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Editors' Introduction

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Editors' Introduction

The Linking Theory & Practice section of OMJ is a reality! What you are holding in your hands, albeit virtually, represents our inaugural efforts to bridge management theory and management practice. As the initial call promised, we have aspired to create something unique and different that will be valuable to practitioners and scholars alike. LT&P is the culmination of many discussions of the OMJ editorial board with a broad constituency from EAM and the larger academic community. It has arisen out of our collective frustration with the traditional links that exist between those that produce managerial knowledge and those that are responsible for improving management practice. Many have talked about a chasm rather than links, and others have argued that the two have been passing each other in the darkness of the night. Both scholars and thoughtful practitioners suggest the need to revisit the ways we approach and nurture those links, recognizing that the current bridges do not work very well.

A number of avenues are possible when seeking to bring theory and practice closer together:

A first avenue views the process sequentially, where steps happen in order and the players are experts specializing in discrete phases of the process. New knowledge is produced by social science scholars; at a later time, when the scholars deem that it has been well vetted, it is transferred to potential users to inform practice. The task of linking theory and practice is viewed as a role for interpreters, those who undertake to explain the lessons of scholarly research to practitioners. An example of this avenue is the *Recent Research of Note* piece by Joseph Seltzer that interprets and brings forth some intriguing insights from the research of Jeffrey Becker, Roya Ayman and Karen Korabik about the impact of discrepancies between a leader's self-perception about their behaviors and the perceptions of their subordinates.

A second avenue develops insightful observations from practice that are then converted to generic packages that can be applied in other situations. Consultants are particularly skillful at learning from one project and creating templates that help them tackle the next assignment more effectively. Managers have long looked to their peers for answers and have replicated their successes as well as their failures. This is a process that commonly bypasses academics; popular business books are seldom authored by scholars or even read by them. Peter Daboul makes this point in his invited commentary, *Strangers in a Strange Land? Reflections on Practice and Theory*, and argues that not only has valuable knowledge been created through this avenue, but the pressures on management will necessitate increasingly that practitioners move even more in that direction. As such, academics risk been left further and further behind.

A third and lesser known avenue is developing around action-based research. It proposes that producing knowledge in the context of application requires shedding traditional disciplinary boundaries, abandoning traditional departure points, embracing multidisciplinary research, and fundamentally bringing the academics and practitioners closer together before the knowledge is produced. The departure is startling in that it challenges the conventional wisdom that knowledge is first created and then it is put to use. In their invited commentary, *Linking Theory to Practice*:

A 'Grand Challenge' for Management Research in the 21st Century?, Tranfield and Denyer elaborate on this view and bring forth the arguments for an imperative shift in the kinds of questions that management research should pursue. They make the case for a different kind of inextricable link between academics and practitioners and they initiate a discussion for different methods to tackle a very different kind of knowledge creation.

The three avenues that can be pursued to bring knowledge and practice closer together do have a lot in common and involve the same players, but they assign them different roles and place different demands on each of them. They also promise to produce different results. In the papers of this inaugural issue, we present three views of the relationship between theory and practice; we look forward to many different perspectives that will populate and build on these views, that will produce actionable knowledge, and that will enhance the dialogue between academics and practitioners.

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Co-Editors, *Linking Theory & Practice*