Abstract

Purpose
The purpose of this paper is to advocate that case study research needs to renew itself and employ its full potential as an innovative theory-generating methodology in management disciplines; and to propose that a viable strategy for such renewal is to exploit the power of case study research and network theory as supplementary methodologies.

Design/methodology/approach
The paper is a reflective and synthesising comparative study.

Findings
If one steps down from the tip of the iceberg and inspects the underwater properties of case study research and network theory a common core is found: the recognition of complexity. The methodologies supplement each other, case study research primarily using verbal language and qualitative data, while network theory uses a nodes-and-links language that opens up for verbal, graphic and mathematical treatment. Case study research is primarily associated with qualitative research in social sciences and network theory with quantitative research in both social and natural sciences. By abolishing the unfortunate categories of qualitative/quantitative and natural sciences/social sciences that have been set against each other, and letting them join forces for a common goal – to learn about life – people open up for methodological creativity.

Originality/value
By comparing case study research with network theory on a fundamental level, the paper offers a novel perspective on research. It is a contribution to an overriding desire to improve the understanding of management and society.

Keywords
Innovation  Quality  Case studies  Complexity theory  Research methods
For personal use only. BIRDS OF A FEATHER: Homophily in Social Networks. Miller McPherson. The literature on these ecological phenomena is spread through the studies of social networks, voluntary associations, social capital (at the individual and community levels), social movements, culture, organizations, and a variety of substantive topics that are affected by network processes. Because the principle of homophily is so key to the operation of these systems, we use it as our organizing concept. 2001. "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks." Annual Review of Sociology 27:415–44. Article Google Scholar. National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. 2001. Network Variables Codebook. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina. Google Scholar. Rapoport, A. 1957. "A Contribution to the Theory of Random and Biased Nets." Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics 19:257–71. Article Google Scholar. New psychology research led out of New Zealand's University of Otago is backing up the old saying that "birds of a feather flock together." The findings emerged after researchers used high-definition video cameras on the roof of a large covered stadium to track and analyze how strangers formed groups. They found that individuals were likely to join groups containing members with similar physical traits -- including levels of attractiveness.