

Study identifies ways to share key data between researchers, business practitioners

July 21 2016, by Matt Shipman



Poole College of Management undergraduate students listen in class and use the grounds surrounding Nelson Hall. Photo by Marc Hall

Academic researchers study many aspects of business, but business practitioners rarely make use of that research. A multi-university research team reports that researchers and practitioners share more interests than either group realizes and outlines ways that the two groups can collaborate more effectively to address shared challenges.

"There's a big gap between science and practice, and our goal with this study was to look at both why that gap exists and how we can eliminate it," says Jeff Pollack, co-author of a paper on the work and an assistant professor of management, innovation and entrepreneurship at North Carolina State University.

Fundamentally, the [researchers](#) found that there are two key issues that contribute to the gap between researchers and practitioners—and those two issues are essentially two sides of the same coin. First, there is a perception that there is little overlap in the interests of researchers and practitioners, which acts as a disincentive for them to work together. Second, generally speaking, the two groups know very little about each other—meaning that neither group has a clear understanding of what the other group thinks is important.

To address these issues in detail, a team of researchers from NC State, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Iowa conducted surveys of 929 business practitioners and 828 active researchers in business disciplines. The researchers also conducted in-depth interviews with 16 academics in the business field and 22 practitioners, ranging from "C-suite" executives and managers to government officials and legal advisors. The surveys and interviews focused on the needs and goals of the study participants.

The interview and survey data were consistent with each other, and identified clear areas of overlap.

"There are many more areas of common interest than either researchers or practitioners were aware of," says George Banks, lead author of the paper and an assistant professor of management at UNC-Charlotte. Specifically, both groups expressed significant interest in eight particular business challenges:

- Reducing or eliminating pay inequality;
- Reducing or eliminating workplace discrimination;
- Reducing or eliminating unethical business practices;
- Expanding opportunities for continuing education;
- Leveraging technological innovation to improve job availability and quality;
- Improving employee morale;
- Reducing the carbon footprint of businesses and products;
- And enhancing the quality of customer service.

"To be clear, we didn't give people a list of topics to choose from," says Brad Kirkman, co-author of the paper, General (Ret.) H. Hugh Shelton Distinguished Professor of Leadership and head of the Department of Management, Innovation and Entrepreneurship in NC State's Poole College of Management.

"These shared interests are subjects that researchers and practitioners brought up independently again and again when asked what they felt were the biggest challenges facing their fields."

"Interestingly, many of these challenges aren't focused on gaining a competitive advantage, but rather on addressing fundamental business practices that apply to multiple stakeholders in the domain of management," Pollack says.

The researchers also outlined four steps that could be taken by business schools to improve collaboration on these shared areas of interest.

First, the researchers urge the academic community to promote research findings. For example, faculty can work with university media offices to disseminate findings to reporters and the public.

Second, the researchers call for the creation of a new journal that is

specifically focused on providing management professionals with practical advice they can actually use.

"We argue that peer-reviewed research can be both academically rigorous and relevant to practitioners - and we need a new journal that appreciates this," Pollack says.

Third, the researchers call on members of the business research community to use social media and other online platforms to reach out directly to business professionals.

Finally, the researchers suggest that business schools change the way they evaluate their faculty.

"Currently, evaluations of professors look at research, teaching and service," Kirkman says. "We propose that faculty also be evaluated based on 'practical impact.' That term may be defined differently in different places, but we think of it broadly as encompassing actions that researchers have made to reach business audiences—whether that is by publishing books for a popular audience or working with businesses to help them craft business plans."

The researchers have already identified more than 160 businesses that are interested in working with the research community. "And that number is growing all the time," Pollack says. More information about these potential business/research partners is available from the authors.

"We are in the early stages of using these findings to implement change," Pollack says. "But we have every reason to believe that this change is inevitable, and that it will benefit both researchers and the [business](#) community."

The paper, "Management's Science-Practice Gap: A Grand Challenge

for All Stakeholders," is published online in the *Academy of Management Journal*.

More information: G. Banks et al, MANAGEMENT'S SCIENCE-PRACTICE GAP: A GRAND CHALLENGE FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS, *Academy of Management Journal* (2016). [DOI: 10.5465/amj.2015.0728](https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0728)

Provided by North Carolina State University

Citation: Study identifies ways to share key data between researchers, business practitioners (2016, July 21) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-07-ways-key-business-practitioners.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.