

Writing literature reviews: The 10 most frequently asked questions



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PG Conference 2013



What is the most important part of a paper, dissertation, PhD thesis?

Agenda



1. Top 10 questions by students related to literature review writing
2. Plenary Q&A

FAQ # 10



What is a literature review?



What is a literature review?

- A critical, evaluative summary
 - Of relevant articles
 - On a specific topic or several very closely related topics
 - Using a systematic approach

FAQ # 09



Why do I need to conduct a literature review?



Why a literature review?

- To identify gaps in the literature
- To avoid reinventing the wheel (at the very least this will save time and it can stop you from making the same mistakes as others)
- To carry on from where others have already reached (reviewing the field allows you to build on the platform of existing knowledge and ideas)
- To identify other people working in the same fields (a researcher network is a valuable resource)
- To increase your breadth of knowledge of your subject area

Bourner, T. (1996) *The research process: four steps to success*, in Greenfield, T. (ed), *Research methods: guidance for postgraduates*, Arnold, London.



Why a literature review?

- To identify seminal works in your area
- To provide the intellectual context for your own work, enabling you to position your project relative to other work
- To identify opposing views
- To put your work into perspective
- To demonstrate that you can access previous work in an area
- To identify information and ideas that may be relevant to your project
- To identify methods that could be relevant to your project

Bourner, T. (1996) *The research process: four steps to success*, in Greenfield, T. (ed), *Research methods: guidance for postgraduates*, Arnold, London.

Why a literature review?



- Part of your research design, e.g. triangulation!

FAQ # 08



Are all literature reviews the same or are there different types?



Types of literature reviews

- Classification based on:
 - *Focus*
 - *Goal*
 - *Coverage*
 - *Audience*
 - *Perspective*



Types of literature reviews

- **FOCUS**

- Research outcomes
- Research methods
- Theories
- Practices

- **GOAL**

- Integration
 - *Generalization*
 - *Conflict resolution*
 - *Linguistic bridge-building*
- Criticism
- Identification of central issues

Cooper, H.M. (1988). Organizing knowledge synthesis: A taxonomy of literature reviews. *Knowledge in Society*, 1, 104-126.



Types of literature reviews

- **COVERAGE**

- Exhaustive
- Exhaustive with selective citation
- Representative
- Central / pivotal

- **AUDIENCE**

- Specialized scholars
- General scholars
- Practitioners or Policymakers
- General Public

- **PERSPECTIVE**

- Neutral representation
- Espousal of position

Cooper, H.M. (1988). Organizing knowledge synthesis: A taxonomy of literature reviews. *Knowledge in Society*, 1, 104-126.

FAQ # 07



**Where/How should I start?
&
Should I read more books or
papers?**



Starting off right...

- What is the purpose/problem of your study?
- What is the research question?
- Which areas of research are you addressing?
- What is the major contribution you expect from your study?

- Preferences in research design?



Articles vs. books

- **Books**
 - Conceptual and/or broad
 - Major theories
 - The ‘classics’
 - Provide very good summaries
- **Articles**
 - Tend to be rather empirical
 - Include research methods
 - Latest developments in the field
 - Find and existing literature review!

FAQ # 06



How to search for articles and books?

Finding articles: A matter of proper keywords/language



- You can **NEVER** have too many keywords to start with
- Choose commonly used technical terms
- Look at keywords provided in articles to identify important terms
- ‘review’, etc. as an additional keyword to look for specific types of papers

Finding articles: A matter of proper keywords/language



- **AND / +** : inclusive, finds papers/books which include all words connected via AND
- **AND NOT / NOT / -** : finds papers/books with the first keywords, but not with the second word
- **OR**: finds papers/books including the first or second keyword
- **“...”**: exact phrase
- *** or ? (wildcards)**:
 - wom*n → wom**a**n + wom**e**n
 - organi*ation* → organi**s**ation, organi**z**ation, organi**s**ation**a****l**
organiza**t**ion**a****l**, etc.



