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## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

# 2011 Presidential Address: What Is EAM Doing to Bridge the Practitioner–Academy Gap?

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May 13, 2011

Welcome to Boston. Since my first EAM [Eastern Academy of Management] conference in 1981, I can't ever remember a view like this for the luncheon.

I am sorry that Steve Meisel couldn't be here. Apart from his wit and insight, Steve was the one who talked me into accepting the nomination for VP of Program, which leads to the position of president. I wanted Steve to be here, so I could tell him what my wife said to me while giving birth to our daughter, "Why the hell did you do this to me?" When I accepted the nomination, I did not bother to calculate that I would be giving the presidential address on Friday the 13th. I hope you all are having only good luck today.

This has been quite a year for me and the EAM. I was married less than a week after the 2010 Portland conference, cleaned up and sold two homes, and moved into a third, which we are still unpacking. I got my materials together for promotion and was granted it. I survived all of this. Thankfully, no one questioned my birth or educational credentials. I have a copy of my birth certificate if there are any "birthers" in the crowd. I can't verify that dt ogilvie and I are cousins. Is dt here? As you can obviously see, we do have a lot in common, especially that wry Scottish humor. We just feel like family; it's part of the EAM tradition. Even if we can't prove that we are cousins, I also don't ever remember two other EAM presidents having the same last name.

In its forty-eighth year, EAM, likewise, has gone through a number of transitions. We finally have online renewal of membership for those who don't come to the conference. The Board adopted ethics guidelines in line with those at the Academy of Management. So, next year when you make your submissions you will be asked to check a box that states you have read and agree to comply with these guidelines. The EAM Fellows are proposing the creation of a foundation to generate

income for our future. We have a successful International Program Committee that runs biennial conferences, this year in Bangalore, India. We are working to increase the coordination and integration with EAM-I, especially in the area of financial reporting. In general we are trying to improve communication and transparency in this vibrant, volunteer organization. On the negative side, Bill discussed losing the sponsorship of Palgrave as the publisher of *OMJ*. We have been working on alternatives and are trying to increase library subscriptions—a key factor in losing their support. Please ask your libraries to subscribe to *OMJ*. Publisher sponsorship is vital to keeping *OMJ* in the databases. [Editor's Note: Shortly after this speech was given EAM signed a contract with Routledge, Taylor & Francis, making Routledge, Taylor & Francis our new publisher.]

The theme that Ted identified for this year's conference resounded in many venues. *Expanding Boundaries: The Scholar + Practitioner* seeks to expand the dialogue between scholars and practitioners, sharing perspectives and questions. Similar endeavors to bridge the gap were championed by James Walsh (2011) in his 2010 presidential address to the Academy of Management. Walsh said that this should be the Golden Age of Management, but it is not. Business is central in our society, and we graduate over half a million students in the United States. However, a recent study found that business students prepare less for class than any other major (Glenn, 2011)—something to which I am sure many of you can attest.

Earlier, in 1994, Don Hambrick raised the question, "What if the Academy actually mattered?" Perhaps because we are a maturing discipline with many baby-boomer faculty members nearing retirement, we are asking these difficult questions about our core activities as faculty.

Jeff Pfeffer and Christina Fong (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002), Henry Mintzberg, 1996, and Lyman Porter and Lawrence McKibbin, (1988) had earlier questioned the relevance what do in the classroom. Does what we teach really matter? Having taught negotiations courses for 15 years, I feel fortunate to be teaching in an area with immediate impact. Students are negotiating all the time and find some immediate value in the

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principles described. They come back to subsequent classes with success stories of how they got a better deal by applying course material. It is not quite as easy in my management principles course but the Biz Café simulation, offered by one of our conference sponsors, Interpretive Simulations, helps. I also increase the relevance by applying what I have learned at EAM, like Drew Harris's Bubble Factory (Harris, 2007), illustrating control principles while blowing bubbles. But as in assurance of learning, individual classes do not equal a relevant curriculum.

I would now like to shift your attention to a discussion examining whether our *research matters*. Do we really write about things that managers apply? Does what we do actually improve organizations and the quality of work life within them? Many well-known colleagues, like Mike Hitt (1998), Andy Van de Ven (2002), Jone Pearce (2004), Denise Rousseau (2006), Larry Cummings (2007), and others, have urged us to close the gap between academia and practitioners. Are we merely talking to one another, that is, preaching to the choir? Do we impact the practice of management?

I was reminded of the research relevance issue recently while attending a banquet at my university to recognize those who were promoted. All of the deans got up and said nice things about those who were promoted. It was then that I learned that one of my engineering colleagues had developed relays that boosted the strength of signals on the Internet while crossing the ocean. That struck me as highly relevant to practitioners—having a real and immediate impact. Our bridges and impacts are not quite so obvious or direct, but they are not invisible either.

What are the gaps that exist and need bridging? Shapiro, Kirkman, and Courtney in a 2007 *Academy of Management Journal* article described two types of gaps between practitioners and researchers. The first they termed “lost in translation,” or the knowledge transfer problem. We do good work but practitioners either don't know about it or don't know how to put it into action. Yesterday Superintendent Burhoe of the Coast Guard Academy said, “If nobody knows about it, does it really matter?”

