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Abstract

A widening gap has existed between academic research and industry practice
(Dostaler&Tomberlin, 2013), with management researchers and industry practitioners often
operating in "isolation from each other" (Kieser&Lener, 2009, 519).  Academics criticize
industry leaders for not consulting scholars or scholarly journals for industry-related research, an
assertion swiftly rebuffed by practitioners dismissing academic research as theoretical, irrelevant,
and written in incomprehensible academic code.  This case study highlights the
concernsexpressed by food service organization representatives interviewed by one doctoral
candidate soliciting employee access for the purpose of experimental research.  The
circumstances surrounding successful study organization recruitment are also presented.  This
case study concludes with seven recommendations for future students and scholars to increase
industry participation in academic research, in order to bridge the gap between academic
research and industry practice.

*Keywords*: academic research, industry practice, experimental research, research-practice
gap.

**Introduction**

A widening gap has existed between academic research and industry practice (Dostaler&Tomberlin, 2013), with management researchers and industry practitioners often operating in "isolation from each other" (Kieser&Lener, 2009, 519). Academics criticize industry leaders for not consulting scholars or scholarly journals for industry-related research, an assertion swiftly rebuffed by practitioners dismissing academic research as theoretical, irrelevant, and written in incomprehensible academic code. Business school administrators concede the majority of academic management research may be irrelevant (Business Week, 1990), with scholars often writing nothing of practical value, and doing so "in a pretentious way" (Business Week, 1990, 62). Current literature confirms the existence of a gap (Bartunek&Rynes, 2010; Dostaler&Tomberlin, 2013), withalow proportion of business professors having significant business communitycontact (Dostaler&Tomberlin, 2013). Richard Schmalensee, former dean of the MIT Sloan School of Management, is frequently quoted as stating business faculty "are more interested in impressing their academic colleagues than in confronting real-world business problems" (2006, 118).

**Literature Review**

Literature discussing the gap between business academic research and industry practice abounds, with examination of the construction and contribution of the "Implications for Practice"

section of a sampling of management-themed scholarly articles finding less than half of articles containing conclusions relevant to management practitioners (Bartunek&Rynes, 2010). Several researchers have suggested the goal of management research appears to be informing scholars, and not practitioners (Adler &Harzing, 2009;Bartunek&Rynes, 2010).As a result of the research-practice gap, business organizations prefer to use management consultants (Kilmann, Thomas, Slevin, Nath, & Jerrell 1983) whose approach is the simplification of, rather than the complexification of complex organizational issues (Brannick&Coghlan, 2006). While some researchers document progress in narrowing the organizational management research-practice gap (Hodgkinson & Rousseau, 2009), others suggest the gap is not bridgeable (Kieser&Leiner, 2009).

Three approaches have been identified for bridging the research-practice gap: Evidence-based management, engaged scholarship, and relational scholarship (Bansal, Bertels, Ewart, MacConnachie, & O'Brien,2012). The goal of evidence-based management is to inspire practice through research knowledge. The goal of engaged scholarship is for researchers and practitioners to solve complicated problems through research collaboration. The goal of relational scholarship is the establishment of a research-practice relationship (Bartunek, 2007) occurring through mutually-beneficial research, with researcher and practitioner supporting the contributions, methods, and qualities of each party.

While the three approaches contain consistent objectives, the prescriptions for bridging the research-practice gap are incomplete, due to the obstacles encountered when crossing the bridge between the two parties (Bansal *et al.,* 2012). Specifically, academic research requires accurate, careful investigation, while practice requires breadth, simplicity, and immediate clarity (Bansal *et al.,* 2012). Researchers suggest the research-practice gap is a result of the paradoxical

nature of research and practice (Bansal *et al.*, 2012). A paradox demonstrates "contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time" (Smith & Lewis, 2011, 382).  Navigation of the research-practice divide requires willingness to embrace these paradoxes, moving forward despite contradiction and disagreement, with a goal of paradox management, not neutralization or removal (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

The research-practice gap is not limited to the United States with the gap more pronounced in India (Panda &Gupta, 2007).  The Indian research-practice gap is a result of the Indian research tradition having been modeled after the American tradition, without prior validation of the relevance of the American framework and methodology (Gupta, 1994; Khatri, Ojha, Budhwar, Srinivasan, & Varma, 2012).The research-practice gap is not confined to business management – the gap also exists in the fields ofaccounting (Tucker & Parker, 2014), business law (Peterson, 2014), and information systems technology (Fitzgerald, 2003).

