Case Study Analysis for Sector Research and Teaching Support

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ABSTRACT

The use of case studies in dealing with problems of the food sector is gaining increasingly attention in the scientific community. Case-based reasoning supports as a scientific approach the analysis of problems, relationships, behavior, and development directions of the sector and may contribute to understanding the sector's opportunities and abilities in meeting the challenges of the future. This editorial provides a short introduction into the case study approach and links it to the publications in the special issue which cover case studies from the US, Canada, South America, Europe, and Africa.

Keywords: food chain; case study

The case study challenge

The use of case studies in dealing with problems of the food sector is gaining increasingly attention in the scientific community. Case-based reasoning supports as a scientific approach the analysis of problems, relationships, behavior, and development directions of the sector and may contribute to understanding the sector's opportunities and abilities in meeting the challenges of the future.

The case study approach is trying to capture a true picture of the situation in the cases it deals with. This differs from a statistical approach which can provide a 'representative' picture which, however levels out differences between cases. The true picture of the situation in individual cases gets lost. Case studies are most relevant, if they allow to draw a picture which helps to understand the situational conditions and if this understanding could have a broader relevance beyond the individual cases. They may also capture future developments under consideration. Both approaches, case study analysis and statistical analysis, could in certain situations complement each other.

As each case is in principal different from others, it is part of the analysis to judge which conclusions can be drawn that reach beyond the case and have wider relevance, allowing some relevance for policy and the sector. The judgments are principally based on a reasoning approach. One needs to be aware that those judgments are 'soft' results where recipients need to judge for themselves to what extent they are prepared to follow the arguments and accept the conclusions.

The case-based reasoning approach

There are three levels of case study analysis one could focus on. The first level concentrates on a descriptive analysis of the situative condition, the second level discusses the behavioral logic inherent in the case organization, while the third level analyses the background (variables) of the behavioral logic which determines its realization.

The behavioral logic represents a non-mathematical model of food chain and enterprise behavior. It might be complex and include many variables. As in all modelling activities, it is the competence of the modelling expert to formulate a model which best represents the behavioral logic while reducing complexity as much as possible. The third level of analysis supports an analysis of food chain and enterprise developments under changing internal and external conditions and, in turn, the formulation of policies for sector development.

The papers in this special issue all focus on approaches for the third level of food chain and enterprise analysis. They build on a descriptive analysis and provide guidance on how to identify the background of the inherent behavioral logic and to arrive at its substantiation.

The presentation

The cases represent a broad variety of backgrounds and demonstrate the flexibility of the approach.

Babb et al. (2016) discuss growth opportunities of a grocery chain in California,

Braga (2016) concentrates on the transfer of a new solar technology to industry,

Cadilhon et al. (2016) deal with a communication and cooperation platform in Tanzania,

Feeney et al. (2016) focus on the promotion of a new technology by a biotech company in Argentine,

Kouwenhoven and Nalla (2016) present a case on the development of a cooperation among greenhouse operators in the Netherlands, and

Mabaya et al. (2016) discuss growth oppoertunities for an agribusiness nursery in South Africa.

All authors have complemented their case study presentations with additional material that could support the use of the publication in a teaching environment. This additional material is available on request as outlined in the papers.

Acknowledgement

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