

Structured Literature Reviews

Building Transparency and Trust in
Standards of Reporting Evidence

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ABBREVIATIONS

3ie International Initiative for Impact Evaluation

IEG Independent Evaluation Group

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This paper provides an overview of the use of structured literature reviews to promote greater reliability in the use and reporting of evidence in evaluations. The work draws from a case study used in an evaluation of the *Doing Business* project conducted by the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) of the World Bank. Andrew Stone, lead evaluation specialist, led the evaluation under the guidance of José Candido Carbajo Martinez (former director, IEG Financial, Private Sector, and Sustainable Development) and Alison Evans (Director-General, Evaluation). The case outlined the methodology and analytical protocols used to synthesize evidence related to the impact of various business regulation reforms.

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses using structured literature reviews to promote transparency and trust in the use and reporting of evidence in evaluations. Structured literature reviews aim to provide a summary of the most impactful, innovative, and recent research on a specified topic using systematic procedures for identifying and synthesizing studies. The paper presents a case study of an application of the method from an Independent Evaluation Group evaluation of the World Bank's *Doing Business* project. It highlights the evaluation's key lessons, which suggest that the World Bank Group's programs need to establish strong criteria for filtering and reporting evidence. Doing so will help safeguard the objectivity, accuracy, and validity of the Bank Group's research, mitigating potential reputational risks associated with insufficiently validated evidence and ensuring that findings do not affect clients and stakeholders adversely.

INTRODUCTION

Staying abreast of the most recent developments in research is becoming an ever more challenging task. The sheer volume of evidence available is growing each year. Therefore, identifying the studies most relevant to a specific topic or question can be difficult (Snilstveit et al. 2016).¹ Most evaluators have only a limited amount of time and resources to engage critically with research. Urgency to implement projects or make decisions about policies often amplifies this problem.

A *literature review* can help address such issues by surveying existing research on a given topic. Surveys of this type may serve several purposes, such as providing an overview of current understanding related to a particular issue, appraising the relevance of existing theories and evidence, providing information to form the basis of future interventions (or improve existing ones), and guiding future research (Petticrew and Roberts 2005). However, literature reviews also have well-documented limitations. A literature review may not be comprehensive, and its authors may be unbalanced in their selection of literature to discuss. Authors may cherry-pick evidence favorable to their own opinions or vested interests, raising questions about the reliability and validity of their findings (Snyder 2019; White and Waddington 2012).

Scientific understanding of systematic procedures for producing reviews of evidence has improved over the past decade, and use of such procedures has increased (Waddington et al. 2012; Waddington, Masset, and Jimenez 2018). Reviews of this type aim to minimize bias by ensuring transparency in experts' efforts to identify relevant research and report their findings (Higgins et al. 2019). Along these lines, the Independent Evaluation Group is also promoting more rigorous standards for reporting existing evidence in its evaluations, mainly by encouraging the use of structured literature reviews. Its guide to evaluation methods notes that a structured literature review is intended to determine a given topic's state of the art using systematic and transparent procedures for synthesizing existing evidence (Vaessen, Lemire, and Befani 2020). This paper

¹ Researchers following the rise in impact evaluations for interventions in low- and middle-income countries have documented a tenfold increase in the annual production of research during the past two decades (Sabet and Brown 2018). More broadly, Google Scholar (currently the largest online database of scholarly work) also includes more than 400 million academic papers and other scholarly literature (Gusenbauer 2019).

provides an overview of various concepts and methods that researchers can use to systematically summarize evidence from a large collection of literature. This is supported by a case study using a literature review to summarize evidence related to an evaluation of the World Bank's *Doing Business* project.

Chapter 1 looks at various literature review methodologies, defining them according to their scope and the practical considerations required to implement them. Chapter 2 shows how to apply the approach, using the recent Independent Evaluation Group evaluation of the World Bank's *Doing Business* project as a case study. Chapter 3 concludes with closing remarks and practical reflections on the approach.

