Chapter 6
Theorizing the Research–Practice Gap in the Field of Management:
A Review of Key Frameworks and Models

Oleksandr Tkachenko
University of Minnesota, USA

Huh-Jung Hahn
University of Minnesota, USA

Shari Peterson
University of Minnesota, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a review of key theoretical frameworks and models in the field of Management that conceptualize various aspects representative of the research-practice gap phenomenon. In particular, the authors discuss the scholarly literature and review key frameworks and models on the topic by elaborating on three streams of research: the rigor-relevance debate; knowledge creation and production; and the role of educational institutions in bridging the gap. In addition, more recent, and, rather, holistic perspectives on narrowing the research-practice divide are also presented. These perspectives are Engaged Scholarship and Evidence-Based Management. The chapter concludes with solutions and recommendations aimed at fostering the convergence between research and practice.

INTRODUCTION

Scholarship on the nature of knowledge and purpose of management research is a long-term journey that is replete with various commentaries, forums, and scholarly publications. Given

the vast literature, the focus of this chapter is on the literature that addresses the issue of research-practice gap in the management field. In particular, the authors' main focus is on the scholarly works and special issues that have received considerable attention in the management community and

continue to be an important point of reference for contemporary scholars. Thus, more specifically, this chapter provides a review of key theoretical frameworks and models that shed light on various issues relevant to the research-practice gap phenomenon.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, the authors provide a brief background on the topic of the research-practice gap in the field of management. Then, three overlapping, yet distinct lines of scholarly work on related topics will be addressed: (a) rigor-relevance of management research; (b) issues of knowledge creation and transfer between practitioners and academics; and (c) literature that underscores the role of management education in addressing the gap. While the distinction between the three streams of scholarship can be seen as somewhat arbitrary, these bodies of literature can be traced to the first special issues in management journals on the research-practice gap (see Bailey, 2002; Hodgkinson, 2001; Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001). What will follow is the review of more recent, and, rather, holistic perspectives on bridging the research-practice gap: the Engaged Scholarship approach (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006a; Van de Ven, 2007) and the Evidence-based Management approach (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006; Rousseau, 2006; 2012). In this chapter, the terms *theory-practice gap*, *research-practice gap*, and *the gulf between theory and practice* are used interchangeably.

BACKGROUND

The issue of narrowing the gulf between research and practice is hardly a new theme in the management literature. According to Rynes et al. (2001), academic forums on the use of research findings and research relevance took place as early as the 1980s. These forums were concurrent with and/or followed by various scholarly publications in this area (e.g., Beyer & Trice, 1982; Lawler, Mohrman, Mohrman, Ledford, & Cummings, 1985). As observed by Rynes et al. (2001), these works did not perceive the gap between research and practice as purely restricted to the organizational sciences. Rather, they underscored its omnipresence in various fields where both researchers and practitioners were present. In addition, the advent of the literature on the topic seems to be characterized by skepticism as to whether bridging the divide was possible (or even desirable); *that* perspective stemmed from the perception that "researchers and users belong to separate communities with very different values and ideologies" (Beyer & Trice, 1982, p. 608).

The beginning of the millennium witnessed growing attention by management scholars to the research-practice gap *phenomenon.* Indeed, following the Tranfield and Starkey (1998) report, the *British Journal of Management* published its first special issue on the topic (see Hodgkinson, 2001). The issue contained an abridged version of Starkey and Madan's (2000) paper, entitled *Bridging the relevance gap: Aligning stakeholders in the future of management research.* In that publication, following the lead article, seven distinguished scholars voiced their opinions on the topic. Then, in 2001, the *Academy of Management Journal* (AOM) published its first special research forum, entitled *Across the great divide: Knowledge creation and transfer between practitioners and academics.* The issue included five empirical papers on the topic (Rynes et al., 2001). In 2002, the *Academy of Management Learning & Education* featured its first editorial issue, in which three distinguished scholars critically assessed the current state of management education (Bailey, 2002).

Over the decades, the number of publications on the topic of narrowing the gulf between theory and practice has grown consistently and considerably; this topic has been the subject of scholarly work published as single publications (e.g., Baldridge, Floyd, & Markoczy, 2004) as well as special research forums in management journals (e.g., Rynes, Giluk, & Brown, 2007;

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