

Impacts of Aging Baby Boomer on Civil Service Workforce

Literature Review Essay

Impacts of Aging Baby Boomers on Civil Service Workforce: A Critical Analysis of the

Literature

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Introduction

There is a growing body of literature on how aging of the baby boomer generation is, and will continue, to impact the civil service workforce. Do these profound shifts in demographics present an opportunity or a burden, and how should human resource management (HRM) respond? The literature is divided in terms of what the primary impacts will be around the predicted wave of baby boomer retirements, and how organizations should respond. It also points out the paradoxes of what organizations, governments, and individuals should be doing to prepare for the impending boomer retirement wave, and what is actually being done.

The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze the literature on aging baby boomers and their impacts on the civil service workforce, in particular, how HRM should respond to these changing demographics, issues and trends. In it I analyze the paradoxes presented and the information left out. I also call into question the relevance of recent academic research on this issue given the current declines in the credit markets, the stock market, and government and individual retirement portfolios. Will boomers even be able to retire given their recent losses, or is the current academic literature moot?

Changing Demographics, Issues, and Trends

Demographic Shift: An Opportunity or a Concern?

Though the research literature is considerably varied regarding the impacts of aging baby boomers on the workforce, they all seem to agree on one thing: That the approximately 76 to 78 million baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964 represent both a “blessing and a curse to organizations” (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008, p. 70). In order to explain their reasoning, most authors use statistical data from the Government

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Accountability Office (GAO), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), or the Department of Labor (DOL) to make their points. And, though the numbers are presented in various ways, one need only look at the overall trends to see the extent of the issues.

According to Lavigna (2005), for example, baby boomers make up 28 percent of the total population, and even larger percent of the labor force. In 1978 boomers ages 15 to 32 made up 45 percent of the workforce. As they age, so does the average age of workers (Dohm, 2000). From 1998 to 2008, the number of workers age 45 and older increased by 17 million, while only 13 million workers age 25 to 44 were available to take their place (Dohm, 2000). Van Horn, Krepcio, and Ridley (2006) describe the problem in similar terms, but with a slightly different set of statistics. They state that from 2006 until 2016, the number of workers age 45 and older will grow by 27 percent, while the number of workers age 16 to 44 will only increase by 3 percent (p. 1).

Dohm (2000) explains that baby boomers now account for 40 percent of the overall workforce and that 54 percent of these workers are expected to leave the workforce in the next 10 years. The GAO describes how the growing percentage of workers age 65 and older is going to increase from 12.4 percent in 2000 to nearly 20 percent in 2030 (GAO, 2007), with a total of 30 million baby boomers leaving the workforce between the years 2000 and 2020 (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008). West (as cited in Condrey, 2005), describes this process as “the graying of America” and explains that the number of Americans in the forty-five to sixty four age group increased by 34 percent between 1990 and 2000 (p. 165).

Some authors are more succinct in their concerns. Kaye and Cohen (2008) state that everyday 11,000 new boomers reach the age of 50, and that, by 2010, this group will be

“retiring in droves” (p. 30). They also explain that there are only 43 million Gen Xers (the post boomer generation) available to take the place of the approximately 76 million boomers. There simply are “not enough young workers to fill the void of those departing” (Kaye & Cohen, 2008, p. 8).

Other authors are dire in their description of what these numbers represent. Former GAO Comptroller General, David Walker warns that American employers face a "demographic tsunami" (Scorza, n.d., para. 2). The U.S. labor force is expected to shrink to less than a fifth of what it is today by the year 2025, while the number of workers per retiree is expected to rise from one to five in 2000 to one to three in 2050 (GAO, 2007). Retiring baby boomers will have a detrimental impact on both the federal budget and the U.S. labor force (GAO, 2007, p. 4). This leaves, what Lavigna (2005) describes as an impending “workforce crisis” (p. 8).

