Beyond synthesis: Contemporary and innovative approaches for analysing and presenting research literature

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Abstract
This tutorial will introduce participants to a number of recently published, and forthcoming papers which present innovative techniques for analysing and presenting research literature, and follows a highly successful and very well-subscribed workshop at ECIS 2013. The motivation for the tutorial is that there has been a “sea change” in leading journals in our field. “The need to publish more literature reviews and theory development papers is crying for EJIS and beyond for the IS community….The CAIS call for a Special Issue on literature review this year might send a strong signal and change the quality if not the frequency of the genre in IS” (Rowe, 2014, p. 241). This is accompanied by a recognition that literature reviews need to move beyond the usual advice of synthesizing and summarising (Rowe, 2014). While much recent advice is aimed at encouraging the development of high quality literature review papers, it is equally pertinent for the development of the literature review sections of research papers. In this task also, expectations of quality and rigour are getting higher, and the range of approaches available is expanding.

In this tutorial, we will present a range of alternatives for conceptualizing and conducting literature reviews, either as a stand-alone literature review papers, or to contextualize other research. These will be based on recent and high profile research by the presenters and other scholars, and will include:

The purpose and genre of the literature review: e.g. describing previous research; understanding a specific phenomenon in the light of previous research; conceptualising the various strands of discourse and key trends in a stream of research or even a discipline or sub-discipline as a whole; generating new theory; critically engaging with previous literature to identify biases, gaps and opportunities. While information systems literature reviews usually affect neutrality, or the so-called “God trick” of “seeing everything from nowhere”, a range of other perspectives are possible. These include (among others): a critical view, aimed at identifying ideological hegemonies and alternative perspectives; an (initially) atheoretical and grounded approach, aimed at theory building.
(Wolfswinkel, Furtmueller, & Wilderom, 2011); or a post-positivist approach using existing theoretical constructs.

**Best practice:** While there are many possible approaches, some themes are common to many of the methods we present, in particular, the necessity for rigour and transparency in all stages of searching, selecting, and analysing research literature.

**Contemporary Methods, approaches and tools:** A major focus of the tutorial will be to introduce alternative methods (beyond the usual “narrative synthesis”) for analysing research literature. We will introduce a grounded approach (Wolfswinkle et al. 2011), and an ontology-based approach for meta-analysis and identifying new research agendas (Ramaprasad & Syn, 2013) Two presentations will be offered by researchers who have recently published high profile literature analysis methods and have further research in the pipeline.

The tutorial leaders have all published papers on approaches for reviewing research literature, as well as literature review papers, in leading journals and conferences, including the European Journal of Information Systems, Behaviour and Information Technology, Communications of the AIS, the European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS). Dr Tate and Dr Furtmueller are currently guest editors of a forthcoming special issue of CAIS dedicated to the literature review in information systems.

**Activities**
Due to time constraints there will not be an opportunity for in depth activities. However, the sessions will be interactive, with plenty of time for questions and discussion as to how these techniques might be applied to the participants’ own research projects. These will also be extensive practical examples.

**Outline**

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Overview</th>
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<tr>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>Introductions, goal setting for the tutorial session (all)</td>
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| 20 minutes | Best practice and “the new normal”  
Deciding the purpose and genre of the literature review  
Paradigms, world-views and the implications for literature analysis  
Overview of methods, approaches and tools  
(Furtmueller and Tate) |
| 30 minutes | A rigorous, systematic and grounded approach to reviewing, analysing and presenting research literature (Furtmueller). This method was presented in a high impact paper recently published in EJIS. |
| 30 minutes | Ontological meta-analysis and synthesis – a powerful, easy-to-use approach for identifying gaps in research literature and proposing new research questions. This method has recently been very well received following presentations at international IS conferences. |

