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COLLABORATION AND THE PRODUCERS OF MANAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE

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Collaboration and the Producers of Management Knowledge

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The world of managers is increasingly knowledge intensive. Competition is growing, large organizations are becoming more global and complex, resulting in a proliferation of new management models and tools, making it difficult for managers to keep up with the latest developments (Huczynski, 1993). Today's managers must necessarily search widely beyond their own experience for management knowledge that is relevant to their unique situations. They hire consultants, study for MBAs, attend executive education programs, and buy management books. As the demand for and debate about management knowledge has grown, so too has the supply and the number of actors involved in producing knowledge about management.

Management consultants and academic researchers are the main producers of management knowledge. Traditionally, they have been depicted as distinct but complementary systems, with business schools and other disciplines acting as producers of knowledge that is turned over to consultancies who then serve as disseminators to managers as the final customer. However, the past decade has seen this role division alter dramatically with academics and consultants now going separate ways to generate their own knowledge. Academics are now pursuing empirical research and publishing in their own journals for their own reading. The larger consultancies are also engaged in the creation of management knowledge (Davenport & Prusak, 2005) to enhance their marketing and provide solutions for clients. Managers, too, have occasionally become engaged in publishing knowledge from

their experience in the form of books (Bossidy, Charan, & Burck, 2002; Welch, 2001). The popularity of these books indicates that many managers prefer "practical" advice and knowledge from consultancies and their managerial peers, rather than from universities and business schools (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002).

This chapter focuses on the producers of knowledge – academics and consultants – as we consider their relative strengths and limitations as current knowledge creators, and the potential value of collaboration between them and with managers in the conduct of future research. It is useful to compare academics with consultants because each party has different concepts of what is knowledge, and what are the best ways to produce it. We also recognize the third party to collaboration, the manager practitioner, who holds the keys to access and the data. Our argument is structured as follows: after a brief discussion of how we view relevant knowledge in management research, we turn to the academic and consulting systems respectively in trying to understand their differing approaches to knowledge creation and collaboration. We then turn to a discussion about how collaboration between consultants, academics and practitioners may be enhanced. We conclude with a discussion of some of the tensions inherent in collaboration, along with possible solutions supported by examples from noted researchers who have combined research with consulting.

Our view throughout is that research collaboration across all parties, given proper safeguards, is a highly useful way to produce new knowledge. Academics have much to give from their scientific theories and research methods, and consultants can provide their advantage of extensive experience with real world issues, while practitioner managers can offer access to their complex reality. Collaboration is about the only way to expose researchers to: 1) richer data about the total situation; 2) observation of the underlying dynamics at hand; 3) the uniqueness and specificity of each situation; and 4) the ability to test one's findings and conclusions through feedback from the subjects of study.

Unfortunately, as we shall see, many academics have withdrawn from collaboration with consultants and practitioners in their research efforts; furthermore, as a result, the latter two parties have avoided contact with academics for their perceived lack of relevance.

Multiple Meanings of Relevant Knowledge

The question of what is and is not knowledge often provokes debate among the different producers; they each have different criteria for what passes as “real” knowledge. In academe, knowledge is usually defined by the theories and methods used to produce it. In consulting, the focus is on the practical results that knowledge produces. For the purpose of this chapter, we view knowledge in terms of its perceived relevance (not always immediately apparent) to various consumers, which includes not only managers but consultants and academics as well. That does not mean knowledge must be stated in "how to do it" terms, but its consequences should enlighten and cause other reactions. This knowledge can appear in a variety of forms:

- ***Research findings*** from using scientific methods, usually conducted by academics
- ***New theories and concepts*** about the managerial world, generated by academics and consultants from their research and experience (e.g. Drucker, 1955; Porter, 1980).
- ***Applied techniques, tools and methods*** created through experience, usually by consultants and managers (e.g. BPR from Hammer & Champy, 1993)
- ***Best practices*** developed from looking across several organizations to see what actions are associated with effective results, often by consultants (Peters & Waterman, 1982)
- ***Personal accounts*** from experience**,** usually by CEOs (e.g. Bossidy et al., 2002; Welch, 2001).

- ***Case histories*** derived from a firm's experience, usually incorporated within the knowledge management system of consulting firms or in teaching cases.
- ***Critical reviews and commentaries*** based on critiques of the literature and its research, largely done by academics such as in this book.

No doubt some skeptics will claim that many of the above examples do not qualify as knowledge. Business schools have been frequently questioned for the usefulness of their research (Pfeffer et al., 2002; Starkey & Tempest, 2004), and consultants are often criticized for the standardization and faddishness of their knowledge. Negative assessments range from failure to adhere to the scientific method to publishing meaningless statistics to succumbing to personal bias and to placing fashion over objectivity. Despite these criticisms, our preference is to regard all of the above examples as forms of relevant knowledge because each depicts and informs a slice of reality. Different forms of knowledge are often created by different producers; each having unique strengths and limits, including even the methods for creating knowledge. removed sentence that was said before

Academic Producers

Management research began as an applied science in which the worlds of academics and practitioners were closely interwoven, with each informing the other. The academic community developed through generating new concepts from field research in organizations; the first classic exemplar being *Management and the Worker* (Roethslisberger & Dickson, 1943). Later came Peter Drucker (e.g. 1955) in his long career and series of popular books on management. These scholars were interested in helping both managers and themselves to understand better such topics as leadership, organizations and markets by creating new frames of reference and many practical implications. Their research methods consisted largely of surveys, interviews and observations as they went out into organizations, spent

considerable time, and even consulted to them. A few managers also made notable intellectual contributions through reflecting on their experience (e.g. Barnard, 1956). Much of this early work was published in books, not journals, to be read by scholars, consultants and managers. They were inclined to view knowledge as part of a systemic whole, which required the full length of a book to describe and document the realities of organizational life (notable examples include Argyris & Schön, 1978; Bennis, Benne, & Chin, 1970; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Miles & Snow, 1978). Many disciplines, from psychology to economics, adopted this approach to knowledge generation and distribution (Blau, 1963; Gouldner, 1954; Homans, 1951; Selznick, 1949).

