EDITOR’S AFTERWORD

LET’S CREATE A TIPPING POINT:
WHAT ACADEMICS AND PRACTITIONERS CAN DO,
ALONE AND TOGETHER

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Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has.

-Margaret Mead

In The Diffusion of Innovations (2003), Everett Rogers summarizes voluminous research showing that the adoption of new ideas or ways of doing things follows a nonlinear progression. Specifically, the adoption of new ideas follows an S-shaped diffusion curve, with only a small number of highly innovative individuals adopting a change in the beginning. However, once a small number of “opinion leaders” adopt the innovation and begin to persuade others, the adoption rate begins to surge. As more and more people embrace the change, more of those who have held back finally reach their “tipping point.” At this stage, the adoption diffuses widely. This idea, supported by extensive academic research, has recently been popularized by Malcolm Gladwell’s The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can make a Big Difference (2002).

The potential implications of this idea for the academic-practice gap are profound. First and foremost, it means that not everyone must change the way he or she does things in order for change to occur—far from it. In fact, only a small number of influential people may have to take action now in order to have a very big impact down the road.

In the next section, I summarize the ideas of the commentators who participated in this Editors’ forum on the Research-Practice Gap in Human Resource Management about what academics can do, both individually and collectively, to narrow the gap. A discussion of possibilities for collaboration between professional organizations such as the Academy of Management (AOM), the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP), the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), and the American Management Association (AMA) follows this summary. Finally, I provide some suggestions on how we might use research on the diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 2003) and the characteristics of tipping points (Gladwell, 2002) to make much faster progress toward narrowing the academic-practice gap and infusing both sides with new ideas.

WHAT ACADEMICS CAN DO

Research-Based Suggestions

The forum commentators’ suggestions with respect to academic solutions fall into two broad categories: research and education. Table 1 summarizes these ideas for solutions and gives several specific examples to illustrate each suggestion. Within the “research” segment, comments further divide into three categories: (1) methods of increasing the relevance and usefulness of academic research for practitioners, (2) the need for more direct study of research translation and knowledge transfer processes, and (3) suggestions for expanding or modifying publication outlets and formats.

Ways to increase relevance, usefulness, and interest to practitioners. One set of suggestions focuses on obtaining greater familiarity with practitioner needs and interests. For example, several commentators recommend that researchers pursue explicit interactions with practitioners while designing their studies, interpreting results, suggesting implications, and testing findings for credibility or usefulness (Cascio, 2007; Cohen, 2007; Latham, 2007a). Previous research has shown that these steps can lead not only to findings that practitioners are more likely to implement (Mohrman, Gibson, & Morhman, 2001), but also to articles that other academics cite more widely (Rynes, McNatt, & Bretz, 1999). Another suggestion is for academics to write articles for practitioner journals and to...
serve on the editorial boards of bridge periodicals as ways of learning about practitioner interests and broader trends affecting businesses and employees (Latham, 2007a; Saari, 2007). Yet another way of learning about practitioner interests is to visit the SHRM Web site, which often lists calls for research proposals and/or synopses of practice-relevant research (Cohen, 2007).

A second set of suggestions focuses on learning how to communicate more effectively with practitioners. For example, Latham gives some great examples of how he changes his language when communicating with practitioners (e.g., “theories” become “frameworks,” “research” becomes “a project,” and “the need for control groups” becomes “the necessity of being able to show senior management what happened in cases where we did versus did not implement our proposal” [2007a: 1029]). In a related vein, Saari (2007) recommends communicating quantitative data in ways that will enlighten rather than frighten practitioners who are not, after all, immersed in the culture and procedures of empirical research. Interestingly, her suggestions are appropriate for academic as well as practitioner audiences, since the most common indicator academics use to signal “importance”—null

