Towards a Systematic Approach to Reviewing Literature for Interpreting Public and Business Management Research Results

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Abstract: Overall, examiner's reports show that a rich research report is one that discusses or rather interprets its empirical findings effectively. This implies that a research should go beyond presenting new data and information but rather this data and information should be interpreted. However, the 'discussion of research results or findings' component is a function of the 'literature review' component as well as 'the presentation of research results or findings' component. Technically, the main outcome or objective of the 'literature review' component is a conceptual framework—that is, a well thought-out outline of how a research should proceed after understanding the research problem, identifying the knowledge gap, and developing a framework for interpreting the research findings. Unfortunately, the interrogation of the literature review component is the most unstructured process in a research undertaking and, therefore, leaves students to wonder in the wildness. Those that finally get it, do so after a long time. To allow for efficient research throughput, university should explore the cognitive trajectory of this undertaking. In simple terms, this means providing some initial structure to interrogating the literature review component in general and, specifically, the development of the theoretical and interpretative framework for discussing research results. Therefore, the main objective of this research is engaging the cognitivism and constructivism theories of instruction summarised in Driscoll (2000) and Gredler (2001) to provide for cognitive processes in the construction of knowledge. We emphasis initial because this will provide a structured approach to kick-start the process of identifying and discussing theoretical and other interpretive frameworks after which the process should then be content-driven after the student is enlightened or catches on.

Keywords: Literature review, conceptual framework, academic field of study, interpretive frameworks, theoretical frameworks, interpreting research findings

1 Introduction

Theoretical frameworks or indeed other frameworks such as models and constructs are important components of public and business management research. They help us explain and interpret research results. However, this is probably one of the most implicit undertaking—even in specialised academic research, such as economics—because it is often assumed that research students should have picked up these frameworks during course work. Articulating this part of literature review is even more difficult for multidisciplinary postgraduate public and business management research students. Usually such students have no prior course work in the specialised academic field of study where their proposed research is located and in some cases they have limited prior training in research.

Therefore, in this article, we discuss with empirical examples how to understand a specialised field whose interpretive frameworks are important to one's research. After that, we point out how to identify and locate important interpretive frameworks and propose key elements of these frameworks that public and business management research students should focus on when reviewing such constructs, models, and theories. In mainline academia, this knowledge is transmitted to students by their supervisors who are also subject specialists in the academic field of study encompassing or driving student research. However, this is not the case with postgraduate public and business management students who might be qualified in another field and yet their research interest is in another field of study. For example, an engineer undertaking a research for a master in business administration (MBA) may need constructs, models, and theories in economics.

We also deal with the collision course—reviewing original material versus latest material. Most academic postgraduate research emphasises the need to review original literature where these interpretive frameworks were first pioneered and yet most of such literature is dated. On the other hand, focusing on the most recent articles implies reviewing contemporary literature that is not original.

Reference this paper: Wotela K "Towards a Systematic Approach to Reviewing Literature for Interpreting Public and Business Management Research Results" *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods Volume 14 Issue 2 2016, (pp83-97)* available online at www.ejbrm.com

When applying the proposed approach, we learnt that most public and business management literature that discusses important interpretive frameworks hardly reveal the pioneers of these frameworks. It also barely discusses the context or what was happening when these interpretive frameworks were coined. This is a disadvantage because without such a context, it is difficult to appreciate an interpretive framework and, therefore, difficult to evaluate its relevance to one's research.

We conclude that postgraduate public and business management students are a different breed that need a different type of knowledge transmission, preferably, based on what they do best—that is, 'learn and do'. We note that such students do well in their course work because it is structured but get stuck when doing their research simply because of the unstructured nature of research tuition. We hope that this explicit instruction on an important part of their literature review will help them to discuss their respective theoretical or interpretive frameworks effectively.

2 Situating the literature review within a research report

As Figure 1 shows, a research report has six main components—that is, the introduction, the literature review, the research procedure and methods, presentation of the research findings, discussion of the research findings, as well as the summary, conclusion, and recommendations. Deduced from systems thinking (Gharajedaghi 2006), here we use the word components rather than chapters deliberately. The word component implies independent functional parts that should all be present for a unit, in our case a research report, to be functional. A chapter might have two components, for example, both 'presentation of the research findings' and 'discussion of the research findings' can be in one chapter. Occasionally, we can split a component into two or more chapters, for example, having a conceptual framework independent of the literature review. However, what is common is having a chapter per component. The bottom row of Figure 1 depicts a doctoral research report or a master of philosophy or what we call a 100 per cent masters research report, where it is not unusual to find three components—that is, research methods, presentations of research findings, and discussion of research findings—in a single chapter collectively called the 'middle chapters'. Such chapters have multiple applications. They can serve as an extension of chapters that need a detailed discussion of a particular section. Some researchers have opted to present different themes of findings in different chapters. In this case, each middle chapter will discuss the 'research procedure and methods' as well as 'presentation of the research results' and 'discussion of the research findings'.

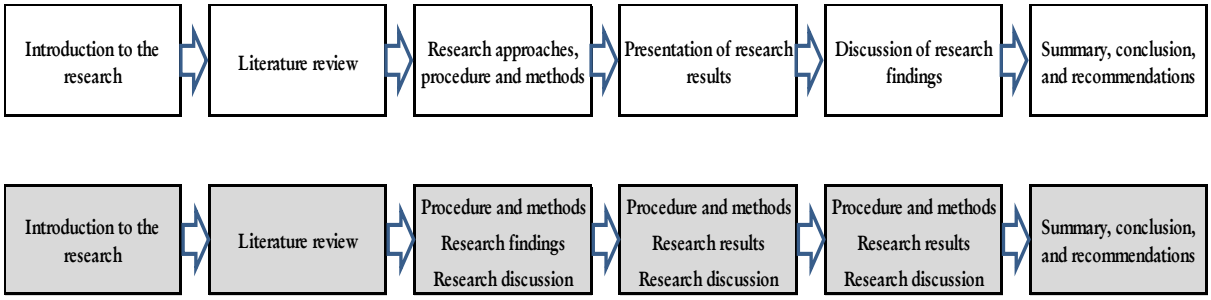


Figure 1: The main components of a research report

The six components of a research report are highly interlinked and, therefore, making it difficult to figure out where one should begin. Remenyi and others (1998), who have proposed an eight-stage research process (listed below) for public and business management students, propose that a research process should begin with a literature review and frankly, we agree.