1

STRUCTURED LITERATURE REVIEWS: BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS



Systematic reviews
identify and synthesize
all research that meets
explicit eligibility
criteria



Rapid reviews
present answers
based on the best
available evidence

Structured literature reviews of the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) aim to synthesize existing research on a given topic using systematic and transparent procedures. The concept and principles of a *systematic review* inspire and guide the approach. A systematic review aims to identify, appraise, and synthesize all relevant research that meets explicit prespecified eligibility criteria (Higgins et al. 2019).¹ Because systematic reviews are intended to be exhaustive, proper implementation can require a considerable amount of time, expertise, and resources. Snilstveit et al. (2017) report an average production time of 12–24 months (depending on the scope and resources available) for a systematic review involving a multi-person expert research team.²

Comprehensively identifying all relevant studies in large volumes of literature can be a particularly challenging and time-intensive task (Thomas, Newman, and Oliver 2013). A broad and fully systematic review often requires searching a variety of literature sources, screening many thousands of studies to identify those relevant to the review. For example, searchable databases do not always use a common set of terms or keywords to index literature. Even when a standardized nomenclature for describing an issue or topic is available, searches on websites such as Google Scholar or the World Bank eLibrary can still yield many irrelevant results. Moreover, such terms likely do not capture the full breadth or nuance of a concept perfectly (Cantrell, Booth, and Chambers, forthcoming). These factors can make it challenging to ensure that a search is comprehensive, and review teams may have to search very large volumes of literature to reach saturation of coverage for the phenomenon of interest. Many systematic reviews even fall short of the mark of conducting truly exhaustive searches (as also highlighted by Evans and Popova 2016).

IEG's structured literature review approach falls into a subset of more rapid evidence reviews inspired by the concept of a systematic review. Other common terms used for these types of literature reviews include *rapid reviews*, *rapid evidence reviews*, and *rapid evidence assessments* (Littell 2018; Tricco et al. 2015). For the sake of consistency, the type of literature review evaluated in this paper will be referred to as a rapid evidence review for the remainder of the paper. The Agency for Healthcare

¹ Oya, Schaefer, and Skalidou (2018; agricultural certification), Snilstveit et al. (2015; education), Vaessen et al. (2014; microcredit), and Waddington et al. (2014; farmer field schools) provide some examples of systematic reviews.

² New technologies are decreasing the time required to complete systematic reviews. However, a systematic review still requires some scoping to adequately delineate what should (and should not) be included in its coverage before production can begin.

Research and Quality categorizes such reviews according to the extent of synthesis applied to the material covered in review (AHRQ 2015). In its categorization, *inventories* provide a list of available evidence, along with other contextual information needed to help inform decisions related to the state of research on a given subject. However, inventories do not synthesize evidence or present conclusions related to the state of the literature. *Rapid responses* present the user with an answer based on the best available evidence but do not attempt to formally synthesize evidence into conclusions. *Rapid reviews* perform a synthesis (qualitative, quantitative, or both) to provide an answer about the direction of evidence and possibly its strength.

Though ostensibly less nuanced than a full systematic review, these approaches nonetheless abide by the same basic principles as a systematic review, such as adhering to prespecified criteria for including studies and transparently reporting on the analysis of all relevant studies identified. However, the methods used may streamline the general approach and procedures used. Many rapid evidence reviews aim to deliver results within six months or less (Ganann, Ciliska, and Thomas 2010; Snilstveit et al. 2017; Varker et al. 2015). They may also use a narrower range of search techniques or sources of literature (Haby et al. 2016; Harker and Kleijnen 2012). Such restrictions ensure that the review can be delivered within shorter timeframes and resource constraints or meet deadlines required to feed into policy and decision-making processes (Varker et al. 2015; Watt et al. 2008).

Given that structured literature reviews may be limited in their coverage of the literature and depth of analysis, it is important to understand the caveats associated with applying this approach. Narrow searches of wide-ranging topics and omitting methods of critical appraisal and synthesis may limit what can reliably be said about the state of the literature and research on a particular subject. However, the processes used to conduct structured literature reviews also vary greatly (Ganann, Ciliska, and Thomas 2010; Haby et al. 2016; Hunter et al. 2020; Varker et al. 2015). Each review inevitably establishes its own set of shortcuts and heuristics, delineating the review according to a unique set of project-specific objectives.