Search engines

- **EBSO, ProQuest, PsychInfo, etc.**
 - Specialized databases
 - Very good search functions available
- **Google Scholar (scholar.google.com)**
 - Searches across different databases
 - Less detailed search functions available
 - Links to university library
 - Includes articles, books, conference papers (everything that can be found online!) → be cautious regarding quality!
- **Harzing's Publish or Perish (PoP) (www.harzing.com/pop)**
 - Uses Google Scholar
 - Relatively good search functions available
 - Automatically provides ranking of articles based on citation
- **Google Books (books.google.com)**



Examples & demo

- EBSCO, Google Scholar:
 - Keywords:
 - Personality
 - Patterns of communication
 - Interactional sociolinguistics
- Google Books:
 - Keyword: Conversation Analysis

FAQ # 05



**There are too many articles.
Which one should I prioritize?**



What is relevance?

- **Citations:**

- Frequently cited papers more discussed than others in the field, thus, have greater impact
- Downside:
 - Older publications tend to have more citations than recently published papers → risk of using outdated knowledge!



What is relevance?

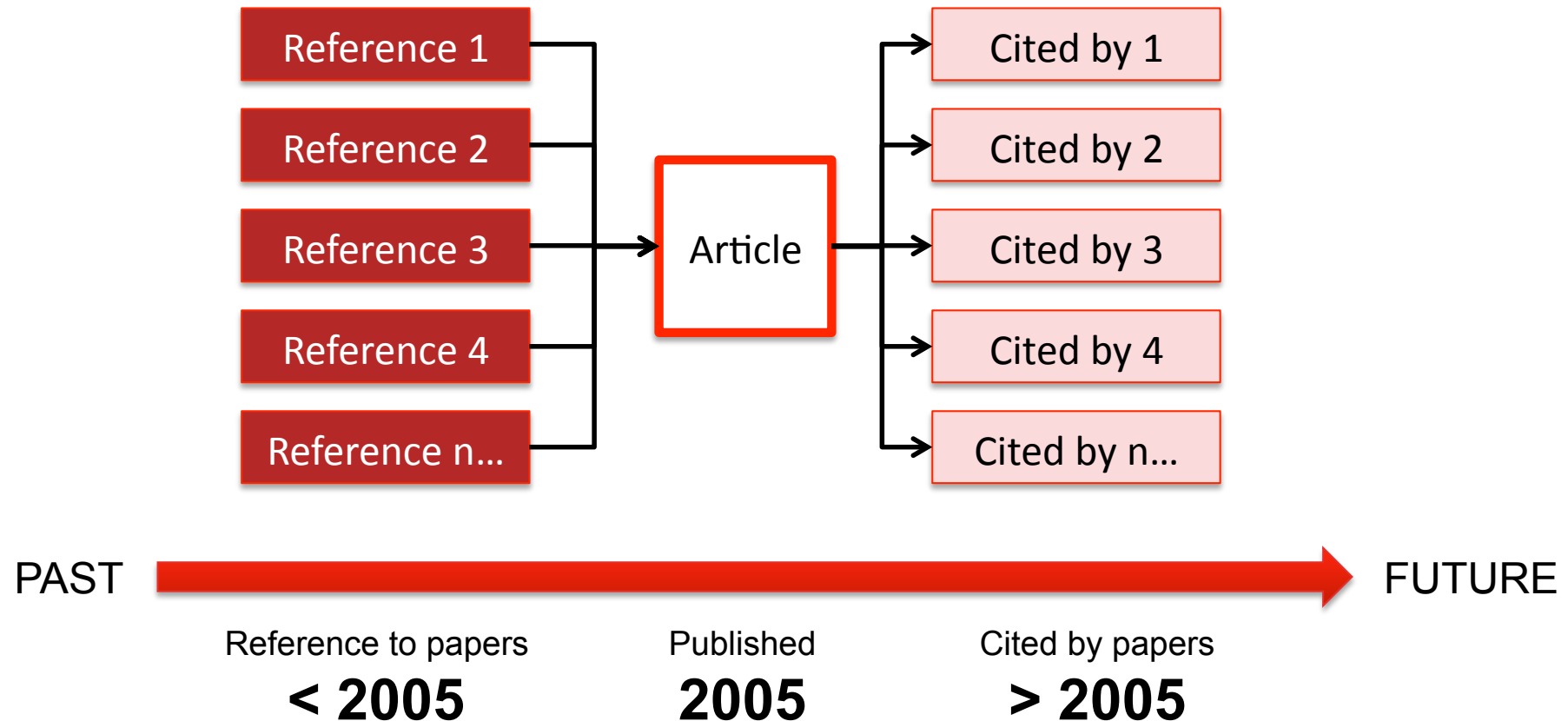
- **Impact factor:**
 - Used for journals
 - E.g. h-index; using Harzing's Publish or Perish (PoP)
 - Harzing's Journal Quality List (934 journals!):
<http://www.harzing.com/jql.htm>
 - H-index of 86 for a journal indicates that
 - *86 articles in the journal*
 - *Have been cited at least 86 times*
 - *And all other articles in the journal have been cited 86 times or less*