1. Reviewing the literature
2. Formalising a research question
3. Establishing the methodology
4. Collecting evidence
5. Analysing evidence
6. Developing conclusions
7. Understanding the limitations of the research
8. Producing management guidelines or recommendations

Therefore, the focus of this paper is the literature review component—that is, a component that researchers broadly use to identify and discuss concepts and terms presented and applied in other chapters of the research report (Remenyi, Williams, Money et al. 1998). Figure 2 shows how the literature review component links in with other components of a research report. Of importance is the special relationship between the introductory component and the literature review. This shows that research conceptualisation in the introductory component informs what we do in the literature review but a comprehensive and critical literature review refines and builds upon the research conceptualisation and the rest of the introductory component. The other arrows suggest that the literature review component feeds into the other components of the research report. This proves that this component is not only the largest (approximately 25 per cent of the research report) but the most important because it feeds into approximately 75 per cent of the research report content.

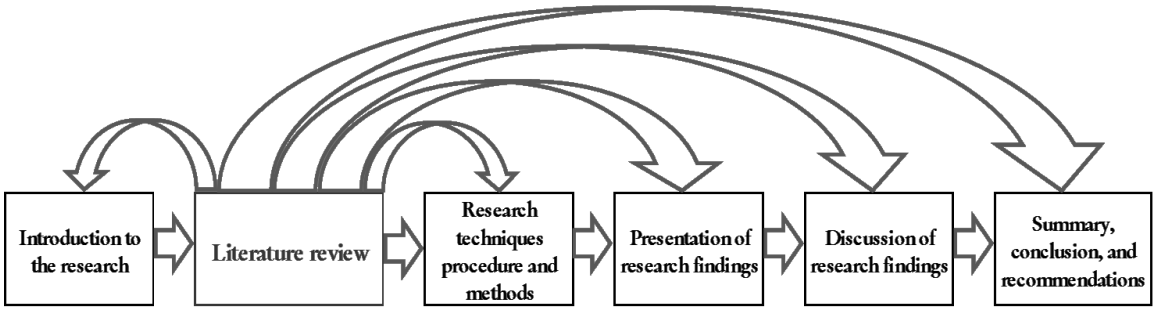


Figure 2: Showing how the literature review links in with other components of a research report

As suggested by Badenhorst (2007), we review literature to (i.) understand the context or setting and, thereafter, to conceptualise the research problem, opportunity, or question, (ii.) justify the research, (iii.) identify the research and knowledge gap through reviewing past and current research studies, (iv.) identify, understand, and develop frameworks, theories, models, and perspectives that we can use to interpret our empirical research findings, and (v.) finally develop the conceptual framework. During this process, researchers should also understand the overall discipline and the specific area within the discipline where their respective research is actually located. This includes established and accepted facts as well as contradictions and paradoxes in the overall and sub discipline encompassing or driving the research (Remenyi, Williams, Money et al. 1998). In sum, after crudely conceptualising a research in the introduction component (title, research problem statement, research purpose statement, and research questions or research hypotheses or research propositions), the literature review should be the next undertaking.

3 Subcomponents of a literature review

Technically, the main outcome of a literature review is a conceptual framework—defined implicitly by Kumar (2014) as an advanced outline of how a research should proceed after we have interrogated key literature on the research of interest. This outline or outcome should result from a detailed understanding of (and justifying) the research problem in context, exposing the knowledge gap, and then developing a framework for interpreting empirical research findings. Inferring from this, we have proposed that including the main outcome or objective, a literature review should have the following seven key subcomponents or areas of focus:

1. Research setting or context analysis … to understand the research setting or context.
2. Research problem analysis … to understand and justify the research problem we intend to pursue.
3. Reviewing past and current attempts of similar research … to establish the knowledge gap.
4. Establishing and then discussing the academic field of study (and its important components) encompassing or driving the research ... to give the research an academic home.
5. Establishing and then discussing the key research variables and/or attributes … to understand what data and information we will be pursuing to answer the research questions or test the research hypotheses or prove the research propositions.
6. Developing an interpretive or theoretical framework … to apply when interpreting the empirical research findings.
7. Deriving the conceptual framework … to outline how the research will proceed based on the summary discussions of subcomponents 1 to 6.

These subcomponents are not radically different from those proposed by Rocco and Plakhotnik (2009). According to these authors, the first three subcomponents make up the function of a literature review while the next three comprise the theoretical framework. Summarising these six subcomponents is what informs or forms the conceptual framework (seventh subcomponent).

Figure 3 illustrates the proposed subcomponents of an outcomes-based literature review divided into four groups, namely; understanding the research problem, establishing the knowledge gap, constructing the theoretical framework, and conceptualising the research process. The inverted cone[1] is suggesting that we should start more broadly and probably less detailed but end up more focused and detailed. By implication, our conceptual framework should be focused and as detailed as possible spelling out how we intend to advance with the research based on literature-supported decisions. The focus of this paper is the third grouping—that is, constructing the theoretical or interpretive framework. This part has three (of the seven) subcomponents—that is, establishing the academic field of study and its components, establishing the key research attributes or variables, and eventually developing a theoretical or interpretive framework. Before then, let us first discuss how we arrived at the structured approaches of interrogating literature on the academic field of study and its components as well as the accompanying theoretical or interpretive frameworks.