However, beginning in the late 1970s, the academic community, concerned with becoming more respected as "scientists", turned to a parallel field of research that had long been operating in the background with roots traceable to Fredrick Taylor's management engineering (Taylor, 1911). Academic business research grew out of this Tayloristic movement, searching for an optimal way to organize and manage work. This quest for the "scientification" of management was driven by a desire to legitimate the managerial occupation by providing it with a "rigorous" knowledge base. In mimicking the "big (natural and physical) sciences", the professional status of management was to be established. The manager was to be made an "expert" who would use his/her own scientific knowledge base for taking action. A hierarchy of knowledge production was therefore established (or assumed) with the academic acting as provider and the manager as the consumer technician. (c.f. Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2005). At the same time, other scholarly disciplines, notably economists and behaviorists, similarly began to organize themselves into professional associations with their own in-house journals.

Academic research, in its drive to become a "real science," has increasingly pursued the values of the natural and physical sciences, including universality (the "truth" of a certain

knowledge should be established through universal criteria – irrespective of particular interests), commonality (results of research are a common good/property), unselfishness (the altruistic search for knowledge) and organized skepticism (refraining from premature judgments, reliance on scientific method and data) (Kieser, 2002b). For many scholars, the truth is to be found through adhering to the orthodoxy (theories and vocabulary) of a chosen discipline, which serves as one's professional identity.

Collaboration and Academics

In striving for scientific ideals imported from the basic sciences, a set of criteria for "good management research" was created that has gradually moved academe away from practice, making it difficult for researchers to engage in such practice-oriented activities as consulting (Engwall, Furusten, & Wallerstedt, 2002; Stymne, 2004). This search for "objective" knowledge has created distance between academics and those being studied. Scholars are today pursuing large samples generated from archival or survey data, which are analyzed using sophisticated statistical methods. The advantage of this type of research is to identify and describe certain patterns across large populations of people and/or organizations, which can be portrayed and compared at single or longitudinal points in time. Disadvantages include inability to pinpoint causality behind surface numbers, and statistical levels of significance become rather meaningless for large samples. Another "distancing" approach is the use of laboratory experiments involving graduate students. While these studies may reveal important aspects of interaction between a limited range of variables, they often overlook aspects of the surrounding reality that may be determining of the variables being studied.

Engagement with practice through consulting is today viewed negatively by many academics. Collaboration with the subject of research is to be avoided because it produces

bias and wastes time in data gathering. Academics are rewarded for staying away from managers.. Prior to the 1960s in Sweden, academic evaluations for tenure took into account engagement with practice, but thereafter only the scientific merits were considered (Engwall et al., 2002). As one might expect, managers have added to the distance gap because they attribute lack of relevance to academic research.

Kieser (2002b) identifies several characteristics that have shaped knowledge creation in the academic world, resulting in barriers between theory and practice. First, the academic system is to a large extent a self-referential system, where relevance and quality criteria are internally created and controlled by one's scholarly peers. Only knowledge certified from within the system is regarded as "real" knowledge. The main vehicle for knowledge diffusion in academe is the scientific article, which is published for members of the academic system, rather than for practitioners who rarely read these articles. Second, success in the world of management research is closely linked to publication and citations in a limited number of reputed "A" journals, as ranked by other academics. The success of a researcher in addressing the practical needs of managers is generally not regarded as a source of scholarly reputation. Instead, extensive engagement and popularity among practitioners might be a threat to one's academic reputation. Consulting is typically treated negatively as an "income earning" and diversion from serious research. Third, a growing degree of specialization in management research, based on refined statistical methods, has resulted in a level of complexity that makes management knowledge increasingly hard to access and understand for outsiders to the academic system. The journal system rewards rhetoric that is abstract and full of technical terms. Academics, acting out of a need to demonstrate technical competence, impersonality, and systematic scepticism, make communication with practicing managers especially difficult. Finally, the dynamics of the scientific system and the protocol of many of its "A"

rated journals prohibit researchers from discussing applied implications and recommendations. The academy's publications sanction distain for the practical world.

These characteristics further isolate the academic world from practice, preventing collaboration with consultants and managers. As a result, the latter assume a reverse relationship between practical relevance and academic value (Kieser, 2002a). This in turn makes it hard for researchers to gain access to organizations where they can obtain rich data, much of it qualitative, for explaining the dynamics laying behind their statistical findings (Schein, 2001).

Another negative consequence of this in-grown academic system occurs subtlety in the quality of research revealed in statistically based articles. On close inspection of statistical tables in most articles, one finds that the hypothesized predictions of the researcher frequently explain less than 10% of the relationship between causal variables and predicted outcomes such as productivity and motivation. All of this unexplained variance raises further questions about the relevance of research engaged in by academics. Distance from the management phenomena is clearly inhibiting the development of more complete and enlightening academic knowledge.

Consultant Producers

The second major producers of knowledge, management consultants, are often depicted by academics as down-stream actors in the supply chain of management knowledge. Presumably, consultants take the knowledge produced by academic research and apply it to the practice of management (Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2005; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2001). Like the management sciences, consulting has its roots in Taylorism with the central idea of designing more efficient work. In the early 20th century, the first consulting companies grew out of industrial engineering to make recommendations based on time/motion studies

(Kipping, 2002). Ironically, for many decades to come, consulting research closely resembled today's academic research, which is engaged in stand-off studies that rely on extensive data gathering and analyses presented in written reports.

