

The Great Divide Between Business School Research and Business Practice

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Abstract

In their 2005 *Harvard Business Review* article, Bennis and O'Toole described business schools as being “on the wrong track” as a result of their focus on so-called scientific research. Some commentators argue that business schools have slowly lost their relevance since the end of the 1950s when they undertook a major overhaul in response to the harsh criticism of the Ford and the Carnegie Foundations on the state of theory and research in business administration. Inspired by Khurana's (2007) book on the development of American business schools, this article describes the debate on the relevance of scientific business research that can be found in the popular business press and the academic literature, and suggests a number of structural and cultural changes to increase the relevance of business research and its impact on practice.

Résumé

Dans leur article publié en 2005 dans la *Harvard Business Review*, Bennis et O'Toole décrivaient les écoles de gestion comme étant « sur la mauvaise voie » en raison de l'importance qu'elles accordent à la recherche soi-disant scientifique. Certains observateurs soutiennent que les écoles de gestion ont lentement perdu leur pertinence depuis la fin des années 1950 alors qu'elles ont entrepris d'importants remaniements en réponse aux critiques sévères formulées par les fondations Ford et Carnegie quant à la théorie et à la recherche en administration des affaires. Inspiré par le livre de Khurana (2007) sur le développement des écoles de gestion américaines, cet article dépeint le débat sur la pertinence de la recherche scientifique en gestion qui

fait rage dans la presse d'affaires et la littérature académique, et suggère des changements structurels et culturels qui pourraient améliorer la pertinence de la recherche en gestion et ses effets sur la pratique.

In a recent front-page article entitled “What They Don’t Teach Law Students: Lawyering,” *The New York Times* bemoaned that law students come out of school without really knowing how to practise law (Segal, 2011). Although new graduates have to attend crash courses in legal training after having been hired by law firms, clients were starting to resent that a proportion of the large legal fees they pay is allocated to training on the job. According to *The New York Times*, law professors were not able to teach “lawyering” because “law schools have long emphasized the theoretical over the useful.” This perspective was illustrated by the out-of-date content of classes in which students learn about “the variety of property law in post-feudal England” or about “Hadley v. Baxendale, an 1854 dispute about financial damages caused by the late delivery of a crankshaft to a British miller” (p. A1). Law professors, rewarded for producing scholarly articles primarily destined for an academic audience, seemed to have developed an “allergy” to the practical. As a result, they were not inclined nor able to spend time revising the curricula to make sure that students learn their “trade” (Segal, 2011).

This apparent divide between research and practice is a recognized problem not only in law schools, but also in business schools. Some argue that business schools became less and less relevant (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005) starting at the end of the 1950s with the major overhaul that responded to the harsh criticism of the Ford and the Carnegie Foundations on the state of theory and research in business administration. Following the publication of the two reports (Gordon & Howell, 1959; Pierson, 1959), North American business schools sought to raise their academic status. It appears that they have been very, if not too, successful (Daniel, 2009; Schmalensee, 2006). There is no doubt that research in business schools has the wind in its sails. Business schools all around the world produce PhD graduates who are socialized in the publication process. A growing number of scholarly journals are available to business scholars for publishing their research. At the same time, while more and more academics compete for the limited number of pages available in top journals, only a few “stars” (Erkut, 2002; Ito & Brotheridge, 2007) end up with their names in print in these prestigious outlets.

In this context of intense business research activity, we take stock of the continuing debate on the relevance of scientific business research that can be found in academic literature and the popular business press. Drawing from Khurana’s (2007) book on business education, we describe the first forays of university-based business schools into academic research and identify the historical and structural reasons for the persistent gap between business research and business practice. We then provide a brief review of the literature on the rigor-relevance debate. This review indicates that although many authors agree on the need to reconcile business research and practice, others believe that recent efforts to close the gap have been successful. We are somewhat less optimistic and believe, along with a number of authors, that the divide between business research and practice is widening and has negative impacts on business teaching at all levels. We conclude by identifying structural and cultural changes that could increase the relevance of business research and its impact on practice.