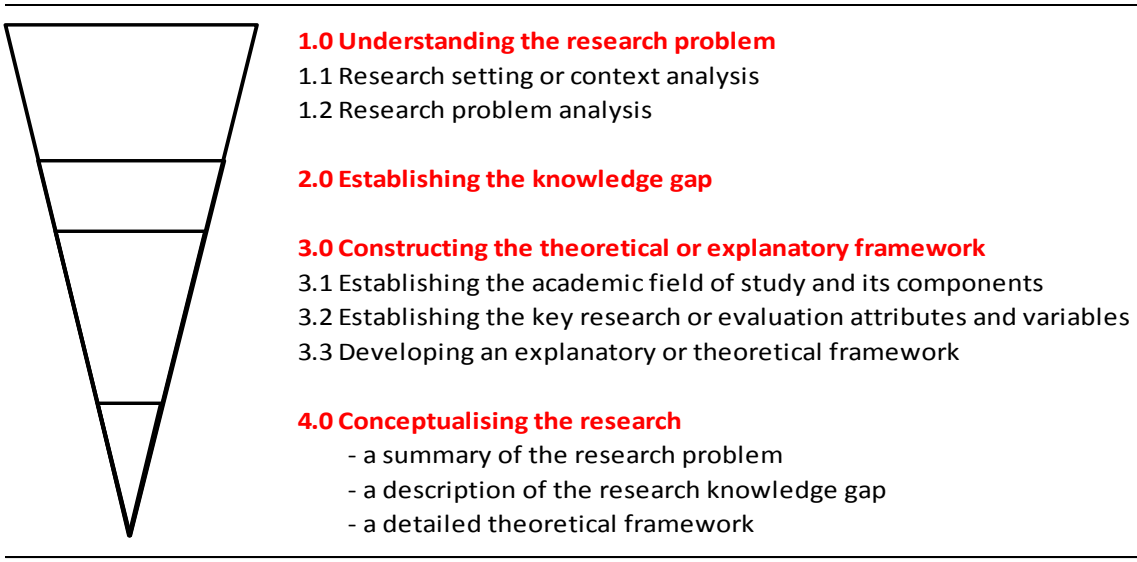


Figure 3: Showing the proposed subcomponents of an outcome-based literature review divided into four parts; understanding the research problem, establishing the knowledge gap, constructing the theoretical framework, and conceptualising the research process

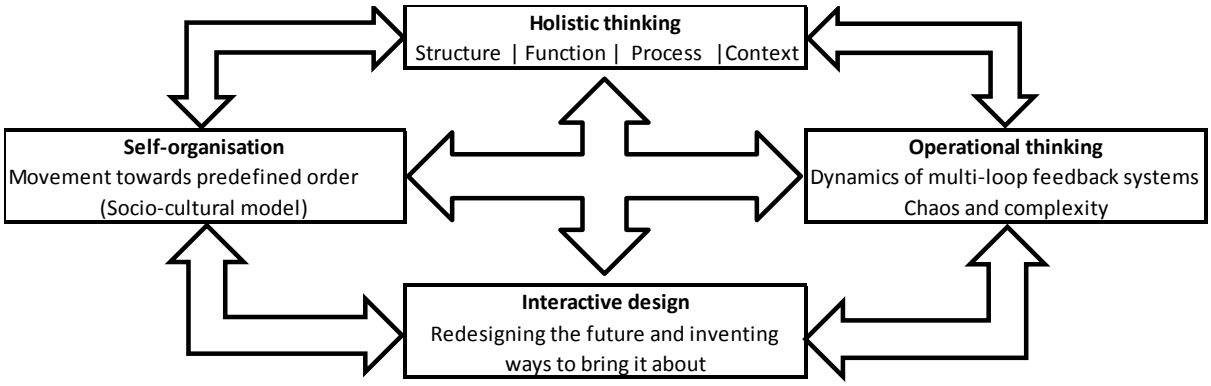
4 The approach—Gharajedaghi's systems methodology and Fisher's devising seminars

The main question is, 'how can we decode an academic field of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks?' There is no obvious answer but we can do so if we point out and relate or link fundamental and contextual aspects of the respective academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks. To do this, we apply systems methodology described in Gharajedaghi (2006: 107)[2] so that we see "… through the chaos and understand the complexities" of academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks. We then derived the initial guiding questions which we then subjected to Fisher's (1983) 'devising seminars' for further reflection or iteration.

As Figure 4 illustrates, Gharajedaghi's (2006) systems thinking methodology is anchored at the centre of four foundations—that is, holistic thinking, operational thinking, self-organisation, and interactive design. First, holistic thinking provided us with a general approach to any academic field of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks using a set of verifiable assumptions (structure,

[1] I should mention that I cannibalised this inverted cone shape idea from my colleague, Dr. Horacio Zandamela.
[2] We are aware that they are more recent versions of this book but we deliberately used the second edition as it explains what we wanted to achieve much better.

function, and process) and how these maybe interconnected. Using a modified version of 'devising seminars'[3], we then subjected the initial framework to about 300 WITS School of Governance post-graduate students[4] (divided in groups of about six) to interrogate, verify, and modify the initial assumptions over a period of three years until we reached satisfactory questions that we share later in this paper. During these discussions and revisions, we collapsed the concepts of structure and function into one concept and simply called it a component but we retained the concept of process. In this paper, a 'component' describes independent parts of the whole. For example, the study of microeconomics and macroeconomics (components) makes up the field of economics (the whole). A 'process' describes activities or operations that help us to realise objectives of the whole and or any of its components. Put differently, processes are vehicles that allow us to get the products of the whole or the independent parts of the whole (components). For example, what we have to do (such as research) to make economic or microeconomic or macroeconomic analysis.



Source: Gharajedaghi (2006: 108)

Figure 4: Showing the four foundations of systems methodology

Second, applying operational thinking allowed us to appreciate the complexity of academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks as they should be embedded and actioned through research. In the first place, these fields of study and their components, thereof, do not exhibit open and linear behaviour, at least in academic literature. This why we cannot predict them easily, therefore, complicating our ability to understand the academic field of study before applying its accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks. Understanding the multi-loop nonlinear feedback relationship between the academic field of study and its accompanying interpretive frameworks is the key to unlock the complexity, the interdependency, and the counterintuitive behaviour of an academic field of study. However, contemporary discussions of theoretical and interpretive frameworks evolve around unidirectional causality making it difficult to visualise how to apply these frameworks in research that exhibits closed loop systems with multi-interdependent relations. Third, from self-organisation, we learnt that no matter how radical we wish to be there are certain aspects in academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks that seem to be universally accepted, for example description and purpose of an academic field of study as well as theoretical and interpretive frameworks. There is no doubt that 'established facts' as well as 'key issues and debates' is the blue print of tuition on academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks. Therefore, our work should be acceptable since it gravitating towards a predefined order.