However, in the 1990's the large consultancies became increasingly involved in the production of their own knowledge for wider distribution and public consumption. Continuing today consultants publish books and their own journals under what they call "thought leadership" (Davenport et al., 2005; Pasternack & Viscio, 1998). These consultancies have exploited their vast bases of experience gained from client projects to offer "brandable" models, such as McKinsey's "7S", Porter's "five forces" and the BCG "Growth matrix". Many popular books advocating models and methods for solving managerial problems have resulted from these efforts (Maister, 1997; Nadler & Nadler, 1998; Slywotzky, 2002). These publications not only serve as useful marketing and branding tools for the consulting firms, but also function as a learning mechanism for consultants and clients (Werr, 1999). In one notable and highly popular book, *In Search of Excellence*, the collaborating authors were a consultant and an academic (Peters et al., 1982). Interestingly, academic research has been stimulated by these models which, ironically, are frequently taught by academic researchers in MBA classrooms.

Knowledge production within management consulting takes place within a different context than the academic world. In consulting firms, two types of knowledge are emphasized (Greiner and Poulfelt, 2005): 1) functional knowledge about topics and issues (e.g., strategic planning and compensation systems), and 2) specific industry knowledge (e.g., financial services and bio-technology). While functional knowledge overlaps with traditional academic disciplines, specific industry knowledge is to a large extent lacking in academic research. In addition to the production of management theories and concepts, consultants are involved in developing detailed methods, tools and approaches to solving contemporary

problems, representing a different kind of knowledge, such as BPR and Six Sigma (see e.g. Werr & Stjernberg, 2003). These practical accomplishments have often gone unrecognized or criticized by the academic world (Salaman, 2002)

Consulting projects and the resulting knowledge are generally aimed at implementing systems and "inducing action" by clients (Kieser, 2002b). "Inducing action" means that knowledge may be used for a number of different ends, including even less legitimate ends such as focusing only on data that justifies 'a priori' decisions made by management (Kieser, 1998). The focus of consultants on action can easily lead to oversimplification by portraying an organizational world that is formally structured with clear roles and controls (Huczynski, 1993). Although this knowledge may attract popular attention, its methodological basis in scientific terms is frequently regarded as weak, and its conclusions dubious (e.g. Alvesson, 1993; Furusten, 1995). Consulting knowledge is seldom subjected to formal evaluation and scientific critique. Critics explain that managers, under pressure to succeed, embrace popular and simplified solutions from consultants that are anxiety reducing (Abrahamson, 1991; Huczynski, 1993). In uncertain situations, managers seek "quick fixes" (e.g. Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 1996; O'Shea & Madigan, 1997). Beyond simplification, the rhetoric of consulting knowledge is characterized by a certain level of mystification and personalization that legitimates and adds to the consultant's value (Clark, 1995; Clark & Salaman, 1996, 1998). This codification of consultant knowledge has been criticized by even clients for being too standardized and ill–adapted to their needs (Greiner & Malernee, 2005) .

Collaboration and Consultants

As the consulting industry has matured, it has developed a unique set of values that have pulled it closer to management practice, clearly distinguishing it from academic values. In the 1990s, with a strong focus on "client service," the work of consultants has shifted from writing reports toward implementing solutions (Nanda & Morrell, 2002). Creating

measurable value for clients is now an overarching goal of management consulting (c.f. Maister, 1993). Academics, on the other hand, are governed more by the twin goals of creating what they regard as "true" knowledge and enhancing their reputations among academic colleagues.

Knowledge creation and learning in consulting is to a large extent based on collaboration between consultants and organizations where they consult. It is a customer driven business with client questions serving as a trigger for knowledge development. In dealing with short-term deliverables, consultants frequently use cross functional teams composed of consultants and client employees to share and leverage their knowledge and expertise (Fosstenlökken, Löwendahl, & Revang, 2003). Besides being a source of consultant learning, collaboration is used to bring about learning for the client, an added example of value creation (Kubr, 2002; Schein, 1988).

Much of the consulting literature is devoted to understanding the characteristics of the consultant-client relationship that facilitates results and applied learning. Kubr (2002) identifies three dimensions to this relationship; first, he emphasizes that “without client-consultant collaboration there is de facto no effective consulting” (Kubr, 2002, p.66). The second is knowledge transfer from consultant to client and vice versa. This leads to trust, the third ingredient, which is needed for achieving an open relationship that allows for knowledge exchange and mutual learning.

Exhibit 1 summarizes and makes clear that academics and consultants indeed live and work in very different worlds with unique task demands and goals that produce different kinds of knowledge (Kubr, 2002, p.58). The comparison indicates that academics are scientific yet removed from the phenomena being studied, and that consultants are overly close to the action but lacking in scientific rigor. We next address the question: Can

collaboration between these producers and with practicing managers help to build on their different strengths and correct for their deficiencies in the production of relevant knowledge?

	Research	Consulting
Main values	Universality, communality, unselfishness, organized skepticism	Client service, profitability
Structuring of knowledge	Disciplines	Functions and industries
Problem	Mainly fashioned by researcher, formulated based in the scientific community	Mainly fashioned by client, sometimes on joint basis
Time scale	Usually flexible	Tighter and more rigid
End product	New theories and models, new knowledge, publications a. citations (+ better management practice?)	Organizational action, happy clients and repeat business (+ better management practice?)
Ownership of information	Usually publicly available	Often confidential
Academic rigor	Methodology tight	Minimum level appropriate to problem
Evaluation	External by peers in scientific community, policy makers	Internal, by company

Exhibit 1. The different logics of consulting and research (adapted from Kubr, 2002, p 58)

Management Context for Research

To better assess the conditions that are likely to facilitate or obstruct collaborative research between consultants, academics and practitioners, we need to understand the nature and context of the management environment, its required skills and working processes. Whitley (1989) identifies five common characteristics of managerial tasks, which he defines as: 1) highly interdependent, contextual and systemic; 2) relatively unstandardized; 3) changeable and developing; 4) combined maintenance of administrative structures with their development; and 5) rarely generate visible and separate outputs which can be directly connected to individual inputs.