FAQ # 04



**There are not many articles!
How can I find more relevant
ones?**

Searching backward and forward in time



Example & demo



- Google Scholar:
 - Keywords:
 - Intercultural communication
 - Critical incident



Practical hints...

- Change keywords (are other terms normally used?)
- Reduce the number of keywords
- Look for **research in other disciplines** using similar approaches or even the same theory
- Search for articles by **authors**
 - Who are the leading scholars in the field?

FAQ # 03



How should I read and analyze
an article for a literature
review?

Screening vs. reading articles





Coding articles

- Attach codes/labels to articles to meaningfully sort them:
 - Type of publication (conceptual, empirical, etc.)
 - Theories used
 - Variables & constructs investigated
 - Methods applied
 - **FINDINGS**

Examples of codes



- **Title of paper**
 - **Year published**
 - **Authors**
 - **Name of Journal**

 - **H-index of journal**
 - **Cites/paper**

 - **Keywords of paper**

 - **Type of paper:**
 - Conceptual
 - Empirical
 - *Qualitative methods*
 - *Quantitative methods*
 - *Mixed methods*
 - Literature review
 - Meta-analysis
-
- **Level of analysis:**
 - Globe
 - Region
 - Country
 - Organization
 - Groups, teams
 - Individual

 - **Variables used**
 - Dependent variable
 - Independent variable
 - Moderators / Mediators
 - Control variables

 - **Concepts and theories used**

 - **Findings**
 - Grouping similar results
 - Grouping similar papers

FAQ # 02



How to structure and write my literature review?

Table 2: Final sample

Discipline	Title of journal	h-index	# of papers
Gen & Strat	Strategic Management Journal	221	5
Gen & Strat	Academy of Management Journal	218	4
Gen & Strat	Journal of Management	183	2
OS/OB,HRM,IR	Organization Science	150	4
Gen & Strat	Journal of International Business Studies	127	3
Gen & Strat	Sloan Management Review	109	2
Gen & Strat	Journal of Management Studies	104	4
OS/OB,HRM,IR	Organization Studies	95	3
Gen & Strat	California Management Review	94	2
Gen & Strat	Journal of International Management	83	2
OS/OB,HRM,IR	Journal of Business Ethics	79	1
Gen & Strat	Long Range Planning	76	6
OS/OB,HRM,IR	Organizational Dynamics	76	2
OS/OB,HRM,IR	International Journal of Industrial Organization	71	1
OS/OB,HRM,IR	Human Resource Management (US)	64	1
OS/OB,HRM,IR	Leadership Quarterly	61	3
Psychology	Journal of Applied Behavioral Science	59	3
Gen & Strat	European Management Journal	57	6
Gen & Strat	British Journal of Management	54	3
Gen & Strat	Business Horizons	53	1
		SUM	58



Dauber, D. (forthcoming). Opposing positions in M&A research: Culture, integration and performance. *Cross-cultural Management: An International Journal*

ONE way of doing it...