Lastly, while all the four foundations of systems methodology were of particular use, there is no doubt that 'interactive design' stood out because it delivered the product, in our case the key guiding questions for

[3] According to Hulet (2013) in Susskind and Rumore (2015: 224), "originated by Roger Fisher and others, a devising seminar' is an off-the-record, professionally facilitated, face-to-face problem-solving session … over an extended period". "The purpose of a devising seminar is to invent mutually advantageous proposals in response to an existing or potential conflict" (Susskind and Rumore 2015: 226). In our case, it was a structured approach to interrogating literature on academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks. Therefore, we encouraged students to unofficially share what they do to understand academic fields of study and theoretical and interpretive frameworks so that we integrate their approach in this structured approach. We then asked subsequent cohorts to comment on the visual perception recreated using comments from the preceding cohorts until we arrived at a mutually acceptable model. Susskind and Rumore (2015) have a more structured case in which a devising seminar was recently used.

[4] Who by their own right are seasoned practitioners working the South African business and civil service organisations with a notable number from other African countries.

interrogating an academic field of study and the interpretive frameworks. Obviously, in systems methodology, "the ultimate aim of interactive design is to replace the existing … [approach to understanding an academic field of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks] responsible for regenerating a pattern of … [compliance] with … [a structured or cognitive approach after all] the best way to learn and understand a system is to redesign it" (Gharajedaghi, 2006: 125). This foundation provided us with two important processes—that is, defining the problem or formulating the mess and designing or idealising or realising the solution. Therefore, in the following sections of this paper, we identify the mess before proposing the solution. In line with systems methodology and Fisher's (1983) 'devising seminars', we divided the students into three independent cohorts with the first dealing with the context (research), the second dealing with the problem of an unstructured approach to literature review, and the third dealing with the solution. This was " … to ensure that the problem is defined within the proper context without undue influence of the solutions at hand" (Gharajedaghi, 2006: 127). Defining the problem and idealising the solution comprise three stages; namely, searching, mapping and communicating.

The searching stage has three processes—that is, systems analysis, obstruction analysis, and systems dynamics. Systems analysis meant stocktaking the current unstructured approaches to interrogating literature on academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks. As is the case, we found several approaches. For example, some supervisors emphasise the understanding and application of theoretical and interpretive frameworks but downplay the understanding of the encompassing academic field of study. Obstruction analysis meant that we figure out why this is the case. Our review points to a lack of research supervision tuition as well as a lack of forums to discuss this shortcoming. There is also a case of emphasising constructivism at the expense of cognitivism when undertaking research. Lastly, we applied systems dynamics to examine and link academic fields of study to their theoretical and interpretive frameworks. It is at this point that we observed that though independent, these two sub-components are highly interlinked with a potential for multi-loop feedback as we attempt to understand and apply them in the research process. As a result, we propose that understanding theoretical and interpretive frameworks should be in context of their respective academic fields of study.

During the mapping stage, which is closely linked to realising a solution to the problem, we have proposed six questions for understanding an academic field of study as well as five questions for the theoretical and interpretive frameworks. Respectively, these are;

What is [insert field of study]?
What is the *purpose* of [insert field of study]?
What are the *components* (*structure* and *function*) of [insert field of study]?
What are the *processes* in [insert field of study]?
What are the *established facts* in [insert field of study]?
What are the *key issues and debates* in [insert field of study]?

What events led to the development of [insert name of framework]?
How was [insert name of framework] developed and what was its intended purpose?
What does [insert name of framework] describe or explain or relate?
What are the advantages and usefulness of [insert name of framework]?
What are the disadvantages and limitations of [insert name of framework]?

At this stage, we performed three iterations. The first iteration was meant to assure us that we can decode an academic field of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks using these questions. In the second iteration, we applied these questions to decoding academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks in the social sciences. We refined the initial approach with a further review of textbooks—including [field of study] for dummies—which discuss these fields of study. In the third iteration, we integrated the components and processes in our understanding of each field of study as well as elements (attributes and variables) linking academic fields of study to their accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks to the satisfaction of most participating students. After this process, we conclude that it is possible to decode a field of study, without being a subject specialist, for purposes of interpreting empirical research results. However, it is impossible to divorce theoretical and

interpretive frameworks from their academic fields of study. Finally, we communicate this story not because we have found a definite solution but to spark a conversation on this important subject.

5 Constructing the theoretical or interpretive framework

5.1 Describing an academic field of study and a theoretical or interpretive framework

To begin with, one needs to demonstrate an understanding of the academic field of study encompassing or driving the research of interest (Remenyi, Williams, Money et al. 1998). For example, if we are studying 'savings' or 'consumption', then we need to have some fundamental understanding of economics. Further, this understanding should include locating the branch or component within this field of study where the research of interest is sitting. A research on 'savings' can be a microeconomic issue if we are looking at household behaviour or a macroeconomic issue if we are looking at regulatory or fiscal policy. Similarly, anyone studying fertility or migration or mortality should begin with discussing demography and its components. This applies to marketing, operations management, as well as other public and business management fields of study.

Discussing the broad field of study should include what it aspires to achieve and the issues the field faces in its quest to achieve its objectives. After mentioning ALL the components, one should then zero down to the component of interest. Similarly, one should discuss what this component aims to achieve and the issues faced in its quest. Thereafter, one has to understand the key attributes (qualitative) or variables (quantitative) within the component of interest as well as within the broad academic field of study encompassing or driving the research of interest. Some texts capture attributes and variables as determinants and others such as monitoring and evaluation as indicators. For example, demographers have a 'determinants framework for fertility' proposed by Davis and Blake (1956). Similarly, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2014) have proposed determinants of human exclusion that one can use to measure four of the five components of development—that is, cultural, political, economic, and social development with the missing component being environmental development. Consequently, as we advance from discussing the broad field of study to the component encompassing ones research, we begin to learn about the overall discipline and the specific area of interest within the discipline. This helps us appreciate the established and accepted facts as well as become aware of contradictions and paradoxes in that discipline (Remenyi, Williams, Money et al. 1998).

