methodology for consideration in the realm of strategic management research, when extension or generation of theory is envisaged (Creswell 2013b, Denzin and Lincoln 2011b, Merriam 2009, Stake 1995, Yin 2009, 2012).

Secondly, by building rigour in the qualitative single case study, this article offers a guide and a focus to other researchers, journal editors and article reviewers in the strategic management research realm, in how to overcome the limitations of lack of rigour, credibility, generalisability, quality and reporting limits in qualitative case study research (Creswell 2013b, Denzin and Lincoln 2011b, Hyett, Kenny and Dickson-Swift 2014 Merriam 2009, Stake 1995, Yin 2009, 2012).

Thirdly, the article also aims at diverting researchers from the current preference for quantitative over qualitative research as the methodology of first choice. This aim finds support in recent literature such as Hyett *et al.* (2014) and Thomas (2011). According to Hyett *et al.* (2014), case study research is an increasingly popular approach among qualitative researchers, its objective being not statistical, with the aim not to produce outcomes that are generalizable to all populations. Hence, its comparison to other methodology does little to advance this qualitative approach, leading to a failure in recognising the inherent value of qualitative case studies. Hyett *et al.* (2014) and Thomas (2011) are also supported by a number of literature, both earlier and recent (Creswell 2013b, Denzin and Lincoln 2011b, Merriam 2009, Stake 1995, Yin 2009, 2012).

Merriam (2009), Stake (1995) and Thomas (2011) add that institutionalised biases in favour of quantitative research in management persist, a position scholars and researchers need to depart from by critically, unemotionally and sincerely evaluating and hence elevating and promoting the use of qualitative single case study to its rightful place in the strategic management research design and methodology realm.

This article is based on the successful testing of a new theoretical model, the activity-resources based view (ARBV) of a consistently high firm where a qualitative single case study research design and methodology was used (Gaya *et al* 2013). The article also serves as an invitation to researchers and scholars in services marketing and strategic management disciplines to dialogue and engage in the current debate where a bias exists in favour of quantitative research. The article clearly explains how the qualitative single case study theory model was empirically constructed and tested, leading to the generation of a new theory using the combined single case study and qualitative research design and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b, Hyett *et al.* 2014).

The resource-based view is considered one of the main theories of determining sources of sustainable competitive advantage as supported in Barney, Wright and Ketchen (2001), Hitt, Ireland and Hoskisson (2001), Hoopes, Madsen and Walker (2003), Kraaijenbrink, Spender and Groen (2010) and Thompson *et al.* (2012). The process of creating sustainable competitive advantage in this study quoted in this article was based on the integration of the resource-based view theory of the firm with the activity-based view to explain the actual value creation process for the customers by tangible resources (Pearce and Robinson 2011, Ray *et al.* 2004, Sheehan and Foss 2007). The integration of the resource-based and activity based view theories explained the actual value creation process, which then addressed a number of weaknesses and criticisms then levelled against the resource based view. The use of theory to guide qualitative case study research is supported by literature (Hallberg 2013, Morse 2011).

In order to meet the study objectives, face to face semi-structured in-depth interviews that were audio-taped were carried out guided by a previously agreed study rationale with key interviewees (or multiple key informants) comprising five senior managers, the chairman and CEO of the selected firm. A further two interviews were conducted with two managers holding supervisory responsibilities to make a total of nine key informants, to achieve concept and broad-based views and allow for case development, case interactions and triangulation (Hyett, Kenny and Dickson-Swift (2014)).

The nine key informants were also employed to ensure multiple sources of information, further case development, shaped by context and emergent data, as recommended by Stake (1995, 1998). The nine key informants also ensured triangulation, to guarantee study integrity, build rigour, validity, credibility and reliability, as recommended in Creswell (2013b), Denzin and Lincoln (2011b) and Stake (1995). Though considered a motor service industry expert, the interviewing of the chairman and CEO were meant to guarantee unfettered accessibility to the consistently high performing case study firm, a key quality requirement in single case study research design and methodology.