Regardless of the exact data sets and how they’re presented, the literature seems to agree on one thing: The number of boomers leaving the workforce is considerably larger than the number entering, and that this reality does not bode well for U.S. industries and government agencies which rely on a steady supply of workers, nor the federal budget, which will be expected to pay social security benefits to a growing number of retirees. Most concur that the impending wave of baby boomer retirements could be disastrous (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Corporate Board, 2000; Dohm, 2000; Dolezalek, 2007; GAO, 2007; GAO, 2008; Giuliano, Townes, & Skinner, 2003; Lavigna, 2005; Kaye & Cohen, 2008; Scorza, n.d.; Trahant, 2008; Volker, 2003; Willett, 2006).

Impacts of Baby Boomer Retirements

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There are several different views in the literature on the specific impacts of baby boomers reaching retirement. Most revolve around the paradoxical question, are aging baby boomers a cost or an asset? Many authors (Callanan and Greenhouse, 2008; Corporate Board, 2000; Dohm, 2000; Dolezalek, 2007; GAO, 2007; GAO, 2008; Kaye & Cohen, 2008; Lavigna, 2005; Prenda & Stahl, 2001; Trahant, 2008; Van Horn et al., 2006; Willett, 2006), believe boomers are an asset, and predict not only a labor shortage, but a significant loss of institutional skills, knowledge and leadership as these skilled baby boomers move into retirement. However, many of these same authors also cite the strain such a large number of retirees will create on local, state, and federal budgets, not to mention, organizational health, pension and benefit plans, as these older people begin to draw social security, pensions, and seek more government services (Callanan & Greenhouse, 2008; Dohm, 2000; GAO, 2007; GAO, 2008; Van Horn et. al., 2006; Willett, 2006). This dichotomy was best summed up by Lindorff (2006, as cited in Callanan & Greenhouse, 2008), when he said, “how are you going to live with Boomers and how are you going to live without them?” (p. 71).

Most authors tend to focus on the problems associated with the retirement of highly skilled baby boomers ((Callanan and Greenhouse, 2008; Corporate Board, 2000; Dohm, 2000; Dolezalek, 2007; GAO, 2007; GAO, 2008; Giuliano, Townes, & Skinner, 2003; Kaye & Cohen, 2008; Lavigna, 2005; Prenda & Stahl, 2001; Trahant, 2008; Volker, 2003; Willett, 2006). Far fewer state the obvious; that there is a considerable group of older boomers who are not highly skilled, nor highly valued. Many of these workers, due to a variety of factors, are being forced into early retirement by either lay offs, downsizing, outsourcing or pure ageism; and these employees find themselves in

precarious positions of being unwanted in a culture that often prefers younger workers to old, and offers few services for those who need to continue to work (Dolezalek, 2007; Van Horn et. al., 2006).

It is curious to note that, while 90% of boomers have high school diplomas, only 30% have bachelor's degrees or higher (Willett, 2006, p. 2) but little of the literature focuses on the impacts of these aging unskilled boomers and the significant issues that surround them. These workers present a particular problem in that they are considered much more expendable by employers, have considerably more trouble finding new work once laid off, do not have much in the way of skills or retirement savings, and will need many more government services than their highly skilled counter parts (Van Horn, et, al, 2006). And all this will be happening just at a time when government entitlement programs will be growing, and government workers will be retiring in large numbers from these same service agencies that are expected to serve this growing group of new and existing retirees (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Dohm, 2000). It is hard to say which is the larger problem; the retiring wave of highly skilled boomers, or the large needs gap between the growing number of older displaced workers and the services available to assist them. But one thing is clear; the literature focuses more on the former than the latter; perhaps because many of the authors likely fall into this category.

Impacts on Civil Service Workforce

The impacts of baby boomer retirement on the government's civil service workforce are predicted to be considerably more severe than in other sectors. (Lavigna, 2005; GAO, 2007; GAO, 2008; Volker, 2003; Willett, 2003). This is because the public sector has a higher percentage of aging baby boomers than the private sector (Dohm, 2000; GAO,

2008; Lavigna, 2005; Volker, 2003; Willett, 2003). The literature points out several possible reasons for this phenomenon. *The Volker Report* (2003) explains that government enjoyed a high level of trust in the mid 1960's, which encouraged the entry of many idealistic young boomers who wanted to make a difference. Since then, trust in government has eroded as a result of poor performance, an inflexible and entrenched bureaucracy, and unmet public expectations, making the civil service much less attractive to Gen Xers and the generations beyond.