To reflect the variety of adjustments a rapid evidence review may adopt, it is important to treat each one as unique. Omitting certain sources of literature, search methods, and analytical approaches will affect different reviews unequally: some shortcuts might be more or less important, representing different levels of risk of bias in different reviews. For example, some sources of literature may be thematically more important regarding some research topics (as would be the case for research on health-related topics, for which searching Medline and PubMed would be intuitively more important). Alternatively, some studies may find citation and reference tracking (a method of searching discussed in “Literature Search and Analysis” in

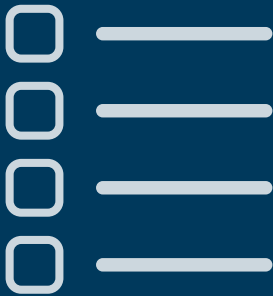
chapter 2) more important for identifying all relevant literature in some contexts (see Cooper et al. 2018; Linder et al. 2015; Papaioannou et al. 2010; and Wright, Golder, and Rodriguez-López 2014). The appropriate choice between the two can depend on the efficacy of search strategies using key terms to identify relevant literature on websites and in databases.

Furthermore, some rapid evidence reviews may also have very good coverage and depth: evidence indicates that a more thorough systematic review does not necessarily always yield different conclusions than a more abbreviated review of the same topic (for example, AHRQ 2015; Haby et al. 2016). Hence, broad-brush statements about the rigor and limitations of rapid evidence reviews do not necessarily reflect authors' individual work or specific applications of the approach.

This chapter discussed some of the underlying concepts and terminology; the next chapter presents an example of a structured literature review based on a case study assessing the effects of the World Bank's *Doing Business* report.

2

REVIEW OF EVIDENCE OF THE EFFECTS OF *DOING* *BUSINESS* REFORMS: CASE STUDY



Identifying relevant
inclusion criteria
for selection



Analyzing and
synthesizing findings
from relevant literature

This chapter presents an example of a structured literature review from an IEG evaluation of the *Doing Business* project for the Committee on Development Effectiveness of the World Bank Group’s Board of Executive Directors. The evaluation was conducted through the first half of 2021, and IEG shared its results with the World Bank’s management group for their factual review and comment on September 8 of that year. The review followed the release of the 2020 *Doing Business* report (World Bank 2020), which included a literature review of evidence on the effects of business regulation reforms. The analysis preceded Bank Group management’s announcement on September 16 that it had decided to discontinue the report (World Bank 2022).¹ Despite the cancellation of the *Doing Business* project, the evaluation highlighted several generalizable lessons about the need to ensure standards of transparency in research. The evaluation’s structured literature review contributed to these lessons, providing a textbook example demonstrating the need to ensure transparency in standards of reporting and use of evidence to continue to build trust in the Bank Group’s research.

Background

Since its inception in 2003, the Bank Group’s annual *Doing Business* report and indicators had aimed to provide objective annual measures of business regulations and their enforcement across most of the world’s economies. The *Doing Business* indicators included an overall measure of the burden of business regulations, which was also disaggregated across 10 categories informing the main score: starting a business, dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registering property, getting credit, protecting minority investors, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts, and resolving insolvency. Each category also featured several subindicators disaggregating these themes further (World Bank 2020).²

To enable international comparisons, the indicators were based on the idea of a “standardized firm.” This required a set of assumptions about the characteristics of a firm and the market in which it operated. These assumptions elicited considerable

¹ The announcement followed an external audit by the law firm WilmerHale, which highlighted data irregularities and ethical concerns about the conduct of former World Bank officials involved in the project.

² Indicators for two additional topics concerning employing workers and contracting with the government also featured in the 2020 *Doing Business* report (World Bank 2020), but they were not included in the indicators main score.

attention and prompted debates regarding indicator methodology,³ comprehensive-ness,⁴ representativeness,⁵ accuracy,⁶ and potential biases.⁷

Nevertheless, despite these issues, the *Doing Business* indicators were widely credited with influencing business regulations worldwide, dominating market share among business climate indicators, and directly motivating many regulatory changes as countries vied for improved status in the rankings the project produced (Besley 2015; Doshi, Kelley, and Simmons 2019). For example, after his election as India's prime minister, Narendra Modi's administration set a target of achieving a rank of at least 50th place (an improvement of more than 100 places) in the country rankings based on *Doing Business* indicator scores. Similarly, in 2012, Russian Federation president Vladimir Putin set a target of placing in the ranking's top 20 by 2018 (Besley 2015; Fenton Villar 2021; Kelley and Simmons 2020). More than 70 countries established special policy committees and working groups dedicated to improving their respective *Doing Business* indicator scores, and the World Bank received

