Management Review Quarterly
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-020-00184-8

Extending Fisch and Block's (2018) tips for a systematic review in management and business literature

W. Randy Clark[1] · Leigh Anne Clark[2] · Deana M. Raffo[3] · Ralph I Williams Jr.[4]

Received: 6 January 2020 / Accepted: 1 March 2020

Abstract
A systematic literature review is designed to synthesize meaningful knowledge from a large number of studies on a research topic. Over the past decade, management researchers have begun to adopt this review methodology with a goal of providing a comprehensive understanding of a business literature topic. This methodology can provide a context for existing literature, guide future research, and by translating theoretical observations into useable real-world principles, help business leaders make better decisions. A systematic literature review serves a different purpose than a traditional literature review, providing a more organized and complete exploration of research literature. However, systematic literature review is new to many management researchers. To aid in the understanding of this methodology, the editors of *Management Review Quarterly*, Fisch and Block (Mange Rev Q 68:103–106,2018), present six tips for conducting a systematic literature review. In this paper, we will examine their six tips, which we applied in a recent systematic literature review of leader credibility. By sharing our thoughts on the application of their tips, we hope to bolster the rigor and consistency of future systematic reviews of management literature. In addition to Fisch and Block's six tips, based on our experiences, we offer three additional tips that became evident in our work to aid in future systematic literature reviews.

Keywords Systematic literature review · Systematic review · Traditional literature review · Literature review · Research process

JEL Classifcation M10

✉ W. Randy Clark
randy.clark@mtsu.edu

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

Published online: 10 March 2020

1 Introduction

There are distinct differences between a systematic literature review (hereafter called systematic review) and a traditional literature review (hereafter called traditional review). A systematic review's purpose is to "answer a specific question, to reduce bias in the selection and inclusion of studies, to appraise the quality of the included studies, and to summarize them objectively (Petticrew 2001, p. 99)." A systematic review flows from an evidence-based approach and "differs from traditional narrative reviews by adopting a replicable, scientific and transparent process, in other words a detailed technology, that aims to minimize bias through exhaustive literature searches of published and unpublished studies and by providing an audit trail of the reviewers' decisions, procedures and conclusions" (Tranfield et al. 2003, p. 209). Traditional reviews typically provide a subjective summary of evidence on a research topic using informal methods of collecting, interpreting, and summarizing studies. The difference in the outcomes of the two literature review types is that systematic reviews build more complete and objective knowledge from a holistic view of existing research while traditional reviews result in fragmented and potentially biased conclusions drawn with purpose from a partial examination of existing research.

A search of ABI/Inform database of abstracts containing the term "systematic literature review" and "management" before 2011 produced only 141 articles. That same search for 2019 generated 1257 articles, which suggests a considerable increase in the perceived value and application of systematic reviews in management literature over the last decade. Noting this increase in systematic reviews in the field, Fisch and Block (2018) published an article in *Management Review Quarterly* providing researchers guidance on key components needed for a quality systematic review in business and management research. Seeking more consistency and familiarity with the systematic review process in future management research, they referred researchers to multiple comprehensive guides on how-to conduct a review (including Aguinis et al. 2018; Booth et al. 2016; Tranfield et al. 2003) and provided the following six basic tips:

- Motivate the topic and state the research question,
- Follow a coherent article structure,
- Identify the relevant literature in a systematic way,
- Focus on concepts and not studies,
- Derive meaningful conclusions, and
- Choose the right balance between breadth and depth.