Lavigna (2005) addresses the same issue from a slightly different vantage point. He states that the public sector has not been able to compete well for new talent due to decades of government bashing that framed public servants as lazy and incompetent, effectively rendering public service as a poor career option. Both Volker and Lavigna agree, however, that poor compensation and a cumbersome hiring process, has made it much more difficult for the government to compete with the private sector for the best and brightest workers.

Regardless of the reasons, the large number of boomers approaching retirement in the public sector is a concern for many authors (Dohm, 2000; GAO, 2008; Lavigna, 2005; Willett, 2007) Certain areas of government will be harder hit than others by the impending boomer retirement wave. School districts, according to Willett (2006), will need to replace 400,000 elementary and 350,000 secondary teachers in the near term (p.3). Other areas of the civil service that will be hard hit by boomer retirement are nursing, education administrators, public administration officials, social workers, public defenders, financial managers, and police and fire personnel (pp. 3-4). The GAO (2008) states that all areas of the federal government will soon see 33% of its workforce retire in

the form of aging baby boomers (p.3). It identifies four federal agencies that will be particularly hard hit by boomer retirement trends: The Small Business Administration (SBA), the Agency for International Development (USAID), HUD, and the Department of Transportation (DOT). In addition, 64 percent of federal career executives will be eligible for retirement by the year 2012 (GAO, 2008, pp. 2-3), while the Social Security Administration (SSA) is expected to lose “a substantial portion of its workforce – at a time when it will experience unprecedented growth in the demand for services” (GAO, 2008, p. 3).

The retirement boom in the public sector is further exacerbated by the use of defined benefit plans that allows civil servants to retire earlier with full benefits than their private sector counterparts. Dohm (2000) explains that government defined benefit pension plans provide “the maximum economic benefits to those who retire at the earliest possible age of pension eligibility” (Dohm, 2002, p. 21). Those in the private sector, by contrast, can usually only retire when they have accumulated enough funds in their 401(k) defined contribution plans. Most have no guaranteed pension. But the literature agrees that the payout of defined pensions to a growing number of retirees will prove to be a double whammy for governments who will be struggling to handle both a labor shortage and a pension-heavy budget strain (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; GAO, 2007; GAO, 2008; Van Horn et al., 2006; Willett, 2006). These problems will be exacerbated by the general good health and expected longevity of the baby boomer generation compared to prior retirees (GAO, 2007; Willett, 2006).

Strategies and Obstacles in Dealing with Boomer Retirements

Delaying Boomer Retirements

Though the reasons may vary, whether the focus is on the impending labor shortage, brain drain, strain on government budgets and services, or lack of financial preparedness for retirement, most authors concur that, in general, workers should be encouraged to delay retirement (Dohm, 2000; GAO, 2007; GAO, 2008; Lavigna, 2005; Van Horn et. al., 2006; Willett, 2007). The literature outlines many advantages of retaining older workers and postponing retirement for both the government and the individuals. Dolezalek (2007) for example, offers this advice to organizations on how to prepare for the impending labor shortage: “part of your strategy should be to hang on to your boomers for as long as you can” (p. 2). Willet laments that aging baby boomers, “Are not saving or investing enough (and many not at all) for their retirement years” (p. 3). Callanan & Greenhouse (2008) state that, “the en masse retirement of the baby boom generation will put pressure on those remaining in the workforce to support, economically, the retirees” (p. 73). While former GAO Director Walker warns that the upcoming strains of boomer retirement could slow economic growth, reduce government revenues and bankrupt social security. “Engaging and retaining older workers is critical for promoting economic growth, improving federal finances, and shoring up retirees’ income security” (GAO, 2007, p. 12). To that, he emphatically states “It is in the nation’s interest for people to work longer...” (GAO, 2007, p. 1).

