

Essay on purpose of the literature review

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Literature Review

A literature review is a critical part of any research. Bernard (2000) emphasizes that neglecting this part can lead to a “wasting a lot of time going over already covered ground, and having your colleagues ignore your work because you didn't do your homework (p. 87).” Hofstee (2006) provides a guide on how to complete a dissertation on time and this document identifies six items that he considers the main purposes of the literature review. These are general purposes of literature review which pertain to (a) credentials; (b) theory base; (c) context; (d) significance; and (e) originality. Further in this section is a brief discussion of how literature review influences the approach to an MBA project.

An MBA dissertation or research project is a major opportunity to advance one's credentials. This research document or project undertaking provides a venue for the MBA student to discuss the theories learned in class and apply these to real-life settings. In the literature review portion of one's dissertation or project report, the student's firm grasp of concepts and theories are highlighted. Literature reviews present factual evidence of what has been accomplished in the past which are closely related to one's intended focus. The materials one selects, the ways these are categorized, and the manner by which these are discussed all provide the reader information on how good the researcher is. Therefore, a highly-organized and succinctly-written literature review section gives out an impressive picture of the writer. This would make the reader realize that the writer knows what he/she is talking about.

A theory is a “logical explanation of why something is as it is or does as it

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does” (Hofstee, 2006, p. 92). Studies present different theories to explain how certain situations come to be. Theory is also very useful to explain what could take place as a result of certain situations. One of the purposes of the literature review is to explain different principles behind certain situations. It is important to inform one’s reader about these different principles as an introduction to the theory that one is either going to propose or to prove / disprove. Identifying important concepts backed by solid evidence and using these documents in one’s study gives a firm foundation in one’s research project.

Locating the context of one’s research project means finding one’s spot in the midst of the voluminous literature about the topic. The cliché do not reinvent the wheel is very appropriate to explain this idea because one need not create anything from scratch. One needs to build on those that have already been studied in the past. The literature review therefore has to identify the studies that are closely related to the current research one intends to undertake. In doing so, the researcher has identified the context of his/her study.

The significance of one’s intended study becomes clearer when one undertakes an extensive review of existing literature. In this part of the research report, one does not limit himself/herself to just presenting what the results were or methodologies used, but one needs to occasionally point out the gaps to these studies and explain that these gaps are ones that the current study are addressing. This strategy shows the reader that the researcher is highly aware of where he/she intends to bring the study. This is also an indication that the study the researcher intends to carry out would not just echo what has been submitted in the past. By identifying the gaps of

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previous studies, the researcher asserts the significance of his/her current study.

Original work means, after an exhaustive review of literature, there has been no study identified that is exactly like the one you intend to carry out.

Hofstee (2006) maintains that if the current work is a replication study or a meta-analysis, there would be very little originality.

Purpose of the literature review for influencing the MBA project

The preceding paragraphs are general purposes for dissertations. In the MBA program, students oftentimes work on a business project as the final requirement to graduate. Most often, such projects are accomplished by a team. The literature review is an important aspect in the whole process of undertaking an MBA project. It provides a theory base, opportunity for teamwork, and development of original work.

Theory base. Previous studies are key sources to develop new methods. As indicated above, theories are logical explanations and these theories can become the principles behind new innovations. If the selected MBA project is an innovative approach towards a current business problem, then an extensive review of literature would be necessary to make sure that the current approach is informed by studies in the past. The theories are very important influence in the decision of what project to undertake. Knowing which worked in what situations provide the project team with solid evidence. This kind of information is crucial in developing appropriate solutions to current problems in the business field.

Teamwork. The literature review can enhance teamwork. In MBA projects,

working together is a key element in the project process since such method facilitates the flow of ideas. The review of related literature is an opportunity for the different members of the team to look over more materials and discuss which of these are relevant to the current study.

Originality. A project in an MBA program looks for effective processes applicable to the business world. This is an attempt to apply innovative strategies to address identified business problems. The project team may want to create something new that would either increase the firm's performance or make its resource investments more cost-effective. MBA projects are very good opportunities to enhance the capacities of project teams. However, to be able to do so, they must first look back at the past and identify the strategies that work, the methods that were feasible, and the theories that can be applied or refined.