The research problem, questions and research objectives are provided next to set the scene.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTIONS

As recommended in Creswell (2013b), Merriam (2009), Meyer (2001) and Yin (2009, 2012), the research problem and questions were framed from theory and a study rationale developed. Meyer (2011) posits that the development of a well-informed theoretical framework to guide a case study should improve consistency, rigour and trust. Lockett, Thompson and Morgenstern (2009) raises issues in previous resource-based view research, for example, the empirical research methodologies applied (Armstrong & Shimizu 2007, Meyer 2001, Newbert 2007, Priem & Butler 2001). In previous studies, tangible resources were excluded as significant sources of sustained competitive advantage (Clulow, Gerstman & Barry 2003, Clulow, Barry & Gerstman 2007). The Clulow *et al.* (2003, 2007) studies recommended further research to ascertain how resources actually create value for the customers (Hill and Jones 2009, Hitt *et al* 2007, Priem & Butler 2001) that are then appropriated by the firms.

In order to find a solution to the research problem and provide an answer to the broad research question, the qualitative single case study posed the following specific research questions:

- Why does the performance of firms in the same motor service industry, operating under the same competitive environment, persistently differ?
- Which tangible resources of the consistently high performing firm provide sources of sustainable competitive advantage and subsequent superior firm performance?
- How do the identified tangible resources actually create value for a firm in the motor service industry and provide the firm with sources of sustainable competitive advantage?
- Can the use of a single case study research design be effectively applied in this field of study?

Based on the above questions the research objectives were formulated as discussed below.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this qualitative single case study is to investigate how tangible resources create sources of sustainable competitive advantage for the study firm. More specifically, the aim of this article was to justify a qualitative single case study in the strategic management realm as the most appropriate research design.

The secondary objectives were:

- To develop a comprehensive case study, based on a consistently high performing firm in the motor service industry, on how tangible resources do create sustainable competitive advantage.
- To justify the use of a single case qualitative study as the most appropriate research design.
- To provide general guidelines for researchers, policy-makers and industry role players for using a single case qualitative study for firms competing in the motor service industry in Kenya.

The justification for the qualitative single case study method is discussed in the following section.

4. JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

Seven reasons for the justification for the single case study are identified in this section. The reasons are extending the theory, the need to define boundaries for the theory, responding to the numerous criticisms levelled at the theory, gaps in the empirical literature review of terminologies in the sustainable competitive advantage creation process as used by previous researchers, the potential significance to practitioners of the findings of the study, the suitability of the research design and methodology used in previous studies, and recommendations for further research by previous researchers in the realm of strategic management. In particular, Priem and Butler's (2001) and Sanchez (2008)'s main critique of the resource-based view is that the theory provides an explanation of resource sustainability but not of value creation, thereby limiting the usefulness of the resource-based view as a strategic tool for management.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW: QUALITATIVE AND CASE STUDY RESEARCH

This section briefly describes literature regarding the research design and methodology used in the study under review including justifying the qualitative approach and single case study research design. The section starts with the qualitative research concept.

5.1 Qualitative Research Concept

This study adopts the qualitative research method as is consistent with background literature, to capture the complexity of the object of study, how a consistently high performing firm creates and sustains competitive advantage in the motor service industry in Kenya, among other firms operating under the same conditions and industry environment. Meyer (2001) posits that it is important for qualitative researchers to provide adequate description for methodological justification and presence of rigour and credibility. Sandelowski (2010) postulates that the chosen research methodology should be in harmony with the study design in addition to being reflected in theoretical literature framework, including in data collection and analysis techniques.

According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2009), Hyett *et al.* (2014) and Rouse and Daellenbach (2002), qualitative research strategy is deemed as the most appropriate in in-depth study of particular firms with unique resources, when identifying and investigating the impact of a firm's resources on sustained competitive advantage, under the resource-based view theory. Armstrong and Shimizu (2007) contend that operationalizing the independent variable, resources, has so far formed one of the major challenges for researchers in the resource-based view, as the key theoretical thrust of its inimitability of valuable resources that lead to sustainable competitive advantage. One of the solutions listed in the resource-based view literature for handling the measurement challenge is the adoption of a qualitative research approach (Armstrong & Shimizu 2007, McEvily & Chakravarthy 2002).