The above view of management as a local and idiosyncratic practice is further elaborated upon by Kotter (1982) in his study of general managers, where he found that most successful leaders had substantial experience in a specific organization or industry sector. This implies that general management knowledge needs to be adapted to the specific situation for it to prove valuable (c.f.Clegg & Palmer, 1996; Whitley, 1989). In addition, the reviewers of management practice point out that managerial skills are about dealing with a series of interconnected problems in a single system, where solutions to one problem may create new and unanticipated problems and solutions. Under these conditions, the situational validity of general management theories and models becomes very problematic, resulting in a lack of applicability in solving management problems. Generalized findings and theories, if they are to be useful, require inductive adjustment to account for local and systemic data.

Against this background of work characteristics, Schön (1983) severely criticizes the scientific/rationalistic model underlying most current academic research. Two central assumptions of this model are identified, which fit awkwardly with managerial practice: First, it separates knowledge from action, implying that knowledge needed for competent action can be unambiguously stipulated by academic experts and then directly transferred to practitioners for implementation. The local and systemic character of management expertise makes this assumption highly questionable. A second criticism is its purported division between means and ends, which implies that a specific situation can be unambiguously identified with a specific problem (end) to be solved by the application of general knowledge (means). This assumption appears to be unrealistic, given the complexity and ambiguous character of today's management challenges. Instead, Schön emphasizes the constructive and interactive nature of the problem solving process adapted to the situation. Scientific models and theories can play a role in this process through acting as a source of inspiration and

insight for a manager's sense-making. In this vein, Stymne (2004, p51) argues for the conditional utility of academic research:

> …the management researcher, who has the ambition to contribute to the competence of managers, has to produce theories that are not necessarily fully based on empirical facts. Instead they should be suggestions to practitioners about suitable ways of reasoning on which to base their actions.

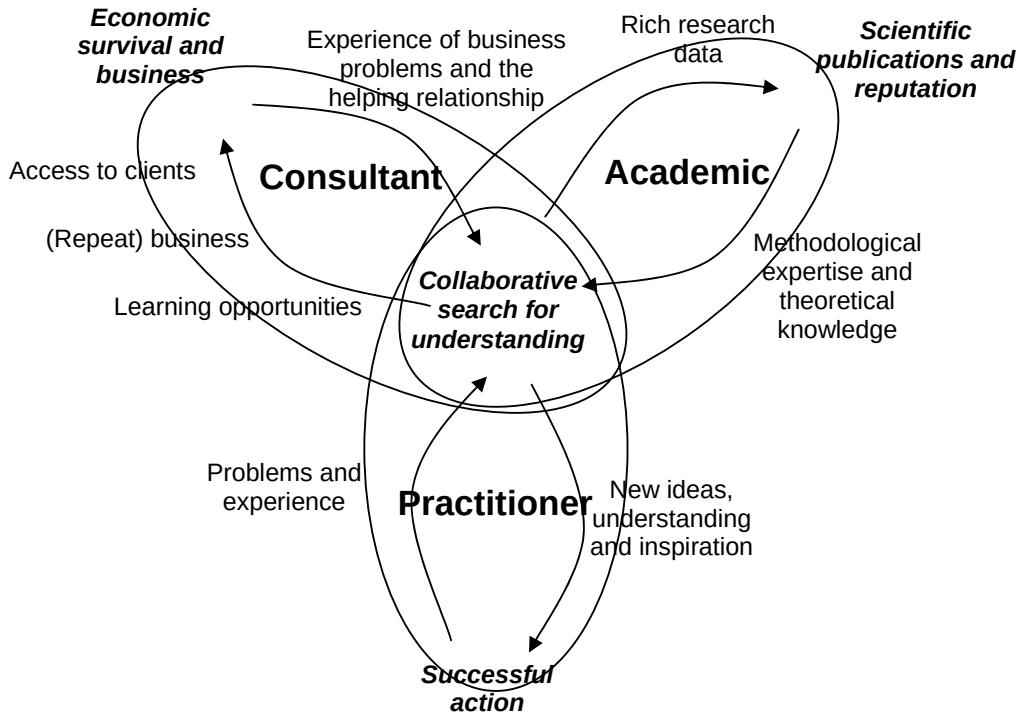
Both academics and consultants will find some comfort in the above observation. Consultants can resonate with the importance of local knowledge, since they are required to operate in close proximity to managers and organizations. Academics, too, will find support in the notion that formal management knowledge and management research is needed to help consultants and practitioners to make better sense of the reality facing them (Czarniawska, 2001; Stymne, 2004)

Toward Collaborative Knowledge

These various descriptions of the managerial world suggest that complete and valid management knowledge cannot by itself be developed at a distance, but rather it needs to be integrated with insights from more intensive exposure to organizational life (Schön, 1987). In our opinion, this means that collaboration in research must be moved to the forefront of the producers' mindset and approaches to knowledge creation. But this won't be easy given the institutional barriers and personal limits mentioned earlier. We now turn to a discussion of what the various parties might do to learn and benefit from each as they move toward collaborative research. In particular, we consider alternative ways in which the strengths of each can be combined to produce new knowledge.

Collaboration is composed of both an individual's attitude and behavior intended to produce a "win-win" outcome for all parties. But this ideal condition is not easily achieved;

for collaborative research to advance, the various collaborators must recognize their own personal limits and know their strengths; they also need to respect each other and value the others' strengths; and they must be skillful in acting to bring synergy to the relationship (c.f. Amabile et al., 2001). Exhibit 2 depicts the key parties involved in collaboration for knowledge creation, along with their potential contributions and gains.