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- ³ For example, Capiello (2014) discussed methodological issues with the way the indicators counted and aggregated the time associated with complying with regulations.
 - ⁴ The Independent Evaluation Group's 2015 investment climate evaluation considered the indicators incomplete because they "do not cover all areas of regulation as identified in the best practice list" (World Bank 2015, xxxix). Specific areas identified as missing included accounting and auditing, contract laws, competition policy, consumer protection, environmental laws, intellectual property (including privacy, copyright, patent, trademark, and unfair business practices), investment policy and promotion, employment law, labor safety, and health and alternative dispute resolution.
 - ⁵ Besley (2015) observed that the standardized firm might be more relevant to the economies of some countries than others. He provided as an example a firm in the agricultural sector, which the stylized assumptions in the indicators methodology would represent very inadequately.
 - ⁶ Holden and Pekmezovic (2020) provided numerous examples from the Pacific islands demonstrating that changes in the indicators had little relationship with changes made to policies and regulations. Hallward-Driemeier and Pritchett (2015) also highlighted that the indicators did not summarize firms' reported experience well.
 - ⁷ For example, some arguments highlighted the indicators' potential bias toward deregulation (Besley 2015).

hundreds of requests every year from officials seeking advice on reforms that could benefit their countries' rankings (Kelley and Simmons 2020).

The *Doing Business* project's popularity raised the question, was there evidence that the types of regulatory reforms the *Doing Business* project promoted had an impact on economic and other development outcomes? This issue became particularly salient among experts who were more skeptical about the popular narrative the project portrayed concerning the effects of reforms. For example, one study showed that the correlations between the *Doing Business* indicators and economic outcomes were unstable (Kraay and Tawara 2013); another showed that they suffered from omitted-variable bias (Pinotti 2008). Furthermore, changes in contextual factors that may have had nothing to do with the regulatory process could affect parts of the indicators, so it was sometimes impossible to attribute changes in the index solely to regulatory adjustments or the outcomes of reforms *Doing Business* promoted (Branstetter et al. 2014; Chemin 2009).

Review Inclusion Criteria

The structured literature review in the *Doing Business* evaluation sought to assemble an inventory of evidence on the effects of changes in regulatory arrangements *Doing Business* promoted. Rather than focus on evidence examining correlations between the indicators and social and economic outcomes, it concentrated on econometric studies exploiting natural experiments or variations in the implementation of specific reforms (such as the variation in the timing or region of the reform) to evaluate the reforms' effects. In doing so, it adhered to prespecified criteria defining the characteristics of an includable study and the method of data (information) extraction and synthesis, and it also reported a specific search strategy. The PICOS(LY) framework (representing the population, intervention, comparison, outcome, study design, language, and year of the research endeavor) used in the review specified the characteristics of eligible studies, outlining includable populations, interventions, comparison groups, outcomes, study designs, study language, and study year (table 2.1).

Overall, the review included studies written in English on interventions identified in a framework based on the World Bank projects reform database (appendix A).⁸ The studies could include population groups in any country and be published in

⁸ The *Doing Business* reform framework presented in appendix A does not capture all possible types of interventions that may have been under implementation in each regulatory category. Interventions outside of the immediate focus of the *Doing Business* project were omitted from the structured literature review.

any format (journal, book chapter, working paper, institutional report, and so on), and studies were not excluded based on the outcome variable featured in the analysis. One exception concerned studies of the effects of infrastructure interventions (for example, in the “getting electricity” domain), which were limited to studies including business outcomes. This restriction reflected the consideration that such interventions might also have broader social impacts unrelated to changes in the business environment, which were beyond the scope of the review. The review also did not include studies of interventions that did not meet the assumptions underlying the stylized firm informing the indicators. For example, reforms to special investment or tax regimes and export processing zones were excluded. Studies were included if they used one of the following study designs:

Table 2.1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Empirical Studies: PI-COS(LY) Summary Table