University-based Business Schools

Of the numerous publications on the need to rejuvenate business education, many of them triggered by financial scandals, Khurana's (2007) book on the development of American business education stands out. Khurana claimed that university-based business schools emerged as part of a "professionalization project" and were intended "not just to prepare students for careers in management but also to serve as the major vehicles of an effort to transform management from an incipient occupation in search of legitimacy to a bona fide profession" (2007, p. 7). Khurana argued that this initial project was never fulfilled because business schools shifted toward a more academic orientation and away from professionalization. This section draws from his fascinating account of the development and evolution of research in university-based business schools.

First Forays Into Business Research

The purpose of professional schools is to prepare young adults for careers in specific domains, such as dentistry, engineering, and law. Khurana (2007) argued that business schools were created in the United States in the late 19th century to develop a socially responsible managerial class. The creation of a "research function" (Khurana, 2007, p. 170) was essential for these newly established business administration faculties in order to gain legitimacy within the universities where they were based. Promoters of business education, and most prominently the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB),¹ an active player since its inception, believed that business professors who engaged in research were better teachers.

Khurana's account of the first forays of business schools into the research world in the early 1920s is particularly telling (2007, pp. 170–176). He explained that the initial efforts to develop research capabilities included faculty and students devoting the summer months to research activities as well as to the founding of a number of business school-based publications such as magazines, reviews, reports, and leaflets. These publications presented "everything from faculty research projects to summaries of facts about certain industries or general economic conditions" (2007, p. 170). No doubt, today's rigorous management scholars would find rather laughable these first steps into what was then loosely defined as *research*. However, the "sincere wish to serve the business general public" (Haney, 1924, as cited in Khurana, 2007, p. 172) that characterized these early research efforts was something that is, according to some, missing in contemporary business schools. Adler and Herzing's plea for research that "matters to society" (2009, p. 73) illustrated this viewpoint. In Canada, the history and evolution of HEC Montréal is a case in point. Increasingly well-positioned as a research-centred North American business school, this institution was very different under the long leadership (1938–1962) of Esdras Minville, who wanted to "train citizens to lead businesses that would contribute to the wealth of the society in which they operate." Beyond this educational mission, Minville was looking for an "integral solution to the French-Canadian national problem" (Duguay, 1998).

Under the academic model in place today, teaching and research are the two key functions of university professors, and satisfying performance in these two areas is the essential criterion for hiring and tenure (Ito & Brotheridge, 2007). It is interesting to

know that in the 1920s and 1930s, business research activities were primarily carried out by “bureaus” established within American business schools and staffed with “field agents” (Khurana, 2007, p. 173). Although these research bureaus tended to focus on very specific operational questions, they had the advantage of being closely connected to and supported by their regional communities. As a result, the bureaus would engage in research projects that served the specific needs of local businesses. However, this research relevance was gained at the cost of academic freedom. Subjects such as “taxation and labor, or challenges to private monopolies of utilities” were judged as questions that were too controversial to be studied (Khurana, 2007, p. 175). Nevertheless, the research bureaus would enable a valuable fit between teaching and research by gathering data on various industries that could be used for case teaching. Before research bureaus eventually disappeared in the 1930s, the AACSB toyed with the idea of creating a federation of such bureaus, and some AACSB members even suggested that practitioners should be included in them. Although this idea may seem rather odd, it could have prevented in some ways the gap that seems to exist today between research and business practice.

The New Look

Founded in 1905, the Carnegie Foundation is dedicated to the advancement of education. Similarly, the Ford Foundation was created by the Ford family to raise and manage financial resources destined for scientific, educational, and charitable causes. Toward the end of the 1950s, these two foundations produced separate reports deploring the state of theory and research in business. It was time for business schools to escape the “wasteland of vocationalism” (Simon, 1991, p. 139) and to embrace a professionalism based on rigorous science, as engineering and medicine had already done. In addition to these two reports, which Daniel (2009) identified as causing the ruin of business schools, Khurana’s thorough analysis of numerous primary and secondary sources shed light on the subtle political manoeuvres that helped shape business schools into what they are today.

