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Research Process Reflection — Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

This reflection is based on Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, and it is not intended to reflect on the findings of the dissertation research, but rather on the research process itself and what I learned from it.

Description

For this dissertation, I examined the link between worker welfare and organisational efficiency at McDonald's in the UK and globally. No new data was gathered, but the systematic literature review was performed based on the PRISMA 2020 model in four steps: Identification, Screening, Eligibility and Inclusion. I created search phrases by using the Boolean operators "OR" for words that are similar and "AND" for ideas that are different. I conducted a detailed search of databases, including Google Scholar, MDPI, Frontiers, and my university library, and applied inclusion and exclusion criteria to narrow down the list to only peer-reviewed, open-access publications from 2021 to 2026. I started with 410 records, deleted duplicates, screened titles and abstracts, and read full texts, leaving 26 studies and several McDonald's company reports and statistics.

Feelings

At the start, I felt confident because the topic interested me, but I also felt overwhelmed by the sheer number of records. It was tiring to screen hundreds of titles, and I found myself getting frustrated when I reached 11 full texts I wanted but could not read because they were behind a paywall. Once things started to fall into a pattern and my argument began to take form, I felt more positive and motivated. The process of constructing the summary table of the key studies was tedious but rewarding, in that it helped me see the patterns clearly.

Evaluation

The good thing was that I was organised through the structured method, and it helped eliminate bias, so my choices could be verified and reproduced by others. The more challenging aspect was dealing with the large number of sources and the fact that I wasn't able to include papers that

weren't open access or recent, even if they seemed useful and interesting at first glance during the screening process.

Analysis

Looking back, the strict criteria improved quality but limited quantity, which is why my final sample was fairly small. Most of the best studies were ones from the hospitality and healthcare sectors, not fast food, so I had to 'rethink' the data from those sectors and apply it to McDonald's through careful reasoning. This taught me that it's easier to have a narrow scope to make the work cleaner, but it also leaves gaps. I also learned that I should take independent evidence into account more than McDonald's self-reported evidence, which can be biased as it's self-reported. My primary finding was directly influenced by that judgment, namely, a policy-practice gap due to the company's very franchised nature.

Conclusion

I now realise that research is not just about coming up with answers, but about making decisions clearly and honestly. Had I focused my initial search terms more carefully, I would have saved a bit of time when screening through records that had nothing to do with my search. I also know that using only secondary data sources does not allow me to prove cause and effect, and that's why I cannot make certain statements about cause and effect that I can in a primary data analysis.

Action plan

Next time, I will test my search string on a small scale before running the full search, to cut out noise early. I'll also ask to be granted access to the library and databases from the outset so that I don't lose out on papers that could be useful. Lastly, I would add some basic data, like a brief survey of the managers and crew in company-owned and franchised restaurants, to test patterns and strengthen and originalize my conclusions.

Reference

Gibbs, G. (1988) *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. Oxford:
Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic.