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In Search of Engaged Scholarship: Evidence of Collaborative Research in the Business Literature

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There is a perception among many in the academic community that scholarly research and academics themselves are becoming increasingly irrelevant. This is particularly true in the area of business where much of the debate has centered on the rigor/relevance gap (e.g., Tushman et al. 2007). In this regard, scholarly research conducted solely by academics is perceived to be driven largely by a quest for fundamental understanding (the rigor issue) with little consideration for how the research will be used by practicing professionals (the relevance issue). Alternatively, practitioner research is perceived to be driven largely by a consideration for how the research will help solve a particular problem for an organization with little interest in how that research will add to the common body of knowledge for the discipline. The implication is that while each orientation may have a place in the overall discipline and profession of business, it often results in suboptimal outcomes where practitioner research might lack the rigor required to validate findings and scholarly research might lack practical relevance. Regardless of the position that one might take on this issue, it has resulted in a growing concern that there is an ever-widening gap between scholarly research and the world of practice.

In response, the concept of engaged scholarship has emerged as a way of combining the best of both orientations. Van de Ven and Johnson (2006), in particular, have been at the forefront of this debate through their promotion of engaged scholarship as “a collaborative form of inquiry in which academics and practitioners leverage their different perspectives and competencies

to co-produce knowledge about a complex problem or phenomenon that exists under conditions of uncertainty found in the world.” In doing so, they maintain that collaborative research will advance both theory and practice within a given domain.

Van de Ven (2005) elaborates on four different levels of engaged scholarship: (1) informed basic research, (2) collaborative basic research, (3) design and evaluation research, and (4) action/intervention. Of these, collaborative basic research appears to represent the strongest and most direct form of engagement. It is also the most easily observed; evidence can be determined by simply counting the number of co-authored research by academic scholars and practitioners.

Unfortunately, the nature and scope of collaborative basic research has yet to be formally reported in the literature. Indeed, Van de Ven (2005) himself asks:

Don't you think *if* we ground our research questions in practice, involve practitioners in problem generation, theory building, research design, and problem solving that management scholarship will flourish and the management profession will benefit? [italics added for emphasis]

If we are to answer Van de Ven's important question, we must take the first step in determining the extent to which engaged scholarship actually exists.

The purpose of this essay is to address this question by providing evidence of collaborative basic research and discuss its implications. To this end, we searched for collaboration (i.e., co-authored research by academic scholars and practitioners) in articles published in six well-known publications for the years 2008-2009. To add

context to the analysis, we first categorized each publication based on its orientation toward scholarly versus practitioner-based research.

Publication Orientations

We referred to each publication's Web site to obtain information on the journal's stated aims and objectives. Based on the descriptions, we categorized publications into one of three areas: primarily scholarly, combined scholar/practitioner, and primarily practitioner. While journals oftentimes state a desire to be academically rigorous and relevant to management practice, the tone of the journals' stated goals, the target audience, and the format of published articles is expected to allow for categorization. Additionally, while the selected publications are not exhaustive, they appear representative of the three orientations and, as such, serve the purposes of this preliminary investigation. In essence, we wanted to determine if there was *any* evidence that collaborative research exists in mainstream business publications. Additional investigation would be warranted *if* evidence of collaborative research can be found.

Category 1. Primarily Scholarly

Decision Sciences

Stated Aims and Scope: "Articles published in *Decision Sciences* must meet high

standards of research rigor and originality, while embracing managerial relevance, not only in the research problem studied, but also in their impact on enhanced decision making. The journal also publishes notes dealing with technical and methodological issues as well as theoretically-driven review and integration articles, particularly those focusing on an emerging topic or redirection of a line of research."

(*Decision Sciences* website,
<http://decisionsciencesjournal.org/mission.cfm>)

Academy of Management Journal

Stated Aims and Scope: "The mission of the *Academy of Management Journal* is to publish empirical research that tests, extends, or builds management theory and contributes to management practice."

(*Academy of Management Journal* website,
<http://journals.aomonline.org/amj/>)

Category 2. Combination Scholarly and Practitioner

Business Horizons

Stated Aims and Scope: "*Business Horizons* fills a unique niche among business publications of its type by publishing articles that strike a balance between the practical and the academic. To this end, articles published in *Business Horizons* are grounded in scholarship, yet are presented in a readable,

non-technical format such that the content is accessible to a wide business audience."