Our four-person research team recently conducted a systematic review of the leader credibility literature and employed various practices to limit biases and incorporate rigor. In this article, we first share those practices within the framework provided by Fisch and Block (2018), and follow with a discussion of additional tips we found essential for a quality systematic review. To provide a foundation, in Table 1, we provide an overview of the differences between a

Table 1 Traditional versus systematic literature review research process factors with tips

Research process factors	Traditional review	Systematic review	Fisch and Block (2018) tips	Additional tips
Goals and research questions	Provides summary or overview of topic Questions can be a general topic or specific questions	Answers focused clinical/scientific questions Clearly defined and answerable clinical/scientific questions	Motivate the topic and state the research question	
Article components	Introduction Methods Discussion Conclusion References	Pre-specified eligibility criteria Systematic search strategy Assessment of the validity of findings Interpretation and presentation of results References	Follow a coherent article structure	
Number of authors Appropriate timeline	One or more Weeks–months	Three or more Months–years (avg. 18 months)		Use a research team approach available to engage in interaction
Requirements to perform review	Understanding of topic Perform searches of one or more databases	Thorough knowledge of topic Perform searches of all relevant databases Appropriate analysis of data	Identify the relevant literature in a systematic way	Use a research team approach available to engage in interaction

Table 1 (continued)

Research process factors	Traditional literature review	Systematic literature review	Fisch and Block (2018) tips	Additional tips
Outcomes	Provides foundation for study Provides summary of literature on the topic	Connects practitioners to high quality evidence Supports evidence-based practice	Focus on concepts and not studies Derive meaningful conclusions Choose the right balance between breadth and depth	
Process rigor		Eliminate bias Ensure transparency		Minimize bias at every step Delay judgment and trust the process

traditional and systematic review. We inserted Fisch and's tips within the table corresponding to the research process factors of a systematic review that a particular tip applies. We do the same for the three additional tips we propose. Using Table 1's order, we examine each tip provided by Fisch and Block as they relate to the systematic review we conducted. We conclude this paper with our additional tips and other observations.

2 Fisch and Block's six tips for systematic reviews and our observations

2.1 Tip 1: Motivate the topic and state the research question

Fisch and Block (2018) explain that researchers must identify the right questions to reveal the scope for the review. Defining the right research question(s) includes deciding how broad or narrow to cast the net, what fields to include in the search, and what audience the review is intended to reach. Because of the comprehensive nature of the systematic review process and the thorough examination of a research stream, stating the objectives and research questions is more critical for a systematic review than for a traditional review to keep the task on target and within the proper scope.

2.2 Our observations, lessons, and implications regarding tip 1

2.2.1 A systematic review is not always necessary for academic research, but in our research situation, it seemed to be the obvious choice

Our 4-person research team conducted a traditional review of leader credibility to provide a foundation of previous work, and we agreed that the traditional review revealed an incomplete picture of what leader credibility was or was not. It was also evident there was substantial overlap between the leader credibility construct and other leadership concepts such as trust, integrity, and honesty. Prompted by this traditional review, we decided to more thoroughly explore existing leader credibility research, and set the following research goals: to synthesize a leader credibility definition that differentiates leader credibility from related constructs, identify concepts relevant to building or diminishing leader credibility, and build sound leader credibility measurement items for future research. Given these research goals, conducting a systematic review to trace the roots of leader credibility was a logical choice due to the thorough documentation and the more encompassing nature.

From our traditional leader credibility reviews, we identified a lack of depth in the discussion of credibility in the management or leadership field that was consistently based on one stream of research. Therefore, we applied the systematic review approach that opened the door to various other disciplines and more obscure management literature where we found work focused on leader credibility. For instance, we found there were relevant articles in education focused on a principal leading

a school or an educator leading a classroom, and pertinent articles in the medical, political science, and public administration disciplines.

2.2.2 We found value in revisiting our research questions periodically to ensure we were on the right path

We strongly propose that in conducting a high-quality systematic review, it is critical to set research questions early in the process to form criteria for inclusion of articles in the systematic review. Based on our traditional review and previous research work, we felt knowledgeable enough of the leader credibility research topic to form research questions at an early stage. We also understood that our research questions would drive our search and literature review methodology and would be critical to uncovering relevant information.

