



Making academic research more relevant: A few suggestions



Abinash Panda ^{a,*}, Rajen K. Gupta ^b

^a *Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management Area, Indian Institute of Management, Kashipur 244713, India*

^b *Human Behaviour and Organizational Development Area, MDI Gurgaon, India*

Available online 2 August 2014

KEYWORDS

Academic research;
Bridging rigour-relevance gap;
Business schools in India;
Criteria of relevance;
Doctoral research;
Ecosystem for research;
Research culture;
Rigour-relevance debate;
Relevant research

Abstract Academic research in the domain of management scholarship, though steeped in scientific and methodological rigour, is generally found to be of little relevance to practice. The authors of this paper have revisited the rigour-relevance debate in light of recent developments and with special reference to the management research scenario in India. The central thesis of the argument is that the gulf between rigour and relevance needs to be bridged to make academic research more relevant to business organizations and practitioners. They have offered some suggestions to enhance the relevance of academic research to practice.

© 2014 Indian Institute of Management Bangalore. Production and hosting by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Management research is generally perceived to have limited influence on management practice (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Miner (1984) found the 32 established organizational theories he reviewed to be of little importance to and usefulness for practitioners. Rigby (2001) discovered that only 7 of the 25 management tools and techniques he

analysed originated from academia, which was also found to have lower utilization and satisfaction, and a greater defection rate.

The findings of academic research that are published in scholarly management journals are perceived to be “only remotely related to the real world of practicing managers” (Susman and Evered, 1978, p. 582) and moreover, managers who apply scientific knowledge or theory seldom get what they desire (Lundberg, 2001). Business organizations, hence, rarely implement management practices that are carved out of the findings of academic research, even if they claim to enhance employee productivity and the financial performance of the organization (Hambrick, 1994; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +91 (0) 8191005838.
E-mail addresses: abinash.panda@iimkashipur.ac.in, abinashp@yahoo.com (A. Panda), rgupta@mdi.ac.in (R.K. Gupta).
Peer-review under responsibility of Indian Institute of Management Bangalore.

The reason for limited relevance of academic research is primarily attributed to academic researchers, who seem to be “out-of-touch” with the language, problems, and concerns of the business world and practitioners (Rudolph & Peluchette, 1992). Practitioners who look for “actionable” knowledge seldom refer to academic research (Beer, 2001; Huff, 2000; Lundberg, 2001) or track the advancement of knowledge in the world of academe. Business organizations prefer to approach management consultants (Kilmann, Slevin, & Jerrell, 1983) instead.

A consultant simplifies complex organizational issues of the empirical world on the basis of understanding, explanations, and predictions (Brannick and Coghlan, 2006), whereas academic scholars are perceived to complexify issues in their attempt to theorize organizational phenomena by considering all possible manifestations and contingencies.

In the process, academic researchers seem to be losing ground to consultants as sources of research ideas and advice for practitioners (Bartlett, 2007; Rigby, 2001). This is happening at a time when academics’ dependence on practitioners for relevant research seems to be on the rise (Trank & Rynes, 2003). This seems to contribute in a significant way to the chasm that exists between the worlds of the corporate and the academe.

However, the schism between corporate India and Indian academe seems to be more pronounced than what is experienced in the West, as management research in India has been mostly replicative in nature with limited context specificity. Further, most of the studies are concept centric rather than problem driven (Panda and Gupta, 2007).

The research tradition in India does not seem to have evolved indigenously. Instead, as Gupta (1994) has pointed out, Indian management scholars chose to build research tradition in India on the foundation of the basic premises of American society and concepts, frameworks, and methods of Western business organizations without validating those for Indian context. Hence, the knowledge created by academic research in India seems to have limited usefulness for management practitioners. Academic scholars, even in the recent past, have expressed concern over “the lack of high quality, context specific management research in India and the predilection of Indian researchers to follow Western models of research and publications blindly” (Khatri, Ojha, Budhwar, Srinivasan, & Varma, 2012, p.104).

The underutilization of knowledge generated by academic scholars by practitioners is a serious concern and needs to be addressed (Brannick, 2000). However, there has been a growing awareness and acknowledgement of the disconnect that exists and the challenges of making academic research more context specific and relevant to business organizations.

The relevance of academic research has long been a theme of discussion and debate (Brannick and Coghlan, 2006; McLean, McIntosh, & Grant, 2002; Rynes, McNatt, & Bretz, 1999; Starkey & Madan, 2001; Van de Ven, 2007), as also the rigour-relevance debate in US management research. Academy of Management (AoM) has repeatedly urged academic scholars to engage in more practice oriented research (Andrew Van de Ven, 2002; Hambrick, 1994; Huff, 2000). Van de Ven (2002, p.178) expressed his concern

about the “growing criticism that findings from academic and consulting studies are not useful for practitioners and do not get implemented”.

Indian Academy of Management (IAoM), during its second biannual meet at IIM Bangalore in December 2011, urged Indian researchers to strive for the level of rigour of the Western models, while conducting indigenous research using context relevant constructs and methodologies, to suit the development and educational requirements of the country (Khatri et al., 2012).

Shapiro, Kirkman, and Courtney (2007) have noted two types of gaps - the “lost in translation” gap (when managerially relevant research fails to reach practitioners) and the “lost before translation” gap (when managerially relevant research is not undertaken by academics). Kieser and Leiner (2009, p. 517) elaborated that “getting lost before translation means that scientific results are unconnectable and therefore untranslatable for practice”.

This paper is an attempt to revisit the rigour-relevance debate with recent developments and with special reference to the management research scenario in India, and offer some suggestions to enhance the relevance of academic research. This paper focuses primarily on how to bridge the “lost before translation” gap.

This paper is organized into four main sections. The section that follows this one presents an overview of the rigour-relevance gap. The second section focusses on business schools in India. The authors attempt to explore the reasons behind the poor research culture in business schools in India and what needs to be done. The third section deals with how to make academic research more relevant to practitioners. In this section, the authors discuss five criteria of relevance namely descriptive relevance, goal congruence, operational validity, non-obviousness, and timeliness, and how they can be integrated into the research process. The fourth section offers some suggestions to create an enabling ecosystem that would encourage academic scholars to conduct academic research with relevance.

Rigour-relevance debate

A researcher undertakes research as a quest for basic understanding or with consideration of use (Stokes, 1997) or a bit of both. Basic academic disciplines typically strive for expanding the understanding with little focus on application or use. Though management science is an applied discipline, management scholars, deeply influenced by the fundamental tenets of basic disciplines, seem to strive for better understanding of concepts and ideas, rather than their applicability in practice (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Vermeulen, 2005). They tend to focus on rigorous analysis of concepts to explore inter-relationship among various concepts to explain a phenomenon, rather than on how the “research insights” culled out of academic research can solve organizational problems.

The focus on analysis is reflected in the nature of management education as well. Mintzberg (2004) in his book *Managers not MBAs* puts forth that the MBA programme tends to focus on analytical skills, while synthesis, and not analysis, is the very essence of management. The MBA

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1016676>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1016676>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)