

Chapter 20

Implementation Concerns of Scholar–Practitioners: A Pilot Study of the Link between Research and Practice

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ABSTRACT

The challenge of combining research and practice in HRD has led to continuing debate on who are scholar-practitioners and how they integrate research and practice in the workplace. This qualitative collective case study provides insights from seven scholar-practitioners to help HRD professionals and researchers understand implementation concerns of scholar-practitioners. The findings reveal scholar-practitioners' perceptions of their roles, the link between research and practice, and actions they took to overcome barriers and challenges related to integrating research and practice. This pilot study can serve as a benchmark for future studies regarding successful integration of research and practice in HRD.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have been trying to understand how professionals engage themselves in both research and practice to better disseminate research findings in the workplace. In this effort, many terms have

been used to describe this group of professionals such as research practitioner (Lynham, 2002), scientist-practitioners (Brewerton & Millward, as cited in Hamlin, 2002; Muchinsky, 2004), scholar-practitioners (Graham & Kormanik, 2004), practitioner-theorists (Lynham, 2002), scholarly practitioners (Ruona, 1999), and reflective practitioners (Jacobs, 1999). Ruona (1999)

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theorized and differentiated HRD practitioners by categorizing them into four types—atheoretical practitioners, practitioners, reflective practitioners, and scholarly practitioners.

- Atheoretical practitioners were defined as having very little grounding in theory, perhaps no relevant educational qualifications or affiliation with professional associations, lacking the knowledge of sound and credible resources, and lacking the skills to consult and interpret scholarly resources.
- Practitioners were defined as meeting the minimum standards of the profession, having a mastery of the common body of knowledge, continually updating of that knowledge, having a willingness to engage in dialogue, having the ability to strategically and effectively analyze/use scholarly resources and theory in practice, and the ability to “sell” theory to gain support of key stakeholders.
- Reflective practitioners were defined as meeting the standards of the *Practitioner* but also critically reflecting on their practice and consulting scholarly resources as a basis for the improvement of their practice.
- Scholarly practitioners were defined as meeting the standards of both *Practitioner* and *Reflective Practitioner*, and also contributing to theory through research, publication in both refereed and non-refereed journals, involvement in scholarly conferences, and having a goal of further development of the field of HRD (p. 895).

We adopted Short’s definition and used it as a guide for the selection of participants because it encompasses Ruona’s reflective and scholar practitioners definitions.

HRD scholar-practitioners operate as a bridge between HRD research and HRD practice to improve the understanding and practice of HRD. They ground their practice in research and theory,

they are champions of research and theory in the workplace and in professional associations, they conduct research, and they disseminate findings from their own research and practice. They are partners with academics and with other practitioners (p. 261).

HRD is not alone in its quest to understand and define the link between research and practice (Short, 2006b, 2006c; Short, Keefer, & Stone, 2006). In fact, the scholar-practitioner divide has also been noted and explored across many different fields including psychology, nursing, education and business (e.g., Amabile et al., 2001; Argyris, 1985; Burack, 1999; Corwin & Louis, 1982; Dean & Bowen, 1994; Gray & Wood, 1991; Hackman, 1985; Mohrman, Gibson, & Mohrman, 2001; Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006).

The gap between research and practice is widely recognized by the HRD community and we are constantly searching for ways to connect the divide. From Estabrooks (1999) we know that “many factors get in the way of using research, and empirically, we know very little about what makes research use happen or not happen” (p. 15). The HRD community remains unclear about the role of HRD scholar-practitioners - how they perceive the relationship between research and practice and more importantly, how they combine these two aspects in the workplace.

Implementation concerns contributes to the gap between theory and practice, because theorists “are relatively unconcerned with how their theories, principles and methods are put into practice in arenas outside of academy study,” whereas practitioners are “deeply concerned with matters of implementation because what they do occurs in arenas not created primarily for scientific study” (Muchinsky, 2004, p. 208). Muchinsky further suggested that there be a linkage between organizational change and implementation and that the scientist and practitioner both could benefit from a better understanding of the linkage. Specifically, Muchinsky notes that “issues of implementation

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