Criterion	Description
Population	There was no limitation on population covered; studies could focus on population groups in any country.
Intervention	The review included studies examining regulatory reforms related to the <i>Doing Business</i> project. The interventions and reforms included in the review were based on a review of the Doing Business reform database (see the framework presented in appendix A). The review excluded studies that did not examine the effects of a specific intervention or reform.
Comparison	Control groups could be subject to no intervention, on a waiting list for intervention, or part of an alternative intervention or condition.
Outcome	The review did not exclude studies based on their outcome except for when related infrastructure projects were considered. Studies examining the effects of infrastructure projects (for example, in the “getting electricity” domain) were limited to business outcomes.
Study design	The review included quantitative studies in which allocation to intervention and control groups was random, or selection bias had been addressed by design (see chapter text). It excluded simple before-and-after comparisons and simulation and forecast models.
Language	The review included only studies written in English.
Year	There was no limitation on the year the study was conducted, but the latest search date for studies was February 2021.

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

- Allocation of participants to intervention and control groups using a randomized or quasi-randomized mechanism at individual or cluster levels.

- Nonrandomized designs with selection on unobservables. This included natural experiments using a sharp or fuzzy regression discontinuity design, studies using panel or pseudo-panel data with estimation strategies to account for time-invariant unobservables (for example, fixed-effects models), and cross-sectional studies using multistage or multivariate approaches to account for unobservables (including instrumental variable and Heckman two-step-type estimation approaches).
- Nonrandomized designs with selection on observables. This included cross-sectional studies that used a method to statistically match or weight observations in the intervention and comparison groups (for example, studies using a form of propensity score matching or entropy balancing).

These study designs are widely recognized as capable of establishing causal relationships between interventions and outcomes when executed carefully (Aloe et al. 2017; Fenton Villar and Waddington 2019; Gertler et al. 2016; Reeves, Wells, and Waddington 2017; Waddington, Fenton Villar, and Valentine, forthcoming). The comparison condition of the control group of such studies could comprise observations subject to no intervention, on a waiting list for intervention, or undergoing an alternative intervention or in an alternative condition. Studies that used simulation or forecast models and case studies that did not satisfy the methodological conditions described here were excluded.

Literature Search and Analysis

Identifying a comprehensive list of studies for the *Doing Business* evaluation proved challenging because the indicators covered such a broad variety of aspects of the regulatory environment. The evaluation required literature from all topics covered in the *Doing Business* indicators, and early testing of searches using key terms in databases such as Web of Science and Scopus indicated a very large volume of literature would need to be searched. Reflecting the time and resources available to complete the literature search, the review adopted an alternative approach using two databases, forward and backward citation tracking of included studies (discussed later in this section), and a selection of other relevant literature reviews on reforms related to *Doing Business*. The search approach was not intended to be fully exhaustive, and it refined the search to a sample of studies likely to be relevant to the evaluation (regarding topic, design, or both), encompassing studies from sources that potentially may not have featured in the *Doing Business* reports.

The search started by screening the *Doing Business* team's own database on studies related to the project. This provided a good indication of the studies known to

the project team. At the time of the search (December 2020 to February 2021), this database included 426 topic-specific research papers. These papers had a strong bias toward studies from outlets ranked in the top 100 economic journals and working papers in Research Papers in Economics and consisted of a broad range of literature reviews, econometric studies, and case studies related to the topics covered by the *Doing Business* indicators. Each study was screened according to its relevance to the structured literature review, and each study was included or excluded based on the criteria described in the previous section.

After this screening, the search screened a second online evidence portal provided by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie). This source of literature was independent of the *Doing Business* project and therefore less likely to consist of studies that simply supported the *Doing Business* team's assumptions. At the time, the 3ie portal consisted of more than 3,500 research papers identified through a long-term project searching for studies meeting the study design criteria discussed in the preceding section. 3ie had screened more than 150,000 records from academic databases in health, economics, public policy, and the social sciences listed on platforms such as Ovid, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. It had also searched library databases and websites from select research organizations, repositories, and academic institutions (such as the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, African Development Bank, Social Science Research Network, and Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives). Studies from sectors irrelevant to the evaluation (for example, education and health) were excluded, resulting in 1,206 records from relevant sectors for examination (for example, industry trade and services and public administration).

To supplement the screenings of the *Doing Business* and 3ie databases, the search reviewed the reference lists of studies selected by the inclusion criteria outlined and a selection of other relevant literature reviews on *Doing Business* and the related reforms (also known as *backward citation tracking*; see appendix B). This screening intended to identify other known studies cited in the included literature but not listed in either database. It was complemented with citation tracking using Google Scholar's electronic citation tracking system to identify recent studies referencing any of the included studies (*forward citation tracking*). Overall, citation tracking identified an additional 11,842 records for examination.

A single coder extracted data from each study that met the inclusion criteria: bibliographic information (such as author names, study title, year of publication, and publication status) and study characteristics (main findings, type of intervention or regulatory reform, and method of analysis). The information was reported descriptively, highlighting areas with clusters of evidence, and compared with the evidence reported in the literature reviews featured in the *Doing Business* reports.

Summary of Key Findings

The review identified a growing body of evidence on the effects of business regulatory reforms *Doing Business* promoted, including at least 103 studies. After duplicate records in EndNote were removed, 9,221 records remained. These records were screened for relevance based on their title and abstract, and studies with no clear relevance to the topic being reviewed were removed (for example, studies not related to business regulation or the reforms identified in appendix A). Full-text screening of the 1,894 remaining studies removed additional studies that did not specifically meet the inclusion criteria outlined in “Review Inclusion Criteria” (for example, because they did not meet the study design criteria). In final, 103 records met the inclusion criteria.⁹

From the evidence identified, the review found an imbalance in the treatment of theory and evidence presented in the *Doing Business* reports. The reports mainly cited studies favoring the reforms they promoted, which made them more of an advocacy tool than even-handed research or an effective evaluation of the issues with which they were concerned. This finding highlighted that the *Doing Business* project required more transparent and systematic methods for reporting the available evidence, with more attention to nuance and complexity. The review revealed three points that had received almost no attention in *Doing Business*’s own literature reviews:

- Despite the positive outcomes reported in many evaluations and emphasized in the annual *Doing Business* reports, 14 of the 103 identified studies also highlighted several unintended potential (adverse) effects of regulatory reforms. For example, findings related to the “starting a business” topic pointed to examples of the possible negative consequences of reforms in that area for issues such as the gender pay gap and environmental outcomes (for example, Castellaneta, Conti, and Kacperczyk 2020; Wang, Chen, and Yao 2019). The evaluation noted that these potential negative consequences required further research.
- The *Doing Business* indicators implied that reforms that improved the cost and speed of complying with regulations were always beneficial, but this implication neglected the fact that many regulations were also intended to serve socially valuable purposes that such reforms might jeopardize (for example, enhancing public health, safety, and the environment and reducing

⁹ World Bank (2022) offers additional information on the distribution of studies across *Doing Business* topics.

corruption). The findings from studies relating to the “enforcing contracts” topic provided an interesting example, highlighting that in some instances, judicial reforms might have been trading off judicial efficiency for the quality of judicial decisions (Kondylis and Stein 2015).

- Cases in which evaluations of flagship interventions reported encouraging outcomes did not indicate that all similar reforms in other countries or contexts would have the same or similar effects. Individual findings’ external validity needed to be given greater consideration before they were generalized to a broad range of contexts. In some instances, regulatory reforms might have also needed to be coupled with changes in other related factors the indicators did not cover to make a meaningful or material difference. For example, the evidence identified for the “starting a business topic” discussed problems related to entrepreneurs’ land tenancy rights that were undermining efforts to encourage formality (de Mel, McKenzie, and Woodruff 2013). *Doing Business* provided little to no insight into how countries could identify or complement the reforms directly promoted by a particular project with broader reform priorities.

Naturally, the review of literature related to the *Doing Business* project faced certain limitations imposed by time and capacity restrictions, the large scope of the topic under consideration, and the nature of the studies examined (see box 2.1). Nonetheless, even the abbreviated review conducted here uncovered new insights and relevant findings that contributed to the assessment of the subject’s overall validity.