Although both the Carnegie and the Ford Foundations were active players in business education between the 1930s and the 1960s, the Carnegie Foundation was more concerned with undergraduate business education, whereas the Ford Foundation concentrated its efforts on graduate education (Khurana, 2007, p. 237). The Ford Foundation had vast financial resources to spend, especially after the death of Henry Ford in 1947, and during a period of 15 years starting in the 1950s, the Ford Foundation “used its enormous financial resources as both carrot and stick to reform not only MBA curricula but also the entire structure of graduate business education” (Khurana, 2007, p. 237).

The Ford Foundation chose to centre its efforts on two American university-based business schools: Harvard Business School (HBS) and the Carnegie Institute of Technology’s Graduate School of Industrial Administration (GSIA). Ford eventually added the business schools of Columbia, Chicago, and Stanford, thus forming an elite group of five well-financed American centres of excellence. The foundation coined the term *New Look* and “repeatedly used it in connection with its efforts” (Khurana, 2007, p. 250). It was hoped that other American business schools would follow the trend set by these centres of excellence and implement the New Look program, including disciplinary research models rooted in social sciences and quantitative analysis.

The Ford Foundation put itself forward as a disinterested agent acting in favour of the improvement of business education in North America. Looking closely at the key actors' affiliations with both the foundation and the business schools, Khurana (2007) argued that the foundation had an agenda of its own. Khurana identified a triumvirate composed of the dean of HBS (who served on the board of the Ford Foundation), the vice-president of the Ford Foundation (who was responsible for business school activities), and the dean of GSIA (who was also “an adviser to and confidant of” this vice-president):

The “crisis” in business education that would be proclaimed by the Carnegie and Ford foundations in 1959 was in fact engineered by parties such as the deans of HBS and GSIA, whose roles as business school deans were intertwined with—and also, to a degree, in conflict with—their roles as agents of the foundations. (2007, p. 238)

However, the two deans had different views on how business schools should be reformed. HBS, the largest and most prestigious institution, already had a well-established tradition of case writing and case-based teaching, and wanted to promote this approach in American business schools, whereas GSIA was keen on quantitative methods and scholarship grounded in disciplines such as economics, political science, behavioural sciences, and operations research (Khurana, 2007, pp. 252–253). To some extent, through the implementation of the New Look program, the disciplinary research model won out. However, Harvard, in spite of (or because of) its case method,² remained on top of the pecking order of business schools, though it did hire a few disciplinary researchers. Interestingly, by subsidizing both HBS and Carnegie GSIA, the Ford Foundation had intended to encourage case-method teaching from Harvard as well as disciplinary research from GSIA. Giving money to Harvard also legitimized giving money to the very new GSIA. It is odd that in spite of the millions spent trying to spread the case method, the only success resulting from this large expenditure was the spread of disciplinary research among almost all the top business schools. This development forced business schools to hire non-business disciplinary professors who did not know much about business itself. Not too surprisingly, these disciplinary researchers had little expertise or interest in using the case method for teaching at the undergraduate and MBA levels.

It is fascinating to see how the joint actions of these three individuals had such a profound and lasting impact on American and Canadian business schools, eventually leading to the heated debate on the relevance of management research. A brief review of the literature on this debate follows. We will demonstrate that although some authors agree on the need to reconcile business research and practice, some believe that recent efforts to close the gap have been successful. Others remain less optimistic and argue that the divide between business research and practice is very wide indeed.

The Business Research Relevance Debate

Most professors responsible for the training of future professionals at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels allocate a significant portion of their time to research. In principle, research carried out by professional school instructors should contribute to the better understanding of the profession and positively affect practice. However, a forum on management research published in the *Journal of Management Studies* suggested

that not all management authors agree with this principle. Building on system theory (Luhmann, 1995), Kieser and Leiner (2009) argued that communities of management researchers and communities of business practitioners were two distinct specialized systems operating in “isolation from each other” (p. 519). It is not clear whether Kieser and Leiner believed that management research and business practice *can* or *should* not be reconciled. Nevertheless, they appear as purists compared to those who have a utilitarian perspective and who strongly voice the opinion that business research must have an impact on practice. This latter group can be separated into two categories: some who believe management research is on the right track and rigor-relevance will soon be realized, and others who believe the gap between business research and practice persists and is perhaps growing.