After beginning the systematic review of the articles that met our stated criteria for inclusion in the review, we refined our initial research questions slightly to accommodate the language found in the literature. For instance, initially, we applied a general question of "how" does a leader build or lose credibility, but our study of the literature drove us to modify the question, seeking "what behaviors" a leader can exhibit to build or lose credibility. We also added a question: "In which empirical studies was leader credibility the focus of the study, such as an independent or dependent variable? And in which empirical studies was leader credibility not specifically explored, but surfaced in the results?" Our systematic review identified that there were a number of studies that initially did not focus on leader credibility, but discussed it as findings in the results. We felt the fragmented nature of the leader credibility construct perhaps resulted from its lack of inclusion in the theoretical framing of the research. For that reason, we thought it was important to add a research question allowing us to capture whether the construct was a planned outcome of a study or merely a coincidental finding.

2.3 Tip 2: Follow a coherent article structure

Fisch and Block (2018) suggest that the resulting systematic review article should follow a coherent article structure with an introduction, overview of literature, disclosure of the process applied, sharing of results, discussion, and conclusion. A clear article structure is important in adequately conveying systematic review findings and helping future researchers replicate the process and research. In particular, they highlight that the section that explains and calls for future research is an important part of a systematic review article, providing research questions that were left unanswered in the article and current literature.

2.4 Our observations, lessons, and implications regarding tip 2

It took more than 18 months for our team to read nearly 300 articles, decide if each article merited inclusion in our systematic review, and record material relevant to our research questions. During that process, multiple points surfaced as potential

contributions to the sections Fisch and Block (2018) suggest as part of a systematic review article: introduction, overview of literature, disclosure of the process applied, sharing of results, discussion, and conclusion. For instance, we found multiple articles that showed confusion among similar concepts—such as leader credibility, trust, honesty, and integrity—and these articles provided potential contributions to our introduction by illustrating the reasoning for our systematic review. Related to the section describing our process, our protocol developed over a course of actions and decisions, and it evolved as we worked. It was important for us to regularly document our process at each step to ensure we were accurately capturing the appropriate methodology and address any assumptions made in the process. Given the length of time required for our systematic review, we could have forgotten potential contributions to specific sections of our final paper. Therefore, in addition to our spreadsheet of material addressing our research questions (discussed more later), we kept a comprehensive set of supplemental notes, in which we recorded relevant discoveries and insights, our steps in developing our protocol, and protocol evolutions. These supplemental notes were particularly helpful in writing our final paper.

2.5 Tip 3: Identify the relevant literature in a systematic way

Fisch and Block (2018) state a systematic review requires a review process that is transparent and reproducible. For this reason, researchers must share their strategy and protocol and provide sufficient justification for their process choices. Any research requires some transparency related to methods. However, a systematic review demands methods transparency at a higher level. For instance, article inclusion criteria in a systematic review form the review's boundaries and are important for building credibility of the knowledge synthesized and helping future researchers identify gaps and creating their own research agendas. Therefore, it is vital that systematic reviewers clearly state inclusion criteria and all other methodological matters, such as search protocol and results.

2.6 Our observations, lessons, and implications regarding tip 3

2.6.1 One person must take the lead in coordinating the work

We feel that the time-extensive search and transparent process demands of a thorough systematic review require a team of multiple researchers. Additionally, regarding the idea of identifying relevant literature for the review, there is benefit in having multiple researchers involved in the study to share their opinions and discuss differences. Multiple points of view can only help produce more complete and unbiased results in a systematic review, which by its very nature demands a thorough and comprehensive examination of a literature stream. However, for the systematic review to proceed at a steady pace, ensure process transparency, and establish a thorough step-by-step recording of the process, we believe having one person take the lead with necessary administrative tasks contributes to the review's quality and consistency. Our process followed the six steps shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Research team responsibilities in the systematic review process

Process stage	Process	Researcher ownership
Step 1	Develop criteria for article search inclusion	All researchers
Step 2	Perform initial article review to identify relevant research	Lead researcher
Step 3	Develop literature review inclusion criteria for the study	All researchers
Step 4	Pilot test the review process	All researchers
Step 5	Assign each article to multiple researchers for review	Lead researcher
Step 6	Research team interacts in same-time to review articles	All researchers