Box 2.1. *Doing Business* Evaluation: Structured Literature Review Limitations

- *The structured literature review screened over 9,000 studies, but because the *Doing Business* topics covered such a broad area, unidentified evidence may still exist. The review did not use an exhaustive search strategy. Future research should focus on continuing to record and expand on the set of studies the review identified. However, even if the coverage of the studies included in the review was not comprehensive, the validity of the three key findings discussed in the chapter remains undiminished.*
- *The analysis for the review focused on coding descriptive information about each study. Further analysis would benefit from examining the magnitude of reform effects and the determinants of effect size heterogeneity. Such analysis might consider using formal statistical methods, meta-analysis, or narrative approaches*

(continued)

Box 2.1. *Doing Business* Evaluation: Structured Literature Review Limitations (cont.)

to synthesis. However, it should avoid making conclusions based purely on vote counting. Because it generally involves simply adding up (counting) the number of studies with positive, negative, and null findings, vote counting does not always account for the magnitude of studies' estimated effect sizes or their precision (Waddington et al. 2012).

- *The analysis did not assess the overall strength of the evidence base or the risk of bias associated with study findings* (see Moyer and Finney 2005; Sterne et al. 2016; and Waddington et al. 2012). Ideally, two independent assessors and an expert adjudicator would complete critical appraisals.

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

3

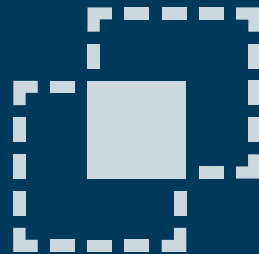
CONCLUSION



Establishing clear
standards for
reporting literature



Adhering to
prespecified inclusion
and exclusion criteria



Synthesizing findings
based on
the strength
and relevance
of evidence

Overall, key lessons identified from IEG’s evaluation of *Doing Business* highlight that by favoring supportive evidence and not establishing strong criteria for filtering or reporting evidence, the *Doing Business* reports opened the door for critics of their objectivity and accuracy, posing a reputational risk to the Bank Group and potentially misleading clients and stakeholders. The *Doing Business* experience revealed the need for mechanisms and safeguards to ensure the accuracy and validity of Bank Group reports and related communications using robust and transparent standards of evidence (World Bank 2022).

Because they aim to provide more robust procedures for synthesizing existing evidence (Vaessen, Lemire, and Befani 2020), structured literature reviews such as the one used for the *Doing Business* evaluation offer one possibility for addressing some of the shortcomings identified in the *Doing Business* project. Establishing clear conventions and standards for reporting literature, as such reviews do, appears essential to safeguarding and continuing to build trust in the Bank Group’s research. More broadly, establishing systematic practices for the identification and assessment of external literature provides a methodology for robustly integrating the wealth of knowledge and research that informs the topics and themes underlying evaluations.

Structured literature reviews require reviewers to outline and adhere to prespecified inclusion and exclusion criteria and methods of analysis; for this reason, they are less likely to be subject to expert bias (even if unintentional) in the selection of materials to review. In addition, they are more likely to promote transparency in experts’ methodology for identifying research to review and in reporting their findings. Even when reviews of this type are more rapid and thus less exhaustive than a full systematic review, they need not be any less systematic in their application (Moons, Goossens, and Thompson 2021).

The methods adopted by structured literature reviews may vary considerably depending on the context, time, and resources afforded to an evaluation, with no detrimental effects on the reviews’ validity. This argues against tightly defining the approaches used to conduct these reviews (which will inevitably vary). However, the basic steps outlined in the summary and the case study outlined in this paper provide a blueprint for the application of more systematic approaches to reviewing literature. Future efforts could build on the many very good practices established by other specialist organizations such as Cochrane, the Campbell Collaboration, the Collaboration for Environmental Evidence, Evidence for Policy and Practice Information, and 3ie. As it stands, the guidance outlined in this paper serves as a stepping-stone for the assessment of literature in evaluations, offering a basic scaffolding that can be altered or modified according to the needs and constraints of specific evaluations.