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Solution Area</th>
<th>Broad Suggestion</th>
<th>Specific Examples</th>
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| **Research**                         | Ensure own research is informed by and integrated with practice | • Design research with implementation in mind. Develop research findings that help to improve actual organizational decisions. (Cascio)  
• Talk with practitioners about research questions before research is conducted and after results are obtained. (Cohen)  
• Conduct research with practitioners. (Latham)  
• Write articles for and publish research in practitioner journals. (Latham; Rynes, Giluk, & Brown; Saari)  
• Serve on editorial boards of journals that target practitioners (Latham)  
• Ask “bigger” research questions. (Gladwell, quoted in Gruber, 2007)  
• Master the art of communicating with managers. (Gruber; Latham; Saari)  
• Ask questions about phenomena that seem puzzling. (Levitt & Dubner, 2005)  
• Read voraciously, talk to many types of people, join practitioner organizations (Daft, Griffin, & Yates, 1987; Gruber, 2007)  
• Use “richer” methodologies. (Bartunek, Rynes, & Ireland, 2006)  
• Conduct research on the adoption and diffusion of human resource research findings to develop a theory of diffusion. (Latham)  
• Provide data-based evidence on the perceived causes and solutions of the “translation” problem. (Cascio)  
• Get research findings out more quickly. (Guest)  
• Make more use of the Web for recording “best practices” or EBM. (Cohen; Guest; Rousseau)  
• Include operational validity as a criterion for evaluating HRM theory. (Latham)  
• Require a section on practitioner application in all scholarly articles in academic journals. (Cohen)  
• Reframe AOM Perspectives as a source of evidence-based management for business school students and their subsequent employers. (Latham)  
• Include practitioners on boards of scholarly journals. (Cohen)  
• Send press releases about HR-related articles to editors and journalists at practitioner magazines. (Cohen)  
• Create a new journal/magazine in partnership with a practitioner organization. (Cohen)  
• Include practitioners as reviewers for all submissions for academic journals. (Cohen)  
• Relax theory requirements. (Hambrick, in press; Miller, 2007)  
• Include implications for teaching in research articles. (Rynes & Trank, 1999)  
• Conduct research on how to teach research methods and statistical principles more effectively. (e.g., Aguinis & Bransfetter, 2007)  
• Educate students regarding research processes, in addition to research findings and practical applications. (Cohen)  
• Include both scientific evidence and insights from practitioners in textbooks. (Cohen) |
| **Seek to understand the academic-practice gap through research** | Include implications for teaching in research articles. (Rynes & Trank, 1999)  
• Conduct research on how to teach research methods and statistical principles more effectively. (e.g., Aguinis & Bransfetter, 2007)  
• Educate students regarding research processes, in addition to research findings and practical applications. (Cohen)  
• Include both scientific evidence and insights from practitioners in textbooks. (Cohen) |
| **Reexamine academic publication processes** | **Ensure practitioners understand what research is and how to access it** | Include implications for teaching in research articles. (Rynes & Trank, 1999)  
• Conduct research on how to teach research methods and statistical principles more effectively. (e.g., Aguinis & Bransfetter, 2007)  
• Educate students regarding research processes, in addition to research findings and practical applications. (Cohen)  
• Include both scientific evidence and insights from practitioners in textbooks. (Cohen) |

*a Citations from commentaries in the current forum (2007) give authors’ names only.*
hypothesis significance testing—is fraught with serious problems (e.g., Schmidt & Hunter, 1997). Thus, any steps that researchers might take to focus more on communicating effect sizes and expected outcomes at various levels of a predictor variable (e.g., expectancy tables) would be simultaneously helpful to academics, educators, and practitioners (see also Becker & Gerhart, 1996).

The commentators also noted that most current top-tier research is driven by gaps in extant research or theory, rather than by either practical needs or puzzling empirical phenomena (e.g., Cascio, 2007). Thus, a third suggestion focuses on examining more novel, interesting, or fundamental research questions. Methods for accomplishing this include reading outside the academic literature, socializing outside one’s own academic and social circles, and paying more attention to the features of daily organizational life (e.g., Daft, Griffin, & Yates, 1987; Gruber, 2007; Levitt & Dubner, 2005; Weick, 2007).