To ensure transparency in the process, the administrative tasks involved in a systematic review are extensive. In step 1, it was important for us to record meeting notes regarding the initial search criteria and create a format (for us this was an excel spreadsheet) for all researchers to follow throughout the process. In step 2, the lead researcher performed the initial database search for articles to be examined based on agreed upon search terms, created a list articles found, and saved searchable versions of each article in a Dropbox folder available to all researchers. In step 3, it was again important to accumulate meeting notes on the systematic review's article inclusion criteria and refinements of those criteria. In step 4, as a pilot test of the process, an initial pool of 10 articles found in our search were randomly assigned to pairs of team members for consideration of inclusion in the final systematic review. In step 5, we discussed our pilot findings, made further refinements of article inclusion criteria, and assigned the full list of articles to pairs of researchers. In step 6, to move the process along, the lead researcher scheduled meetings and recorded notes for each article during the meetings. The lead researcher was aided by a graduate assistant in assigning articles to researchers and incorporating meeting notes into the final article spreadsheet. While a research team was helpful given the time-intensive task, it remains important that one of the researchers served in this leadership role to nudge the team along, ensure completion of each of the organizational tasks, record any process changes, and redistribute work if a team member fell behind.

2.6.2 DropBox was very important to our process

We found using a cloud storage technology was an important tool to help us document, share, and create our work. Our research team specifically used a DropBox folder, so we will use the term DropBox to generically refer to the larger category of cloud storage technology options. We used a shared DropBox folder to house notes and files needed by everyone as well as individual folders for each researcher as a repository for our individual notes. Once the database search identified articles to be evaluated for inclusion in the review, these articles were uploaded to a common folder shared by all team members. A master spreadsheet was created and assigned to pairs of team members to evaluate each article's inclusion based on the criteria developed from our research questions. Using DropBox allowed us to access the articles, criteria notes, and the master spreadsheet reporting findings related to our

research questions from various locations, including separate offices and homes. We also had access to the folder in conference rooms where we conducted our team meetings. To protect the integrity of the work, only our research team and a graduate assistant had access to the DropBox shared folders.

2.6.3 Using a searchable version of the article allowed the researchers to use the FIND command to identify where "credibility" was applied in each article

Although perhaps a small point, we found it very helpful to save articles in our DropBox in a format allowing use of the FIND command to quickly identify where the term "credibility" was applied in each article. If a FIND search for "credibility" indicated a substantial discussion of the topic, then a full read of the content was warranted, but for an article in which the FIND search indicated a superficial or nonrelevant discussion of credibility, the article warranted a cursory scan and often judged not worthy of inclusion consideration. To ensure solid and non-biased decisions, two members of our team separately reviewed each article and conducted the FIND search. Given the large number of articles we considered for inclusion in the systematic review process, we found that using technology to more quickly identify key points regarding the criteria was very helpful.

2.6.4 Meeting in person made a difference

Every couple of weeks throughout the process, we met in person for about 90 min. Initially, none of us realized how much these face-to-face meetings would contribute to the quality of our work. In these meetings, we identified and then refined the criteria, discussed the articles, decided whether an article met the agreed upon inclusion criteria, and, discussed relevant points from each article which helped to build a consistent level of understanding across our team. The in-person interaction allowed us to ask questions about what we found and revisit our criteria and methodology to ensure we were searching for key points in a common manner. We had the benefit of all working in the same building, which better allowed us to coordinate the in-person discussions. For a team working remotely, we believe it is important to use regular virtual meetings or telephone meetings while progressing through the articles. Ongoing face-to-face interaction facilitates the team's understanding of the findings at a deeper level and prompts discussion of discoveries and insights. One team member who had produced other systematic reviews where in-person or virtual team meetings were rare, found this in-person meeting approach to be much better in achieving a more complete examination of the articles against criteria than relying merely on emails. We discuss this more later.