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APPENDIX A
**SUMMARY OF
DOING BUSINESS
INTERVENTIONS
AND REFORMS**

<i>Doing Business</i> Topic	<i>Doing Business</i> Category	<i>Doing Business</i> Indicators (What Was Measured)	Related Reforms and Interventions
Opening a business	Starting a business	Procedures, time, cost, and paid-in minimum capital to start a limited liability company for men and women	Reduced business registration and post-registration costs (for example, licensing, permits, publication, company seal, filing fees); streamlined registration and post-registration procedures (for example, tax registration, social security registration, licensing); new (or improved) electronic services; one-stop shops for registration (or post-registration procedures or both); improved public infrastructure (for example, internal information systems and staffing); minimum capital requirement abolished (or reduced, or initial capital deposits held at a bank before registration); requirements to use a corporate seal abolished; improved notary systems (or reduced notary requirements); time limits on the registration process; and fast-track business registration process
Getting a location	Dealing with construction permits	Procedures, time, and cost to complete all formalities to build a warehouse and the quality control and safety mechanisms in the construction permitting system	Streamlined permit application procedures, stricter qualification requirements for architects and engineers, improved transparency and public access to information, reduced fees, one-stop shops, and new (or improved) electronic services
	Getting electricity	Procedures, time, and cost to get connected to the electrical grid; the reliability of the electricity supply; and the transparency of tariffs	Tariff transparency interventions, streamlined connection procedures, reduced connection costs, new (or improved) systems for regulating outages and service restoration, training programs for utility engineers, new (or improved) electronic services, power network modernization and capacity expansion, and compensation programs for customers affected by blackouts

Doing Business Topic	Doing Business Category	Doing Business Indicators (What Was Measured)	Related Reforms and Interventions
	Registering property	Procedures, time, and cost to transfer a property and the quality of the land administration system for men and women	Streamlined registration procedures; improved transparency and provision of information on property registration (including land titles); reduced taxes or fees (for example, real estate taxes and notary, property, and sale registration fees); new (or improved) electronic services; one-stop shops; improved public infrastructure and staffing (for example, internal information systems); and fast-track registration process
Financing	Getting credit	Movable collateral laws and credit information systems	Unified (or modernized) collateral registry for movable property; introduction of a functional, secured transactions system; expanded range of movable assets that can be used as collateral; granting of absolute priority to secured creditors or allowing out-of-court enforcement; establishment or expansion of credit bureau (or registry); offering of credit scores by bureau or registry; and legal guarantees of borrowers' right to inspect relevant data
	Protecting minority investors	Minority shareholders' rights in related-party transactions and in corporate governance	Expanded shareholders' rights and role in major corporate decisions; increased disclosure requirements for related-party transactions; increased director liability; clearer (or simplified) rules governing ownership and control structures; introduction of independent reviews of related-party transactions; and promotion of independent directors

<i>Doing Business</i> Topic	<i>Doing Business</i> Category	<i>Doing Business</i> Indicators (What Was Measured)	Related Reforms and Interventions
Dealing with day-to-day operations	Paying taxes	Payments, time, and total tax and contribution rate for a firm to comply with all tax regulations and post-filing processes	Streamlined filing and payment procedures, new (or improved) electronic services, tax rate and social contribution reductions, more inclusive tax-deductible expenses, more comprehensive tax depreciation rules, reduced number of taxes (or merged taxes), streamlined value-added tax refund process, and streamlined tax audit processes
	Trading across borders	Time and cost to export a product of comparative advantage and to import a standardized cargo of goods by sea	Streamlined documentation requirements (for example, licenses and certificates); new (or improved) electronic services; improved border infrastructure; and improved custom clearance (or inspection) systems
Operating in a secure business environment	Enforcing contracts	Time and cost to resolve a commercial dispute and the quality of judicial processes for men and women	Streamlined civil procedures or enforcement rules, changes to method of case management or rules, new (or improved) electronic services, introduction (or expansion) of specialized commercial court and public personnel, introduction (or expansion) of alternative dispute resolution mechanism, transparency and information interventions, and introduction of private bailiff system
	Resolving insolvency	Time, cost, outcome, and recovery rate for commercial insolvency and the strength of the legal framework for insolvency	Improved (or simplified) restructuring procedures and insolvency process, improved provisions on treatment of contracts during insolvency, strengthened creditor rights, increased creditor participation in insolvency proceedings, time limits during insolvency procedures, mandatory qualifications for insolvency administrators, increased regulation of administrators, and specialized tribunal systems

APPENDIX B
SELECTION OF
LITERATURE
REVIEWS RELATED
TO *DOING BUSINESS*

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