Research Methods for Business Students

Chapter 3

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Learning points

- Understand the importance and purpose of the critical literature review to your research project
- Know what you need to include when writing your critical review
- Be aware of the range of primary, secondary and tertiary literature sources available
- Be able to identify key words and to undertake a literature search using a range of paper-based and electronic methods including the Internet
- Be able to evaluate the relevance and sufficiency of the literature found
- Be able to reference the literature found accurately
- Be able to apply the knowledge, skills and understanding gained to your own research project
3.1 Introduction

- The preliminary search that helps you to generate and refine your research ideas.
- Critical review is part of your research project proper.
- Project assessment criteria usually require you to demonstrate awareness of the current state of knowledge in your subject, its limitations, and how your research fits in this wider context.
3.1 Introduction

- You need to establish what research has been published in your chosen area and try to identify any other research that might currently be in progress.
- For most research projects, your literature search will be an early activity. Once obtained, you can read and evaluate them, record the idea, and start drafting your review.
- Unlike some academic disciplines, business and management research makes use of a wide range of literature.
3.2 The critical review

- The purpose of the critical review
  - Your critical literature review will form the foundation on which your research is built.
  - You should not expect to start your research without first reading what other researchers in your area have already found out.
  - The precise purpose of your reading of the literature will depend on the approach you are intending to use in your research.
  - The literature review process
    - See figure 3.1 in page 45
3.2 The critical review

- The purpose of the critical review
  - To help you to refine further your research question and objectives.
  - To highlight research possibilities that have been overlooked implicitly in research to date.
  - To discover explicit recommendations for further research. These can provide you with a superb justification for your own research question and objectives.
3.2 The critical review

- The purpose of the critical review
  - To help you to avoid simply repeating work that has been done already.
  - To sample current opinions in newspapers, professional and trade journals, thereby gaining insights into the aspect of your research questions and objectives that are considered newsworthy.
  - To discover and provide an insight into research approaches, strategies and techniques that may be appropriate to your own research question and objective.
3.2 The critical review

- The content of the critical review
  - To include the key academic theories within your chosen area.
  - To demonstrate that your knowledge of your chosen area is up to date.
  - To show how your research relates to previous published research.
  - To assess the strengths and weaknesses of previous work, including omissions or bias, and take these into account in your argument.
  - To justify your arguments by referencing previous research.
  - Through clear referencing, to enable those reading your project report to find the original work you cite.
3.2 The critical review

- **What is meant by “critical”**
  - Refer to work by recognized experts in your chosen area.
  - Consider and discuss work that supports and work that opposes your ideas.
  - Make reasoned judgments regarding the value of others’ work to your research.
  - Support your arguments with valid evidence in logical manner.
  - Distinguish clearly between fact and opinion.
3.2 The critical review

- The structure of the critical review
  - A single chapter
  - A series of chapters
  - Throughout the project report as you tackle various issues.
3.2 The critical review

- The structure of the critical review
  - Start at a more general level before narrowing down to your specific research question and objectives.
  - Provide a brief overview of key ideas.
  - Summaries, compare and contrast the work of the key writers.
  - Narrow down to highlight the work most relevant to your research.
  - Provide a detailed account of the findings of this work.
  - Highlight those issues where your research will provide fresh insights.
  - Lead the reader into subsequent sections of your project report, which explore these issues.
3.3 Literature sources available

- An overview
  - See figure 3.2 in page 50
3.3 Literature sources available

- Secondary literature sources
  - Journals
  - Books
  - Newspapers
3.3 Literature sources available

- Primary literature sources
  - Reports
  - Conference proceedings
  - Theses
3.4 Planning the literature search

- Defining parameters
  - Language of publication
  - Subject area
  - Business sector
  - Geographical area
  - Publication period
  - Literature type
3.4 Planning the literature search

- Generating key words
  - The identification of key words or search terms is the most important part of planning your search for relevant.
    - Discussion with colleagues, your project tutor and librarians.
    - Initial reading.
    - Dictionaries, thesauruses, encyclopedias and handbooks.
    - Brainstorming.
    - Relevance trees.
3.4 Planning the literature search

- Generating key words
  - The function of relevance trees
    - Which key words are directly relevant to your research and objective.
    - Which areas you will search first and which your search will use later.
    - Which areas are more important.
3.4 Planning the literature search

- Generating key words
  - How to conduct relevance trees
    - Start with research question or objectives at the top level.
    - Identify two or more subject areas that you think are important.
    - Divide each major subject area into sub areas of relevance.
    - Divide sub areas into more precise sub areas of relevance.
    - Identify those areas that you need to search immediately and those that you particularly need to focus on.
    - As your reading and reviewing progress, add new areas to the tree.
3.5 Conducting the literature search

- Tertiary literature sources
  - To ensure maximum coverage, need to use all appropriate abstracts and indexes.
  - Can provide:
    - Author or authors of the article
    - Date of publication
    - Title of the article
    - Title of the journal
    - Volume and part number of the journal issue
    - Page numbers of the article
3.5 Conducting the literature search

- Searching using tertiary literature
  - Printed sources
  - Databases
    - Common link terms that use Boolean logic
      - See table 3.3 in page 63.
3.5 Conducting the literature search

- Searching using tertiary literature
  - Scanning and browsing
  - Identify when whose journals that are the most relevant are published and regularly browse them.
  - Browse new book displays in libraries.
  - Scan new book reviews in journals and newspapers.
  - Scan publishers’ new book catalogues where available.
  - Discuss your research with your project tutor and librarians.
3.5 Conducting the literature search

- Searching using tertiary literature
  - Searching the Internet
    - Homepages
    - Search tools
      - General search engines
      - Meta search engines
      - Specialized search engines
      - Subject directories
    - Bookmarking
3.6 Obtaining and evaluating the literature

- Obtaining the literature
  - To check your library catalogue to find out the appropriate publications.
  - To note the location in the library to discover whether worth reading.
  - To order the items from the other libraries if you really need them.
3.6 Obtaining and evaluating the literature

- Evaluating the literature
  - Assessing relevance
  - Assessing sufficiency
3.7 Recording the literature

- Three sets of information you need to record.
  - Bibliographic details
    - See table 3.6 in page 74
  - Brief summary of content
    - See table 3.7 in page 74
  - Supplementary information
3.8 Summary

- A critical review of the literature is necessary to help you to develop a thorough understanding of and insight into previous research related to research question and objectives.
- There is no correct structure for a critical review.
- Literature sources can be divided into three categories: primary, secondary and tertiary.
- What should you do when planning your literature search.
- Your literature search will be undertaken using a variety of approaches in tandem.
- The literature must be evaluated for its relevance to your research question and objectives.
The End

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THANK YOU!

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