2.7 Tip 4: Focus on concepts and not studies

Another point from Fisch and Block's (2018) guidance is that systematic reviews should focus on the concepts that flow from the studies and not solely on study results. Systematic reviews should focus on strong logical and conceptual reasoning.

"In this sense, writing a systematic literature review very much resembles the writing of a conceptual theory paper (p. 105)." In other words, allow the existing research on the constructs and concepts themselves to create the knowledge gleaned from the systematic review.

2.8 Our observations, lessons, and implications regarding tip 4

2.8.1 We were surprised to find a small number of empirical studies existed to ground the research of our systematic review's focus

After reviewing 269 articles from over 30 years of credibility literature, only 54 were empirical studies in which leader credibility was explored or found in the results (e.g., qualitative research where leader credibility was mentioned in interviews). Additionally, many of these empirical studies were outcomes of measures created in one particular stream of research or from measures taken from "source credibility," which was not our focus. We felt this was a relatively small amount of empirical research on the construct, particularly one that had been discussed so often over the last thirty years. First, it concerned us that there was very little measurement of the key concept explored in our systematic review. Second, much of the empirical work was derived from a singular theoretical basis, which had a weak methodological foundation and was pulled from streams of research only loosely connected to our focused construct. Given the large number of theoretical arguments made around the leader credibility construct, we were surprised that there was not more empirical grounding and measurement refinement. Focusing on the leader credibility construct in a holistic manner, and less on individual studies, helped support our goal to develop a leader credibility measure in future research.

2.8.2 Focusing on concepts and making sense of the concepts is challenging

At the start of the project, the research team envisioned that the systematic review of the universe of articles would reveal a clear picture or map of the leader credibility structure and how it relates to other key relational constructs such as trust, honesty, competence, and integrity. As the review progressed, it became more and more evident that there was little consensus over the construct of leader credibility or how it related to these other constructs from a measurement standpoint. Some studies seemed to discuss credibility and trust as if they were interchangeable. Furthermore, many studies created circular logic of the input and outcome variables of credibility. Even a consistent definition of the term was not clear from the existing research on the construct.

To make sense of the leader credibility construct, we identified terms and key concepts used to define leader credibility, behaviors or contexts that build leader credibility, and behaviors or contexts that diminish leader credibility. Once we created these lists of terms and concepts, we coded like terms and came to agreement over our coding structure. Then, informed by the pieces included in our review, we began to conceptually map a picture of the construct. The resulting conceptual

map should prove valuable in creating a more over-arching construct measurement instrument, and it should also prove useful to any others conducting leader credibility research. Following Fisch and Block's (2018) tip, we focused on concepts rather than studies to develop a more complete and unbiased view of the research construct.

2.9 Tip 5: Derive meaningful conclusions

A systematic literature review needs to go beyond categorizing the literature "to synthesize and interpret this knowledge. The literature review should derive meaningful conclusions, identify gaps in the literature, areas for future research, and should answer the question: What do we learn from this summary?" (Fisch and Block 2018, p. 105). As mentioned above in our discussion of traditional reviews, often a literature review is a means to an end where researchers find the articles supporting their viewpoints, and they choose to ignore or include a cursory inclusion of other research that does not fit cleanly in their view or the lens of their article. Instead the review itself should inform the state of the construct under study, and new or future research should be built from the complete picture created in the review. As researchers, diverging views should not dissuade us, but instead they should provide excitement for the opportunities to answer previously unknown truths.