Finally, one should identify and review the reigning interpretive or theoretical frameworks in the field of study in general and specifically in the component of interest. We should note that decoding the academic field of study and locating the component where the research is located as well as the key attributes or variables is the academic gateway to understanding established interpretive frameworks within an academic field of interest. With this understanding, one can then conceptualise an informed approach to the research and pan out an analysis plan for interpreting the empirical findings. What then is an interpretive framework? Levy and Ellis (2006: 198) define a framework as "… a generalised type of theory that indicates relationships between constructs or latent variables". Therefore, here we are using a more general term, 'interpretive framework' to point out that whatever the format, the purpose of such a framework is to allow for interpreting the research results. The interpretive framework should include theories, models, and even constructs ranging from those that are descriptive and explanative to those that are predictive and interpretive. Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between constructs, theories, and models or frameworks.

Most definitions and descriptions of academic disciplines as well as interpretive frameworks are found in introductory course work. This is why some universities insist that students who register for a particular research qualification should have done sufficient course work in a particular field of study. However, one can review textbooks that describe academic fields of study and interpretive frameworks to get a grip on important concepts, facts, and issues. One can also review empirical studies (journals) that have contextualised their respective researches in such academic fields of study and those that have applied the interpretive frameworks of interest to interpret their empirical results. It is the 'how' of this undertaking that we focus on in the rest of this article.

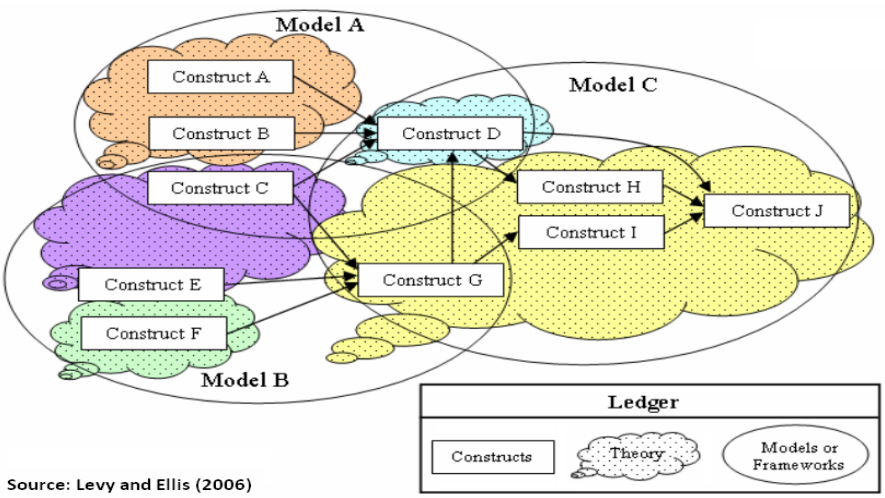


Figure 5: Illustrating the relationship between constructs, theories, and models

5.2 Identifying the mess—what is the problem?

Theoretical frameworks or indeed other frameworks such as models and constructs that help us explain and interpret research results are important to any research. However, this is probably one of the most implicit undertakings in research—even in specialised academic research, such as economics—because it is often assumed that research students should have picked up established interpretive frameworks during their undergraduate or postgraduate introductory course work. This sub-component is even more difficult for multidisciplinary postgraduate public and business management research students. Usually such students have limited prior training in *social* research and no prior course work in the specialised academic field of study where their proposed research is located. For example, an engineer undertaking a master in business administration research requires economic constructs or models or theories to interpret their empirical research findings.

Therefore, in this article, we discuss how to interrogate a specialised field of study whose interpretive frameworks are important to one's research. We also describe how to locate and discuss important interpretive frameworks and point out key components of these frameworks that public and business management research students should focus on when reviewing such constructs, models, and theories. In doing so, we also deal with the collision course—that is, reviewing original material versus latest material. Most academic postgraduate research emphasises the need to review original literature where these interpretive frameworks were pioneered and yet most such literature is dated. On the other hand, focusing on the most recent literature implies reviewing contemporary literature and yet such thinking is not original.

5.3 Mapping the mess—how do we structure the solution?

5.3.1 Describing the research process

As Figure 6 illustrates, postgraduate public and business management research comprises two complimenting phases, that is, the research process and the research product that we eventually submit for examination. The research process should provide us with an *initial* structure of the report and point to the content that we should be pursuing. Obviously, as we interrogate content, we develop arguments and refine the structure of the report. Ultimately, a good research report or write-up is one with a good structure as well as solid and supported arguments. In this paper, we provide for the (i.) research process, (ii.) the initial structure, and (iii.) point to the content that one should interrogate to construct a theoretical or interpretive framework for interpreting postgraduate public and business management research results. We should point out that the structure we propose here should fundamentally change as one interrogates the content that discusses the academic field of study and the theoretical or interpretive frameworks of interest.

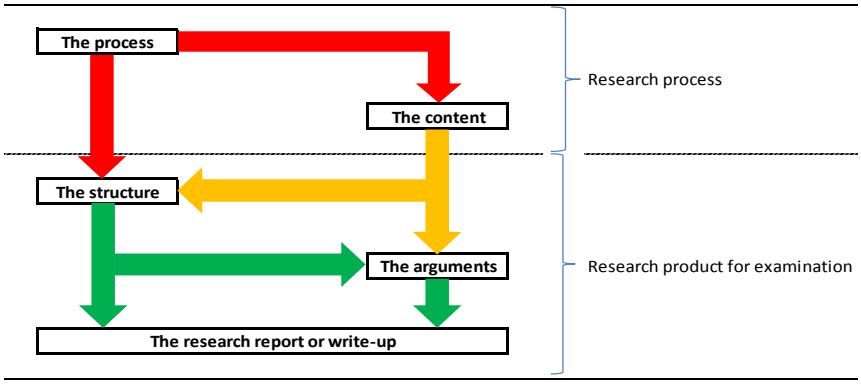


Figure 6: Showing the five elements of a research process

5.3.2 Establishing and discussing an academic field of study, its key components, and key attributes or variables of interest