Researchers have suggested several reasons for the research-practice gap, three of which are relevant to the context of this case study.  First, research findings are frequently not relevant (Lang, 2003), with doctoral students not encouraged to perform consultant-oriented research focused on specific, practical organizational problems (Panda & Gupta, 2014).Second, research findings are often not timely (Lang, 2003; Moody, 2003; Price, 2011), with the research and publication process often lasting more than one year (Fitzgerald, 2003), while industry requires more immediate, timely solutions (Middlehurst, 2008).While empirical evidence indicates the relevance and usefulness of information systems (IS) research, the lengthy scholarly publication process presents a challenge to IS research timeliness (Lindgren &Christiansson, 2015).  The third cited reason is language, with researchers communicating to each other with academic jargon, instead of communicating to practitioners in industry terminology (Price, 2011).

**Material studied**

As a doctoral candidate, this researcher aspired to contribute to academic literature by investigating an innovative, contemporary topic, about which limited or insufficient information currently existed. The research intent was the advancement of organizational leadership and management understanding, whileproviding industry with practical, beneficial information.  The doctoral dissertation discussed in this case study examined the impact of workplace spirituality on worker turnover intention in the food service industry.

Workplace spirituality is defined by Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2010) as a culture in which organizational values encourage a sense of purpose through meaningful work occurring within the workplace community context, and is a macro level, cultural view of the organizational spiritual climate (Shinde, Shinde, & Lytle, 2012).  Ashmos and Duchon (2000) identified three factors or dimensions of workplace spirituality: conditions for community, meaning at work, and the recognition of an inner life.  A spiritual workplace will demonstrate a commitment to spiritual values and goals (Shinde*et al.*, 2012), regardless of whether or not a formal workplace spirituality program has been implemented (Pawar, 2008).

Employee turnover is defined as the ratio of the number of employees replaced in an organization or industry to the average number of employees in that organization or industry during a specific time-period (Iqbal, Kokash, & Al-Oun, 2011).  Turnover intention is defined as the behavioral attitude of a person desiring to withdraw from an organization (Aydogdu&Asikgil, 2011), and has been determined to be an effective predictor of employee turnover (Hom&Griffeth, 1991; Rahman, Naqvi, &Ramy, 2008; Vardaman, 2012).  Employee turnover adversely affects organizations, in terms of the direct costs of recruitment and selection (Jacobs, 2011), and the indirect costs of reduced productivity (Hausknecht& Trevor, 2011; Park

& Shaw, 2013; Shaw, 2011; Tracey &Hinkin, 2008), service disruption (Hausknecht& Trevor, 2011), and reduced revenue (Shaw, 2011; Tracey &Hinkin, 2008).  Employee turnover further adversely impacts the food service industry through food waste during new employee training, and reduced customer satisfaction (Detert, Trevino, Burris, &Andiappan, 2007), supporting the need for the identification and development of turnover mitigation methodsfor the food service industry (Park & Shaw, 2013).