Hiring and Retaining Older Workers

The literature describes several organizational advantages to hiring and retaining older workers. Several authors (Condrey, 2005; GAO, 2008; Prenda & Stahl, 2001) cite research stating that older workers are sick less, have better attendance records, fewer on the job injuries, less alcohol and drug addictions, have better interpersonal relations,

stronger work ethics, and use fewer health care benefits than younger employees with children. Dolezalek (2007) states some older workers may be willing to work for less because they have fewer financial needs and work more to feel useful (p. 5). Older workers are also more loyal (if treated well) and can also help transfer skills to younger workers in an orderly fashion (Kaye & Cohen, 2008)

However, this issue also highlights a major paradox presented in the literature: It is in the best interest of workers, organizations and governments if older employees stay in the workforce longer; however at the same time, older workers are being laid off, forced into retirement or downsized at ever greater rates (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Condrey, 2005; GAO, 2007; GAO, 2008; Van Horn et al., 2006).

The GAO outlines the considerable obstacles older workers face in staying in the workforce. These include misperceptions on the part of employers about the cost of hiring and retaining older workers; age discrimination, lack of suitable work, lack of training to keep skills up to date, layoffs due to a changing economy, strong financial incentives to retiring sooner, and lack of flexible work opportunities and benefit plans that meet older workers needs. (GAO, 2007). In addition, Callanan and Greenhaus (2008), describe how the sheer volume of well-qualified workers in the baby boom generation, allowed employers to see them as expendable and value them less (p. 74).

Myths and Stereotypes on Aging and Performance

By far, the biggest impediment outlined in the literature to older workers remaining in the workforce is ageism: The myths and stereotypes that surround aging and performance. In general the myths assume that older workers are in poor health, have less stamina, less mental capacity, more injuries, more absenteeism, use more health benefits,

are more fearful, less efficient, more accident prone, and can't or won't learn new skills (Kaye & Cohen, 2008; Prenda & Stahl, 2001). Kaye and Cohen (2008) describe how older workers are considered a poor investment and denied training, developmental opportunities and advancements. This, in turn creates a self-fulfilling prophesy as older workers are denied the very training and opportunities that can keep them active, productive and engaged (2008, p. 8). In addition, false perceptions on older workers can cause human resource departments to seek a strategy of ridding themselves of older workers, just at a time when demographic trends suggest they should be attempting to retain and invest in older workers (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008, p. 76). The literature points out that there is little or no evidence that prevailing myths around aging and productivity are accurate, and, in many instances, the opposite is true (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Condrey, 2005; GAO, 2007; GAO, 2008; Prenda & Stahl, 2001). And, while it will be nearly impossible for organizations to change as long as ageism persists, Callanan and Greenhaus are clear on the eventual outcomes: "The inevitability of the coming labor shortage and the need to have highly skilled workers with institutional knowledge will eventually force organizations to develop human resource strategies that are responsive to the challenges of the aging baby boom workers" (2008, pp 76-77).

Managerial Strategies for Dealing with an Aging Workforce

Many authors outline various strategies organizations can use to recruit and retain older workers in an attempt to avert future labor and skill shortages (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Corporate Board, 2000; Dolezalek, 2007; GAO, 2007; GAO, 2008; Giuliano et. al., 2003; Lavigna, 2005; Kaye & Cohen, 2008; Trahan, 2008; Volker, 2003; Willett, 2006). At the top of this list is the need to reduce ageism in the workforce:

“Organizations must first overcome the negative biases toward older workers before they can enact any programs designed to attract, retain, or develop these workers” (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008, p. 76).

Once ageism is removed, many authors offer a variety of suggestions for dealing with an aging workforce. Several suggest providing incentives that might appeal to older workers and encourage them to stay, including more flexible work hours, fewer hours or working more from home (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Corporate Board, 2000; Dolezalek, 2007; Prenda & Stahl, 2001). Providing opportunities to transition more slowly from full time work to full time retirement was also encouraged (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Dolezalek, 2007; Kaye & Cohen, 2008; Prenda & Stahl, 2001), as was providing work spaces that accommodate aging workers reduced physical capacities (Callahan & Greenhaus, 2008; Prenda & Stahl, 2001).

