

Research Methodology

Chapter 3

Reviewing the literature



Topics covered

- Function of literature review
- How to review the literature
- Searching for existing literature
- Reviewing selected literature
- Developing theoretical and conceptual frameworks
- How to write a literature review



Function of literature review

- A literature review is an integral part of the research process
- Providing a theoretical background to a study:
 - Bringing clarity and focus to the research problem
 - Improving research methodology
 - Broadening knowledge base in the research area of interest
 - Contextualising findings by integrating with the exiting body of knowledge



How to review the literature

- Start with broad area of interest if research problem is not known and narrow down
- Focused around the research problem
 - What is already known in the area?
 - What is not known or what are the gaps in the existing body of knowledge?
 - What questions have remained unanswered?
 - Are there any areas of professional conflict?
 - What theories have been put forward relevant to the area of research?
 - What suggestions have been made for further research?
 - What research strategies have been employed by others undertaking similar research?



Four steps of doing a literature review

1. Searching for the existing literature in the area of interest
2. Reviewing the selected literature
3. Developing a theoretical framework
4. Developing a conceptual framework



Searching for existing literature

- Set parameters for the search
- Compile a reading list
- Start with:
 - Books
 - Journals
 - Conference papers
 - The Internet



Reviewing selected literature

- Read existing literature and examine critically:
 - Note whether the knowledge relevant to a theoretical framework has been confirmed beyond doubt
 - Note the theories put forward, the criticisms of these and their basis, the methodologies adopted (study design, sample size and its characteristics, measurement procedures, etc.) and the criticisms of them
 - Examine to what extent the findings can be generalised to other situations
 - Notice where there are significant differences of opinion among researchers, giving an opinion about their validity in addition to putting forward a position with reasons
 - Ascertain the areas in which little or nothing is known – the gaps that exist in the body of knowledge



Developing theoretical and conceptual frameworks

- Read with focus in mind
- Sort information into main themes and theories
- Literature fits in two categories:
 - Universal or general
 - More specific
- Conceptual framework is the basis of enquiry and stems from the theoretical framework



How to write a literature review

Write about the literature reviewed to provide a theoretical background and contextualise findings to existing body of literature:

- Describe various theories
- Specify gaps in the existing knowledge area
- Write about recent advances in the area of study
- State current trends
- Refine own methodology
- Quote findings from existing studies



Writing a literature review

- Thematic, based on the main theme of enquiry
- Following a logical order
- Arguments referenced with supporting evidence from the existing literature
- Use academic referencing style

