

Reviewing the literature

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to understand:

- What is meant by literature review?
- Functions of literature review
- Steps of literature review

Literature Review

- is the documentation of a comprehensive review of the published and unpublished work from secondary sources of data in the areas of specific interest to the researcher.

literature review

The literature review is an integral part of the entire research process and makes a valuable contribution to almost every operational step.

A literature review has a number of functions

- Bring clarity and focus to your research problem
- Improve your methodology
- Broaden your knowledge base in your research area
- Contextualise your findings

Bring clarity and focus to your research problem

- **N.B.** you cannot effectively start the literature review search without an idea of the problem you wish to investigate.
- The literature review can play an extremely important role in shaping your research problem
- It also helps you to define the relationship between your research problem and the body of knowledge in the area.

Improve your methodology

Literature review

- acquaints you with the methodologies that have been used by others to find answers to questions similar to the one you are investigating.
- Tells you if others have used procedures and methods similar to the ones that you are proposing, which procedures and methods worked well for them and what pitfalls they have faced with them.

Broaden your knowledge base in your research area

- Literature review ensures you read widely around the subject area in which you are intend to conduct your research study.
- It is important to know what other researchers have found in regard to the same or similar questions, what theories have been put forward and what gap exit in the relevant body of knowledge

Contextualise your findings

- Literature review helps identifying how your findings compare with the existing body of knowledge.
- How do answers to your questions compare with what other have found? What contribution have you been able to make to the existing body of knowledge? How your finding different from others?

Procedures for reviewing the literature

There are five steps involved in conducting a literature review:

- search for existing literature in your area of study;
- review the literature selected;
- develop a theoretical framework;
- develop a conceptual framework;

1) Search for existing literature

- Start with at least some idea of the broad subject area and of the problem you wish to investigate, in order to set parameters for your search.
- Next compile a bibliography for this broad area. There are two sources that you can use to prepare a bibliography:
 - books;
 - journals.

Notice

- Be aware that sometimes a title does not provide enough information to decide if a book/ journal is going to be of use.
- Start with the latest issue, examine its contents page to see if there is an article of relevance to your research topic.
- Start by reading the abstract. If it is relevant then download and read.

2) Review the literature selected

- Now that you have identified several books and articles as useful, the next step is to start reading them critically to pull together themes and issues that are associated.
- If you do not have a theoretical framework or themes in mind to start with, use separate sheets of paper for each article or book.

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- Once you develop rough frameworks, slot the findings from the material so far reviewed into that framework, using a separate sheet of paper for each themes of that framework. As you read further, go on slotting the information where it logically belongs under the themes so far developed.

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- Notice where there are significant differences of opinion among researchers and give your opinion about the validity of these differences.
 - Ascertain the areas in which little or nothing is known-the gaps that exist in the body of knowledge.

3) Develop a theoretical framework

- As you start reading the literature, you will soon discover that the problem you wish to investigate has its roots in a number of theories that have been developed from different perspectives.

4) Develop a conceptual framework

- The conceptual framework stems from the theoretical framework and concentrates, usually, on one section of that theoretical framework which becomes the basis of your study.

