
Writing the literature review for empirical papers

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1. Introduction: Why Lit Reviews Matter

- Why do you need a literature review?
 - Substantiates the argument of your research's relevance and the gaps in the field it addresses (its contribution)
 - Gives you clout (you know your stuff, you know what's lacking, you are on top of it) ;)
- Research is ~supposedly~ a collective endeavor!! A literature review is a part of the process of aggregating (collecting) and critically/theoretically expanding the work of "those who came before you"
- The authors admit there are lots of issues that complicate the approach and validity of a given literature review: need for brevity and the endless amount of research already out there.



2. Approaching Literature Reviews as Full Articles

- Literature reviews aren't just for dissertations or chapters of books, they can be stand-alone articles in journals (or social work research classes) too!
- There are several strategies for writing and constructing literature reviews:
 - a. **Meta-analysis (MA)**
 - Very algorithmic/ statistics-driven collection and analysis of large sets of articles on a subject. Data driven. Function themselves in a database capacity. Dare I say ~ positivist adjacent?
 - b. **Critical Analysis (CA)**
 - Authors think about a body of literature more conceptually and critically than in meta-analytical lit reviews. Oftentimes look forward towards what the future of the given body of research needs/ what is lacking in the current body of literature.
 - Paper selection is "subjective" rather than algorithmically driven
 - Why are algorithms/ data aggregation presented as "objective"? Something to consider.
 - c. **Integrative or Systematic Literature Review (SLR)**
 - Reviews, critiques, and synthesizes "representative" literature, using a larger paper/ data set than a critical analysis.
 - Intends to be "evidence based"



3. The literature review in an empirical paper

- Plays the fundamental role of unveiling the theory, or theories, that underpin the paper argument.
- Sets limits of discussion, and defines and clarifies the main concepts that will be used.
- A thorough review is the basis for any good research project and provides the theoretical foundation that is required to support any argument of contribution.
- The first task of the literature review is to reveal which theories are used in the argument
- Two fundamental ways to make a theoretical contribution
 - Exploratory studies observe and identify interesting phenomena that are not yet well explained
 - Confirmatory studies empirically test the hypothesis and confirm, refute or expand them
- It opens up the field, showing how the issue under study has been discussed and which are its main concepts, how they have been studied from different points of view and how the field has evolved over time.



3. The literature review in an empirical paper

- Crafting the literature review section has three goals
 - Establishing the theoretical background- useful to balance classic texts, which have established the discussion, with contemporary references, show the current estate of the field.
 - Number of references is not the main concern, but keep that in mind.
 - Identifying gaps- missing point in current knowledge on a subject, literature review should point to it.
 - It can be identifying on three rationales
 - Incompleteness, inadequacy, and incommensurability
 - Defining key concepts- should not limit itself to a list of concept and construct definitions, it should present how they interconnected and how they will be used to support the argument.



4. Which are the main characteristics of a good literature review?

- Must address different requirements, covering the relevant literature and synthesizing it with clarity.
- Needs to limit itself to what is important to the argument.
- Dissertation guides and handbooks indicate the key features for a literature review
 - Coverage- must be covered by the text. Not just by citing lots of authors, but identifying and presenting the relevant literature, the main research strands, and building a framework where the paper can be positioned. It is like drawing a map in which key places are identified, and indicating where in that map the paper argument is located.
 - Synthesis- summarize and connect relevant references. Not just putting references and concepts together. Requires creativity to offer a fresh view on the topic. Can be presented in the form of questions that have to be answered by fieldwork.
 - Rhetoric- must be clear and coherent. Ideas must be presented in a well-articulated text.
 - Significance- must register organizational contributions which indicated the core of significance in the paper's introduction.



4. Which are the main characteristics of a good literature review?

- Good literature review balances “appropriate breadth and depth, rigor and consistency, clarity and brevity...” (Hart, 1998, pg 2).
- Consistency and clarity are essential, as they support the coherent argument, depth and rigor show how authors master the subject. Finally, brevity is also essential, as all relevant literature must be presented, analysed and articulated in a limited space.
- When one finishes reading a literature review, they should be able to answer the following questions
 - What are the main sources on the subject under study?
 - Which are the key theories and ideas that support the paper’s assertions?
 - How the paper argument relates to a major issue or debate on the topic?
 - What are the key concepts of the paper’s argument and how are they defined?