Additional challenges of measuring resources are found in the all-inclusiveness of the term "resources" (Armstrong & Shimizu 2007, Barney *et al.* 2001, Priem & Butler 2001) and the expansive definition of resources by existing literature (Denrell, Fang & Winter. 2003, Hill & Jones 2009, Hitt *et al.* 2007, Thompson *et al.* 2012). Before adopting the qualitative research approach, this study recognised the potential disadvantages of the qualitative approach, such as subjectivity and personal bias, and decided to resolve these disadvantages through triangulation of the information by using multiple sources of evidence from multiple interviewees. This is supported in Creswell (2013b), Gibbert and Ruigrok (2008), Hyett *et al.* (2014), Morse (2011), Thomas (2011) and Yin (2009, 2012). To achieve multiple sources of data, in-depth interviews were held with five senior divisional managers. The case study was further developed by interviewing the CEO and the chairman of the selected firm, before triangulating the data collected by further interviewing two senior managers exercising supervisory roles. McKeivily and Chakravarthy (2002) provide an example of using the qualitative approach in resource-based view research and triangulating the interview data with trade journals and two other industry experts).

Armstrong and Shimizu (2007) and Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2009) further recommend that in active environments, qualitative approaches should be used more in applying the resource-based view to challenging areas and as a basis for new theory building as supported by Siggelkow (2007) and Yin (2009, 2012). In addition, Denzin and Lincoln (2011b), Hyett *et al.* (2014), and Merriam (2009) note that the qualitative research revolution is progressively becoming an important research strategy in the social sciences and related professional fields, such as strategic management research. Morse (2011) and Merriam (2009) add that qualitative research is naturalistic, draws on multiple methods that respect the humanity of participants in the study, focus on natural context, is emergent and evolving, and is fundamentally interpretative. Creswell (2013b) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011b) view social worlds as holistic that engage in systematic reflection on the conduct of research and remain sensitive to their own social identities.

The criteria for ensuring rigour in this qualitative research in this case study, is discussed next.

5.2 Criteria For Rigour In Qualitative Research

When data is collected through qualitative research methods, the question of integrity, quality and reliability is extremely important, as reliability is synonymous with consistency. Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2009), Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2013b) propose that it is necessary to specify terms and ways of establishing and assessing the trustworthiness and reliability of qualitative research that provide an alternative to reliability and validity in quantitative research approaches. The two primary criteria for assessing a qualitative study are trustworthiness and authenticity. In strategic management research, like in other social sciences research, trustworthiness in qualitative studies comprises four criteria or tests (Denzin and Lincoln 2011b, Gibbert and Ruigrok. 2008, Merriam 2009 and Creswell 2013b). The criteria include:

- Credibility (internal validity);
- Transferability (external validity);
- Data dependability (reliability); and
- Confirmability (objectivity).

These four criteria or tests were incorporated in the study to establish integrity and rigour in the qualitative single case study. A clear research framework was formulated based on the literature review (Creswell 2013b, Hyett *et al.* 2014, Meyer 2001, Morse 2011, Yin 2009, 2012). Case study as a research design adopted in the study is justified in the next section.

5.3 The Case Study As Research Design

Stake (1995) defines case study research as an investigation and analysis of single or collective cases, intended to capture the complexity of the object of study. Merriam (2009:46) adds that case study methodology maintains deep connections to core values and intentions and is particularistic, descriptive and heuristic (Hyett *et al.* 2014, Merriam 2009). Yin (2009, 2012) defines case study research design as an in-depth practical investigation of a current event in the actual context.

In case studies, investigators adopt the research design to understand a real-life phenomenon under important natural conditions that are relevant to the occurrence under investigation (Hyett *et al.* 2014, Thomas 2011). This first part of the definition serves to distinguish the case study from other research designs. While Yin (2009, 2012) is the most prominent in supporting the case study for social science research, such as strategic management, Merriam (2009), Meyer (2001), Morse (2011) and Stake (1995, 1998) contribute to the use of case studies in firms, including in particular and unique cases, which are or are not, generalizable (Hyett *et al.* 2014).