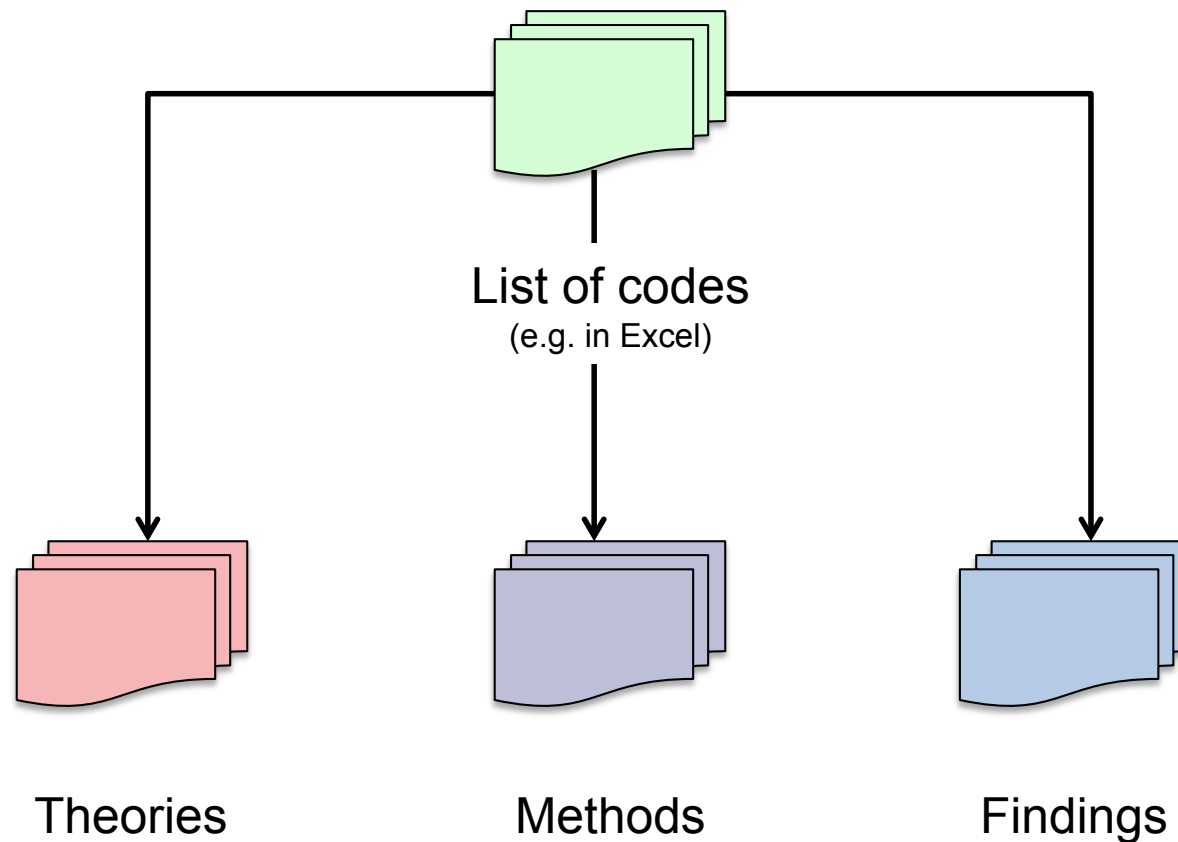
