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## EVALUATION OF PRECEDENT RESEARCH/ REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter introduces the evaluation of precedent research to support a research project.<sup>8</sup>

Every researcher designs investigations based on research foundations established by others. Some may have researched the chosen topic or related topics. Other researchers will have laid the perspective (theory) bases for approaching, interpreting, and applying research about the chosen topic. A wise researcher will carefully evaluate the bases upon which to design any new research. Often, useful precedent research will be present in divergent disciplinary approaches. For example, history, anthropology, theology, economics, comparative religion, political science, and geographical/ecological studies may all contribute in addressing a single mis-siological research issue. Different disciplines provide different windows into the issue. This chapter introduces what is often called a “review of the literature.”

A researcher should review or evaluate two kinds of literature: secondary sources and primary sources. Secondary sources are sources written *about* the subject at hand. Primary sources *are* the subject or are *participants with or eyewitnesses* to the subject. Historians using diaries, letters, and interviews with eyewitnesses (all primary sources) write historical accounts (secondary sources) about the subject. A theologian would use Luke-Acts (a primary source) to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the church at the time of the apostles. The same theologian would use the writings of the second century historians (secondary sources) to supplement the study. The same theologian might use the writings of other twentieth century

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<sup>8</sup> In this chapter, the phrases “review of precedent research” or “evaluation of precedent” research will be used as a synonym for review of the literature.

theologians' writings about the same subject who had gone back to study the original text (secondary sources) to determine the extent of what had been written about the subject, to determine what new contributions the present research might offer or whether the study was simply for personal enrichment. If, on the other hand, the theologian had as the central focus of the study what second century historians thought, then their writings would be the *primary sources*.

An anthropologist would read all of the ethnographies and worldview studies (secondary sources) available about a people in preparation to examine primary sources such as personal observations and interviews with the people.

Several key questions in this chapter focus around the issue of precedent research, including the following:

- Why consider others' research?
- Relating research logic to precedent research;
- Basic issues in reviewing precedent research;
- Where to look;
- Selection of appropriate precedent research or literature;
- Documentation, and
- An overview of the review process.

“Library” research and “precedent” research are distinguished in this chapter. “Library” research simply refers to the broad use of library resources for research purposes. Libraries provide repositories of books, dissertations, theses, journals, microforms, digitized information, online databases, and many other kinds of other archived materials. Moreover, libraries provide important links to vast information networks and incomprehensible stores of data and information beyond their geographic locations. One may do either primary or original research with original documents (primary sources) in libraries. Or, one may use the resources of a library to establish the foundations for additional research (secondary sources). The latter is the main focus of this chapter. Both original research and research in precedent studies may be done in a library. Simply to refer to one's research as “library research” reflects a naive view of research. Researchers must be careful not to confuse the more general term “library research” with the more specific term “precedent research.” This chapter seeks to describe the foundations for doing original research by an evaluation of research that has already been done.

## Why Consider Others' Research?

Before engaging in any research, one should consider what research has been done previously about the topic. What has been done previously provides the means to:

- Validate the significance and scope of the central research issue
- Establish the boundaries of what has been previously researched so appropriate research questions may be raised
- Provide the perspective(s) or theory to investigate and interpret what is found
- Establish values or criteria for an evaluative study
- Set the research in the broader context of what has already been researched about the topic

### Central Research Issue Significance Validation

The evaluation of precedent research should establish the significance of the existing research. As one begins to explore what research others have done about the topic and topics related to the project at hand, the significance of one's own research soon becomes apparent. The degree to which others have examined the issue in the past or have expressed the need for research in the area provides a basis on which one may judge the significance of the present project and the appropriate scope of the project. While a specific topic may lack much focus or attention in precedent research, a broader reading may reveal its importance to the community. One may find statements in articles, books, online, or research studies calling for or recommending research in new areas or for the proposed research topic. For example, research is currently limited to missiological principles for evangelizing and nurturing the second- and third-generation Korean Americans. However, other research provides much insight about second and third generation converts, not only among immigrant communities in the United States, but other Asians and peoples from the Pacific Rim, as well as Africans and Europeans. Each immigrant community will differ significantly because of its own culture and reasons for immigration. Communities who were displaced because of slavery, economic pressures, religious persecution or natural disasters all face both unique and common challenges. The cultural distance between the immigrant community and the receptor community including the religious divergence emerges as one