(*Business Horizons* website,
http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/620214/description#description)

Journal of Business Research

Stated Aims and Scope: "*The Journal of Business Research* applies theory developed from business research to actual business situations. Recognizing the intricate relationships between the many areas of business activity, *JBR* examines a wide variety of business decisions, processes and activities within the actual business setting. Published for executives, researchers and scholars alike, the Journal aids the application of empirical research to practical situations and theoretical findings to the reality of the business world."

(*Journal of Business Research* website,
http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/505722/description#description)

Category 3. Primarily Practitioner

Long Range Planning

Stated Aims and Scope: "*Long Range Planning* is one of the leading international journals in the field of strategic management that is published six times a year. It features articles which offer original research

Journal Name	Number of Articles	Number of Collaborators	Percent of Collaboration
Scholarly Orientation			
<i>Decision Sciences</i>	57	5	8.8%
<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	104	10	9.6%
Scholarly/Practitioner Orientation			
<i>Business Horizons</i>	84	7*	8.3%
<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	338	18	5.4%
Practitioner Orientation			
<i>Long Range Planning</i>	58	12	20.7%
<i>California Management Review</i>	57	15	26.0%

*One article had three practitioners and no scholars.

Table 1: Collaborative research.

that bridge the gap between academia and practice. We aim to influence the behaviour of senior managers, administrators and to influence academic thinking. Our typical readers are executives with a good MBA and senior academics actively involved in practice.”

(Long Range Planning website,
<http://www.lrp.ac/>)

California Management Review

Stated Aims and Scope: “California Management Review serves as a vehicle of communication between those who study management and those who practice it. We publish articles that are both research-based and address issues of current concern to managers. CMR’s contributors include management consultants, policy makers, and senior executives as well as business school faculty from across the nation and abroad.”

(California Management Review website,
http://cmr.berkeley.edu/about_cmr.html)

Although we do not present formal hypotheses, we do propose that the number of articles published featuring collaborative research will vary based on the orientation or target audience of the journals. Collaborative research would appear to be more consistent with practitioner-oriented publications than those that are more scholarly-oriented. We would also expect that publications with a practitioner/scholarly orientation would fall between these two extremes, in terms of numbers of collaborations.

Results

The cumulative results suggest evidence of engaged scholarship in all three categories of publications. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Discussion

This exploratory analysis was intended to shed light on the presence of engaged scholarship in the literature. The results indicate that collaborative research between business scholar and practicing professionals ranges between 5 – 26% of published articles during the time period studied. It also appears that journals that have a stronger scholarly

orientation are less likely than those with a practitioner orientation to report findings from collaborative research (and vice-versa). Additionally, the rates for joint practitioner/scholarly publications are very similar to those that have a scholarly focus. In total, the results suggest that the primary domain for the reporting of collaborative research in the literature is with the practitioner-oriented publications.

Although we cannot, at this time, explain the reasons for the variation in publication percentages, several propositions can be presented for consideration. It may be that collaborative work is more suited to practitioner publications. In this regard, the question is whether it is easier for scholars to adapt to a practitioner orientation or a practitioner to adapt to a scholarly orientation, given that the requirements for manuscript acceptance vary among the various journals. This does not, however, explain why publications that have a joint scholarly/practitioner orientation report collaborative research at roughly the same rates as the scholarly journals. It may be a function of the selected journals and/or the fact that we restricted the analysis to a relatively short time period.

Additional analysis covering more journal publications and across a longer time line appears warranted to further confirm (or refute) these preliminary findings. In the meantime, the evidence reported in this study suggests that engaged scholarship in the form of collaborative research between academic scholars and practitioners is indeed *bonafide*. As such, we recommend that Van de Ven’s question of what would happen “if” we engaged in collaborative research should be revised as follows: “Does research that is grounded in practice, involves practitioners in problem generation, theory building, research design, and problem solving help management scholarship flourish and benefit?” Further analysis of the individual collaborative articles will help answer this question. For now, the question of “if” has at least been partially answered. ■

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stay in New York on Saturday, May 1. If we had not done so, we would have been either locked in or locked out of our hotel room at the Marriott Marquis, since that was the night of the recent terrorist attempt in Times Square. If we had stayed in New York, we would have experienced yet another crisis and this article would have been longer. ■

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