Introspection

Articles in top-tier management journals regularly address the question of the impact of business research. The *Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)* was particularly introspective over the last few years under the editorship of Sara L. Rynes, whose research interests include the research-practice gap (Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001). In 2007, *AMJ* published two editor’s forums on management research that addressed the gap between business research and practice. The fourth 2007 issue of *AMJ* included an editor’s forum entitled “Research With Relevance to Practice,” whereas the sixth 2007 issue proposed a forum that celebrated the 50 years of the *AMJ*. In both forums, invited contributors recognized the gap between business research and practice, and suggested ways to close it. Some contributors argued that academics and practitioners could be brought together (Bartunek, 2007); others were less optimistic (Hambrick, 2007).

In their counterpoint to Kieser and Leiner’s (2009) contribution to the management research published in the *Journal of Management Studies*, Hodgkinson and Rousseau (2009) used a decisively cheerful tone, arguing that bridging the gap between business research and practice is “already happening” (p. 534). The authors supported their claim by referring to their own experience, both of them having “conducted field research in partnership with organizations, their leadership and members where the output has included scientific publications in top journals” (2009, p. 539). Furthermore, one of the authors was an advocate of evidence-based management, defined as “managerial decisions and organizational practices informed by the best available scientific evidence” (Rousseau & McCarthy, 2007, p. 94).

The AACSB could also be positioned as among those who believe that business research has practical relevance. The Impact of Research Task Force, set up by the association, stated in its final report that business schools have “many reasons to be proud of their growing commitment to scholarship” and that “carrying out rigorous basic research in business and management is an important role that collegiate schools of business are uniquely positioned to fill” (AACSB International, 2008, p. 5). The AACSB does not seem to question that the research work of business scholars results in advances in business practice.

Unsurprisingly, the *Academy of Management Learning & Education* regularly discusses the gap between management teaching, research, and practice. For example, Burke and Rau (2010) argued in a recent edition of this journal that the spotlight is too often on the divide between research and practice. The authors therefore turned their

attention to the fissure between teaching and research. It is interesting to note that these authors seemed to be looking for ways to provide undergraduate and MBA students with the “skills they need to be enduring clients of management research” (Burke & Rau, 2010, p. 133). One could argue, however, that if business research was undeniably relevant, not much effort would be needed to *sell it* to the future members of the business community.

O’Brien, Drnevich, Crook, and Armstrong (2010) tested whether academic research adds value for the graduates of business schools. Although their paper addressed from an interesting angle the issue of the relevance of business school research, the existence of a causal relationship between faculty publication and the increase in salary for the average MBA graduate after graduation can certainly be questioned. Many variables could explain the observed correlation, such as the reputation of business schools and the extent to which relationships with the business community facilitate placement of graduating students. A reverse causation might also exist. It could be argued that wealthy MBA graduates make large donations to fund research at the business schools where they studied, and that these donations in turn result in higher numbers of faculty publications. Furthermore, the focus on graduate salary is a far cry from the social responsibility dimension of the initial professionalization project described by Khurana:

One prominent banker scolded business schools during the 1934 AACSB meeting for failing to fulfill their most basic duty, which he described as “to bring into the business world on the part of its graduates somewhat of a social point of view,” to teach them that they had “obligations to society at large” and must not simply use their careers in business “as a means to [make] money for themselves.” (2007, p. 180)

A Persistent Gap

In stark contrast with the two optimistic views described above, some authors argued that not much has changed since the 2005 *Harvard Business Review* article in which Bennis and O’Toole described business schools as being “on the wrong track” as a result of their focus on so-called scientific research and the hiring of professors who lack business experience. The business press regularly comments on the gap between business teaching and research and on the limited effect of research on the business profession. In a recent dossier on the future of business schools, *The Financial Times* noted the “difficulty of quantifying and analyzing the impact of business schools on the business world,” adding that “the vast majority of managers will never knowingly come into contact with business academia” (Bradshaw, 2009). Similarly, the proportion of business school professors having significant contact with the business community is probably rather low.