Researchers demonstrated the variables of workplace spirituality and turnover intention to be negatively correlated in several industries, with increased workplace spirituality levels resulting in reduced employee turnover (Crawford, Hubbard, Lonis-Shumate, & O'Neill, 2009; Hong, 2012; Kinjerski&Skyrpnek, 2008; Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003; Rego& Pina e Cunha, 2008).  However, research conducted in other industries may not be generalized to the food service industry, because no other industry is engaged in the simultaneous production of a customized product, and delivery of an individualized service to the extent of the food service industry (Murphy &Murrmann, 2009; Murphy & Williams, 2010).  Prior to this study, no experimental research existed examining the impact of workplace spirituality on turnover intention in food service organizations (Geh & Tan, 2009; Milliman *et al.*, 2003; Saks, 2011; Tevichapong, Davis, & Guillaume, 2010).

The specific problem prompting this research was that food service industry stakeholders possess insufficient information necessary for the development of employee turnover mitigation strategies (Kim, 2012; Kim &Jogaratnam, 2010), and further information was needed about the efficacy of a workplace spirituality program on turnover intention (Geh & Tan, 2009; Milliman *et al.*, 2003; Saks, 2011; Tevichapong*et al.*, 2010).  The purpose of the study was to determine

whether the implementation of a workplace spirituality program affected turnover intention in a multiple location food service organization.

The study population consisted of employees of the quick service, fast food segment of the food service industry organizations in the state of Florida, with the turnover rate for that industry segmentestimated to be 80% in 2012 (Quick Service Restaurant, 2012). The experimental group ($n = 27$) received a modified version of the Spirituality and Healthcare Workshop (Ellis, 2011) workplace spirituality intervention, modified with the assistance and permission of the author for use in the food service industry; and, the control group ($n = 26$) did not receive any intervention. Both the experimental and control groups completed the workplace spirituality subscale of the Work Environment Survey (WES; Crawford *et al.*, 2009), and the turnover intention subscale of the WES to measure turnover intention, before the experimental group received the intervention, and then again after completion of the intervention. Participants were compensated in the amount of ten dollars each upon completion of the pretest survey, ten dollars each upon completion of the posttest survey, and experimental group participants were compensated at the rate of ten dollars per hour during the intervention sessions.

The results of the study suggested the implementation of a workplace spirituality intervention program did not significantly increase or decrease turnover intention scores of employees of a multi-location quick service food service organization. Although previous experimental research demonstrated the implementation of a workplace spirituality program to have a beneficial impact on employee turnover in the accommodations industry (Crawford *et al.*, 2009), and the healthcare industry (Kinjerski&Skrypnek, 2008), the study findings suggested those benefits may not be generalizable to the food service industry. Two reasons cited for the lack of generalizability were the previously mentioned uniqueness of the food service

industry,with multiple, conflicting tasks frequently performed by the same worker (Murphy &Murrmann, 2009; Murphy & Williams, 2010), and the low compensation, and work hour conditions in the food service industry (Brown, Thomas, &Bosselman, 2015). The study results supported the position that working conditions in the food service industry are unique from other industries,suggesting the implementation of a workplace spirituality intervention program may not be a viable turnover reduction strategy for the food service industry.

The following section outlines and describes the general and specific concerns encountered during the process of organization recruitment for the subject study, and the circumstances surrounding the successful recruitment of an organization with a sufficient number of employees to accommodate this study.

**Results**

Upon receipt of dissertation proposal approval, and completion of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process at Northcentral University, this researcher commencedthe recruitment of food service organizations for dissertation study participation. With a minimum required sample of 26 participants per group (Cohen, 1992), one or more organizations with a minimum combined total number of 200 subjects were needed to mitigate effects of nonparticipation, attrition, and elimination of incomplete survey responses.

The process of securing one or more food service organizations capable of providinga suitable sample proved nearly as challenging as the dissertation proposal approval process. This researcher interviewed representatives of 31 prospective food service organizations as potential study organization participants. The majority of food service organization representatives($n =$ 27) declined study participation. Several of the non-participating food service organization representatives provided general or specific reasons for nonparticipation. The following two

subsections describe and discuss the concerns of the nonparticipating representatives, along with a summary of the circumstances related to the successful recruitment of a study organization.The concerns expressed by the interviewed representatives are both indicative and supportive of a research-practice gap in the subject study.