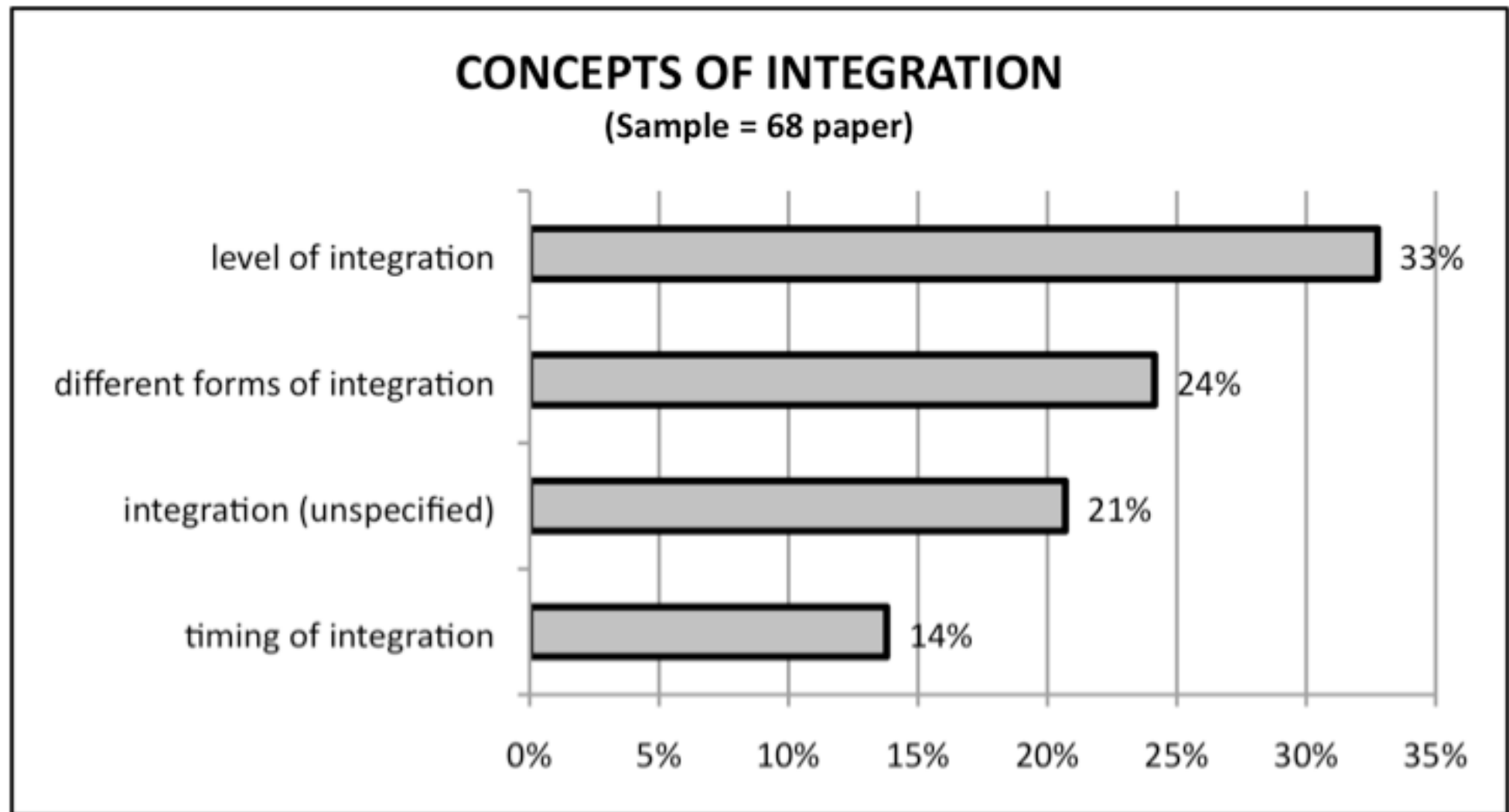


