

18 Are you case studying a company or attribute?

Case studies are probably the most wildly misunderstood and poorly done part of strategy studies

Designing case studies

We will be preparing detailed case studies of quite a few development finance banks. We have some strict rules for this. These rules ensure we are always carefully separating the glossy marketing spin from the facts:

- (1) An equal balance of “success” and “failure” cases
- (2) No 3rd party information in newspaper articles, press releases, magazines or business school case studies can be used unless they are corroborated via a focus interview, which we conduct, with someone senior from the organization under discussion.
- (3) Either a past employee and/or a peer in the industry must corroborate all focus interviews with employees of the case studied company.
- (4) Data/facts used to generate insights we choose to use for the study must be corroborated by at least 2 interviewees.
- (5) We will not case study companies, but rather attributes within case studies.

These guidelines ensure we do not merely follow shoddy reporting in the press.

Given the rigor we are using, this implies we will do fewer case studies, but extract far more useful insights.

The team will do a first-cut using media information, and we will use that to decide which development finance banks / agencies will be analyzed via in-person interviews.

We have decided to proceed with 7 first-cut case studies using publicly available information.

From that initial list, we will likely drop it down to 3 or 4 detailed studies.

This is the initial draft of countries we will study. This may change later once the team settles in and we know more from the focus interviews that guide our thinking on where are the best ideas.

Peter is leading this work and will also need to create a criteria set for choosing the focus interviews and may very well come out with a new list based on his more refined ranking system.

Anyway, this is where I think we will focus for the first cut:

- (1) Mexico
- (2) Brazil

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- (3) India
- (4) Dominican Republic
- (5) Kenya
- (6) Thailand
- (7) Bangladesh

QUESTION(S) OF THE DAY: Do you feel case studies generate genuine insights or are they used merely to reinforce the consultant's initial ideas?

We answer this question, additional reader questions and discuss more issues raised in this article on the accompanying episode on the *Strategy Skills* podcast channel on [iTunes](#), [Google Android Podcasts](#), [Libsyn](#), Spotify, [Acast](#), [Podbay](#), [Podbean](#) and [Listen Notes](#). This is the world's #1 ranked business strategy podcast channel.

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