The second gap involves a knowledge production problem or “lost *before* translation.” Here the research questions aren't relevant and greater collaboration is needed between managers and researchers in designing research projects that ask meaningful questions.

Action research was intended to address this gap. I did my master's thesis with work groups at Herman Miller in Holland, Michigan, sharing the data and meeting with them to identify action steps. However, I haven't done such a collaborative venture since. It is time-consuming and risky. I spent my last sabbatical at Otis Elevator (where we had a lot of ups and downs), working on learning and development projects, but I could never get my busy collaborator to find the time to write with me, beyond a few conference papers. So, I too, have struggled bridging the gaps.

Ed Schein has a history of asking good questions. Building on his legacy, Ilene Wasserman and Kathy Kram interviewed researchers and practitioners about the interplay between these two realms of activity. In a 2009 *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* article they noted that applied researchers are boundary spanners and see themselves as different, as pioneers.

There are also dilemmas in bridging the gaps. This is the road less traveled. This type of research takes more time and is risky, something that is challenging for the untenured. In Wasserman and Kram's research, practitioners too expressed conflict with the scholar–practitioner divide, with one saying, “It's hard living in a world that wants you to be one or the other.” Yet Admiral Burhoe (2011) said yesterday, “It is irresponsible to be a practitioner without being a scholar.”

Despite these risks and conflicts a number of people, many sitting in this very ballroom, have strived to bridge the gap.

I have selected some works by EAM scholar–practitioners to illustrate how the gap is being bridged. My apologies for not including your work. This is a reflection on my EAM experiences and some of the sessions in which I have participated.

- First, this afternoon's plenary session focuses on Eileen Fisher, a practitioner with vision and commitment, aided by Susan Schor, a former academic.
- At another conference, Boston University explained its long-term relationships with the managers of a Norwegian shipping firm, describing how the relationship enhanced both of their lives.
- The conference theme identified by Dilip [Mirchindani] in New Brunswick was sustainability. His program helped us to learn what organizations are doing to be more sustainable and how we can apply sustainability principles in our research, classes, and institutions.
- In this year's conference, sustainability was documented in a case about the Nissan Leaf by Giapponi, Cavanagh, and McEvoy (2011), as well as in a panel this morning on bringing sustainability to campus, in which Dilip participated.
- Sandy Morgan and Bob Dennehy's (2004) work on storytelling and communities of practice helps us create better working places and find ways to communicate important lessons to their members.
- Allison Konrad's (Konrad, Kramer & Erkut, 2007; Stickney & Konrad, 2005) work on gender addresses real and persistent workplace problems, problems that have a significant impact on people's lives.
- Tim Golden's work on flex-time and telework is pushing the boundaries of practice and scholarship (Golden, Sardeshmukh, & Sharma, 2010).
- A number of ELA exercises bring relevance to the classroom—from Drew Harris's Bubble Factory, (2007) to Lynn Miller's, (2008) comparison of

brainstorming and Nominal Group Technique to the wicked problem solving methodologies of Livtin, Stork, and Woodilla, (2010). These activities make the classroom more relevant and encourage future practitioners to think and question as scholars.

- Jeanie Forray's work on the nature of conversations that human resource (HR) personnel have in their organizations showed how even small conversations shape how managers view issues and influences actions they may take (Forray, 2001). Clearly, this is bridge-building work.
- Most recently (2011), three EAMers published an interesting article in *Human Relations*. Anshu and Pushy Prasad and Raza Mir looked at the discourse of fashion and the implementation of diversity programs. Being fashionable or *au courant* was viewed by the consultants who were implementing the program as helping to facilitate change. However, these programs soon became standardized and thus less relevant to local issues. These EAM authors were critical and highly relevant in pointing out the *shortcomings* of practitioners and consultants, creating a conundrum where relevant research points out the irrelevance of practice. The trend-seeking nature of diversity programs created cynicism and resistance to change in the Canadian organizations they studied, an outcome that was the opposite of what was intended.

Such research involves role conflicts and stretching—sometimes being uncomfortable, going to unfamiliar places. Captain Marcille from the Coast Guard Academy used the phrase, “There is no comfort in the growth zone and no growth in the comfort zone.”

A sociology colleague of mine at the University of Hartford left his comfort zone and hung out with Puerto Rican gangs in Springfield, Massachusetts, playing basketball with them to win their trust. His award-winning book *When the Heart Turns Rock Solid* (Black, 2009) chronicled their experiences and explained the difficulties they encountered. While we may not get this uncomfortable, it illustrates the payoffs from entering the discomfort zone.

So, perhaps when all is said and done, the dichotomy between practitioner and scholar is not as great as some suggest. In another paper at this conference, Shapiro, Liu, and Duffy (2011) assert that we are actors on a continuum between the two, with the endpoints not nearly as polar as some have described.

In closing, I am confident that EAM will continue to bridge the divide with work that is relevant in terms of scholarship, pedagogical developments, and the development of doctoral students.

Bridging is what we are all about.  
Enjoy the rest of the conference.

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