Siggelkow (2007) and Thomas (2011), argue that case studies are valuable for inspiring new ideas and explaining new theory development, especially for new theory extension or new theory generation. Recent literature considers case studies designs as central in management research (Creswell 2013b, Flyvbjerg 2011, Hyett *et al.* 2014, and Thomas 2011). In Sweden, case studies research design constitutes the most important empirical base for PhD theses at business schools). Nevertheless, in many other countries, case study research is exception (Thomas 2011).

In the field of qualitative research methodology, the case study is described as a significant qualitative strategy (Creswell 2013b, Denzin & Lincoln 2011a, Hallberg 2013, Meyer 2001, Merriam 2009, Morse 2009, 2011). According to these researchers, the case study method is differentiated from other research strategies because the focus of the research is a bounded system or case (Hyett *et al.* 2014, Rosenberg and Yates 2007). In the qualitative case study, placing the interpretations of the tangible resources of the consistently high performing firm in the motor service industry within a demarcated framework to support the case study findings, was paramount, in order to meet the case study objectives.

Thomas (2011) posits that case study is popular with qualitative researchers, as it allows flexibility in qualitative approach. Hyett *et al.* (2014) add that methodological development of case study has benefitted from a number of seminal scholars and researchers such as Creswell (2013b), Denzin and Lincoln (2011b), Lincoln (1995) Merriam (2009), Stake (1995, 1998) and Yin (2009, 2012).

According to Merriam (2009) and Rosenberg and Yates (2007) the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the empirical object of the study, the firm in this case study. The case is a unit, entity or phenomenon with defined boundaries that the researcher can demarcate or fence in and therefore, determine what will or will not be studied. Focussing on a snapshot at one point of time (statistics) may therefore be totally inadequate (Hyett *et al.* 2014, Merriam 2009, Stake 1995, Thomas 2011, Tight 2010). In the next paragraph, the use of a single case with the qualitative approach to extend or generate theory is justified.

5.4 Justifying The Use Of A Single Case

Stake (1995) posits that more than one case can be simultaneously studied. However, each case study should be concentrated, single inquiry, studied holistically in its own entirety. Hyett *et al.* (2014) add that case study should be designed to suit the case and research questions.

According to Siggelkow (2007) and Stake (1995) single case studies do provide extremely convincing data to test theories, as long as the single firm possesses unique features or attributes needed to meet the study objectives. A consistently high performing firm is particular and one example cited by both Siggelkow (2007) and Stake (1995). Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2009) also recommend the use of a single unique firm, for example a high or poor performing firm for a particular in-depth investigation. A single case can be a very powerful example, as is in the cases of "a talking pig" and in the case of Phineas cage in the study of a "special" organization (Siggelkow 2007:21).

The decision for a single firm as the empirical object of the study is also supported by similar past studies (Clulow *et al.* 2003, 2007) where only single, consistently high performing firms in the financial services industry in Australia were studied. Rouse and Daellenbach (2002) also support a single firm. According to Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) combining qualitative and case study research designs and methodology specifically offers both opportunities and challenges for theory building from particular and unique cases.

The combination of qualitative and case study is discussed in the next section.

5.5 Combining Qualitative And Case Study Research

Denzin and Lincoln (2011b) postulates that a case study, if need be, is a standalone qualitative approach. Using case study in qualitative design is supported by two schools of thought: social constructionist paradigm of Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998, 2009) and post positivist view point of Yin (2009, 2012) Flyvbjerg (2011) and Eisenhardt (1989).

Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2009), Gibbert and Ruigrok (2008), Hyett *et al.* (2014) and Yin (2009, 2012) postulate that justifying and using the combined qualitative case studies as a research design is one of the most difficult in all social science research, especially where the researcher has, as a priority, the desire to collect, present and analyse data at an acceptable quality level, and bring the qualitative case study to a logical conclusion by writing a compelling qualitative case study report. Hyett *et al.* (2014) Thomas (2011) and Yin (2009, 2012) list a number of questions that qualitative case study research has to consider. Firstly, a qualitative case study researcher should explain and indicate how methodological rigour is achieved. Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007) adds that methodological rigour has to begin with a thorough literature review, followed by a careful and thoughtful posing of qualitative case study research questions and objectives in order to protect against threats to validity, maintaining a chain of evidence and investigating and testing rival explanations. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) are supported by Denzin and Lincoln (2011b), Morse (2009, 2011) and Thomas (2010, 2011).

Secondly, Creswell (2013a), Gibbert and Ruigrok (2008), Hyett *et al.* (2014), Siggelkow (2007) and Yin (2009, 2012) recommend that a qualitative case study researcher should understand and openly acknowledge the strengths and limitations of case study as a specific research design and that different social science research designs, including that in the discipline of strategic management, fulfil different needs and situations for investigating research topics. The aim of understanding the complexity and intricacies of the issues is the main occupation of qualitative case study research design as it enables researchers to preserve meaningful features of real-life occurrences (Creswell 2013b, Gibbert and Ruigrok 2008, Hyett *et al.* 2014, Siggelkow 2007 and Yin 2009, 2012).

Hyett *et al.* (2014) add that this expectation increases the tendency to associate case study research designs with qualitative research. This has increased the tendency to combine case study research designs with qualitative research although case study research designs can employ both quantitative and qualitative research strategies in data collection.

The combination of qualitative and case study research in the theory extension, theory testing, new theory generation, and subsequent re-testing in comparing new theory to theory-in-use is supported by recent literature including Creswell (2013b), Denzin and Lincoln (2011b) Gibbert and Ruigrok (2008), Hyett *et al.* (2014), Merriam (2009) Siggelkow (2007) Thomas (2011) and Yin (2009, 2012). Creswell (2013b:97) summarises qualitative case study thus: qualitative case study explores a real-life, contemporary bounded case

or cases over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes.

Meyer (2011) posits that the development of a well-informed theoretical framework to guide a qualitative case study should improve consistency, rigour, and trust. The place of theory in qualitative case study research is next.

5.6 The Role Of Theory In Qualitative Case Study

The role of theory as a requirement of ensuring rigour in a qualitative case study research design and methodology is a point of difference between case studies and competing methods. According to Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2009) Flyvbjerg (2011) Hallberg (2013) Meyer (2011) Morse (2011) Sandelowski (2010) and Yin (2009, 2012) the role of theory in qualitative case study research must be underscored in all case study researches. The dimensions include development of theory and generalising from case study to theory. Meyer (2001) and Hyett *et al.* (2014) recommend that since theory development in the field of strategic management takes time and offer extreme challenges, qualitative case studies have to rely on existing literature, which provide a rich theoretical framework for the case study research design and collection of the needed rich data. Meyer (2001) and Hyett *et al.* (2014) are supported by Flyvbjerg (2011) and Yin (2009, 2012). Hyett *et al.* (2014) quoting Meyer (2011), postulates that, *'the development of a well-informed theoretical framework to guide a case study improves and enhances rigour, consistency and credibility in qualitative case study research* (Hyett *et al.* 2014:3).

For this purpose, having a theoretical proposition prior to data collection, is a vital phase in all rigorous qualitative case study research. The benefit of developing a theory is the presence of a stronger research design and methodology and a heightened ability to interpret the data collected and to link it with the study questions and objectives (Hyett *et al.* 2014, Meyer 2011 and Morse 2011).

In the qualitative single case study, the researcher's preparation included extensive reviewing of literature related to sources of sustainable competitive advantage, discussion of the topics and ideas with colleagues and sponsors, including the clarification of the issues being studied, the knowledge gap in management being filled and the original contribution the qualitative case study findings and conclusions were expected to make. As many theories and concepts relevant to sources of sustainable competitive advantage as possible, were considered, such as the resource-based and activity-based views of the firm. Other concepts include the activity drivers concept, sustainable competitive advantage and the value chain analysis, in line with the recommendation of leading researchers including Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) Meyer (2001) Morse (2011) Merriam (2009) and Yin (2009, 2012) all who place emphasis on using theory to guide a qualitative case study research.

6. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY USED IN THE STUDY

Methodological discussions on qualitative case study research are important and a review is usually necessary to analyse and understand how this methodology has been applied in the research literature. According to Meyer (2011), it is important for researchers to provide adequate description for the methodology used in qualitative case studies where rigour is present. The choice of key informants is discussed next.

6.1 Choice Of Key Informants

Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2009), Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), and Hyett *et al.* (2014) offer a foundation and an instance using key informants for collection of specialised in-depth data for the study. In this study, a total of nine top managers at the selected firm were purposefully selected, to be the key respondents. They were the chairman, CEO, five divisional managers and two senior managers in supervisory positions. These top managers were selected based on the perception that from their senior positions at this Kenyan motor services firm, they would be reliable and knowledgeable about the competitive, market and industry environment within which the firm operates. These managers were also selected as key informants particularly because of their extensive experience in the firm and the motor service industry in general (Clulow *et al.* 2007, Gaya *et al.* 2013).

The use of top industry experts to mitigate the construct measurement problems in resource-based view research, through face to face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, is supported by Clulow *et al.* (2003, 2007) McEvily and Chakravarthy (2002) and Armstrong and Shimizu (2007).

6.2 Case Study Protocol

The case study protocol contains the data collection instrument and incorporates the procedures and general rules that were followed in using the data collection instrument. By employing a case study protocol to guide the study, the integrity, credibility and reliability of this study was increased. The case study protocol incorporated a number of components, namely:

- *Outline of the case study.* The outline of the case study incorporated a literature review, case study objectives and issues; tangible resources creating sources of sustainable competitive advantage.
- *Field procedures.* Field procedures include credentials and access to the case study sites, general sources of information, and procedural reminders. In this study, the chairman of the board was the entry point into this Kenyan motor service firm and the gateway to reaching the selected key informants.
- *Case study questions.* Case study questions included the specific research questions the investigator developed for collecting data and the sources of data and information needed for answering each question. In this study, an interview rationale and semi-structured interview schedule guided data collection, preparations and analysis, which were developed from theory.
- *A guide for the study report,* including the outline, format of the narrative, and specifications of any bibliographical information and other documentation provided.

6.3 Steps In Research Design And Methodology

The following steps were followed during the research design and methodology stage of the study:

- Conceptualising a framework and designing an interview schedule based on the rationale of the conceptual framework.
- Conducting the field interview with the five divisional managers and collected thick data as guided by the interview schedule.
- Analysing the in-depth data collected from the divisional managers using case description and case themes to develop the case of Toyota Kenya.
- Conducting further field interview with the CEO Toyota Kenya to ensure completeness of the case.
- Conducting an interview with the chairman to investigate further refinements and more case development.
- Triangulating some case results with the two managers with supervisory roles. The triangulation was to ensure multiple data sources, shaping the case by context and emerging data.
- Writing up the final case report.
- Discussing the presented case and comparing the findings to theory in the literature.
- Writing up findings and formulating conclusions and recommendations for future research.

6.4 Data Collection

According to Creswell (2013b) Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2009) Hyett *et al.* (2014) Merriam (1998, 2009) Meyer (2001) and Yin (2009, 2012) face-to-face detailed in-depth interviews is the most regular sources of data in qualitative case studies. In the qualitative case study under review, the following recommendations of Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) and Yin (2009, 2012) were adopted, to ensure a rigorous, extremely comprehensive and systematic research methodology in the conduct of the qualitative case study research: preparation was made for data collection, collection of evidence, analysis of the evidence and the composition of qualitative case study report.

The skills of the investigator in Gaya *et al.* (2013) was put to use in data collection, the ability to ask pertinent questions, to listen attentively, to adapt to unforeseen circumstances, to grasp the issues being addressed and to identify and reduce effect of personal bias the data collection process. According to Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) Hyett *et al.* (2014) and Yin (2009, 2012) the skill and personality of an experienced researcher has a bearing in the qualitative case study research process and findings.