5. How to write a literature review for empirical papers?

- Start with a preliminary critical analysis.
- Start with a small set of 8-10 papers.
- Selection of paper:
 - Talk to supervisors, professors, or seasoned researchers.
 - Obtain from academic portals like Web of Knowledge, Scopus, Science Direct, EBSCO, JSTOR, SciELO, etc.
- Search in multiple portals to get better coverage of a topic.
- Portals usually rank papers by number of citation/relevance, which is useful to identify fundamental papers and authors.
 - Be careful of outdated sources.
- Your set of papers should be refined as you continue to study the subject.
 - Remember that citations from papers are always a good source for further reading.



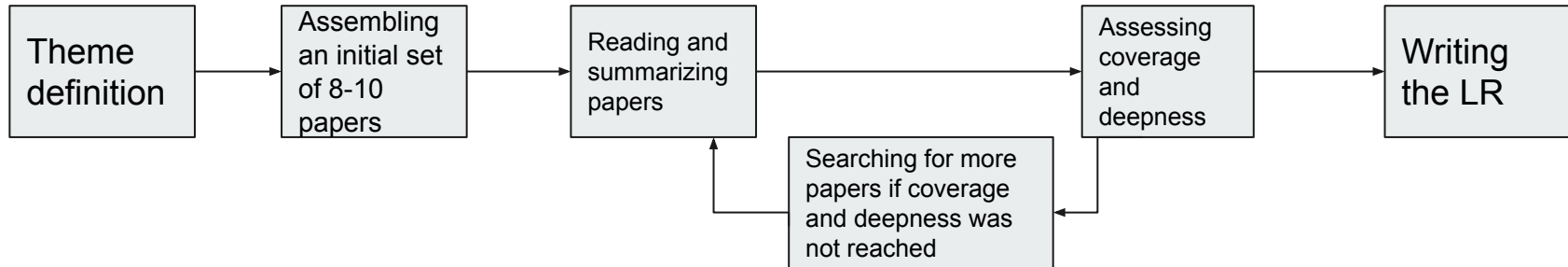
5. How to write a literature review for empirical papers?

- Empirical papers usually are structured in at least five sections:
 - (1) introduction, (2) literature review, (3) empirical methods, (4) data analysis, discussion and findings, and (5) conclusions.
- Read the introduction (paper's aim), theoretical gaps and its research questions, and the conclusion (discusses limitations and future research implications) to get a grasp on the paper.
- After reading each paper, summarize data in a table:

Authors	Objective	Findings	Research Question	Further Research	Limitations	Methodology	Practical Implications
Abbariki et al. (2017)	The paper analyses whether tacit knowledge was being shared through collective learning routines at two sites where employees were undertaking knowledge-intensive work	Superiors can overlook the presence of embedded knowledge work in tasks environments that are largely static, procedure driven and independent.	How can employees share tacit knowledge if they are performing tasks independently, and if their superiors discourage face-to-face interactions when they are performing tasks in real time?	Enhance confirm ability by examining sites that are similar to Cases, with employees operating within a largely static, solo work and procedure-driven task environment.	Although the authors sought to obtain a close-up picture of how tacit knowledge was being shared at Case A, the very nature of such knowledge rendered it difficult for employees to provide explanations to an outside interviewer.	34 semi structured interviews about task environment and collective learning activities of informants at various hierarchical levels Case A: 3 directors/9 senior managers/16 operational managers Case B: 1 director, 2 senior managers and 2 operational managers.	a) It is important for managers to recognize that even procedure-governed tasks require tacit knowledge b) Managers should encourage and facilitate the sharing of tacit knowledge among employees.

5. How to write a literature review for empirical papers?

- Using that chart ask yourself:
 - Is there good coverage?
 - Does it support the claims that will be made?
 - Which present concept definitions?
- You will realize:
 - Which subjects need to be further studied.
 - Start a new search and reading of papers.



6. Conclusions

- These strategies will aid in preventing a weak or absent literature review.
 - Weakness jeopardizes any claims for contribution authors might have.
 - Undermines all effort put into field work and data analysis.
- Research in OM should not start exclusively from theory.
 - Practice has been and should continue to be a major source for research.
- Real world phenomena should motivate us to study and solve them.
 - Our efforts should be aimed towards not only its solution, but also to how it can be generalized.





Questions to Consider

- When you read the authors substantiate the need for literature reviews by claiming research is a collective endeavor, what did you think of?
 - How does research funding, access to publishing or written resources, and cultural hegemony (enforced power dynamic giving certain knowledge systems, ideas, and forms of thought sharing supremacy) complicate this narrative?
 - How does the concept of a literature review itself replicate this dynamic? How can a lit review challenge this?
- How do the three different approaches to crafting lit reviews (MA, CA, SLR) speak to you?
 - Do these techniques/styles have affinities with different approaches to research we have learned about so far, such as positivist, postmodern, critical, postpositivist, etc?