I had occasion to think about this last tactic—paying more attention to “real” organizational life—as the commentaries for this forum were being written. One of the questions the lead paper raises is why there has been so little discussion of goal setting in practitioner and bridge periodicals. Several of the commentators speculate that it may be because the effectiveness of goal setting is no longer “news.” This is a reasonable speculation. However, I had to chuckle when I received an e-mail from the Organizational Behavior (OB) Division indicating that Gary Latham was being honored with its Lifetime Achievement Award, in no small part because of his path-breaking work on goal setting. In the same bulletin, I read that the winner of the OB Division’s Scholarly Achievement Award was Adam Barsky, for a paper entitled “Understanding the Ethical Cost of Organizational Goal-Setting” (Barsky, in press; emphasis added). Most of the impetus for Barsky’s paper comes from real-world examples of goal setting gone awry, such as the Sears automotive center scandal of the early 1990s or Enron’s performance-unit-based incentive plan. As if that weren’t enough of a coincidence, in the same week I also received an editor’s copy of a book called Destructive Goal Pursuit, based on the 1996 Mount Everest disaster (Kayes, 2006). To me, this confluence of events indicated that goal setting is still a very vibrant topic for both researchers and practitioners. Goal setting can work wonders, but it can also foment disasters (especially when linked to very large monetary rewards without appropriate controls). As such, it is hardly an irrelevant topic for organizations trying to reach aggressive production or financial targets while simultaneously pursuing a variety of other goals and trying to avoid legal and ethical pitfalls. Thus, by juxtaposing accepted research findings against current events, topics that might otherwise seem like “old news” can become quite newsworthy. I think that, as researchers, we should take it upon ourselves to do more of this (see, for example, Latham and Locke [2006]).

Finally, although this suggestion did not figure much in the present commentaries, several scholars have suggested that the use of richer, more intensive methodologies (e.g., grounded theory, case analyses, or ethnography) would be likely to generate greater interest among practicing managers (e.g., Bartunek, Rynes, & Ireland, 2006; Weick, 2007). Such investigations are more likely to provide the kinds of rich stories and pose the dilemmas with which practitioners resonate, thus increasing the likelihood that our research will be seen as relevant to them. Second, the “real world” of HR managers is messy, complex, and filled with human drama (Frost, 2007), making it unlikely that it can be completely understood using “hands-off” methodologies such as surveys and archival analyses. Third, rich research can sometimes reveal dynamics that explain otherwise perplexing or counterintuitive findings, as illustrated by an interesting study by Amy Edmondson (1996). Using quantitative methods, she uncovered a puzzling finding: various measures thought to correspond with “good management,” such as strong employee coaching, clear managerial direction setting, and high-quality team relationships, were correlated with higher error rates in the hospital medical units she was studying. Edmondson was able to resolve the mystery through supplementary qualitative investigations by a researcher who was blind to Edmondson’s quantitative findings. The qualitative results revealed that teams with a blame-oriented culture, low trust, and authoritarian leaders were less likely to report errors and mistakes—but not less likely to make them. Although qualitative research has been quite rare in HR and micro OB, it could be a very valuable addition to our methodological tool kit and one that would almost certainly improve our ability to speak to practitioners (Bartunek & Seo, 2002; Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999).

Direct study of research translation and knowledge transfer processes. The preceding suggestions deal largely with research processes. In contrast, this suggestion deals explicitly with research content. Both Cascio (2007) and Latham (2007a) suggest that researchers should “lead with their strength” by conducting research on translation processes between academics and practitioners.
For example, Latham suggests that researchers study “the adoption and diffusion of human resource research findings in the workplace” and develop “a theory of diffusion” (Latham, 2007a: 1028). I certainly agree with this suggestion. In particular, I think much more research needs to be done to determine (1) why practitioners don’t believe some of our findings, in addition to (2) why they don’t implement them, even if they believe them. As Lawler (2007) notes, most people think they already know quite a lot about human behavior. Therefore, anytime researchers present findings that run counter to someone’s current practices or beliefs as a manager, the stage is set for potential rejection of the message. In addition, the fact that most people avoid unpleasant messages and seek hopeful, uplifting ones (Guest, 2007) further increases the chance that at least some HR research findings (e.g., the sizable role of genetics in determining behavior and outcomes) will present severe diffusion challenges. Thus, we need much more research on how to communicate findings in ways that actually stimulate changes in the beliefs of both researchers and practitioners!

**Reexamining academic publication practices.**

The commentators also make a number of excellent suggestions about how to improve academic publication and information dissemination processes. First, they argue that academics need to spot trends and get results out more quickly (Cascio, 2007; Guest, 2007). With respect to spotting trends, no one is arguing that academics should “chase fads,” since to do so would be to emulate behavior that is generally viewed as problematic in the business world (Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2001; Latham, 2007a; Saari, 2007). However, the world is changing very rapidly, and at least some of the underlying drivers can be expected to challenge not only current managerial practices, but also the extant research knowledge base (e.g., Tsui, in press). Thus, in addition to developing a greater sensitivity to practitioners’ needs, researchers should also keep an eye on broader business, demographic, and geopolitical trends.