2.10 Our observations, lessons, and implications regarding tip 5

2.10.1 We were intentional about delaying conclusions and allowing each person to work independently

Throughout our process, we resisted the urge to discuss potential conclusions, as this would occur after the review process was complete. If one team member began to discuss potential conclusions, other team members would make a plea to focus on the review and delay concept building until all the information was gathered. We did not want to make early assumptions based on partial information. To not bias each other and create premature results in our work, from an early point in our process, we made a concerted effort to avoid global discussions of the research and specifically included steps throughout the process to address this concern. We avoided allowing one strong article to dominate the discussion, and ultimately dominate our conceptual framework, until we were finished with the review. In other words, we were intentional in adhering to the process and delaying conceptual mapping conclusions until all the literature had been examined and coded. In doing so, the conceptual map created was ultimately formed from the data and from a team consensus of that data, resulting in a critically assessed and unbiased picture of the construct.

While discussing articles, we often became intrigued about a new research idea that became evident or interested in a study that examined the construct in a unique situation. That would likely happen for anyone conducting a systematic literature review. However, it was important to continually remind each other to adhere to the

stated criteria, not make an inclusion decision based merely on a level of interest in an article, and record personal notes on these ideas to discuss later in the process.

2.10.2 As we proceeded with the review, identifying gaps and ideas for future research became easy to do

Since there was a small number of studies that measured leader credibility, we knew there was a gap in the literature, a need for further empirical research, and a need to develop such a definition and construct measure. We also saw from the review that many researchers used the term "leader credibility" without defining that term or how it was conceptualized. In layperson terms, we found the literature on this topic "a mess." We also knew from other literature reviews focused on leadership that one of the strongest streams of research using the term "leader credibility" seemed to frame leader credibility as leader excellence or leader effectiveness. Therefore, early in our process some obvious areas of further study became evident. We documented potential future work and built an extensive research agenda (to this point we have listed approximately 20 ideas for future research). Not only did these discussions help in documenting gaps that appeared to exist in the literature, but the potential publication opportunities also motivated us to remain committed to the process.

2.11 Tip 6: Choose the right balance between breadth and depth

Fisch and Block (2018) explain that reaching a balance between the breadth and depth of the review, "including all relevant studies but only describing important studies.

In more detail in a structured way" (p. 104) is not always easy and depends on how well the literature is developed. They encouraged the use of tables and figures to make sense of very dense information and convey more details about important studies. Sharing lessons learned from their own systematic reviews, they explained it was an iterative process sharpened by the right research question and refined inclusion/exclusion criteria.

2.12 Our observations, lessons, and implications regarding tip 6

2.12.1 We revisited the breadth and depth decision often as we conducted the review

Some literature streams may prove to be well-tested and a systematic review may take on a more meta-analytic approach to document and reconcile the numerous statistical conclusions found in the stream. While others (like the path we pursued) are very untested and extremely fragmented with vague conclusions often supported by little theoretical basis or documented definitional support. Since we applied no time limits in our literature search and we drew material from several fields of study, our review has substantial breadth. Given the lack of clarity related to our construct, this breadth was needed. However, because of the confusion we found among related

constructs and the lack of empirical study, our report will not have great depth, which means we will provide a comprehensive overview without discussing many articles in great detail. As we reviewed and discussed the articles as a team, we often erred on the side of inclusion rather than exclusion. For example, we had to decide whether an article about teacher credibility in the classroom was a form of leader credibility or whether a definition was actually of leader credibility or of something else (source credibility or credibility generally). We included literature if it seemed to be a discussion of leader credibility research but we were very broad in our interpretation of leader. To remain transparent, we recorded these decisions in our notes.

3 Additional tips for systematic literature reviews

In addition to the six tips provided by Fisch and Block (2018), we identified some additional points from our process worthy of mention. These additional three suggested tips include *Use a Research Team Approach Available to Engage in Interaction, Minimize Bias at Every Step, and Delay Judgment and Trust the Process*. These additional ideas do not contradict Fisch and Block's (2018) thoughts, in fact they provide additional support for many of their tips. Refer to Table 1 for an explanation of which factor of the systematic review we believe these tips address. We also discuss them here to show how they impacted our review and contributed to the overall systematic review process.

