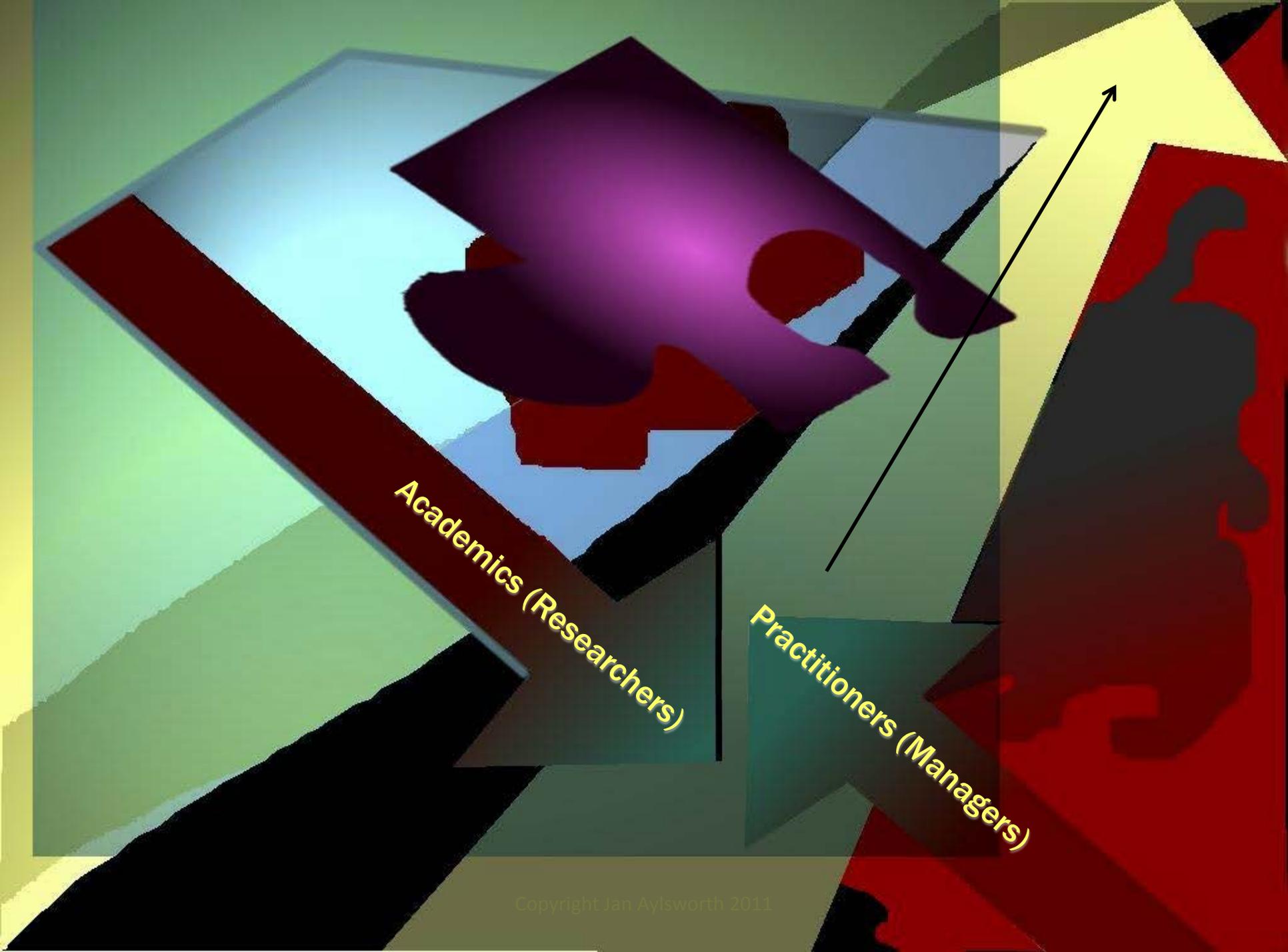


The Academic-Practitioner Divide

Academics (Researchers)

Practitioners (Managers)



Academics (Researchers)

Practitioners (Managers)

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The Academic-Practitioner Divide

"...a considerable chasm
between research and
practice in management..."

Sara Rynes-Weller, Ph.D. (2007)

"... almost no evidence-informed
management or management-
informed evidence..."

Denise Rousseau, Ph.D., (2007)

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The Academic-Practitioner Divide



Does it really matter?