To construct a theoretical or interpretive framework for our respective researches, we need to first establish the academic field of study encompassing or driving the research, its key components, as well as the key attributes or variables of interest. For example, if the research is on 'savings', one should determine and fit 'savings' and other important variables within the study of economics. Literature on basic economics points to two components, that is, microeconomics and macroeconomics. If this study is from a microeconomics angle, the other key variables would be 'income', 'consumption', and 'interest rates' over and above variables or attributes that describe the demographic and background characteristics of the respondents. Unfortunately, we have seen and evaluated research reports that have discussed and applied theories and models as well as constructs to interpret research findings without discussing the *parent* academic field of study to these theoretical or interpretive frameworks. The problem of omitting such a discussion from one's research report is that one cannot fully appreciate the frameworks they are applying in their research. For example, how does one *fully* appreciate and apply microeconomic theory or the demographic transition theory without demonstrating their understanding of basic economics or demography, respectively? Obviously, if one does not fully appreciate a framework they are using to interpret their research results, then its application is likely to be compromised as well—and therefore, the 'discussion of the findings' component will be compromised as well.

Though some are straightforward, determining the academic field of study encompassing or driving a research requires knowledge of the research setting; an understanding of the research problem; and, especially an appreciation of similar past and current research articles. Therefore, the 'introduction to the research' component as well as discussions under Sections 1 and 2 of the literature review (Figure 4) play an important role in determining the academic field of study encompassing or driving the research of interest.

Once we have determined the academic field of study encompassing or driving the research, we need to demonstrate our understanding of this field using a process that requires us to undertake four tasks:

1. Determining the *themes* that require one to understand (not master) a field of study.
2. Sourcing, selecting, and summarising literature on that field of study.
3. … then selecting and synthesising (*content analysis*) this literature.
4. Repeating Steps 1 through 3 for each relevant component(s) and subcomponent(s) of this field of study until one gets to attributes or variables.

First, to understand a field of study, we apply the following questions to guide the discussion[5]:

What is [insert field of study]?
What is the *purpose* of [insert field of study]?
What are the *components* (*structure* and *function*) of [insert field of study]?

[5] Before arriving at these six questions we share here, we subjected our initial four questions, derived using systems methodology described in Gharajedaghi (2006), to about 180 post graduate public and business management students using a modified version of Fisher's (1983) 'devising seminars'. During these seminars, participants jointly interrogated, verified, and modified important questions or themes that one requires to understand a field of study until we got to the ones we share in this paper.

What are the *processes* in [insert field of study]?
What are the *established facts* in [insert field of study]?
What are the *key issues and debates* in [insert field of study]?

As we have explained earlier, 'components' describe the independent parts of the whole. A 'process' describes activities or operations that help us to realise objectives of the whole and or any of its components.

Second, using the themes as guidance, we then source, select, and summarise literature on the academic field of study of interest into Table 1 (Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet Template).

SOURCE	TEXTBOOK	TEXTBOOK	JOURNAL
Author and year	John, P. (1960)	Michael L. Shatten (1965)	H. Hugh Heclo (1972)
Title of article	The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy: A Review and an Agenda.	The determination of Public policy	Public Analysis
Defining and describing public policy (studies)	"Public policy studies involve the relatively detailed statements of government objectives in a sector and a general statement of the methods to be used in achieving those objectives" Pg 30. "There are national goals and strategies which are expressed in national processes, implemented by policy instruments and institutions and then ultimately affects society" Pg 32	"Public policy is a principle of judicial legislation or interpretation founded on the current needs of the community; that it may be regarded as the highest common factor of public sentiment and intelligence as ascertained by judges assisted by the bar." (Page 1).	"Public Policy concerns organizing purposive action in a society by state authority, it is concerned with meta-choices ie choices as to how others shall make choices in whatever sphere public authority is intervening" Pg 85-86. Public Policy is a proposed course of goal-oriented action within a given environment providing obstacles and opportunity" Pg 84. "James Robinson specifies policy in terms of goals, means and consequences" Pg 84. "It is a course of action intended to accomplish some end" Pg 84.
Aims and objectives of public policy (studies)	"Public policy studies aim to highlight how public policies are supposed to bring about change in a current state of affairs. This change can be political, economic, social or institutional" Pg 34.		"Public Policy is used to encompass both conscious decisions and the course that policies take as a result of interrelations among decisions, including certain political processes" Pg 84. "To embrace both what is intended and what occurs as a result of the intention, any use which excluded unintended results" Pg 85.
Established facts in public policy (studies)	"Despite recurrent debates on merits and disadvantages of projects as instruments of development intervention, no effective alternatives have emerged and projects are likely to remain a basic means for translating policies into action programmes" Pg 37.		"Policy action pursued under the authority of governments is necessarily at the heart of the political scientist's concern. Disciplinary boundaries for a study of public policy are necessarily quite fluid" Pg 85.
Key issues and debates in public policy (studies)		"The policy concept should or can be universal touchstone of justice: While the policy approach to legal problems has considerable merit when used by able legal scholars to expose the reasons for legal rules and doctrines, it would lead to someone hasty and bad judgements if all judges in all cases were to discard all legal rules and decide on the ground of a choice between competing policies." (Page 4).	"The contemporary loss of the stable state has now created the need for the government to become an improved learning mechanism, and in particular to do so by moving from the center-periphery model to an interactive network model with many sub-centres and only centralized themes" Pg 107.
A summary of key components of public policy (studies)	"The key factors to be shaped by policy studies can be economic, political, cultural or demographic" Pg 34		
Processes in public policy (studies)			

Table 1: Showing a partially populated Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with summaries of information on public policy according to the six themes

Here we recommend that one should source both textbooks and journal articles. When decoding a field of study, textbooks provide theoretical descriptions and discussions of a field of study while journal material provides operational definitions as well as applications of a field of study. Similarly, one should source both

dated and latest literature. Dated material provides fundamentals of the field while latest material provides contemporary thinking on the academic field of study. Each Cell should have less than 100 words or five sentences so that only important points are extracted and should be exactly as the source article. The page number should be inserted. Note that it is possible to insert rows if any of the six questions has more than one theme or main point. For example, the description of public policy might have several descriptions and, therefore, each description should have its own row to capture the unique description from various authors.