Business scholars also voice their concerns occasionally in the business press. Interviewed by *The New York Times* when he stepped down in 2005 after 10 years as dean of the Yale School of Management, Jeffrey E. Garten asked for dramatic change in business school education:

I think there should be different criteria for tenuring faculty What business schools need to do is add some criteria for promotion. One of them should be some real-world experience, in the same way that a doctor teaching at a medical school would have had to see patients. (quoted in Holstein, 2005)

Similarly, at the end of his tenure as dean of the MIT Sloan School of Management, Richard Schmalensee wrote in *Business Week* that business students are “taught by faculty who are more interested in impressing their academic colleagues than in confronting real-world business problems” (2006, p. 118). Also in *Business Week*, Hambrick claimed that the format of academic articles, which he described as “a contorted, misshapen, inelegant product”, was more than enough to deter practitioner readership.

Bartunek and Rynes (2010) have examined the construction and contributions of the “Implications for Practice” (IFP) section normally found at the end of management and organizational behaviour scholarly articles. This examination has led to mixed results: although more recent articles appearing in outlets such as the *Academy of Management Journal* and the *Journal of Applied Psychology* tended to include an IFP section, almost half of the articles sampled by Bartunek and Rynes (2010) failed to articulate conclusions specifically destined for practitioners. The authors concluded their article by joining Adler and Herzog (2009) in strongly condemning the way management research informs only itself.

Lastly, Starkey, Hatchuel, and Tempest (2009) provided one of the most refreshing views on the rigor-relevance debate in their contribution to the aforementioned forum on management research published in the *Journal of Management Studies*. The authors argued that Kieser and Leiner’s (2009) view of management research and practice as unbridgeable was based on a too-narrow conception of science and rigor:

What the postmodern critique of sciences does demonstrate, leaving value judgments aside, is that there is a proliferation of different modes of inquiry, that the old institutions of science, such as the university, can no longer expect to survive as the privileged knowledge spaces they once were. (Starkey et al., 1990, p. 548)

Following from this statement, we argue that a hypothetical team of management consultants, business school professors, and managers put together by a trade organization to find ways to improve supply chain performance could produce new knowledge—and in a way that was as rigorous as the methods used in research reported in scholarly journals. This project would be reminiscent of those conducted by the research bureaus described by Khurana (2007). It might be rather difficult for an article on supply chain performance co-authored by a management consultant, a business school professor, and a manager to find its way into a *Financial Times* Top 45 journal. However, Starkey et al. (2009) would probably claim that many other outlets (either printed or web based) would welcome such contributions, contributions that should be considered as “scientific” and “rigorous” as the *Financial Times* list of top journals. We believe that major structural changes are needed in the world of business schools for such claims to become conventional wisdom.

Up or Out of the Business School

A number of business scholars (Adler & Harzing, 2009; Pfeffer, 2007; Vermeulen, 2005) have suggested that the very structure of tenure and promotion systems within universities and business schools in the United States, Canada, and other regions around the world is a key reason for the persistent gap between business research and business practice. This phenomenon is an example of how organizational structure, policies, rules, and promotion criteria subtly shape the behaviour of organizational actors as described by Bower (1970).

In many business schools, when a tenure-track position becomes available, young PhD graduates who have already started to work on their publication record will stand a good chance of getting the position even if their experience of organizational life is limited to a few summer jobs. Right after being hired, the young assistant professor will expend energy and effort to obtain research grants, to participate in academic conferences, and to publish in scholarly journals. Teaching gets in the way for the young professor who knows that her top priority should be research. With some luck and very hard work, the young professor will earn some notoriety, her papers will be quoted by her peers, and it will become easier to obtain research grants. However, undergraduate and graduate students will sometimes complain that the teaching of this young professor is too theoretical. Furthermore, she will not be recognized by the local business community, and no practitioner will ever read her work. Nonetheless, she may be satisfactorily advancing within the existing tenure and promotion system.