Exhbit 2 - Profiles of Three Potential Collaborators

While each of these collaborators clearly experience a different reality, they all have something important to give to the other. If one can satisfy both their own and the other's needs it should advance the cause of collaborative research. We explore now what each party wants and has to give back through interaction.

Alternative Forms of Collaborative Research

Personal and institutional limits often prevent full and complete collaboration. We previously have noted that academics are limited by university reward systems and journal requirements; consultants are constrained by the client situation and pressure for immediate results; and practitioners by their involvement in a complex reality. So it helps to keep in mind a route of alternative approaches and sometimes more modest arrangements for achieving collaboration.

Central to making collaboration of any kind happen is the *practitioner* manager who controls access and is concerned about solving a problem. Nothing will happen unless they are willing to invite academics and consultants into their premises. Many practitioners are skeptical about consultants who have a partly deserved reputation for high fees and questionable value. Managers are also likely to be skeptical of academics whom they are inclined to perceive as wasting their time by asking theoretical questions and requesting certain kinds of data not easily available. This skepticism has to be overcome by helping practitioners to see the potential benefits of collaboration.

For a research project to be perceived as relevant by managers, collaboration must possess a number of characteristics, several of which are often overlooked by academics, though rarely by consultants. First, any collaborative attempt needs to be perceived as addressing the reality of the issues facing the manager practitioner. Second, its approach and methods must be understandable and workable from the manager's point of view. Third, it must add to the managers' knowledge base, i.e. question or confirm some of the manager's "taken for granted" assumptions (Weick, 1979). As Mohrman et al note, practitioners are more inclined to view the results of research as useful when they are involved in discussing and interpreting the findings (Mohrman, Gibson, & Mohrman, 2001). Taken together,

researchers and consultants alike must demonstrate to the practitioner that their efforts can yield greater insight and practical benefits.

For the needs of the *consultant*, the practitioner can offer the revenue from a sale, a problem to be solved, and a willingness to cooperate in a study. From this collaborative process, the consulting firm can add to its revenue and knowledge base. As for the *academic's* needs, the practitioner can open the door to the "real world", which includes rich data from observations and interviews about the dynamics taking place. The academic might be easily satisfied by simply gaining access to an organization with its data. However, to get even closer to the phenomena in ways that earn trust from the manager, the academic must become more involved; he/she has to be willing to listen, give and receive feedback in a spirit of reflective learning. This exchange requires academics to use terminology that resembles the practitioner's lexicon in helping to solve a client's problem. The academic will not gain much cooperation if perceived as lacking respect for the practitioner. Instead, the academic can add value to knowledge creation with their methodological skills, as well as their knowledge from research findings in areas of concern to the practitioner.

The academic can further collaborate in research with the consultant without even having to become involved with a manager. They can incorporate their research questions into a data gathering process being conducted by a consultant for a client. Further, often unrecognized by academics is the fact that consultants possess a reservoir of untapped knowledge about management, which because of their project demands they don't find much time to write up and publish. Academics can therefore work with consultants to draw out their knowledge and jointly publish it. They can also interview consultants for researchable problems and solicit their feedback and alternative explanations for journal drafts.

A more complete form of collaboration involving all knowledge producers is advocated by Schein (2001) with a model he calls "clinical research/process consultation". According to

Schein, management knowledge cannot be produced *for* managers but rather it needs to be produced *with* them. In this truly collaborative model, the elements of knowledge production, research, consulting and practice are integrated into a joint effort to better understand and deal with issues of concern to all parties. The nexus of this relationship is a practitioner's problem and the consultant/researcher's genuine willingness to help the practitioner solve the issue.

Paramount to Schein's mode of full collaboration is a genuine search by all parties for mutual understanding about what is "really" going on in the situation; this objective is in line with the basic academic value of searching for truth. However, unlike in positivistic academic research, practitioners become involved in the process as providers and interpreters of data. Data in this process comes voluntarily as all participants gain by revealing more about themselves as they seek to understand their reality. Even though academic involvement in the research site violates the values of "objective" research, we all remember Lewin's famous axiom that by trying to change a system one learns more about it. This knowledge is produced from richer and deeper data than what is typically available in surface statistical data. Another scholar, Donald Schön (1983), calls this process "reflection in action," which emphasizes openness, spirit of inquiry and authenticity of communication. Client anxieties related to revealing more about themselves are overcome by establishing an open and trustful relationship.

To conclude, there are multiple advantages for academics to engage in high levels of collaboration, including the identification of research questions, access to organizations, and availability of a test site to interpret findings (Amabile et al., 2001). Prior research suggests that academics who spend more time in organizations report greater personal learning and a higher frequency of citations for their publications (Rynes, McNatt, & Bretz, 1999). They also find that academic involvement in organizations increases the likelihood that their

findings will be implemented by manager practitioners. The academic's theoretical and methodological skills become valuable by ensuring the quality of management knowledge produced (although the quantitatively oriented management researcher may need to add some qualitative tools (c.f. Schein, 2001). Clinical researchers can still engage in surveys, perform interviews or act as participant observers. The difference from mainstream research is that ”total collaboration” is accomplished with a focus on a problem defined by the practitioner and with a mindset to help the client deal with that problem.

Living With Limits and Bridging Tensions

While the arguments are compelling for using Schein's model of full collaboration among all parties, it is constrained by the amount of time it takes and by its focus on a single organization. Research universities and "A" journals today are unlikely to accept articles based on exclusive use of this model, unless the sample of firms is larger and the patterns in findings across them appear profound. Nor are skeptical consulting firms and practitioners likely to open their doors wide to academics for conducting extensive collaboration. Schein's model can be used to enrish and probe beneath statistical findings generated from archival and survey data, and also to generate research leads. Some day this set of three seemingly closed systems may cycle back to produce research generated through more open and friendly collaboration.