Third, we then apply a thematic summative content analysis when synthesising and writing up on the academic field of study encompassing or driving the research. It is *thematic* because we interrogate and write-up on each themes. It is *summative* because we provide for the six themes before engaging the literature and leave an option to derive more themes during interrogation of literature. Lastly, it is *content analysis* because during interrogation, we should focus on explicit and implied subjective interpretation of material in each theme. Hsieh and Shannon (2006) have provided a detailed description of summative content analysis amongst other types of qualitative content analysis. As one synthesises this text thematically, we should look out for similarities and differences in arguments provided by the various authors. Bryman (2012) has argued that in qualitative information analysis, the greatest payoff is when information across articles is *typically* similar. However, articles that provide extreme or *deviant* or counterfactual information on the academic field of study provide added insight. Lastly, disconfirming articles provide exceptional information on the field of study that allows us to be critical on the supposed facts. In sum, similarities might provide us with established facts in the field of study while differences—which could be contextual or time bound—provide us with debates and issues. In sum, if well executed, this approach can potentially provide a near comprehensive and critical understanding (not mastering) of an academic field of study. Besides, since we are synthesising literature from multiple sources to understand each theme, the similarity index (plagiarism) is very low and our discussion does not sound like we are reproducing an introductory textbook. Below is a typical resulting statement from synthesising the summaries in Table 1.

Describing public policy
Sometimes referred to as policy sciences, policy analysis, and policy studies (Ham and Hill, 1993), John (1960), Shatten (1965), Heclo (1972), Snyman (1986), Dunn (1994), Hanekom (1995), Cloete and Wissink (2000), as well as Pal (2001) describe public policy as an applied social science that uses multiple methods of inquiry to prescribe and communicate a course or pattern of action or inaction, including legislating and its interpretation thereof, by public authorities meant to achieve an intended objective or relevant knowledge.

Lastly, we should repeat Steps 1 through 3 for component(s) where the research is sitting. For example, when studying 'savings' the research can take up the microeconomics facet or the macroeconomics one. In this case, one has to discuss the relevant component. Singling out a component can help us focus because most of the time the research we are pursuing will be located in one 'component' of the field of study driving the research. We should mention that determining components in some academic fields of study is not that straightforward. In such a case, one has to justify (using academic literature) the components they are proposing. As stated earlier on, when we systematically breakdown subcomponents step by step, one is likely to get to attributes or variables—defined here as elements or features on which one can collect information (attributes) or data (variables) that can be processed to answer research questions or test hypotheses or prove propositions. For example, one cannot collect data on economics or microeconomics but one can collect data on 'income', 'consumption', 'savings', and 'interest rates', which are effectively components (or elements) of microeconomics which in turn is a component of economics.

As an example, Figure 7 shows the link between demography[6] (academic field of study) and the variables on illegal immigration. As we have stated in an earlier example, migration is one of the three components of demography, the other two being fertility and mortality. Further, migration comprises of internal and international migration with the latter describing the movement of individuals across international boundaries—for example, when South Africans move to other countries (emigration) or non-South Africans move into South Africa (immigration). Further, one can divide individuals coming into a country into legal immigrants and illegal immigrants. Illegal immigrants can be broken down into three groups. First, those that enter a country illegally but later on legitimise their stay. Second, those entering legally but stay on after their permits have expired and hence remain in the country illegally. Lastly, those entering a country illegally and stay on illegally.

[6] We also have examples on development, public policy, leadership, governance, and marketing.

We should stress that this approach provides for one to link and trace research attributes or variables through subcomponents and components to the main field of study encompassing or driving the research of interest. Such a link provides for nesting attributes or variables whose data and information we will need to collect, process, analyse, and interpret. This rationalised approach puts us in a superior position to understand the field of study encompassing or driving the research and how it links in with relevant components as well as subcomponents and consequently with attributes and variables of interest, therefore, providing for an informed interpretation of empirical results.

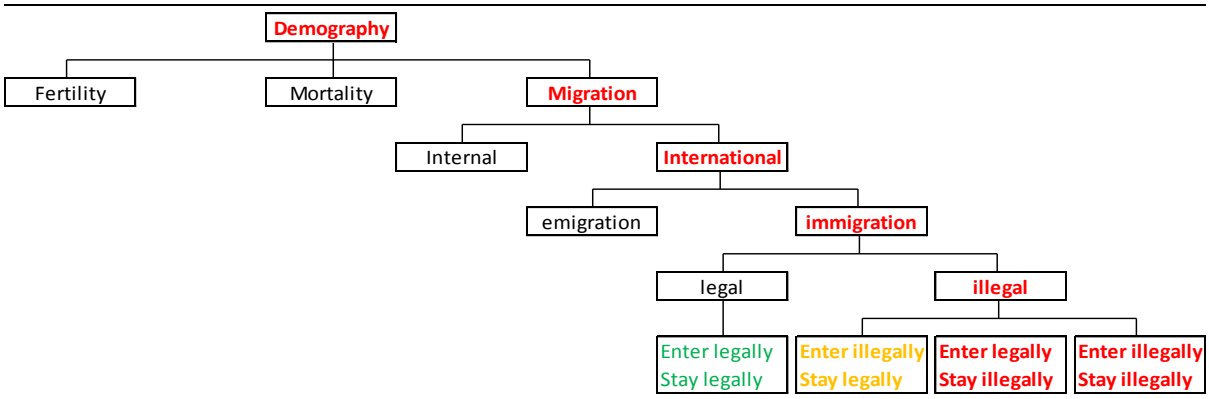


Figure 7: Showing demography and its components with a special focus on the migration components and variables of illegal immigration.