In addition to being quicker to spot emerging areas of research needs, academics also need to find ways to disseminate new knowledge more quickly. Even if academic researchers were to spot trends as soon as consultants or journalists do, by the time they conduct research and disseminate their results, practitioners may no longer be interested (e.g., Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999). To be sure, a number of developments have increased the speed with which academic research is being disseminated. For example, innovations such as Web-based submission systems and automatic “tickling” of reviewers have resulted in average review turnaround times of less than two months at some management journals (including *AMJ*). In addition, more and more journals (including all the AOM journals) now make their in-press articles available online to subscribers, getting research findings out to the public 6–12 months earlier than the print versions do. Third, the numbers of papers posted in “working paper” series have increased dramatically; the Social Science Research Network (SSRN; http://www.ssrn.com) is particularly noteworthy in this regard. Fourth, *AMJ* (through the Academy’s publicist, Ben Haimowitz) and other journals (e.g., *Management Science*) are doing much more to publicize their research findings to the press. In summary, things are improving on the dissemination front, although more can probably be done.

A second important issue raised by the commentators is that journals and periodicals are probably not the best medium for conveying bodies of knowledge to practitioners. For example, in this forum Saari (2007) points out that practitioners usually only look for research evidence in response to a particular problem or need. In such cases, even if the information is “all there” in journals, it requires considerable effort (and expertise) to find it, synthesize it, and sort out the disparate findings. Thus, Cohen (2007), Guest (2007), and Rousseau (2007) all argue that Web sites are likely to be more effective repositories of evidence-based knowledge for practitioners.

Cohen (2007) and Bartunek (in press) also argue that research journals could do much more to ensure that the manuscripts they publish include implications for practice. Similarly, Rynes and Trank (1999) argued that authors might also include implications for management education in their articles—noting how the findings change or add to what we might tell students in a classroom or managers in a consulting situation.

Finally, several authors (not in the present editorial forum) have recently argued that top-tier journals’ insistence that the work they publish make both strong empirical and theoretical contributions may be diminishing the relevance of our research for practice (e.g., Hambrick, in press; Miller, 2007). In Hambrick’s view, it is essential that top-tier management journals find a way to accommodate studies that are empirically interesting or important but do not necessarily contribute to theory. Insisting on contributions to theory from all empirical pieces may be particularly restrictive in subdisciplines such as HR, which are inherently applied. (Indeed, a 2004 survey of *AMJ*’s Editorial Board revealed that members of the HR Division placed a lower value on theoretical contribution, and a higher
value on implications for practice, than the members of other divisions). Still, even more theoretical subdisciplines, such as organization and management theory (OMT), have not been immune from this criticism (e.g., Miller, 2007).

Education-Related Suggestions

Three of the commentators in this editors’ forum—Cohen, Guest, and Latham—believe that researchers can and should do more to educate practitioners about research findings and processes. Cohen says, “It is disappointing that formal education was dismissed [by Rynes, Giluk, & Brown, 2007] .... Without the foundation to understand scientific evidence or the reinforcement of seeing it in business school teaching, how is EBM ultimately to take hold?” (2007: 1014).

I fully agree with Cohen’s point. Academics should do everything we can to weave research findings and insights on research paradigms (as well as examples of practical applications) into our courses and textbooks. The reason for our not having been more optimistic about business school education in the lead article is that most managers (including most HR managers) are not business school graduates (see also Cascio, 2007). Furthermore, an increasing proportion of business school teaching is being done by people without research degrees. Nevertheless, I agree with Cohen’s position that academics should be doing more in the classroom to explain research methods and logic along with research findings.

Latham provides some wonderful examples, both in this forum and in his recent book on motivation (Latham, 2007b), of how to get students interested in research by involving them in the process. His creativity in doing so is an inspirational model for us all. Another exemplar (of a different sort) comes from Aguinis and Branstetter (2007), who used recent developments in educational psychology to modify the teaching of an important statistical concept (sampling distribution of the mean), with demonstrable improvements in student learning. Much more of this type of work needs to be done and disseminated. Even more ambitious efforts would develop broader educational materials for managers, such as Greenhalgh’s (2006) book for the medical field, How to Read a Paper: The Basis of Evidence-Based Medicine.

