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Writing a Qualitative Master Thesis at the Department of HRM & Organization: Structure, Contents and Checklist

Make sure to define all relevant terms when these are mentioned the first time. Think of what an average fellow student who is not familiar with your topic knows. If you have good reason to doubt that an average fellow student does know the respective term, define it. Do not "discuss" different definitions, but rather **pick a suitable definition from the literature, cite the respective source and proceed!**

1. Introduction

- Start with a "grabber", i.e. with something that attracts the **interest** of the reader.
- Following the grabber, you **motivate** and **define** your **constructs** of interest and **demonstrate** a **research gap**.
- Based on that you derive your **research question** and **convince the reader of its relevance.**
- **Formulate your research question explicitly and with a question mark!** Your research question should include your constructs of interest.
- Briefly describe your **research approach** and the **interview target group** used to address your research question.
- The **last paragraph** in your introduction is devoted to describing how you will **proceed**. Refer to the respective chapters (e.g., by writing „in chapter 2, I derive/argue/discuss…"). Comment on all the relevant steps you will take to answer your research question. Deciding on how to structure your argument is an essential task of your Master Thesis. So, take all the efforts it needs to make clear how your argument is developed!

2. Literature review

- **Each Qualitative Master Thesis at our Department does include a literature review.**
- In a Qualitative Master Thesis, the main function of the literature review is to **provide a contextual background** for your research question.
- Accordingly, in the literature review you **synthesize findings from existing studies**. Focus on those aspects of the literature that are **directly relevant to your research question**.
- The aim is not to be exhaustive, but to provide a foundation for the later interpretation of your findings.
- Tip: In qualitative research, the relationship between literature review and empirical findings is often **iterative**. This means that **insights from the literature may be revisited and refined throughout the research process**.

3. Methodology

- Your methodology section **consists of four sections**: research design, research setting, data collection and data analysis.
- **Research design**: It is important to name your **approach** and **justify** why it is suitable for answering your research question. Further, explain briefly how your study is **grounded in prior research** by positioning it at the intersection of relevant literature streams.
- **Research setting:** Clearly describe the type of organizations or environments where the study takes place, including relevant characteristics such as industry, and explain the **rationale** for selecting this setting.
- **Data collection:** Explain how you gathered your data, including the method used (interviews), and describe the process (e.g., timeframe, interview guideline, tools, recording, transcription). Within this section you have to include a **table showing the respondents' demographic characteristics while ensuring anonymity**.
- **Data analysis:** You mainly describe how you analyzed your data, including your coding procedures. You have to include an **illustration of how you assigned quotes to your first-order codes** and an **illustration of your data structure** in your data analysis section.
- You are expected to **code the data yourself**, **without** the assistance of **AI**.

4. Findings

- When writing your **findings section**, organize your results **according to your data structure**.
- A rule of thumb is to include at least **one quote for each first-order code**. Make sure **quotes** are clearly visible by using **indentation** and **italics**.
- Whenever possible, **incorporate additional literature** to contextualize your findings.
- After presenting each second-order code, you may formulate a **proposition** that summarizes your findings.
- Based on your findings (and the theoretical propositions), you may then be able to develop a **theoretical model**. If you develop a theoretical model, include not only a figure but also an explanation of the model.

5. Discussion

- You should start by addressing the **theoretical implications** of your study. Explain how your findings/theoretical model contribute to existing theories or literature streams. Be explicit about the relevance of your results for the academic field.
- Next, offer **managerial or practical implications**, by describing why your findings are important for practitioners, organizations, or policymakers. Offer **concrete recommendations** based on your results.
- Finally, reflect on **the limitations of your study** and **suggest directions for future research**. Describe the shortcomings of your own study, provide a defense against potential criticism, and propose ideas for further advancing the field. This **three-step structure** should be applied to every limitation you discuss.

6. Conclusion

- Sum up the **main results** of your thesis in a way that is generally understandable.
- Do not describe how you proceeded when you wrote the thesis (First, … then …). Rather concentrate on your **results** and what can be learnt from them.

References

- **Stick to our binding** Formal Guidelines
- Make sure that **all** sources mentioned in the running text are listed in the reference list and vice versa!

Appendix

- **Interview guideline:** Include the final version of your interview guideline in the appendix. If any interviews were conducted in English, please include the English version of the guideline. If all interviews were conducted in German, please include the German version.
- **Coding overview:** Include a table in the appendix listing all your first-order codes grouped by their corresponding second-order codes.

Checklist

Introduction		Motivated research question?
		Defined and motivated all relevant constructs?
		Demonstrated a research gap?
		Formulated research question as a question?
		Described proceedings with chapter references?
Literature review		Provided a contextual background for your research question?
		Focused only on literature directly relevant to your research question?
Methodology		Stated and justified research approach?
		Positioned within relevant literature streams?
		Described and justified study environment?
		Explained how you gathered your data?
		Included a table showing the respondents' demographic characteristics?
		Described your coding procedures?
		Included an illustration of how you assigned quotes to your first-order codes?
		Included an illustration of your data structure?
Findings		Organized your findings according to your data structure?
		Used quotes to illustrate your findings?
		Incorporated additional literature to contextualize your findings?
		Optional: Formulated propositions to summarize your findings?
		Optional: Developed a theoretical model?
Discussion		Explained how your findings/theoretical model contributes to existing theories/literature streams?
		Offered implications for practitioners and/or policymakers?
		Discussed limitations, addressed potential criticisms, and suggested future research directions?
Conclusion		Compactly summarized the findings?
		Answered research question?
General		Abided formal guidelines for scientific writing? (see Formal Guidelines)
		Avoided plagiarism? (see Plagiarism guidelines)
		Marked direct and indirect quotes?
		Used action titles (where possible and appropriate)?
		Paid attention to flow of text (appropriate transitions)?
		Used terms consistently?
		Documented use of AI? (see Statutory Declaration)
		Included interview guideline in the appendix?
		Statutory declaration signed and included?