***General concerns about academic involvement in subject organization***

Five general concerns were presented byfood service organization representatives declining participation in the subject study.

1. A business professor is not qualified to investigate or advise concerning business management topics.  This researcher was unable to counter this concern, despite having been employed in business management for 18 years prior to beginning an academic career.

2. Interaction with employees would be a disruption to business operations.Assurances that surveys and intervention would be conducted prior to or after scheduled shifts did not alleviate this concern.

3. Participation in a scientific study might financially harm the subject organization through revelation of sensitive information.  Quantitative informationsuch as number of employees per specific location, and qualitative information concerning employee turnover intention might be of value to competitors of the subject organization.

4. Participation in the proposed studymightfinancially harm the subject organization by influencing employee behavior.  One business owner expressed concern that study participation might enlighten employees aboutalternativeworking conditions, resulting in increased employee turnover with the organization.

5.The use of the words *experiment* and *intervention* in thedissertation summary and interview discussion.While commonplace in academic literature, the two terms are not common in industry and might suggest invasive or uncomfortable scientific procedures.

***Specific concerns related to nature of my study***

Two specific concerns were presented by the representatives of the organizations declining participation in the subject study.

1.  Possible religious conversion, or undermining of employee religious beliefs, resulting from misunderstanding of the workplace spirituality concept.  An explanation that most researchers defined spirituality as a secular construct and not as a religious construct (Dent, Higgins, &Wharff, 2005; Geigle, 2012) did not mitigate this concern, which was expressed by the majority of interviewed food service organization representatives.

2.  Potential legal liability resulting from researcher interaction with employees regarding a potentially sensitive topic.  Two food service organization representatives expressed concern that employees mightview participation as a religious freedom violation, might anticipate retaliation for nonparticipation, or might interpret the study as a company-sponsored forum for religious conversion, resulting in potential legal liability.Employerconcern about religious conversion or interference is supported by workplace spirituality literature (Lips-Wiersma, Dean, &Fornaciari, 2009).

***Successful recruitment circumstances***

The study organization selection process consisted of this researcher contacting multiple colleagues via email and telephone, in orderto requestintroduction to potential food service industry acquaintances as possible research study organizations.  The selection process resulted in31 potential study organizations,with representatives from four organizations agreeing to

participate, and oneof the four willing participants employing a sufficient number of workers to provide the necessary sample.  Theselected food service organization representative cited the following as factors influencing research participation: the introduction to this researcher having been made by a trusted colleague; personal knowledge about the study independent variable (workplace spirituality); and, relevance of the study dependent variable (worker turnover) to the subject organization.

**Discussion**

The widening gap between academic research and industry practice iswell documented in the literature, and the existence thereof is supported by the dissertation research circumstances discussed in this case study. While the goal of this researcher was to provide industry with practical, beneficial information, the nature of the specific study topic may have inadvertently contributed to the research-practice gap.Based uponreview of the literature, and the previously discussed research participation concerns, sevenrecommendations are offered for future students and scholarsto increase industry participation in academic research.

1.  Recruit potential study participants through networking with industry colleagues.Faculty report difficulty recruiting industry research partners as a common barrier in establishing collaborative research (Howells, Nedeva, &Georghiu, 1998).  The food service organization representatives who were willing to participate in the previously discussed study were both personal and professional acquaintances of colleagues of this researcher.  The representative of the selected study organization cited the introduction to this researcher having been made by a trusted colleague as a factor in the study participation decision.

2.  Involve prospective industry organization(s) early in the dissertation or research process.Potential concerns and objections might be identified andmitigated, or alternative study

subject organizations might be recruited prior to the lengthy and rigorous dissertation proposal and IRB approval processes. This recommendation is supported by research suggesting inclusion of industry management in a collaborative approach to business research (Panda & Gupta, 2014; Tushman& O'Reilly, 2007).