3.1 Additional tip: use a research team approach available to engage in interaction

3.1.1 Working in a team with face-to-face interaction improved the quality of our review as our team evolved over time

Three of our four team members were new to systematic reviews and the timing of understanding our process evolved at a different pace for each of us. Therefore, it was important for each researcher to see that their contributions were captured as we allowed for time for all team members to understand the process. Being patient and deliberate in limiting our discussions of articles to our inclusion criteria allowed us to reach the same decisions as a group on what to include and not include. We did have disagreements on article inclusion at times that warranted extended discussions. However, these discussions proved useful because they helped us, as a team, to better understand our protocol and the systematic review process. Without frequent in-person interaction, this development would not have progressed as well as it did.

During our interactions, we were able to share different experiences and expertise from different fields, which broadened understanding across our team. Certainly, working as a team helped shorten the time required to progress through the extensive amount of work necessary to conduct a thorough systematic review. Further, our interactions were a catalyst to generating questions and seeking clarification.

While our interaction took significant time, the results mirror a clinical approach to learning, and we believe reflects the scientific roots of a systematic review.

3.1.2 We learned that consensus also improved quality

We periodically had lengthy discussions regarding article inclusion or exclusion criteria. In fact, one recurring discussion addressed inclusion based on research quality. Some systematic reviews limit their scope to top journals or through some other means that attempts to limit inclusion of inadequate research. These decisions are appropriate and completely up to the researchers conducting their systematic reviews. Our discussions on this matter ultimately chose to err on the side of inclusion from multiple literature areas because we felt this particular stream of research was very fragmented compared to other streams. Our tip relates not to this decision but instead to the process regarding these discussions. Instead of taking a democratic process where we would vote on decisions and majority would "win," we chose to discuss each disagreement until all researchers had some degree of acceptance of the decision. This approach likely resulted in longer discussions on these topics, but also led to more consensus building within the group, and therefore, acceptance of our process. This represents another value of frequent face-to-face interactions.

One member of our research team had been a part of other systematic literature reviews with colleagues in separate locations. He commented that because of our regular interactions, this review and the process used was much richer than his previous reviews. Without face-to-face interactions, systematic review teams might incorporate virtual or telephone discussions. We urge team interaction in discussing articles as it provides everyone with a baseline digesting of all works in the review, but at minimum there should be a discussion among those with differing initial reviews.

3.2 Additional tip: minimize bias at every step

3.2.1 Remembering to limit bias throughout the process was an ongoing challenge

To replicate the protocols of an experimental research approach, we implemented some elements to remove or minimize bias. We believe that having more than one researcher review each article was important as it increases interrater reliability. Borrowing from the practice of having more than one expert evaluate or categorize responses, we set out to do the same with the article review process. We also believe it was important to change the mix of researchers reviewing each article. To facilitate this process, we generated a list of articles to be examined and then a graduate assistant made article assignments to pairs of team members, and the pairs of team members were rotated (Member A would work with Member B, and then with Member C, and then with Member D). By using this approach, we removed bias that could be created by having two team members always reviewing the same articles.

We attempted to prevent a researcher from biasing their review of an article by seeing what another person had written. We set up individual folders for each research team member so individuals could work separately and store their comments, reducing

the opportunity for us to contaminate each other's analysis until we met. We also used group folders to allow for the sharing of a master Excel spreadsheet after a same-time meeting with the results of each person's review and our collective decisions. Following each meeting, the lead researcher was responsible for making the changes to the master spreadsheet, but that happened only after an article's review was completed and agreed upon. By incorporating both these shared and individual virtual spaces, we produced a process that allowed individual research thought and creativity, but accomplished our group goals while minimizing bias.

The culture of the research team quickly developed to respect the importance of not biasing another's judgement of an article. It became the norm at a meeting to table the discussion of an article if both reviewers had not completed their review; one might say "wait, I want to make my own evaluation of the article before hearing your thoughts." Interestingly, we found that even with this proclivity for delay, the process continued to move forward consistently because each researcher felt the need to keep up with other team members as we worked through the process.