Still, some modest movement toward promoting collaboration can be made, though it takes political will. On the institutional front, top rated journal editors can insist on accepting only studies that support and interpret the causes behind statistics, which would likely cause more field research involving collaboration. These editors could also require a section at the end of each article that discusses the practical implications of an article's findings. After all, most authors work in business schools, which is an applied institution devoted to teaching

and applying knowledge about management. In addition, the reward and promotion systems of universities could be adjusted to elevate books with theoretical significance, as well as accepting highly regarded publications like the *Harvard Business Review* (HBR) to the same level as "A" journal articles. The acceptance ratio for *HBR* is likely more rigorous than for most "A" level journals. Business schools can also act to remove "faculty consulting" from their "dirty word" list, making these schools more congruent with the warm welcome they typically extend to consulting firms during recruiting season.

As for consulting firms and their consultants, they can reach out to receptive academics to encourage books and articles written jointly with them. They might also invite academics to serve in residence during sabbaticals while performing research on the firm's knowledge system. They could also ask academics to join them as part-time research advisors to their projects on relevant methods and theory. They could further evaluate a project's results, since consultants rarely ask for an assessment of their work. In reaching out to clients, as in action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001), consultants can include client members on the consulting team to interview, provide and interpret data. They also can also give lectures of practical significance and organize retreats with intensive discussion and problem solving.

Even these minor changes are likely to threaten the status quo now producing resistance, so consultants and academics will need to make up their own minds about how far they are willing to proceed. No doubt some small steps are possible for many of us, which can lead to major results. For example, one of the authors of this chapter, Larry Greiner, had an MBA student who became a consultant and then a CEO who invited him in to help in a collaborative way to solve some strategic problems. Greiner and his colleague, Arvind Bhambri, kept detailed notes on what happened, leading eventually to an academic paper that won the McKinsey prize at an SMS (Strategic Management Society) conference and to a publication in the Strategic Management Journal (Greiner & Bhambri, 1989). Other small

steps for academics to take include occasional uses of collaboration with consultant friends to explore what's behind statistical findings. Also, going out to write a teaching case can lead indirectly to interesting research ideas for follow up. Academics might also initiate a larger study of "consultant knowledge" about management, industries and implementation, since consultant experiences are much closer to these phenomena.

In all these efforts at collaboration, the involved parties will likely encounter and confront tensions that are not easily resolved. Everyone will have to find their own resolutions. For academics and consultants who fall at the extreme ends of these tensions, they might occasionally consider moving more toward the middle, which would be beneficial for both research quality and knowledge creation. Listed below are some of the major tensions facing these various producers of management knowledge, with some possible resolutions:

Involvement v. Distance - At one extreme is the academic value of assuring objectivity through distance from the subject being studied. In order to gain “true” knowledge, the system must be studied “unobtrusively” so as not to influence its “real” workings (as if the act of studying has no effect). For resolution, academics need to recognize that involvement may not only be unavoidable, but also an important source of rich data (Schein, 2001). At the other extreme, consultants are not always conscious of how their involvement and desire to please the client can bias their objectivity. To overcome this problem, consultants can invite academics to advise them on research methods, such as triangulating interviews with numerical data. Weick (1979) argues for diversity in research approaches and perspectives to match the diversity and complexity in the phenomena being studied.

Academic v. Practical Relevance – Academic reputations are currently derived from contributions to intellectual discourse rather than to practice. They purposely avoid normative conclusions in their research, which makes it hard for academics to be perceived as relevant

to practitioners. Ironically, if one observes academics teaching cases in the classroom, they typically ask students for their "action plans", and are not reluctant to give their own remedies to problems. This suggests that academics are not immune to practical consequences. So, if interested, academics might approach consultants to indicate their willingness to work with them in framing research projects to deal with both practical and theoretical problems simultaneously. On the other hand, consultants can improve their analyses of client problems by gaining additional insight from academics drawing on the latest research.

Openness v. Confidentiality - Practitioners understandably want to protect information, either positive or negative, from leaking out within the firm or to the public. This causes problems for both academics and consultants who may be interested in publishing research based on client data. Academics must respect the confidentiality concerns of both consultants and practitioners. This responsibility can be dealt with by aggregating data over several cases while making the sources anonymous.

Generalization v. In Situ studies. Universality is a strong value in the academic community that causes academics to shy away from generating deep knowledge from a single case. However, several cases can be compared in order to identify patterns that yield more generalizable insights (Eisenhardt, 1989). Single cases can be used to refine theories and conceptual models. Turning to consultants, they too have a mutual interest in discovering generalizable knowledge, such as “best practices,” which they can brand, publish, and use in other engagements. Both parties should be open to the opportunity for joint publication.

Acting as Both Consultant and Academic

The overarching implication of this chapter is for academics and consultants to reevaluate their roles and identities as participants in the research process. So far we have discussed each party as if they are separate people, which is usually the case. But there is

evidence that the two roles can be integrated within a single person. Such a combination of roles may bring about outstanding results that can benefit knowledge creation. Many well-known management scholars have produced some of their most influential findings through acting at the same time as both consultant and researcher; examples include Edgar Schein, Chris Argyris, Andrew Pettigrew, Michael Porter, Paul Lawrence, Jay Lorsch, Ed Lawler, Henry Mintzberg, Jeffrey Pfeffer, Thomas Cummings, Noel Tichy, Mike Beer, Dave Ulrich, Warner Burke, Robert Quinn and David Nadler. We have asked three of these – Edgar Schein, Chris Argyris and Edward Lawler – all highly regarded in academic and consulting circles, to provide personal examples of how they have used the combined role to work for them in creating new knowledge. While their experiences are different, they all take advantage of gaining access to field situations and use collaboration to create not only solutions locally but broader knowledge.