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The Academic-Practitioner Divide

“It is hardly news that many organizations do not implement practices that research has shown to be positively associated with employee productivity and firm financial performance (e.g., Hambrick, 1994; Johns, 1993; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000; in Rynes et al., 2007).”

It matters.

... academics' “failure to `matter more' ” (Hambrick, 1994; in Rynes et al., 2007) is nearing the crisis stage” (e.g. Bartlett, 2007 in Rynes et al., 2007).



The Academic-Practitioner Divide

What is “evidence-based management (EBM)?”

- EBM “means translating principles based on best evidence into organizational practices...”
- EBM moves “professional decisions away from personal preference and unsystematic experience toward those based on the best available scientific evidence.”
- “Leads to valid learning and continuous improvement, rather than a checkered career based on false assumptions.”

(Rousseau, 2006)

The Academic-Practitioner Divide

What Evidence-Based Management is NOT

- EBM is NOT “best practices” (Rousseau, 2006)
 - “Best practices” is not an academic concept
 - If it were, it would probably come closest to “Scientific Management,” (Taylorism/ Fordism), which looks at the organization as a machine and is associated with the early days of automobile manufacturing/factory work.

What Evidence-Based Management IS

- EBM = Big “E” and little “e”

Big “E”

Evidence that generalizes: e.g. “specific goals promote higher attainment than general or vague goals.”

Little “e”

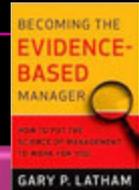
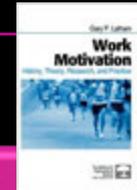
Evidence that comes from data gathered specifically to help the organization make decisions.

(Rousseau, 2006)

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The Academic-Practitioner Divide Terminology

Practitioners	Academics
Researchers vs. Managers/Leaders	Academics vs. practitioners
Business, company, agency	Firm, organization
Hiring	Selection
Contribute to	Inform
Problematic	Not helpful
Person	Actor
Person being interviewed	Informant
Parties with a vested interest	Stakeholders
Solution/project/initiative (Plan)	Intervention (Scheme)
Explore implications	Elaborate
Over-simplified	Too reductionist
How people see themselves	How they construct their identities



Gary P. Latham, Ph.D.

Secretary of State Professor of Organizational Behavior
Rotman School of Management
University of Toronto
(Leading goal-theory scholar and industry consultant)

- “Academics are perceived as having mastered the art of obfuscation.”
- He writes of the need for academics to become “bilingual” – “able to explain theory and research in meaningful and memorable ways not only to scholars but to managers and hourly employees.” (Latham, 2007)

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The Academic-Practitioner Divide

Different Perspectives/Separate Worlds

Practitioners	Academics
Get to the point (Prescribe)	Point? (Describe)
Convince/persuade/enforce	Explore, explain and recommend only with extreme caution. We are probably wrong.
Decide what to do	Avoid being “too prescriptive.”
Reality can be described; the truth is out there.	All decisions have desirable and undesirable consequences, which vary according to the interests of the stakeholder (vested party)
Unitarist: The organization’s goals are everyone’s goals.	Pluralist: Goals and interests are stakeholder-specific and not necessarily aligned with those of the organization.
Change is good (if it advances the organization’s goals); resistance is bad.	All change has negative impacts for some stakeholder groups; resistance offers insight.
Power is enacted as coercive: A can make B do something B would rather not do.	Power is relational, hidden – and we are all caught up in it.

The Academic-Practitioner Divide

HR: Big “E” Evidence that Organizations Could be Using

- **Rynes & colleagues (2002) surveyed nearly 1,000 HR VPs, directors and managers to assess their knowledge of well-documented research findings.** (In Rynes et al 2007, p. 988)
 - They identified nine major findings that HR professionals were not aware of or believed to be wrong. Among them:
 - “Intelligence predicts job performance better than conscientiousness (Schmidt & Hunter, 1988).” (JA Note: That’s tied to skill-level/conscientiousness is better for lowest-skill-level jobs).
 - “The tendency to make errors in performance appraisal is very difficult to eradicate through training (London, Mone & Scott, 2004).”
 - “People’s actual behavior suggests that pay is much more important to them than they imply in surveys (Rynes, Gerhart & Parks, 2005; Rynes, Scwhab, & Heneman, 1983).”

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The Academic-Practitioner Divide

Implications for Evidence and Theory Beyond HR

- **Marketing:** Consumers' ability to predict their own buying behavior is limited because of values and needs that reside in the unconscious and are not available to them. Thus, projective methods (e.g. stories) are needed. (Zaltman, 2003).