In the qualitative single case study under review, rigorous data collection followed carefully linked steps, including in-depth face to face interviewing of nine top managers of consistently high performing firms to ensure the use of multiple sources of information, the creation of a case study database including attaching the study transcripts, and the maintenance of a chain of evidence, through the use of the conceptual framework developed from theory as recommended by Meyer (2001) Morse (2011) and Yin (2009, 2012) for data collection, data analysis, discussion of case study findings and final case study reporting. The use of multiple sources of data enabled the coverage of a broader range of views and issues and facilitated triangulation of sources to reveal as much depth as possible while enhancing confirmation validity.

6.5 Data Analysis

Regarding data analysis, the qualitative single case study research followed the recommendations of a number of researchers (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2009, Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007, Hyett *et al.* 2014 and Yin 2009, 2012) who propose relevant strategies for data analysis, as well as noting Merriam's list of a number of data analysis strategies within a qualitative case study research (Creswell 2013b, Merriam 1998, 2009 and Thomas 2011). As recommended in Yin (2009, 2012) the rich data was systematically recorded and managed, through a data base. Data analysis included construction of categories or data themes, naming the categories and sub-categories, and developing systems for placing the data into these categories and data themes as

recommended in literature (Morse 2011, Sandelowski 2010, Tight 2010, Yin 2009, 2012, Webb and Kevern 2000). The categorisation of data collected increased the quality of the data analysis.

Data analysis included data presentation, discussion and interpretation. Tables were used extensively to present the findings, illustrating the respective data themes and facilitating systematic analysis and reporting as recommended in the literature (Creswell 2013b, Hyett *et al.* 2014, Stake 1995, 1998 and Yin 2009, 2012). Working from the transcripts and guided by the data themes agreed upon earlier, the firm's activities formed the basis for the interpretation of the phenomena gleaned from the key informants' responses. The data collected from the qualitative case study research was then presented using tables, with key categories and data themes, following the order of the research questions in the semi-structured interview schedule and the pre-determined categories and themes of resources, activities and activity drivers, as represented in the qualitative case study research conceptual framework and study model, which had been derived from theory in literature.

In summary, the data analysis in this qualitative single case study research relied on the theoretical propositions through a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework helped to focus attention on the data needed to contribute to theory extension or generation.

7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A combined qualitative and single case study research design and methodology offer several advantages to strategic management researchers. In a systematic and rigorous yet innovative fashion, the combined approach accommodates more dimensions and flexibility. Qualitative approach and case study share the same objective: uncovering complexity in a natural context. Case study research and qualitative methodology are also joined at the hips as they are complementary. This finding is supported by a number of literatures. Denzin and Lincoln (2011b) assert that case study can be a stand-alone qualitative approach while Hyett *et al.* (2014) add that case study allows flexibility in qualitative approach.

Buoyed by literature, this article contends that increased understanding and use of qualitative single case study will advance strategic management research especially in theory testing, extension and generation. The two offer a rich methodology when combined, preparing an opportunity for understanding complex issues in their natural context and environment (Creswell 2013b, Denzin and Lincoln 2011b, Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2009, Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007, Hyett *et al.* 2014, Merriam 1998, 2009, Siggelkow 2007, Tight 2010, and Yin 2009, 2012).

The findings and discussion revolves around the place of combined qualitative single case study research design and methodology in strategic management realm. Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2009), Gibbert and Ruigrok (2008), Thomas (2011) and Yin (2009, 2012) postulate that justifying and using qualitative case studies as a research design and methodology is one of the most appropriate and natural in all strategic management research.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article presents a detailed description of the qualitative single case study research design and methodology used to achieve strategic management research objectives, by investigating how tangible resources actually create value for a firm in the motor service industry. The methodology including the role of theory, formed the starting point that guided the study. These included the theoretical and conceptual framework of the qualitative case study, the formulation of research questions, interviewing rationale, interviewing schedule design, data collection, data preparation, data analysis and the reporting of the findings. These steps are in line with the requirement for quality and rigorous qualitative case studies research where the importance of having elaborate theories as starting points for qualitative case study research, is specifically emphasised in recent literature, including Creswell (2013b), Denzin and Lincoln (2011b), Flyvbjerg (2011), Gibbert and Ruigrok (2008), Hyett *et al.* (2014) Merriam (1998, 2009), Siggelkow (2007) Thomas (2011) Tight (2010) and Yin (2009, 2012).