Reporting of the MBA project. The literature review is also crucial in the reporting of the MBA project because this provides the background of the project. An extensive, factual, and theory-based literature review would also impart an image of a project team that is credible and highly-informed. One that is most likely to develop innovative solutions to current problems in the business world.

Statistical Significance

The concept of statistical significance is used in quantitative analysis. It is defined by BusinessDictionary as a “ set of data large enough to represent the phenomenon or population being studied a finding is called statistically significant if the probability of its occurrence purely by chance is less than 1 in 20” or has less than five percent chance. In other words, statistical

significance is a way to determine if the results of a study is brought about by a relationship between the different variables or by just chance. Several key concepts that are important in statistics are variables, hypothesis, relationship. Variables refer to the factors wherein a relationship is examined whether there are existing effects between and among the variables. Variables can be indirect variable, dependent variable, or instrumental variable.

A hypothesis is a proposition, this is what a researcher would want to prove through a study or an experiment. A null hypothesis means there is no effect or that there is no relationship between the different variables or factors. In quantitative reports, especially in tables showing statistical results, the notations $t=.02$ or $p < .05$ indicate statistical significance. The mathematical entry “ $p=.05$ ” is read as “the probability of an event occurring by chance is less than 5 percent” (Gunsch, 2013). In the course of statistics, students learn how to generate regression results. The F-statistic is the p-value which would represent the overall significance while an examination of the “t-statistic will tell the significance of the corresponding independent variable” (Eisenhauer, 2009, p. 42).

Issues when using a Survey Instrument

There are four main issues that should be considered when using a survey instrument within one's own organization. According to Deiner and Crandall (1978, as cited in Bryman and Bell, 2011), these are (a) harm to participants; (b) lack of informed consent; (c) invasion of privacy; and (d) deception.

Harm to participants

This can be actual or immediately resulting from the activity or potential. A person who experiences high levels of stress while answering the questionnaire undergoes real harm. One scenario for a potential harm would be when a person's answers can be traced back to him/her and serve as incriminating evidence which may result in that person being sacked by management. There are codes of ethics in different professions that clearly identify what are considered harmful research practices. Confidentiality clauses are often included in questionnaires to assure respondents that his/her personal data would remain in the researcher's confidence and that the data gathered would be used solely for research purposes.

Lack of informed consent

There are certain research objectives that can only be attained when participants are observed without their knowledge. For example, studies that used covert monitoring to gain information about unofficial use of resources. However, such a method can be considered unethical. To address situations like this, the Association of Management (AoM) Code of Ethical Conduct defines informed consent as "explaining to potential participants the purposes and nature of the research so they can freely choose whether or not to become involved" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 133). The very detailed aspects of the research may not be provided to participants especially if doing so would negatively affect the methods used. However, it must be very clear to participants at the beginning of the research what the objectives of the study are, how these would be carried out, who is involved, and for whom the findings would be given to. As the AoM Code states the

explanations should also “ include warning of possible harm” and give the personnel involved a chance to “ refuse to participate and to terminate participation at any time” (p. 133).

Invasion of privacy

Most often people do not act as they usually do when they know they are observed resulting to inaccurate information gathered by the researcher. Although it would be ideal to carry out covert research, this practice is also considered an invasion of property. The Statement of Ethical Practice of the British Sociological Association states that covert research “ may invade the privacy of those being studied” however, the code points out that “ if it is impossible to use other methods to obtain essential data” then researcher should “ safeguard anonymity of research participants” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 134). But, the Market Research Society does not agree to jeopardizing privacy in the name of research. In its Code of Conduct and Guidelines, it says “ the objectives of any study do not give researchers a special right to intrude on a respondent’s privacy nor to abandon normal respect for an individual’s values” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 134).

Deception

When the researcher, who would do everything just to get his/her needed data, would resort to deception, then that is an extremely unethical act. When someone who belongs to the same organization carry out a research based on deception, that person may attain his/her research objectives, but in the eyes of his/her co-worker, such research is an act of betrayal.

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