

Bridging the Research-Practice Gap in Diversity Training

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The Research-Practice Gap Exists: Researcher Perspective

- Terpstra & Rozell (1997) surveyed HRM departments at 201 US companies and found that the majority failed to use five strongly supported selection processes.
 - For example, they did not use validation studies to evaluate their selection procedures.
- Rynes et al. (2002) surveyed 995 SHRM members and found that most had incorrect ideas about many HR practices.
 - For example, 70% believed integrity tests have an adverse impact on racial minorities, which is false.

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The Research-Practice Gap Exists: Practitioner Perspective

- Howard Ross will offer some anecdotal evidence of scholar ignorance of the realities of practice.
- An important point made here and continued throughout the session is that practitioners vary dramatically in their professionalism and understanding of research.
- The slides are phrased to maximize the apparent difference from researchers.

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The Research-Practice Gap: Bad and Good

- Bad: Teachers and trainers are less effective than they would be, if they knew and could rely on cutting edge research finding.
- Good: The existence of the gap implies that knowledge is advancing.

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Reasons for the Gap

- The gap exists because researchers and trainers differ in many ways.
 - Personal predilections and training.
 - Situational influences
- With the next few slides, we will list some possible differences.
- We will then ask you to propose additional differences.

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Education and training

- Researchers
 - PhD with an emphasis on research and the scientific method.
- Practitioners
 - Quite varied and often on-the-job with an emphasis on problem solving.
- This difference feeds into many of the other reasons.

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Standards of “Truth”

- What it takes to accept a finding or practice as valid.
- Researchers
 - Standard used is “beyond a reasonable doubt.”
- Practitioners
 - Standard used is “the preponderance of the evidence.”

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Acceptable Evidence

- Researchers
 - Statistical analyses of controlled experiments or passive observation that uses measurement to control alternative explanations.
- Practitioners
 - Personal impressions of effects or reports from others that a practice had the desired effect.

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Intrinsic Motivation

- Researchers
 - Want to understand why, how, and under what conditions diversity training has an effect.
- Practitioners
 - Want to provide diversity training that positively affects individuals and organizations.

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Extrinsic Motivation

- Researchers
 - Get rewarded for publishing research articles in peer-reviewed journals.
- Practitioners
 - Get rewarded for convincing others that their training has made a difference at the individual or organizational level.

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Time Perspective

- Researchers
 - Are free to spend months or even years getting a paper into a journal.
- Practitioners
 - Must set up the diversity training program quickly.

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Attention to Social Factors

- Researchers
 - Tend to ignore social factors, organizational politics, and the importance of social acceptance.
- Practitioners
 - Must attend to social factors, are affected by organizational politics, and realize that diversity training must be accepted to be successful.

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Attention to Context

- Practitioners
 - Are very sensitive to unique aspects of their organization and make decisions for that organization.
- Researchers
 - Treat unique aspects of the organization as “noise” and draw conclusions across organizations.

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Constraints

- Practitioners
 - Have resource, power, and time limitations in their ability to control how and when diversity training is implemented. They must overcome organizational resistance.
- Researchers
 - Lack access to organizational and other sources of data.

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Other?

- You now have 10 minutes to discuss additional reasons for the research-practice gap.
- One person at each table should record the reasons on index cards.
 - Please write “Reasons” at the top.
 - We will gather them at the end of the session and post the ideas on the conference web site.
- We will then spend 5 – 10 minutes sharing the reasons with the entire room.

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Other Reasons Generated by Workshop Participants

- Researchers and practitioners do not talk to one another.
- Many people have an “us vs. them” perspective.
- Lack of a forum for communication.
- Different researchers say different things.
- Research lacks usability/applicability.
- Timeliness and relevance of information.
- Egos of practitioners.

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Other Reasons Generated by Workshop Participants

- Few people can do both effectively.
- Lack of promotion/media coverage of scholars' work.
- Lack of depth of understanding of foundational concepts of the research.
- Scholars rely on peer reviews with other scholars, not practitioners.
- Scholars don't see practitioners as knowledgeable.
- Resentment between scholars and practitioners in regard to compensation.
- Researchers are often interested in explaining phenomena (theory); practitioners look for application possibilities.

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Other Reasons Generated by Workshop Participants

- Sales/marketing orientation of practitioners.
- Researchers undervaluing practice
- Credibility
- Ego
- Respect
- Privilege
- Researchers rely on undergraduates
- Lack of communication, in part due to lack of appropriate forum
- Different researchers say different things.
- Rewards are based on self-branding, which discourages collaboration.

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Bridging the Gap

- Wanting to shrink the gap is not enough – we must take actions.
- The rest of today's session will be devoted to discussing some possible actions.
- After David and Howard offer some ideas, you will take over.

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Researcher Actions

- Attend practitioner conferences.
- Talk with practitioners about their jobs and spend time with them at their jobs.
- Write for practitioner publications.
- Study questions with important practical implications.
- Do research on the research-practice gap.

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Practitioner Actions

- Manage the sometimes competing aims of solid work/successful business.
- Take the time to find and study the research.
- Make connections with researchers to understand their methods and approaches.
- Create partnerships to bring “real world” to research and find ways to put research into action.

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Institutional Actions

- Research and practice-oriented professional organizations can jointly facilitate member collaborations.
- Business schools can reward both types of publications
- Business schools can invite practitioners to give talks about their work and the research they would find helpful.
- Businesses can invite researchers to talk about their past research and can facilitate their ongoing and future research by giving them access to data.
- Businesses and universities can sponsor conferences designed to bring together researchers and practitioners.



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Best Practice Example

- Unconscious Bias Studies
 - Research has demonstrated the impact of unconscious biases.
 - Practitioners have incorporated this work into their practice. Helping clients understand that unconscious biases are normal increases their willingness to acknowledge possible problems.

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Other Actions

- You now have 10 minutes to discuss additional actions that could be taken.
- One person at each table should record the actions on index cards.
 - Please write “Actions” at the top.
- We will then spend 5 – 10 minutes sharing the reasons with the entire room.

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Other Actions Generated by Workshop Participants

- Sharing information / practitioners should reach out to researchers.
- Create an online networking forum.
- Creating of “think tanks”.
- Creation of informal roundtables.
- Access to journals (academic)
- Dedicate time for research (practitioners)
- An effort must be made on both sides.
- Building relationships.
- Institutions rewarding researchers for practice work.
- Use Chief Diversity Officer involvement to be a voice for change.

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Other Actions Generated by Workshop Participants

- Do research on practice by getting grants of funding opportunities to do so.
- Encourage practitioners to present training to scholars to get feedback.
- Produce research articles with both a technical and public (layman's) abstract along with the article.
- Provide adjunct opportunities for practitioners and practice assignments for scholars.

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Other Actions Generated by Workshop Participants

- More positions that bridge the gap.
- Academics should write an article with a practitioner.
- Encourage collaboration with systemic rewards that require huge changes if this is to be sustainable for the future.
- Credible body that marries both worlds and offers credentialing opportunities.
- Academic journals include practitioner pieces and vice versa.
- Dedicating time and money to bridging the gap.
- Elevating diversity to every level of the organization.
- Get practitioners to take research classes or classes on how to interpret research.

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Commitments

- These actions will not occur on their own.
- If you are willing to make a commitment to take these actions, please do so.
 - Write your commitment down for your own records.
 - Also write your commitment on an index card along with your mailing address to turn in to us. We will send you a letter to remind you in a few months.
- Feel free to make joint plans with another participant.

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Thanks

- This slide does not read “The End” because it is not the end – we hope it will mark the beginning of bridge building.
- Thank you for your involvement and for your commitment

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