The article also advocates the rationale for adopting the qualitative single case study research design and methodology to extend theories as well as to generate new theories in the realm of strategic management research as supported by leading researchers (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2009, Eisenhardt & Graebner 2007, Gibbert and Ruigrok 2008, Hyett *et al.* 2014, Merriam 1998, 2009, Meyer 2001, Morse 2011, Siggelkow 2007, and Yin 2009, 2012). In Gaya *et al.* (2013) the resource-based view theory was extended by being integrated with the activity-based view, to create a new theory, the activity resource-based view (ARBV) theory that explains the process of how tangible resources actually create value for a consistently high performing firm in the motor service industry in Kenya.

In the discussion and findings section, this article specifically succeeds in advocating for the combined use of single case study research design and qualitative research methodology by offering evidence of the success of such a combination (Gaya *et al.* 2013). In addition, in-depth qualitative single case study research is held as one of the most suitable to obtain the richness of data required for a detailed analysis of a specific high

performing firm in service industry (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2009, Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007, Gibbert and Ruigrok 2008, McKeivily & Chakravarthy 2002, Rouse & Daellenbach 2002, Siggelkow 2007).

This article concludes that a qualitative in depth single case study research industry is arguably the most appropriate research design and methodology contention supported by a number of recent researchers including Armstrong & Shimizu (2007), Creswell (2013b), Denzin and Lincoln (2011b), Flyvbjerg (2011), Gibbert and Ruigrok (2008), Hyett *et al.* (2014) McKeivily and Chakravarthy (2002), Merriam (1998, 2009), Siggelkow (2007) Thomas (2011) Tight (2010) and Yin (2009, 2012).

9. DISTINCT CONTRIBUTIONS FOR RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

As recommended by Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2009), Gibbert and Ruigrok (2008), Hyett *et al.* (2014) Sandelowski (2010), Siggelkow (2007), and Yin (2009, 2012) the first contribution is achieved by the use of multiple key informants in a resource-based view case study, as opposed to a single key informant, as was the case in previous similar case studies (Clulow *et al.* 2003, 2007). This contribution to knowledge, through an improvement in research methodology, lent credence in particular, to the recommendation in Yin (2009, 2012) who posit that the use of multiple sources of evidence, in a manner encouraging convergent lines of inquiry during data collection, is available to increase construct validity when carrying out qualitative case studies. Stake (1995, 1998) and Thomas (2011) adds that multiple data collection and analysis methods are adopted to further develop and understand the case, shaped by context and emergent data.

The use of multiple key informants in this qualitative single case study also introduces the concept of data triangulation, through multiple sources of information, which increases this study's validity and the reliability of data collected, as supported by literature (Hyett *et al.* 2014, Meyer 2001, Morse 2011, Yin 2009, 2012). This mode of data triangulation after field interviews of key informants has been used earlier in a number of studies (McEvily & Chakravarthy 2002).

Additional contribution of this article is the empirical testing the need for theory to guide the theoretical and conceptual qualitative case studies. In this qualitative case study, the terms resources, capabilities and competencies are considered as three distinct concepts, with a further recommendation that the usage of the terms resources, capabilities and competencies ought not to be interchangeable. This is a fresh interpretation of terms in the realm of empirical strategic management literature and is supported by more recent literature (Armstrong & Shimizu 2007, Hitt *et al.* 2007, Hoopes *et al.* 2003, Hyett *et al.* 2014).

The following extract seems appropriate in concluding this article:

“strong defence for the use of case study designs, positing that case studies are significant in proving the importance of specific research questions ... inspire new ideas, as well as being strong in illustrating or testing theory or concepts.” (Easterby-Smith et al. 2009)

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