5.3.3 Establishing and discussing an interpretive framework—theories, models, and constructs

After establishing and discussing the academic field of study encompassing or driving the research as well as its key components and key attributes or variables; we should then proceed to construct a framework for interpreting empirical research results. Obviously we need to review *almost* all theoretical or interpretive frameworks in the field of study encompassing or driving the research of interest. We emphasise 'almost' because sometimes it is impossible to know all of them. One would hope to identify these frameworks when reviewing similar past and current research studies and during the interrogation of the academic field of study its key components and key attributes or variables. Therefore, discussions under Sections 2 as well as 3.1 and 3.2 of the literature review (Figure 3) play an important role in identifying theoretical or interpretive frameworks in the field of study encompassing or driving the research of interest.

Once we have identified the theoretical or interpretive frameworks, we need to interrogate them using a process that requires us to undertake four tasks:

1. Determining the themes that will enable one to understand (not master) interpretive frameworks.
2. Sourcing, selecting, and summarising literature on the interpretive frameworks of interest.
3. … then selecting and synthesising (content analysis) this literature.
4. Determining and detailing the most applicable interpretive framework(s).

First, to understand an interpretive framework, we use the following initial themes (structure) to guide the discussion:

What events led to the development of [insert name of framework]?
How was [insert name of framework] developed and what was its intended purpose?
What does [insert name of framework] describe or explain or relate?
What are the advantages and usefulness of [insert name of framework]?
What are the disadvantages and limitations of [insert name of framework]?

Second, using the themes as guidance, we then source, select, and summarise literature on each interpretive framework under review into Table 2 (Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet Template). Here we recommend that one should source a minimum of 7 articles (textbooks and journals) per framework and should include the pioneering or original article of the framework under review as well as reflections of both supporters of this

framework and antagonists spread across time since the framework was first published. As an example, Table 2 also provides us with a rough spread of articles we should consider if we are interrogating a framework coined in 1950. Most academic postgraduate research emphasises the need to review original literature where these interpretive frameworks are pioneered—in this case this framework was first published in 1950 and, therefore, dated but original works. Another seemingly opposing emphasis is reading latest work and, therefore, one should read reflections on the 1950 framework published in the last 5 years (between 2010 and 2016) preferably one article of a supporter and another one of an antagonist. These two articles are latest but certainly not original. But effectively we have reviewed both the original article as well as the latest articles on this framework. Our understanding of the framework can be strengthened if we review four more articles, that is, the reflection of a supporter and an antagonist at the time the framework was published (between 1950 and 1955) and another set half way between when it was published and when we are reviewing the framework, in this case between 1980 and 1985. These need not be the exact dates but close to these time intervals and of course any other key reflection should be included. Practically, we learnt that the pioneering article provides explicit information on the first four themes while those of supporters provides explicit information is on the third and fourth themes and lastly antagonist provides explicit information on the third and fifth themes. Eventually, these seven articles are likely to provide one with comprehensive and critical information on a framework of interest. Similarly, it is possible to insert rows if any of the five questions has more than one theme or main point.

Third, we then apply a thematic summative content analysis when synthesising and writing up on each interpretive framework. As one synthesises this text thematically, we should pay attention to the thinking of the pioneer at the time they wrote and published the framework and how this thinking has changed over time.

	Pioneer	Supporters			Antagonists		
Author and year:	Author (1950)	Author (1955)	Author (1983)	Author (2016)	Author (1955)	Author (1983)	Author (2016)
Title of the article:							
What events led to the development of [insert name of framework]?							
How was [insert name of framework] developed and what was its intended purpose?							
What does [insert name of framework] describe or explain or relate?							
What are the advantages and usefulness of [insert name of framework]?							
What are the disadvantages and limitations of [insert name of framework]?							

Table 2: Showing the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that one can use to populate summaries of information sourced on an interpretive or theoretical framework according to the five themes for a framework pioneered in 1950, supporters, and antagonists

Fourth, during the review process, we should be determining the most applicable theoretical or interpretive frameworks. How? It should be those that incorporate the attributes or variables of interest and, therefore, linked to the research questions or hypotheses or propositions. Ultimately, it is the empirical results comprising this information or these data that we should interpret. Here we recommend that once we have

determined the most applicable interpretive or theoretical framework(s), we should detail them further as they play an important role in our fifth component of a research report—that is, discussion of the findings.

6 Summary, conclusions, and recommendations

The proposed process in this paper helps one to fulfil what Remenyi and others (1998) have pointed out—that is, using the literature review platform to provide a general understanding of the overall discipline as well as the specific area within the discipline that encompasses or drives the research of interest. Further, one should use this component to discuss established and accepted facts, contradictions, and paradoxes within the overall and specific discipline of interest (established facts, issues and debates). During this review, we should also establish and understand theories and models within the discipline of interest that will be useful to interpret our empirical research findings.

In mainline academics, this is transmitted to students by their research supervisors because they are also subject specialists. However, this is not the case with postgraduate public and business management students. Therefore, we had to propose an explicit cognitive process because postgraduate public and business management students are a different kind of breed that require knowledge transmission based on what they do best—that is, 'learn and do'. We thought this would be useful because we noticed that such students do well in their course work because course work is structured but struggle with their research simply because research tuition is mostly unstructured. Like most text, Remenyi and others (1998) have pointed out the importance of understanding an academic field of study encompassing the research as well as the accompanying frameworks but without providing for a structured approach to this undertaking.

Further, during this research we learnt that most public and business management literature sources that discuss important interpretive frameworks hardly reveal the pioneers of these frameworks. The literature also barely discusses the context of what was happening at the time when these interpretive frameworks were coined. This is a disadvantage because without a context, it is difficult to appreciate an interpretive framework and certainly difficult to evaluate its relevance to one's research.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the research students—both WITS Business School (WBS) and WITS School of Governance (WSG)—that took part in the *devising seminars* where we discussed the theoretical themes for decoding an academic field of study and theoretical or interpretive frameworks. More so, those that heroically applied this untested approach in their respective researches. I would also like to thank the WITS School of Governance (WSG) members of staff who attended the conversation where this approach was first presented for their helpful comments as well as the encouraging remarks from Professors Mike Muller (waters) and Gavin Cawthra and Dr. Manamela Matshabaphala. Lastly, I would like to thank the reviewers for helping us fine-tune and reconcile our argument and perfect this write-up.

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