Fortunately, there are an increasing number of outlets through which teachers like Latham, Aguinis, and Branstetter can publicize their methods and provide evidence of their success. These include the Academy of Management Learning and Education (AMLE), the Journal of Management Education, and some new outlets as well, such as the inaugural issue of the Journal of Human Resource Education, which just came online (http://business.troy.edu/JHRE).

Other resources for HR instructors include HR Instructional eXchange (http://fisher.osu.edu/mhr/hrx/) and the SHRM Web site (voted the most valuable HR teaching resource by eXchange participants). In addition, the Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC) provides grants for research designed to increase the effectiveness of management education through its Management Education Research Institute (http://www.gmac.com/gmac/). Finally, the HR Division of the Academy of Management recently instituted an award for innovative teaching in HR, with the winner sharing his or her innovations with others at the annual AOM meeting.

WHAT PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS CAN DO

The commentators also see a considerable role for professional associations such as the AOM, SHRM, and SIOP in bridging the academic-practice gap. Many of their suggestions focus on facilitating informal interactions and connections between academicians and practitioners; Table 2 presents some of these ideas and practical examples. For example, Cohen suggests that we “conduct focus groups or host day-long symposia between academicians and practitioners on the issue of the gap between scientific evidence and HR practice with a professional scribe to take notes and summarize the themes and points that are made; make a commitment to create a set of action steps to follow up these events” (2007: 1018).

In my view, setting up interactive sessions in which academics and practitioners can work together on important problems is probably the most important thing that our professional associations can do to narrow the gap (see also Shapiro, Kirkman, & Courtney, 2007). Such socialization processes—especially those in which individuals spend time together to produce some form of shared mental model, metaphor, or analogy that can serve as a framework for moving forward—also represent the first step in Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) theory of cross-boundary knowledge creation.

However, successful socialization requires that individuals empathize with one another enough to incorporate others’ feelings and beliefs, so that a larger sense of possibility can emerge (Nonaka & Konno, 1998). Not surprisingly, this is very diffi-
cult for academics and practitioners to do in the absence of face-to-face interactions. But it is also difficult—even for people who are in the same room—to empathetically incorporate each others’ beliefs when they are giving formal presentations designed to represent particular points of view (see also Bartunek, in press). As a case in point, Cohen writes: “I have listened to discussions and read articles about the academic-practitioner interface for almost 25 years. At times, it has felt like some academicians are saying, ‘Pay attention to what I do because I know what is important,’ rather than asking, ‘How can I use my significant (academic) talents to help HR practitioners and managers?’” (2007: 1017). Our professional associations can help us avoid such moments by sponsoring carefully thought-out interactions designed to create a common, collaborative space for both practitioners and academics, rather than a space where we simply talk at or past one another.

Besides facilitating informal interactions around joint areas of interest, a variety of other ideas emerge from the commentaries. For example, Cohen (2007) suggests inviting the press to annual conferences and preparing advance materials that will help them “hit the high points.” Guest (2007) and Rousseau (2007) suggest that professional associations help build and maintain collaborative EBM Web sites. Cascio (2007) feels that professional associations could incorporate more research-based content into their certification study guides and examinations. And Saari (2007) offers the idea of awards from professional associations for the research papers they judge as having the greatest potential for advancing practice or the use of EBM. All these suggestions, if adopted cumulatively, might get us beyond what Cohen describes as “nibbling at the corners” of the problem.

**HOW CAN WE “TIP THE TREND”?**

A tipping point is “that one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once.” (Gladwell, 2002: 9)

The major point of Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, is stated after the colon in his title: “little things” sometimes have an enormous effect on whether a trend dies out or becomes an epidemic. So far, what we have done as researchers and practitioners to bridge the gap has made only a little difference. How can we maximize the chances that we reach a tipping point—that our impact might be greater this time?

