It is widely believed that case studies are useful in the study of human affairs because they are down-to-earth and attention-holding but that they are not a suitable basis for generalization. In this paper, I claim that case studies will often be the preferred method of research because they may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience and thus to that person a natural basis for generalization.

**Experience.** We expect an inquiry to be carried out so that certain audiences will benefit — not just to swell the archives, but to help persons toward further understandings. If the readers of our reports are the persons who populate our houses, schools, governments, and industries, and if we are to help them understand social problems and social programs, we must perceive and communicate (see Bohm, 1974; Schön, 1977) in a way that accommodates their present understandings. Those people have arrived at their understandings mostly through direct and vicarious experience.

And those readers who are most learned and specialized in their disciplines are little different. Though they write and talk with special languages, their own understandings of human affairs are the most part attained and amended through personal experience. I believe that it is reasonable to conclude that one of the more effective means of adding to understanding for all readers will be by approximating through the words and illustrations of our reports the natural experience acquired in ordinary personal involvement.

At the turn of the century, German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1910) claimed that more objective and "scientific" studies did not do the best job of acquainting man with himself.

Only from his actions, his fixed utterances, his effects upon others, can man learn about himself; thus he learns to know himself only by the round-about way of understanding. What we once were, how we developed and became what we are, we learn from the way in which we acted, the plans which we once adopted, the way in which we made ourselves felt in our vocation, from old dead letters, from judgments on which were spoken long ago....we understand ourselves and others only when we transfer our own lived experience into every kind of expression of our own and other people's lives.

He distinguished between the human studies and the other kinds of studies.

The human studies are thus founded on this relation between lived experience, expression, and understanding. Here for the first time we reach a quite clear criterion by which the delimitation of the human studies can be definitively carried out. A study belongs to the human studies only if its object becomes accessible to us through the attitude which is founded on the relation between life, expression, and understanding.

Dilthey was not urging us merely to pay more attention to humanistic values or to put more affective variables into our equations. He was saying that our methods of studying human affairs need to capitalize upon the natural powers of people to experience and understand.

Knowledge. In statements fundamental to the epistemology of social inquiry, Polanyi distinguished between propositional and tacit knowledge. Propositional knowledge — the knowledge of both reason and gossip — was seen to be composed of all interpersonally sharable statements, most of which for most people are observations of objects and events. Tacit knowledge may also dwell on objects and events, but it is knowledge gained from experience with them, experience with propositions about them, and rumination.

Through reason man observes himself; but he knows himself only through consciousness. (Tolstoy, War and Peace, 1869)

Tacit knowledge is all that is remembered somehow, minus that which is remembered in the form of words, symbols, or other rhetorical forms. It is that which permits us to recognize faces, to comprehend metaphors, and to "know ourselves."