Example 1: Edward E. Lawler III - Understanding business process outsourcing in HR

"When the Exult Corporation was founded in 1998, there were no companies focused on human resources business process outsourcing (HR BPO). HR then, as it is now, was frequently criticized for its failure to become a strategic partner with line management, and for being mired in administrivia. Exult saw an opportunity to change this situation and built a business model based on their taking over the administrative parts of the HR function for major corporations.

I heard about Exult in 2000 from a number of HR executives who were intrigued by their business model. I made contact with them and was invited to join their advisory board. It was a distinguished group, including Dave Ulrich and Jac Fitz-enz.

At the time I joined the board, I had already done a number of studies on the role of the HR function in U.S. corporations. These studies consistently showed that HR was not

transforming itself from an administrative function to a strategic function[1]. The Exult approach appeared to me to offer an opportunity to reposition the HR function in major corporations as a high value-added strategic partner. My initial role with Exult was to meet with clients, consult with Exult on the design of their HR systems, and give talks about HR outsourcing.

As I learned more about HR BPO, it became apparent to me that there was an opportunity to do a research study that evaluated the effect of utilizing HR BPO in major corporations. After some discussions with me, Jim Madden, the president of Exult, was eager to support a research project. Discussions with Dave Ulrich and Jac Fitz-enz led to an agreement that the four of us would do research and write a book on the impact of Exult's HR BPO system in four major corporations: BP, Prudential, International Paper and Bank of America. We got a financial grant from Exult to fund our work, and hired a case writer to do in-depth reports on each of the four cases. In addition, I used the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California to collect survey data from HR executives in each of the four companies.

We were able to collect enough change data to justify publishing a research-based book on business process outsourcing[2]. It was the first book to focus on the impact of HR BPO, and to make a significant contribution to our understanding of its impact on the HR function.

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[1] Lawler, E. E., Boudreau, J. W., and Mohrman, S. A. (2006). *Achieving strategic excellence: An assessment of human resource organizations*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

[2] Lawler, E. E., Ulrich, D., Fitz-Enz, J. and Madden, J. C. (2004) *Human resources business process outsourcing: Transforming how HR gets its work done.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

There is no doubt in my mind that if I hadn't had a consulting relationship with Exult, the opportunity to do this piece of research would never have appeared. The consulting relationship helped build trust with the management of Exult and made them more receptive to our needs for financial support in order to do the research.

On a personal side, I learned a great deal about HR BPO from my consulting work with Exult that greatly enriched the book. There were a number of unexpected findings that I most likely would not have identified if I had not had a good working relationship with Exult. Just to mention one, we found a type of co-dependency between HR managers and line management in the companies we studied. Both decried the traditional relationship between HR and the line as mired in administrative trivia and at times, even conflict, but when freed of this, both parties were unable to abandon the old. In many cases, they simply did not have the skills or the concepts needed to redefine their relationship to one where HR was more of a strategic support function for the line."

Example 2: Chris Argyris – Understanding the learning organization[3]

"About two decades ago the top Board members of the Monitor Group, a consulting firm, invited me to assist them in becoming a first class learning organization. I asked, and they agreed that we should begin with the Board.

The major research procedures that were used were observing and tape recording their meetings. We were able to map the Board members' interactions to show how they inhibited the kind of double-loop learning they sought.

We also used this knowledge to create an intervention, at the top, to strengthen their productive interactions as well as create new ones. As the success of this intervention was documented (through the tape recording and observations), it was used throughout the company beginning with the immediate reports to the board members. The intervention, changed through our learning, continues to be used in the hiring and training procedures.

A second result was the development of diagnostic and change instruments and procedures that would be offered to clients. I believe that it is fair to say that these procedures created a quality of services that benefited the effective implementation of the recommendations in the client organization.

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[3] Chris Argyris, (2004) Reasons and Rationalizations Oxford, Oxford University Press

Chris Argyris, (1993) Knowledge for Action San Francisco, Jossey-Bass

Edmonson, A. Moigeon, B (1996) " When to learn how and when to learn why", eds. Moigeon, B. Edmonson, A. Organizational Learning and Competitive Advantage London, Sage Publications 17-37

I believe that the foundation of my two decades with the firm as well as the continued deepening and expansion after I became less active was due to the fact that the research was based upon a model of consulting. This made it necessarily acceptable for Monitor to continually confront us on the advice that they were receiving. It also made it possible for us to make demands to collect data (e.g. through tape recordings) and to design interventions that in addition to helping them, could be used to test out theories of effective action and learning."

Example 3: Edgar Schein[4] - Deciphering a failure to implement a new technology

"For several years I was a process consultant to a senior manager in a bank operations department, helping him with a variety of projects. One of his main goals was to introduce an effective new information technology system for handling various financial transactions. Several years had already been spent on developing the technology and contract research had been done to determine the feasibility of introducing the technology to the clerical workforce. The essence of the new technology was to have fewer clerks handling many more tasks rather than having specialists for each task.

As the new technology was being installed, it became evident that many fewer clerks would be needed and it was then discovered that the bank had an unbreakable norm that nobody would be laid off. Everyone was to be retrained and given other jobs in the bank. At the same time it was discovered that my client would not be able to relocate or retrain the many persons who would be displaced by the new technology because either the retraining

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[4] Schein, E.H. (1999) *Process Consultation Revisited.* Jossey-Bass.

Schein, E.H. (2001) "Clinical Inquiry/Research" In Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (eds.) *Handbook of Action Research.* Sage.

would not suit given clerks or there were no alternate jobs available. The existence of the “no layoffs” norm was well known, but no one had any idea of how powerfully held it was until the technological change was attempted. No one realized how overstaffed all the other departments of the bank were. The new technology was at this point abandoned as impractical.