- **Information technology:** The failure rate of new technology change projects is somewhere between between 40 and 70 percent (Kearney, 1989; Bessant and Haywood, 1985; McCracken, 1986; New, 1989; Smith and Tranfield, 1987; Voss, 1985); in Burnes, (2004).



And from the cross-cultural comparison literature:

- **Societal differences in cultural distance, as gauged by a cultural orientation called “egalitarianism,” exercise a direct effect on cross-border investment flows. (Foreign Direct Investment [FDI]) (Siegel, Licht & Swartz, Forthcoming, 2011). (Note: Egalitarianism: A cultural orientation that induces people to recognize one another as moral equals who share basic interests as human beings.” (ibid).**

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We have established...

- Existence of the academic-practitioner divide
- OP/OB as the science that offers evidence-based management (EBM)

But the knowledge doesn't transfer

Why not?

Academics (scholars)



Practitioners (managers)

What needs to happen?

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Scholars/Academics

- Masters of obfuscation
(Latham, 2007)
- Do not have the writing skills to write bridge/practitioner articles
(Rynes et al., 2007)
 - More difficult to simplify and condense than to write for an academic audience
 - Simplicity is not where you start; simplicity is distilled complexity.



Image: Gabriel Doyle

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Scholars/Academics

- Prefer to ask their own questions in their own time. (Rousseau, 2007)
 - But managers need answers now (Rynes et al, 2002).
- Not particularly skilled at consensus-building (Rousseau, 2007)
- Academic journals value ground-breaking theory vs. systematic evaluation of existing evidence (Rousseau, 2007).



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Practitioners (managers)



Image: Mario Alberto Magallanes Trejo

- Rely on other managers (Rynes, 2007), the popular press (Mazza & Alvarez; in Milner, 2005), consultants or their own experience instead of EBM (Rousseau, 2006).
- Don't know the evidence because :
 - Of how management is taught in business schools (Rousseau, 2006)
 - They don't read the bridge journals (even HR managers) (Rynes et al, 2002)
 - Students unaware that learning becomes out-dated (Rousseau, 2006)
- Don't like what the evidence says or are not permitted to act on it (Rynes, 2007)
- Don't have access to the literature/databases or time or know-how to do a literature search – and the evidence is very difficult to figure out (Rousseau, 2007).

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Practitioners (managers)



Managerial settings make valid learning difficult.

(Rousseau, 2006)

- Work under pressure to produce short term results (Peffer & Veiga, 1999)
- Absence of psychological safety necessary for continuous learning (Garvin et al, .2008)
- Widespread uptake of fads and fashions (e.g. Walshe & Rundall, 2011; in Rousseau, 2006). (e.g. organizational culture as a variable for improving performance)
- Collaboration with academia is seen as a dispensable frill (Rousseau, 2006)

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Practitioners (managers)



And...

- Unlike law or medicine, management is not a profession. (Liecht & Fennell, 2000; Trank & Rynes, 2003)
- Managers are not required to be educated as managers. (Rynes et al., 2007)
- No requirements for licensing, credentialing or continuing education. (Rynes et al., 2007)

Bridging the academic-practitioner divide: What needs to happen?

It's necessary—but not sufficient—that managers be exposed to, and embrace, scientific evidence. (Rynes et al., 2007).

Scholars place the responsibility mostly with scholars, writing that scholars need to:

- ... become “bilingual,” that is, be “able to explain theory and research in meaningful, memorable ways not only to scholars but to managers and hourly employees.” (Latham, 2007)
- ... remember that the field exists to solve organizational problems – and it is the mandate of researchers to provide answers from the best science available to human resource specialists, managers and organizations. (Salas & Cannon-Bower, 1999)
- ... expand their practitioner efforts without reducing their teaching, writing and research efforts. (Miner, 2005)
- ... “facilitate declarative knowledge,” that is, tell managers how the evidence can be used. (Rousseau, 2007)
- ... be mindfully aware that procedural information needs to acknowledge context (Rousseau, 2007), and research designs need to be more sensitive to context and time. (Pettigrew, 2005)
- ... develop more innovation management theories and methods (Pettigrew, 2005) though Rousseau (2007) writes that that academic journals’ prizing of new theory over systematic evaluation of the evidence contributes to the divide.

But narrowing the divide is not just the responsibility of scholars

- Narrowing the gap will require desire and effort from both sides of the divide. (Rynes et al., 2007)

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A bridge too far?

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