When he retired, Dean Garten commented that business school professors are awarded tenure “on the same qualifications as he or she would if they were in a department of economics or a department of history” (Holstein, 2005). Business schools might have earned their academic status, but their undergraduate and MBA programs seem to have lost to some extent the ability and legitimacy to train future managers. Furthermore, like scholars in many disciplines, business school professors seem to be writing not because they want to share ideas and convince readers, but because they want to be published in scholarly journals and quoted by their peers. Scholars seems indifferent to the fact that they might not be *truly* read.

Junior business school faculty play this enduring system well. They learn early on, even during their doctoral studies, what is expected from them. They very well understand that writing pedagogical cases or practitioner articles will not get them promoted. The fear of having their tenure application turned down by their departments is a powerful motivator. Business schools that do not have tenure systems may nevertheless engage in competition with other schools through the various rankings (Adler & Harzing, 2009), rankings that are now almost impossible to avoid. Such rankings send the signals that only a limited number of journals “count.” Management faculty who can only publish in “all the other” journals may easily feel like poor cousins in the academic family. In addition to tenure processes and the academic rankings, journal editing also shapes academic behaviour. A management researcher who has done particularly well and who has long been recognized by the management research community may end up in an editorship position. This is a dream position in which actors can continue to reinforce the system by systematically rejecting articles they judge as not rigorous enough.

Although business schools professors work hard to elaborate conceptual frameworks to demonstrate their knowledge of the principal theories in sociology or economics, they may look at problems for which managers have already found solutions. This fact may not matter, however, because their research questions amount to excuses to collect data and exhibit statistical skills. They then try to take up a few pages in top-tier scholarly journals so that they are respected by their peers. But the problem is that most business practitioners do not read scholarly journals. As a result, business schools professors have gradually less and less to contribute to the better understanding of the management profession and to affect positively what goes on in it.

It should be noted that the divide between business school research and business school teaching has an impact on all the programs that business schools offer. Although it is always possible for business schools to bring managerial experience to the classroom by hiring practitioners with master's degrees as part-time lecturers, up until quite recently, AACSB required for accreditation that at least 50% of instructors at the bachelor's and master's levels be "academically qualified," which normally means a PhD and regular publication in refereed journals (AACSB International, 2011). At its 2013 annual meeting, AACSB accredited members voted to modify this standard to encourage more academic practitioners. The new standards require a minimum of 40% such "academically qualified" instructors now referred to as "scholarly academics," so long as at least 60% are either scholarly or "practice academics." The latter category normally hold doctorates and are "professionally engaged." Evidently, the structure of the tenure and promotion system described above also has repercussions on research master's and doctoral programs. Students in these programs prepare theses under the supervision of professors who also have specific promotion and tenure needs. Research topics and methodologies will therefore be selected because they are publishable, not because they could solve practical problems or improve business practice.

Bridging the Divide

What structural and cultural changes in business schools could help reverse this phenomenon? Markides (2007) advocated "ambidextrous" career paths; that is, business professors would concentrate on publishing in scholarly journals and, until they are tenured, refrain from disseminating their research results to a non-academic audience other than in the undergraduate and MBA classrooms. After academic researchers received tenure, Markides suggested that they could afford to "move into 'riskier' types of managerial research" (p. 767). We believe that such an academic career plan would only increase the gap between business research and practice because professors who concentrate exclusively on scholarly outlets at the beginning of their career are likely to continue to do so after tenure. Where newly tenured professors allocate some of their time to writing textbooks, their lack of practical experience would probably force them to use second-hand and out-dated examples to illustrate theories. The use of such textbooks in undergraduate and MBA courses would only serve to sustain the gap between research and practice.