3. Streamline research process and shorten timeline in order to provide timely results. The urgency of the management decision-making process is antithetical to the rigor of the scientific method (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2010). Academics perform rigorous, lengthy, theoretical research, while industry leaders face practical problems requiring simple, immediate solutions.

4. Research topics should address relevant industry needs with a potential for practical application. Schmalensee suggested "[m]anagement schools need to engage thoughtful practitioners in research-based, problem-driven endeavors to improve both the teaching and practice of management" (2006, 27). The research-practice gap might be reduced if less time and resources were allocated to research focused on the description and analysis of organizational phenomena (Dostaler&Tomberlin 2013). The successful recruitment of a subject organization in the current study was due to the practical nature of the study topic of turnover relating to the specific subject organizational needs. The subject organization reportedan overall 100% annual turnover rate, and a 300% annual turnover rate at one participating location.

5. Avoid confusing, controversial, or easily misunderstood concepts and terminology. This recommendationis supported by research indicating the majority of subjects identified misunderstanding the nature or process of the study as the primary reason for nonparticipation (Williams, Irvine, McGinnis, McMurdo, & Crombie, 2007). If one or more study topics are not common industry concepts or terminology, potential participants may require further information

and training about the concept and potential or proven benefits.  Concerning the research

conducted by this researcher, it is plausible that a food service industry might not implement a

workplace spirituality program, if for no other reason than the confusing, misleading nature of

the term.  Moreover, of the 31 food service organization representatives interviewed, the selected

candidate was the only candidate possessing personal knowledge about the study topic.  It is

possible that if another study variable were used, such as conscious capitalism or workplace

culture, the recruitment process might have been easier.  However, the academic research

processlimits the ability of researchers to rename or substitute concepts and terminology for

participant palatability.

6. Ensure confidentiality of organization identity, participants, and sensitive, proprietary

information, a practice common in academic business research (Brannock& Denny, 1998).While

ensuring confidentiality of proprietary information might appear antithetical to the concept of

academic freedom, one faculty survey showed 57.3% of respondents conducting industry

research reported having signed a confidentiality agreement as a condition of research (Lee,

2010).  The revelation of proprietary information such as wages, productivity rates, and

employee satisfaction levels could be valuable to a competitor, and damaging to the subject

organization.  Moreover, organizational management might not desire the publicity, notoriety, or

embarrassment that may result from research study participation findings.The food service

organization in the subject study requested, and was provided anonymity of the organizational

identity, restaurant locations, and number of employees at corresponding locations.

7.  Prepare and publish findings in industry or trade journals, written in industry-

appropriate language and terminology.  In graduate school and beyond, we are expected to write

in a scholarly manner, yet we expect our findings to be welcomed and understood by non-

academics.  Colleges and universities might encourage faculty publication in practitioner and trade journals, in addition to academic journal publication (Dostaler&Tomberlin, 2013).

**Conclusion**

A widening gap has existed between academic research and industry practice (Dostaler&Tomberlin, 2013) in multiple fields, including accounting (Tucker & Parker, 2014), business law (Peterson, 2014), information systems technology (Fitzgerald, 2003), and management (Kieser&Lener, 2009).  Researchers have suggested several reasons for the research-practice gap, three of which were relevant to the context of this case study: research findings are frequently not relevant (Lang, 2003); research findings are often not timely (Lang, 2003; Moody, 2003; Price, 2011); and, scholars and practitioners do not communicate with the same jargon and terminology (Price, 2011).

In the previous case study, this researcher described the concerns expressed by 31 food service organization representatives interviewed during the process of recruiting a food service organization for dissertation research.  The concerns expressed were both indicative and supportive of a research-practice gap existing in the subject study.  Based upon a summary literature review, and recent dissertation research experience, this researcher offered seven recommendations for future dissertation students and academic researchers seeking toincrease industry participation in academic research.  This researcher suggests utilization of the recommendations may benefit scholars and practitioners in narrowing the research-practice gap.

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