Figure 2: Concepts of integration considered in the sample of articles (in %)

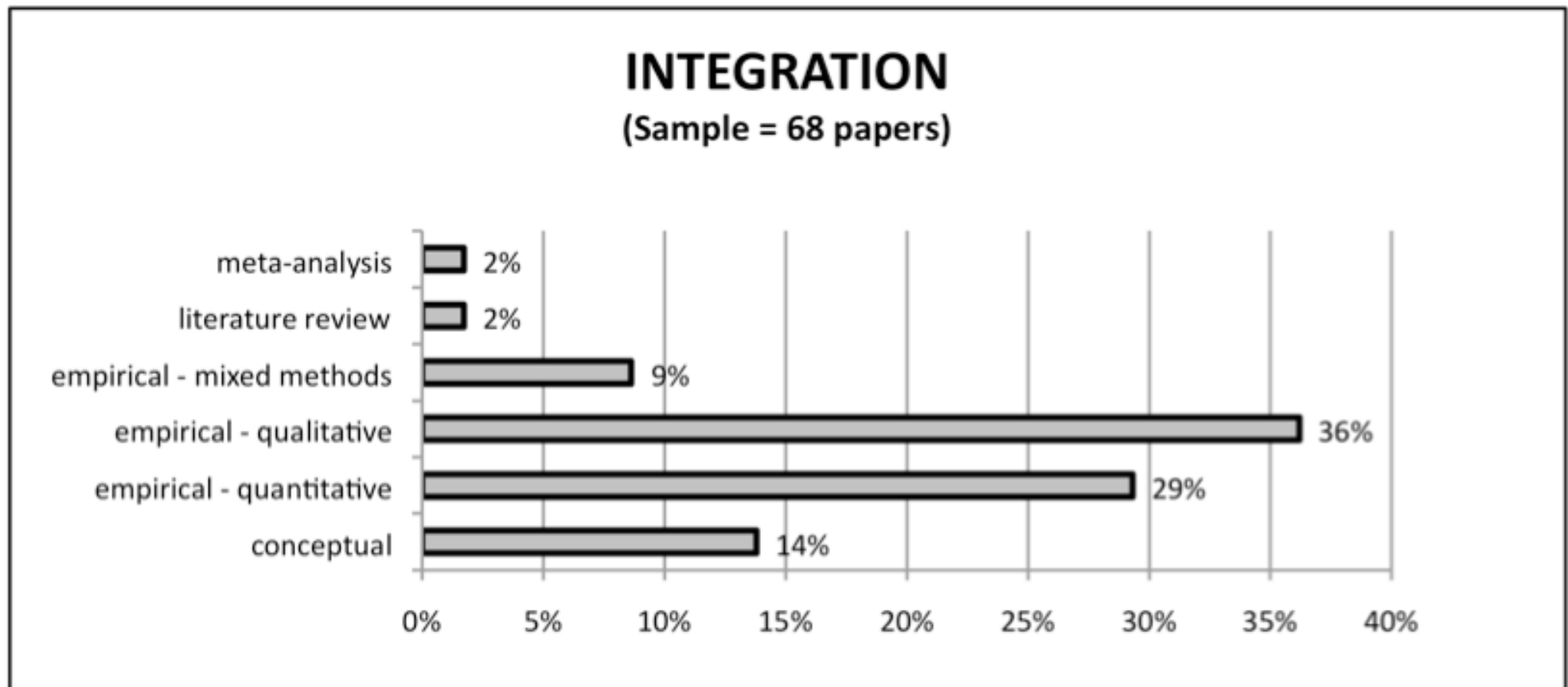


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Figure 3: Most frequently used methods to measure integration (in%)





Let others speak for you

- ‘While lack of strategic fit is often blamed as being a major reason for unsuccessful deals, the notion of ‘cultural fit’ has gained in importance in recent years.’

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Let others speak for you

- ‘While lack of strategic fit is often blamed as being a major reason for unsuccessful deals, the notion of ‘cultural fit’ has gained in importance in recent years (e.g. Cartwright and Cooper, 1993; Chatterjee et al., 1992; Child et al.; 2001; Datta, 1991; Fink and Holden, 2007; Hurt and Hurt, 2005; Larsson and Lubatkin, 2001; Olie, 1994; Teerikangas and Very, 2006; Weber, 1996; Weber, et al., 1996; etc.)’

Dauber, D. (forthcoming). Opposing positions in M&A research: Culture, integration and performance. *Cross-cultural Management: An International Journal*



Let others speak for you

- ‘In particular, many scholars argue that cultural fit during the post-M&A phase is even more important than strategic fit (Cartwright and Cooper, 1993; Chatterjee et al., 1992; Weber, 1996; Weber, et al., 1996).’

Dauber, D. (forthcoming). Opposing positions in M&A research: Culture, integration and performance. *Cross-cultural Management: An International Journal*



Let others speak for you

- ‘While some scholars argue that cultural differences cause M&As to fail (e.g. Barkema et al. 1996; Harris, & Ravenscraft, 1991; Krishnan et al., 1997; Morisini et al., 1998; Weber & Pliskin, 1996; etc.), other studies suggest the opposite (e.g. Chatterjee et al., 1992; Datta, 1991; Datta & Puia, 1995; Harrison et al., 2001; Larsson & Finkelstein, 1999; Very et al., 1997; etc.).’

Dauber, D. (forthcoming). Opposing positions in M&A research: Culture, integration and performance. *Cross-cultural Management: An International Journal*

FAQ # 01



How many articles or books do I need to read in order to write a good literature review?



Final remark

- Research is about making decisions on a sound, rigor, comprehensible, logic and traceable basis:
 - Research question,
 - Context,
 - Methodology,
 - Sampling,
 - Analysis,
 - Theory, etc.

Q&A



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