Some authors encouraged more training opportunities for older workers (Callahan and Greenhaus, 2008; Dolezalek, 2007). Some suggested making changes in pension and retirement plans that allow older workers to continue accruing retirement benefits while doing transition work, and allowing workers to claim some retirement benefits while reducing worked hours (Dolezalek, 2007; GAO, 2007; GAO, 2008; Willett, 2006). Many suggested benefit plans that appeal to different life-cycle phases including preretirement planning seminars, onsite clinics, and assistance with elder care (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Corporate Board, 2000; Dolezalek, 2007; Kaye & Cohen, 2008).

Other authors encourage more strategic planning as a way to avert a workforce disaster particularly in government (GAO, 2007; GAO, 2008; Giuliano, 2003; Lavigna, 2005; Trahan, 2008; Volker, 2003). Lavigna (2005) outlines how some public

organizations are already reforming their HR systems to bring them into the 21st century. These changes include: Aggressively marketing public service as a way to make a positive contribution, creating quick and easy online application processes, create hiring and retention bonuses, performance-based compensation programs, allow on-the-spot hiring to fill critical positions, instituting formal succession programs, allow phased (or transitional) retirement options (p. 8). Most importantly, Lavigna outlines the need to incorporate strategic workforce planning that would allow organizations to predict their current and future workforce needs, and create HR policies and plans to meet them (2008, p. 8)

In an attempt to position itself for the future, the GAO is encouraging the federal government to become the workplace of choice for older workers. Suggestions for doing so include the development of workforce and succession planning to forecast retirement trends and labor shortages, with strategies for dealing with both, including attempts to retain older, experienced workers that can help transfer skills to the next generation. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) also allows use of flexible hiring practices that can be used to retain skilled, older workers including: Dual compensation waivers for federal retirees so they can fill important positions without loss of retirement benefits, temporary appointments for short-term needs, use of consulting or commercial contractual arrangement to fill short term needs, on-the-spot hiring without competition to fill critical positions with OPM approval, and Veteran recruitment appointments (GAO, 2008, pp. 11-13). In addition, federal agencies have the ability to offer a variety of work schedules that appeal to the needs of older workers including: Part-time work, flexible work schedules, and telecommuting options (GAO, 2008, p. 13). And, finally,

federal agencies have the ability to provide additional compensation to employees it hopes to retain, including recruitment, relocation and retention bonuses and raising the pay rate of critical positions with OPM approval (GAO, 2008; Volker, 2003).

The Volker report also cites the need to improve the speed of the hiring process, and federal recruitment, retention and training efforts around human capital as other critical concerns. And it lists OPM efforts to utilize online technology to recruit new employees, offer virtual job fairs, and educate federal agencies about legally allowed flexible hiring options open to them. (Volker, 2003, pp. 28-29). However, the Volker Report also encourages use of early retirement incentives at the executive and judicial level in an attempt to “reshape workforces to correct skill imbalances” (p. 28). Curiously, these are two of the areas that the GAO cites as the greatest concern for retirement and skill losses (GAO, 2008, p. 7). Purging the executive and judicial branches of career civil servants and replacing them with younger workers of a more conservative bent may be inline with current administration strategies for insuring implementation of its ideological objectives; something that appears to be encouraged in Volker’s findings.

Finally, authors, such as Trahan (2008), suggests government organizations begin by asking critical human capital questions: How can we compete with the private sector for the best talent? How can we improve the bonds between our employees and our mission? How can we capitalize on people’s motivation to make a difference through public service? (p. 36). Questions like these may be the best place to start.

Conclusion

The literature outlines several paradoxes at play around the issue of retiring baby boomers. These include whether older workers are considered a burden or an asset,

whether they should be retained or let go, whether organizations would be better off investing in or divesting themselves of these older workers, and what is the perceived versus real capacity of older workers themselves? The literature also outlines a number of different strategies organizations and HR departments can employ in order to better prepare themselves and their workforces for the coming demographic shift through a process of succession and workforce planning. The literature is less voluminous around what to do about the vast number of less skilled aging boomers, and how their needs will impact labor and governments. In addition, the literature makes no predictions about what might happen to many retirement plans in the wake of the current economic collapse, and what this might mean for organizations, governments and individuals alike.