- **Examples of conceptual framework**

Conceptual Model



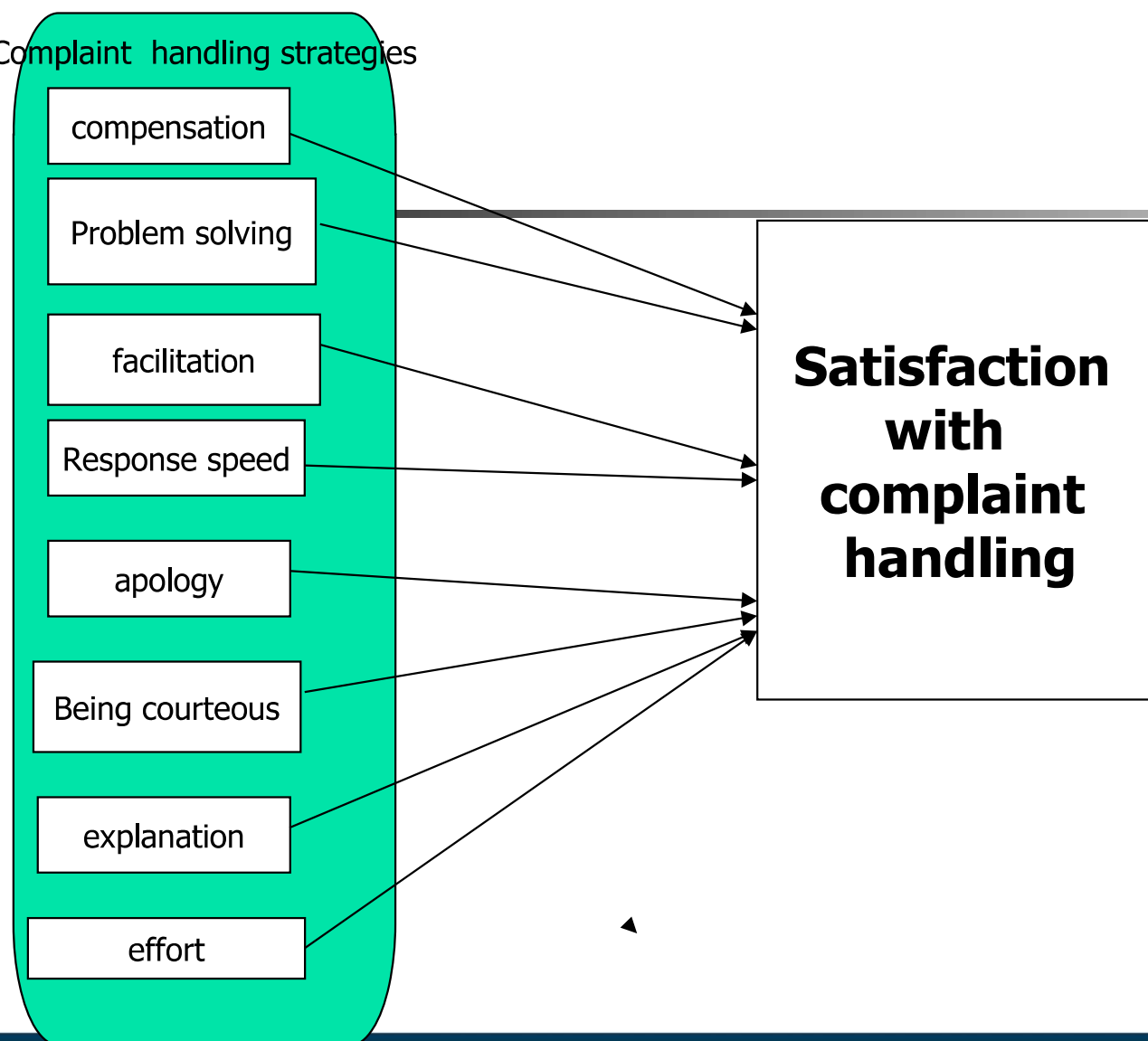
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graph LR; A[Complaint Handling Strategies] --> B[Satisfaction with Service Recovery]
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The diagram illustrates a conceptual model with two main components. On the left, a box labeled 'Complaint Handling Strategies' is connected by a horizontal arrow to a box on the right labeled 'Satisfaction with Service Recovery'. A vertical line descends from the title 'Conceptual Model' and meets a horizontal line that spans the width of the slide, intersecting the arrow.