3.3 Additional tip: delay judgment and trust the process

Our final tip for conducting a systematic literature review was to trust the process and delay reaching conclusions about what the review revealed. At first, we found ourselves wanting to form conclusions based on a small number of articles reviewed early in the process. To see the results revealed in the evidence of the review, it was important to let go of preconceived views of what the literature showed. For example, one of the team member's main reasons for initiating the systematic literature review was to show that an existing stream of research was not strongly grounded in theory. Some of the early articles reviewed seemed to support that argument and the team discussed going ahead and start writing the introduction of a paper making that point. However, as the review continued, that same researcher questioned her initial views and began to see that the stream of research may have been grounded in one of the original sources of credibility research in another field. Although this origin was not often apparent in recent literature, their work may be grounded in a solid foundation. By delaying interpretation and conclusion until the entire review was completed, this team member was open to what the results and evidence revealed.

Our lead researcher, with previous systematic review experience, would remind us to trust the process. He would also do this when we wanted to jump ahead or hurry through a step. He would often return us to the fundamentals and have the team refine the wording of the criteria or ask whether we were asking the right research questions. Soon, he was not the only one that was reminding us to trust the process which subsequently became a strong team norm.

4 Conclusion

Due to its methodical process and thorough examination of a specific research stream, a strong systematic review may result in a fruitful stream of research. For us, this included an article about the process we used, an article updating the field on the history of systematic reviews and its evolution in the management discipline, a qualitative study focused on leader credibility and confusion in the field, and a mirrored qualitative study focused on trust and the confusion between leader credibility and the trust construct. At the conclusion of the systematic review, we will have one or two articles focused on the results. We also anticipate developing a measure of leader credibility and testing that measure. Additional articles may include addressing leader credibility and its potential outcomes. All of these future research ideas stem from our more complete understanding of the current research on the construct of leader credibility that was only possible from the systematic processes.

The systematic literature review in business and management has its origins in the sciences and clinical fields. However, the social sciences research is more often conceptual than empirical in nature, resulting in a more quasi-systematic literature review. This conceptual-focus does not lessen the importance of the technique in producing sound research in the social sciences. In fact, we believe that the systematic literature review brings rigor and a structured framework to making sense of a sometimes confusing, fragmented, and overlapping area of management research. In addition to the six helpful tips identified by the editors of the *Management Review Quarterly*, here we provide our support for their tips and offer three additional tips and practices we used in our research. We look forward to learning from others as we become better stewards of the systematic review process in our discipline with the goal of uncovering takeaways that have value to leaders and managers in practice.

References

Aguinis H, Ramani RS, Alabduljader N (2018) What you see is what you get? Enhancing methodological transparency in management research. Acad Manag Ann 12(1):83–110

Booth A, Sutton A, Papaioannou D (2016) Systematic approaches to a successful literature review. Sage, Los Angeles

Fisch C, Block J (2018) Six tips for your (systematic) literature review in business and management research. Manag Rev Q 68:103–106

Petticrew M (2001) Systematic reviews from astronomy to zoology: myths and misconceptions. BMJ Clin Res 322(7278):98–101

Tranfield D, Denyer D, Smart P (2003) Towards a methodology for developing evidence-informed management knowledge by means of systematic review. Br J Manag 14(3):207–222

Affiliations

W. Randy Clark[1] · Leigh Anne Clark[2] · Deana M. Raffo[3] · Ralph I Williams Jr.[4]

Leigh Anne Clark
la.clark@mtsu.edu

Deana M. Raffo
deana.raffo@mtsu.edu

Ralph I Williams Jr.
ralph.williams@mtsu.edu

[1] Department of Marketing, Jones College of Business, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN 615-494-8953, USA

[2] Department of Management, Jones College of Business, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN 615-494-8672, USA

[3] Department of Management, Jones College of Business, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN 615-494-8713, USA

[4] Department of Management, Jones College of Business, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN 615-898-2825, USA