**DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

**Introduction**

This is a helpful process when writing dissertations and undertaking research. You may conclude your literature review with a conceptual framework for example. As you will see later you may develop one as you do your research and writing. Doing one should provide you with a sense of control over your work, although it should not be imagined as easy to achieve. Successfully achieving one should also, in the end, simplify your task. A good one gives you a sort of map or grid to interpret your findings. Once determined the researcher should not see it as “set in stone” – it could alter!

**When should it be developed?**

There are two possibilities:

* A structured approach when it is done early and based on a preliminary theory, concept or hypothesis. Here it guides the research process and the collection of material. This can take much longer than the approach next discussed. However, it provides certainty over the structure of your work. You must be warned that, even though you might have a framework, you must not be reluctant to change it.
* A grounded approach when it is done later or towards the end. Here material is collected without prejudice, with no preliminary conceptual thoughts – after that the framework can be determined. Although quicker than the above it has the disadvantage that you might miss stuff that could provide you with new insights.

**Developing conceptual frameworks**

It should emerge from the Literature Review essentially. It could be there requiring no, or little, change. It might, on the other hand, require modification or adaptation.

1. **What is a concept?**

You need to be clear of what we mean by concepts. So, if you are doing research on “motivation” you might find a dictionary might provide 5 definitions of this. As you read you find even more! You might discuss these in your LR (ensuring they are cited) and then choose the one best suited to your work and tell the reader why.

So, concepts are:

1. The building blocks of models and theories
2. The working definitions use in particular analyses for which they have been devised or selected
3. Chosen to be useful, not correct, and
4. More than a dictionary definition.
5. **What is a framework?**

Here you fit the concepts together and illustrate the relationships and connections between them.

A framework:

1. Is an analytical scheme
2. Simplifies reality to enable discussion, analysis and research
3. Simplifies reality by the selection of certain phenomena/variables and suggesting certain relationships between them
4. Is judged in terms of utility (usefulness), not correctness.

These relationships could be:

* “Cause and effect”. These could range from the simple (in economics the relationship between demand and price) to the complex (in economics the relationship between demand and a number of factors – price, real incomes, advertising, the availability of credit, etc.)
* Stages in a process. Here logic and order are the important factors at play. So in Strategic Management you may have learned a framework of Analysis, Choice, Implementation, Reanalysis, etc. etc. However, there are other frameworks –for Strategic Planning – less structured “emergent” ways for example. These would be talked about in your LR and you would choose one and hopefully justify that choice.
* Hierarchical relationships. Maslow’s hierarchy is clearly an example.
* Maps and coordinates. Most commonly in business, matrices are used. Ansoff, SWOTs and the BCG matrices immediately spring to mind.
* Pairs and opposite - Lewin’s Force-Field analysis provides an example.
* Exchange and equilibrium – this is, of course, a common feature of business …. organisations are often seen as achieving an equilibrium when viewed from the point of view of their stakeholders – each being “satisficed” (employers, managers, unions, customers, financiers, etc.). The Balanced Scorecard is another obvious example.
* Similarity – here concepts are related because they are similar. A good example might be McKinsey’s “7S” model on the effectiveness of organisations.
* Gaps – here the framework concentrates on what is ***not*** there. SERVQUAL , the instrument for measuring service quality (Parasuraman et al, 1991), is based on questionnaires showing the gap between the planned service and that provided, and the service that customers anticipated and received.

Many of the above can be expressed diagrammatically, but they could be in the form of words too. Do ensure that:

* They are not too complex – KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid – a design principle in the US Navy in the 1960s) or Occam’s razor should be borne in mind. William of Occam, a medieval philosopher said “Entities ought not to be multiplied except by necessity”.
* The relationships need to be stated – with clear arrows, clear scales on matrices, etc.
* The framework relates to your research and is simply not a framework of the Literature read.

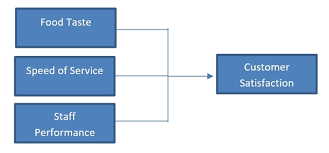
1. **What are theories?**

This is the third phase in developing a conceptual framework. This does not mean, even at Masters level, developing a new theory – it may be simply the development of an existing one. This might be, in much business and management research, the application of a theory in another context.

Theories are:

* In general terms, ideas about how phenomena relate to each other
* More specifically, ideas about how particular events or actions tend to lead to others or are brought about by them
* Generalisations
* The inductive heart of scientific study (i.e. attempts to produce generalisable findings from specific instances).

## **Simple Demonstrations of a conceptual framework**



Independent Variables ……………………………….› Dependent variable

## **Another demonstration,**

Facebook marketing

(independent variable)

Sales Revenue Model

(dependent variable)

Discounts and offers

(independent variable)

Product quality

(independent variable)

**Example 1**

Watch the video on the YouTube link as given below

(explains the basics of conceptual framework , 7 mins)

**Example 2**

Example <https://youtu.be/UufeuPxqBHQ> om past students’ Conceptual Frameworks

Below you will find examples of CFs produced recently by students. These are examples and not perfect but do give a flavour of what you should be attempting to achieve.

Following the evaluations of the theories of motivation it can be discovered that all this theories are based on the concept of needs in order to achieve a particular goal. Moreover, all these theories suggest that employee motivation can be influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. According to some authors (Herzberg, 2003), (Grant and Berry, 2011) internal factors are expected to increase employee motivation, while external factors are not so efficient. However, other studies assume that both factors are equally important in the process of employee motivation.

To investigate what are the factors which influence employee motivation the proposed research is going to be focused on intrinsic and extrinsic factors through deep analysis of motivation models. The conceptual framework is established as shown in figure below, where employee motivation is dependent variable, and intrinsic and extrinsic factors are taken as independent variable.

Salary

Praise

Promotion Company policy

Job security Criticism

|  |
| --- |
| **Extrinsic factors** |

**Employee Motivation**

**Motivation models**

Personal growth

Achievement

Recognition

Challenging work Appreciation Advancement

|  |
| --- |
| **Intrinsic factors** |

*Independent variable Dependent variable*

Conceptual framework of the proposed research

1. **Finally, the Difference between Theoretical framework and Conceptual frame work**

Theoretical framework is a theory in the form of a model or diagram that serves as the basis for the study . It includes the main constructs , their relationships and their results. This identifies several variables that are important to the research and also the associated relationships.

Conceptual framework on the other is the **researchers own model** illustrating the variables that specify the problem and gives a direction to the study. It may be an adaptation of theoretical models with modifications to suit the research inquiry.

Reference:

Parasuraman, A., Berry,L.L. and Zeithaml, V.A. (1991), *Refinement and reassessment of the SERVQUAL scale,* JOURNAL OF RETAILING, Vol.67, no.4: 420-450

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| Conceptual Framework | <https://youtu.be/UufeuPxqBHQ> | 7 mins, illustrative |