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Responsible Party</th>
<th>Broad Suggestion</th>
<th>Specific Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional organizations</td>
<td>Facilitate interaction with and connection between academics and practitioners</td>
<td>• Support and facilitate focus groups/symposiums between academics and practitioners on the issue of the academic-practice gap; ensure follow-up action. (Cohen)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Support translation of academic research for practitioners</td>
<td>• Hold annual conferences on subject matter of direct interest to practitioners. (Latham)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic-practice collaboration</td>
<td>Build and execute the Evidence-Based Management Collaboration (EBMC)</td>
<td>• Facilitate dialogue whereby scholars talk with practitioners about research questions and practitioner concerns prior to conducting research and then communicate relevant knowledge after results are obtained. (Cohen; Guest)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Build and execute the Evidence-Based Management Collaboration (EBMC)</td>
<td>• Establish Internet links from practitioner-oriented articles on research-based professional Web sites to HR practitioner Web sites. (Saari)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Build and execute the Evidence-Based Management Collaboration (EBMC)</td>
<td>• Invite members of the press to annual academic conferences and prepare advance materials to allow them to have meaningful experiences. (Cohen)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Build and execute the Evidence-Based Management Collaboration (EBMC)</td>
<td>• Offer support (e.g., professional writers) to help researchers rewrite their research for practitioner outlets. (Saari)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Build and execute the Evidence-Based Management Collaboration (EBMC)</td>
<td>• Establish an award for best translation of research for practitioners and/or research with the greatest potential for advancing practice. (Saari)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Build and execute the Evidence-Based Management Collaboration (EBMC)</td>
<td>• Provide, maintain, and update an online portal for organizational research relevant to practice in a user-friendly format and language. This portal would share principles supported by research as well as information regarding their use and limitations. It would require critical consideration of what consensus about good practice exists. (Guest; Rousseau)</td>
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Research shows that tipping points—large-scale changes in practice—generally begin with only a small number of people (e.g., Rogers, 2003). Gladwell called this the “Law of the Few”: “The success of any kind of social epidemic is heavily dependent on the involvement of people with a particular and rare set of social gifts” (2002: 33). In his terminology, what we need are a few committed “mavens” (people who obsessively accumulate knowledge and like to share it), “connectors” (people who know everyone), and “salesmen,” (people who are unusually persuasive and draw others into their way of thinking).

As scholars, our natural strength is in attracting, nurturing, and rewarding mavens; we are excellent at accumulating knowledge. In terms of academic-practitioner links, mavens are the people who, for example, might create the basic research syntheses necessary for the Evidence-Based Management Collaboration envisioned by Rousseau (2007; see http://www.tepper.cmu.edu/ebm). Alternatively, a few great mavens might develop research streams on the persuasiveness of alternative methods for translating research findings for practitioners. We also need a few great “connectors,” particularly those who like to draw people from well beyond their immediate environment into a project (Rousseau’s EBM Collaboration again comes to mind). Finally, we need to enlist the talents of some great salespeople—particularly those who can bridge the research-practice divide—to energize not only practitioners, but also academics.

As Ghoshal (2006), Rousseau (2006), and others (e.g., Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2001) have noted, human livelihoods (and sometimes, lives) are on the line in organizations. Yet despite the calls from nearly every recent AOM president for a broader view of scholarship and a larger influence on practice, for most academics, it remains “business as usual.” Our emphasis is on “hits,” almost as if we were employed by the Soprano School of Management.¹

People are counting on those of us in business schools to educate business leaders who will take broader, longer-term views that will help stem the corruption, scandals, and exploitation that occur all too frequently in the world of commerce. We do have knowledge that could help. But getting it out there, and persuading people to use it, is going to be very challenging. In the words of history professor Bernard Cooperman:

> Our society is more than happy to accept spin and cant because we have come to believe that all expertise is bias, that all knowledge is opinion, that every judgment is relative. I see this daily in my university classroom. Many of even my best students seem to have lost the ability to think critically about the world. They do not believe in the transformative power of knowledge because they do not believe in knowledge itself. [This lack of faith in knowledge] is built into our carefully balanced political “debates,” into our news shows with equal time given to pundits from each side and into the “fairness” we try to teach in our schools. We need not be surprised that people have become consumers who demand the right to choose as they wish between the two equally questionable sides of every story. (2007: 18)

If Cooperman is correct, we have our work cut out for us. But the rewards could be great. Positive

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¹ “The Sopranos” is a popular U.S. television program about a family of mobsters. In this context, a “hit” is a commissioned murder.
psychology shows that the peak experiences in individuals’ lives occur when they successfully face down immense challenges, particularly in ways that contribute to the common good (Seligman, 2004). Furthermore, research on tipping points and the diffusion of innovations demonstrates that every one of us need not be a hero for our efforts to make more of a difference in the world to succeed. But we do need “a few good people.” And they will have to come from both sides of the academic-practice gap.

REFERENCES


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