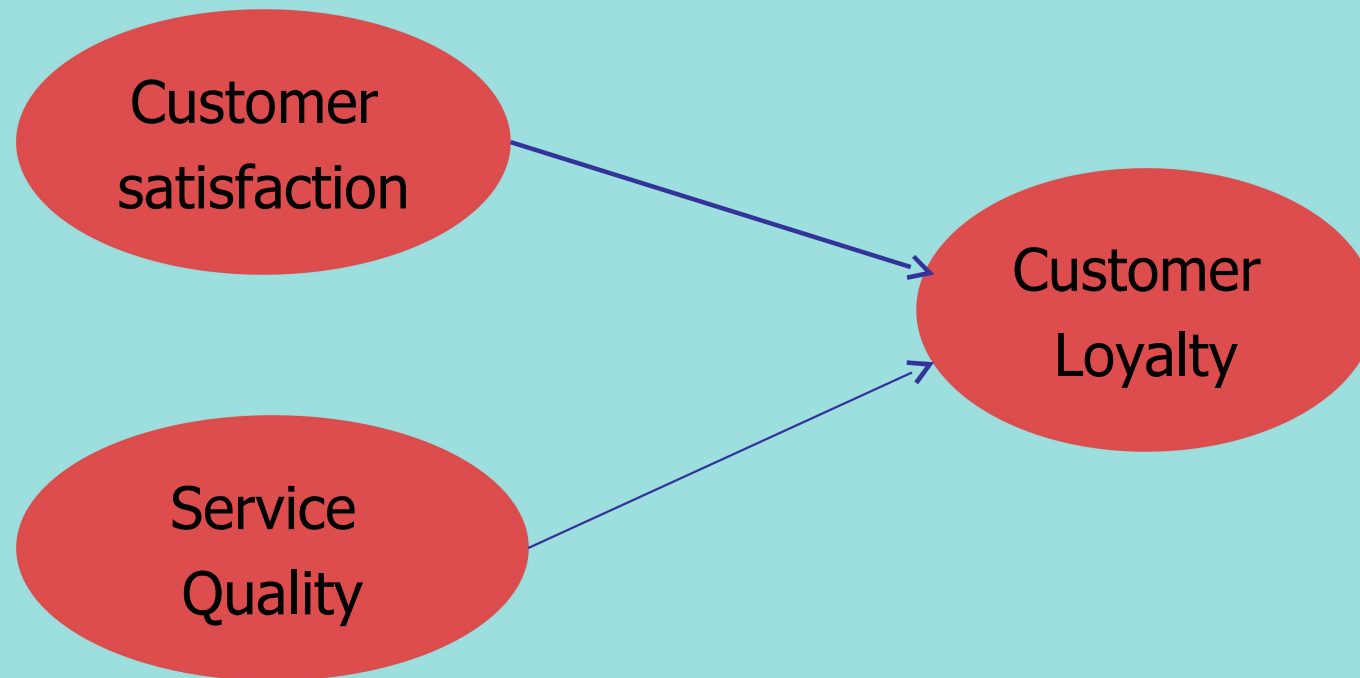
**Complaint
Handling
Strategies**

**Satisfaction
with Service
Recovery**

Complaint handling strategies



Examples of conceptual framework



5) Writing up the literature reviewed

- While reading the literature for theoretical background of your study, you will realize that certain themes have emerged.
- List the main ones, converting them into subheadings. These subheadings should be precise, descriptive of the theme in question, and follow a logical progression.

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- Now, under each subheading, record the main findings with respect to the theme in question, highlighting the reasons for and against an argument if they exist, and identifying gaps and issues.

Examples of Literature Surveys

Organizational effectiveness

Organization theorists have defined organizational effectiveness (OE) in various ways. OE has been described in terms of goals (Etzioni, 1960), efficiency (Katz and Kahn, 1966), resources acquisition (Yuchtman and Seashore, 1967). As Coutler (2002) remarked, there is little consensus on how to conceptualize, measure, or explain OE.

Examples of Literature Surveys

Researchers are now moving away from a single model and are taking contingency approaches to conceptualizing OE (Cameron, 1996; Wernerfelt, 1998; Yetley, 2001).