This gap could be reduced if less time and resources were allocated to fundamental research aimed at describing and understanding organizational phenomena. These research inquiries should be left to disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and economics, just as fundamental research in the health sciences is more often conducted in faculties of science rather than in medical schools. Just as the teaching assignment of medical professors is adjusted to allow them to practise medicine, business professors could divide their time between teaching and practice, and should be encouraged to use sabbaticals as opportunities to assume roles in businesses. Although this solution could appear unworkable because of the lack of experience many PhD professors have in the "real world" of management and business, we believe that industrial sabbaticals could provide academics with an opportunity to improve their knowledge about business practice and for practitioners to reflect on the way they conduct their affairs. In fact, a closer interaction between business professors and business practitioners is one of the AACSB's

recommendations to increase the impact of business school research (2008, p. 39). This solution might help business schools to successfully complete the “professionalization project” (Khurana, 2007) that they undertook at the beginning of the 20th century.

Furthermore, instead of promoting top-tier academic journal publication as the highest benchmark, business schools should encourage the adoption of multiple models of academic inquiry coexisting on equal footing. Publishing in scholarly journals should not “count” more than writing case studies or developing industry notes for teaching tools, pursuing a research agenda partly modelled on the “research bureaus” of the 1920s and 1930s, and publishing in practitioner journals as well as in the popular press. A more drastic approach for the management research community could be to question the peer review process itself (Macdonald & Kam, 2007), or to value the publication of books as much as that of peer-reviewed articles. It is worth noting that junior faculty from lower-tier business schools have difficulty publishing in top-tier scholarly journals. They face a lose-lose situation when value is attributed solely to peer-reviewed publication. Junior faculty from such schools would probably waste less time if they were encouraged early in their career to develop close links with local business communities in the manner of the research bureaus of the 1920s and 1930s. They should be rewarded for using their doctoral training to rigorously prepare undergraduate and MBA students to make a difference in the companies that will employ them as much as they would be for publishing in scholarly journals. They may also need to be made aware that they will have access to fewer resources in the form of research grants or teaching assistantships.

In this paper, we have argued that a discrepancy between business research and business practice exists and is widening. Further research is needed to evaluate the magnitude of this discrepancy. For example, it would be interesting to look at the topics of the research master’s and doctoral theses over the recent past in a sample of business schools from around the world and to evaluate their degree of practicality. Similarly, a detailed comparison of the most popular textbooks currently used in core undergraduate and MBA courses (strategy, marketing, accounting, finance, human resource, and so on) with those that were used 10 or 20 years ago could also be informative. This textbook review could focus on the examples used by a more recent generation of authors compared to earlier ones and evaluate the extent to which they are able to illustrate theories with stories that they themselves have witnessed.

Is it possible to close the gap between business research and practice? As demonstrated earlier, the roots of this gap can be traced to the development of American business education as analyzed by Khurana (2007). The expression *two foundations’ reports* is now used as a leitmotif by numerous commentators who argue that business schools have lost their relevance. However, we argue that it is not so much the reports themselves but rather the positioning of two deans and a foundation vice-president at a point in time that brought about major changes, almost by accident, in business schools in the 1950s, and consequently led to the persistent gap between business research and practice. It would be unwise to wait for another historical accident to reverse the current trend. Further evidence of the gap between business research and business practice should be gathered to foster consensus among business school faculty, students, alumni, administrators, and advisers that the gap is indeed widening. Once consensus is reached, we can hope that the necessary structural and cultural changes could be implemented in business schools. 🍁

Notes

- ¹ Founded in 1916, the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business was later renamed the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) to better reflect its international reach. The mission of the AACSB is to contribute to the improvement of management education worldwide mainly through a formal business school accreditation process. In Canada, 19 of 55 business schools are AACSB accredited.
- ² Business instructors using the case method of teaching require that students analyze an assigned teaching case to be discussed in class. Teaching cases describe business situations but are not intended to demonstrate effective or ineffective handling of managerial problems. As a matter of fact, the managerial problem to be solved can be more or less explicit in the case (Leenders, Mauffette-Leenders, & Erskine, 2001)

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