In the traditional research model the existence of this norm would be a sufficient “explanation” of the observed phenomenon that a potentially useful technology failed to be adopted. But what I learned as a consultant to the head of this unit “deepens” our understanding considerably. Once we discovered that the no layoffs norm was operating, I began inquiries about the source of the norm and learned that it was strongly associated with my client's boss. He had been in his job for a long time and for him “no layoffs” was a central management principle that he had made into a sacred cow. I had assumed from prior knowledge of social psychology that norms are upheld primarily by group members themselves. I found, instead, that in this situation it was the boss’s fanaticism that was really the driving force, an insight that was confirmed three years later when he retired. All the attitudes about layoffs changed rapidly, the department was now ready to lay off people but, surprisingly, the new technology was still not introduced. *My previous two explanations would both have been wrong.*

It should also be noted that, as a traditional researcher, I would not have been allowed to hang around for so long, so I would not even have discovered that the constraint on the new technology was something other than the no layoffs norm and the presence of its powerful originator. To explain further what was happening I had to draw on some other knowledge I had gained as a member of the design team for the initial change. I remembered that the group had had great difficulty in visualizing what the role of the new operator of such a computer program would be and especially what the role of that person's boss would be.

The group could not visualize the career path of such an operator and could not imagine a kind of professional organization where such operators would be essentially on their own. I asked a number of people about the new technology and confirmed that people did not see how it could work, given the kinds of people who were hired into the bank and given the whole career and authority structure of the bank. Low level clerk specialists were easy to manage and their careers were well understood. Superclerks of the kind that would be created by this technology would have to be better educated, would want more pay, would be autonomous operators operating essentially from a principle of "self-control" instead of managerial control.

So what was really in the way of introducing the new technology was not only the norm of no layoffs, but some deeper conceptual problems with the entire socio-technical system, specifically an inability to visualize a less hierarchical system in which bosses might play more of a consultant role to highly paid professional operators who, like airline pilots, might spend their whole career in some version of this new role. In fact, the no layoff norm might have been a convenient rationalization to avoid having to change deeper cultural assumptions about the nature of work and hierarchy in this bank.

What the clinical process revealed was that the phenomenon was "over-determined," multiply caused, and deeply embedded in a set of cultural assumptions about work, authority, and career development. We were dealing with a complex system of forces, and once this system was understood as a system, it became obvious why the bank did not introduce the new technology. Attributing it to the boss with his norms of no layoffs would have been a misdiagnosis even though all the surface data indicated that this was a sufficient explanation.

The clinical process also revealed the interaction of forces across hierarchical boundaries, the operation of power and authority, the role of perceptual defenses, the linkages of forces across various other organizational boundaries, and the changing nature of those

forces as the situation changed. Human systems are complex force fields and many of the active forces are psychological defences and cultural assumptions that will not reveal themselves easily to uninvolved observers, surveyors, testers, or experimenters. It is too much to ask of the traditional research process to reveal this level of dynamics, yet without understanding organizations at this level how can we possibly make any sense of what we observe around us?"

Moving Ahead

As we have seen, collaborative research involves three distinct professions--academe, consultation and management--all operating from different thought worlds (c.f.Amabile et al., 2001). We have argued for the potential benefits of knowledge creation through collaboration across these worlds while working singly or in pairs or triads. However, as we have observed, there are serious institutional obstacles to making collaborative research happen. Recognizing these limits, individuals must decide how far they personally wish to go. As one ventures forward, it is important to realize that collaboration involves additional responsibilities like understanding the other party's frame of reference in searching for a "win-win" outcome.

It is an advantage that all the knowledge producers are united by their common focus on knowing better the managerial world, which still remains a combination of science and art. For the *practitioner manager*, individual success is linked to their organizations' growth and success (Whitley, 1989). They are judged by the results they produce, which hopefully stimulates a search for better understanding of the messy reality being faced. The problems encountered by practitioners become the motor and enabler for collaborative research. In addition, academics and consultants must carefully select among practitioners for those who have a keen appreciation for the importance of research, and who enjoy working with and learning from people different from themselves (Amabile et al., 2001).

The *consultant's* world is dominated by an overall need to secure an inflow of new assignments, which means keeping clients' satisfied while building the firm's reputation and brand image in the business world. In their relationships with clients, consultants derive knowledge from their experience with numerous cases, which is sometimes formalized into books, tools and methodologies. They hope for satisfied clients who will purchase their services again and refer them to potential clients. However, not all attempts at collaboration by consultants live up to being "helpful" because the pressure to sell becomes a barrier in achieving a truly helpful relationship (Schaffer, 2000; Schein, 1988). Consultants who engage in a collaborative relationship will have to give up some of their needs for control and make themselves more open and vulnerable to influence from academics and manager practitioners. Engaging in collaborative processes with academics can also help consultants to validate their models and experience, allowing them to improve their concepts and methods (Suddaby et al., 2001).

The *academic* world, finally, can contribute to the consultant's and practitioner's worlds with theoretical knowledge and methods for systematically gathering and interpreting data, two skills that many consultants and practitioners lack. The academic is driven by a search for "true" knowledge and academic reputation, which is operationalized in journal articles and citations. Efforts by academics to collaborate with consultants and practitioners will give them access to rich data. Both academics and consultants are likely to gain through joint publications, a commonly shared goal that enhances both their reputations (Davenport et al., 2005).

This nexus and spirit of helpfulness and risk-taking in bringing together academics, practitioners and consultants in collaborative research relationships promises, we believe, to open up new opportunities for further learning and the production of valuable and useful knowledge that will benefit all involved.

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