Chapter 3
The Role of Business Schools in Marketing Education

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ABSTRACT

Business schools play a key role in training marketing professionals. However, there is a strong divide between the expectations held by marketing professionals and those held in academia. This article considers this phenomenon from a theoretical point of view and explores its causes. The author argues that business schools are able to play a key role in bridging theory and practice in marketing. The article closes by offering several suggestions for how business schools might increase the relevance of marketing research while reducing the gap between marketing theory and practice. In particular, the article suggests the adoption of an inductive approach to research and offers a set of policies that business schools can implement in order to close this gap.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of rigor versus relevance has stimulated the academic community over the past few years. Rigor has increasingly become the main driver for research in marketing, leading to the decreased relevance of articles published by leading marketing journals (Lehmann, McAlister, & Staelin, 2011). Kumar (2016) argues that rigorous research should go 'hand-in-hand' with relevant research to better serve the practitioner community. This is why the Journal of Marketing selects articles with actionable managerial implications and, at the same time, a rigorous approach to research—that is to say, articles that employ clear and sound analytical and conceptual frameworks. Other scholarly publications in the field of marketing have adopted similar editorial policies. This is true of the "Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing" (Hutt & Walker, 2015), which is concerned with advancing theory and practice in the business marketing arena whilst removing the boundary between scholarly and practical research.

According to Kumar (2017), lack of focus has made the marketing field irrelevant and has reduced the quality of management education and research currently taking place at business schools. In fact, the practical relevance of research is only realized when it moves beyond the academic community and reaches practitioners and decision makers (Kumar, 2017). Recent research shows that the influence of scholarly marketing research is greater when it comes to marketing topics that are important to practice, such as brand management, new product development, marketing strategy, advertising, pricing, sales and channel management (Roberts, Kayande, & Stremersch, 2014).

The way in which marketing is generally taught does not help students to grasp real issues that affect management practice. To overcome this constraint, scholars should be able to bring relevant research into the classroom. This strategy has been adopted at Arizona State University's marketing department, where corporate partners have provided empirical data and support for scholarly research over the past 15 years (Hutt & Walker, 2015). To successfully conduct this research (which has delivered more than a dozen studies), several activities have had to be critically managed by scholars. These include: (i) demonstrating the value of the research to sponsoring firms; (ii) selecting a research theme that resonates with managers' concerns and that addresses the firms' key priorities; (iii) discussing business challenges prior to undertaking research; (iv) delivering on the promise to advance sponsoring firms' performance; and (v) treating research as a process of exchange.

Other initiatives have been launched to bridge the academic-practitioner divide in the field of marketing, such as establishing new editorial policies within academic journals (Holbrook, 1995), adopting new approaches to solving marketing decision problems (Lilien, Rangaswamy, Bruggen, & Wierenga, 2002), and improving the quality of marketing management textbooks (Gummesson, 2002). The case of Arizona State University's marketing department suggests that a new solution to bridging practice and academia in marketing might arrive from other sources, such as business schools. The literature featuring the academic-practitioner divide does not provide a view on how business schools can play a part in closing this gap.

The purpose of this work is to revisit the drivers that contribute to the academic-practitioner divide and to explore alternative solutions for bridging this gap, specifically solutions and policies that can be adopted by business schools. To achieve this aim, the work offers a theoretical enquiry which adopts marketing as the focal point of observation. The study starts by reviewing the literature on the relationship between marketing education and the marketing profession. It then tackles the gaps that result from this disconnect and critically assesses the realities that affect business education. The study closes by offering several suggestions for how business schools might increase the relevance of marketing research while reducing the gap between that research and marketing practice.

THE PARADOX OF 'RIGOUR' VS. 'RELEVANCE'

Schiller (2011) discusses the paradox of 'rigor' vs. 'relevance', highlighting the supremacy of the former (academic rigor) over the latter (the relevance of research to management). He claims that knowledge has become less important to management practice. This topic has come to the attention of the scientific community. Vermeulen (2005), for example, takes a critical stance on the impact of the research currently being carried out due to the belief that management research is unable to influence practitioners. The author also points out a possible reason for this: in failing to view managers as members of the audience of scholarly writing, academia has become separated from reality.

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