Given current circumstances, I posit that the transition of baby boomers into retirement will occur more slowly than predicted, and over a longer period of time. This, in turn, will allow organizations, HR departments and individuals more time to prepare for upcoming realities. Organizations will have access to their older, skilled workforce longer than predicted, as the ability of future retirees to spend a considerable percentage of their lives in retirement, under the circumstances, may prove to be unrealistic. Governments will not have to pay out retirement benefits at the rates predicted, and older workers will continue working and contributing to the tax base and their retirement savings longer. The current economic reality will change the parameters of most, if not all, of the literature on this issue. The demographic shift that will inevitably occur by aging baby boomers may end up being much more impacted by the reality of death than the possibility of retirement.

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APPENDIX A
Outline with Instructor Comments

Kristi, This looks like a very interesting subject. You have got a good start on a reference list.

Kristi Laguzza-Boosman
Literature Review Outline
MMPA 6275-01

Impacts of Aging Baby Boomers on Civil Service Workforce: A Critical Analysis of the Literature (w.t.)

- I. Introduction
 - A. There is a growing body of literature on how aging of the baby boomer generation is, and will continue, to impact the civil service workforce. Do these profound shifts in demographics present an opportunity or a burden, and how should human resource management respond?
 - B. The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze the literature on aging baby boomer and their impacts on the civil service workforce, in particular, how HRM should respond to these changing demographics, issues and trends.
 - C. Overview Statement for Entire Paper
- II. Changing Demographics, Issues, and Trends
 - A. Section Overview Statement
 - B. Demographic Shift: An Opportunity or a Concern?
 - C. Myths and Stereotypes on Aging and Performance
 - D. Legal Trends on Aging Workers
 - E. Managerial Strategies for Dealing with an Aging Workforce
 - F. Summary/Transition
- III. Text
- IV. Conclusion

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APPENDIX B Checklist: Literature Review Essay*

Using the Checklist. This list summarizes the standards for this assignment. It should be carefully utilized in the preparation of outlines and papers. It should not merely accompany the assignment without ensuring that each of the guidelines were followed. Please ask about them if they are not clear. Papers received without this checklist and instructor-reviewed outline and draft paper, lose one letter grade.

Format Requirements

- klb_ 1. Use a title page. Does the title/subtitle reflect the theme of the essay? Is it succinct? Is it alluded to in the text?
- klb__ 2. Comparable to a book review, list all major sources consulted, in proper style and single spaced, at the top of page one.
- klb_ 3. Does the Introduction succinctly state and limit itself to the nature of the *public administration* topic that the report addresses? Does it describe the entire paper in less than 2 pages? Are the theme(s) of the essay clearly identified?
- klb_ 4. Does the body of the paper (about 10 pages) provide an overview of representative works in a logical manner? Does it begin with a statement characterizing the literature? Is a brief summary provided at the end of the body?
- klb_ 5. Do the findings/recommendations in the Conclusion section (1-2 pages) flow directly from the text and the theme(s) articulated in the Introduction?
- klb_ 6. Do all references follow APA? (for crib sheet, see <http://menthelp.net/guide/pro25.htm>)
- klb_ 7. Is your draft outline (with the instructor's comments in it), as well as this sheet, attached to the front of the paper? It is not necessary to submit a revised outline. See Appendix A & B at end.

Style Hints

- ___ 1. Use proper top/bottom, right/left margins throughout; avoid excessive spacing when setting off section headings.
- ___ 2. Utilize overview or "contract" statements to introduce the paper and each section of it. Provide a brief summary and/or transition statement at the end of each section.
- ___ 3. Sentences and paragraphs are not to be excessive in their length. Avoid repeating terms when synonyms can be used.
- ___ 4. When making a series of five or more points in one sentence or paragraph, indent, number, single space, and list them in a column.
- ___ 5. Ensure that the tense used in the paper is consistent throughout.
- ___ 6. Indent and single space quotations five or more lines in length; do not use quotation marks for such quotations. Avoid excessive use of such quotations.

*Remember that this assignment is primarily a critical analysis of the literature on a topic--not general term paper that merely describes the subject. That is, it should be an integrative work that critically evaluates what the literature says --and does not say--about the subject under examination. What does the literature do well? What needs to be improved? What are some areas of future investigation?

BOW-307A