

Lost in Translation? On Mind *and* Matter in Management Research

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Abstract

Again and again scholars evoke a seriously dysfunctional relationship between management research and education on the one hand, and the practice of management on the other. We share this viewpoint, and with this appraisal intend to (re-) open the debate. We expose some views on the intellectual and sociological roots of the malaise, advocating a philosophical stance rooted in pragmatism and particularly in John Dewey's pragmatic stance. We outline a number of essentially workable, albeit for debate's sake provocative and unpolished proposals for the redesign of academic institutions and of their publishing process. We sketch out radical redesign of academia—with, *inter alia*, (a) permeable academic and practical careers, so that executives and scholars could move between and act within each others' realities; (b) a focus of management education on post-experience graduate level; and (c) an academic publishing process worthy of the real-time era of the Internet.

Keywords

business administration and business economics, economic science, social sciences, general management, management, cognitivism, approaches, psychology, methodology, sociological research methods, sociology, research methods

Preamble

W: “J., did you see that call for papers of <academic journal> on the return to practice of academic writing and teaching? What do you say, shall we go for a joint paper?”

J: “Yes, great, let's have a go. We've churning the dysfunctional relationship between academia and practice over in many discussions, why not have a go at writing something down.” Some days later.

W: “So? What do you think of my draft proposal? Too radical?”

J: “Not at all. But . . . you know, the part where you propose to criticize long publication lead times . . . to do this in a paper call for Fall 2009 with a slim hope to be published in 2012 . . . isn't that a trifle incoherent?”

W: “Hmmm, you're right . . . so how about we begin the paper like that: ‘When this was written, both Chirac and Bush were presidents, most cars were powered by internal combustion engines . . . ,’ and take it from there . . . ?”

It was in the fall of 2008 when the author had these conversations with a dear friend. Inspired by the call, a fast and furious first controversial proposal went forth, and back, between them, advocating no less than a redesign of academia, including the common sense suggestion that the academic

publishing process be streamlined and its product made easier to digest. We abstained from submitting to the call in question in favor of a tighter version for a journal that claims shorter lead times. We thus have, in other words, sacrificed journal ratings, so cherished by academic evaluation committees, accreditation authorities and rankings, to gain on readability, with some hope of a rich and timely dialogue with interested readers. You could say that we behaved more like practitioners and less like academics. Three months later, the submission deadline we still had not heard from the editors, and so we withdrew. A short while later, the author's comrade-in-arms sadly passed away and with him this budding paper. Three years later, as Sarkozy and Obama were just about still presidents, the status quo of academia described back then was unchanged, the surviving author took up these ideas once again and developed them in this opinion paper.

(Ir-)relevance in Management Research

The critique is not novel: A growing number of academics argue that it is desirable to get involved in the “real world,” both for students and professors as for researchers, and

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learn alongside managers how to better contribute to the learning in the organizational studies field. Table 1 summarizes key critiques of academia and of the relevance gap (Starkey & Madan, 2001) between theory and practice. These scholars defend diverse perspectives in terms of whether this divide can be, or even should be overcome. Some posit that the generation of knowledge by academics and practitioners are separate missions and that purpose of research is essentially to develop theory and to universally contribute to the understanding of phenomena (Jarzabkowski, Mohrman & Scherer 2010). Others do not reject practical relevance per se, but consider the scholar-practitioner divide as irreconcilable as these two communities develop and apply knowledge fundamentally differently (e.g. Kieser & Leiner 2009, 2012). Others again – and we pertain to these – acknowledge and regret the separation between the scholar and practitioner communities, and the lack of practical relevance of academic inquiry and they suggest diverse measures at various levels of analysis by which to connect, to translate, and to co-construct knowledge that is both scientifically valid and practicable. This article goes further, advocating that academics at least those that are concerned with the practical impact of their inquiry should in some way be able to become managers, while remaining scholars. And, why not, vice versa. This in turn requires a radical redesign of academia—especially of its self-conception and the publishing process—and we sketch out one such redesign. Our views are rooted in pragmatism (e.g., Dewey, 1929; James, 1907; Peirce, 1992, 1998), a philosophy of science that emphasizes the link between action and truth and argues that a good validation of for belief is the willingness to act on it. Pragmatism a priori situates research and learning evolutionarily within the process of living, in the shape of an intelligent adaptation of the species to its environment. The theory of cognition of the Cartesian subject–object differentiation is undermined in pragmatism by a theory of action, in which the object and the subject reciprocally constitute themselves. One could say that inquiry, with truth rather than knowledge, is the essence of logic here. Dewey (1926) proposed activity-based learning rather than a traditional teacher-dominated approach, because learning was “an affair of the intercourse of a living being with its physical and social environment” (Bernstein, 1971, p. 23). Inspired by Dewey’s reflections, Eduard C. Lindeman (1926) argued,

Our academic system has grown in reverse order. Subjects and teachers constitute the starting point, [learners] are secondary. In conventional education the [learner] is required to adjust himself to an established curriculum . . . Too much of learning consists of vicarious substitutions of someone else’s experience and knowledge. Psychology teaches us that we learn what we do . . . Experience is the adult learner’s living textbook. (p. 4)

Today, a hundred years after Dewey (1904) first expressed a fundamental tension in the “proper relationship” between

the theory and practice in inquiry, much formal education and inquiry continue to suffocate naturally inquisitive minds by controlling and isolating the environment of inquiry. Why this isolation? Why do we, for example, know so little about top executives, especially unsuccessful ones? A query among 180 academics at a Swiss conference (Fendt, 2005) yielded some possible explanations:

- Top executives are difficult to reach. Their availability for research on specific management topics of their concern is already limited, their availability for research on their selves is close to none. Unsuccessful leaders are even more difficult to persuade to speak about their experiences.
- Academics are under constant pressure to publish. It is easier and faster to build on work from existing research.
- Situations and contexts in which executives perform their work are so diverse and complex, and fast-changing, that it seems difficult to establish data that permit valid conclusions, generalization, or theory building.
- Scholars prefer to focus on the successful aspects of business, hoping to materialize their findings in a blockbuster management book.
- Most management scholars have little access to the practical business world, and some are not really interested to meet practitioners. Most CEOs have little theoretical experience or interest. The dialogue seems difficult; worlds of practice and theory seem to remain separate.
- When scholars do have access to the practical business world, for example, as business consultants, they are sometimes reluctant to bite the hand that feeds them.
- Academic research is increasingly privately financed and some scholars might not wish to disgruntle a most welcome source of income. To remain independent, they prefer to address more uncompromising topics.

Unrepresentative and speculative as these explanations may be, they reflect a defeatism or even autism not unfamiliar to the ear of scholars throughout Western academic cultures. Some might be tempted to use “put your money where your mouth is” as a catchphrase to characterize pragmatism—if it were not that, one of the masters himself provides us with more colorful “truth’s cash value” (James, 1907, p. 200) or “the true is only the expedient” (p. 222).

Pragmatists consider confrontation with reality through action as the principal *source of doubt*, which in turn feeds scientific curiosity and becomes the driving force to inquire to settle that doubt, and make way for new doubt.¹ Thus, action and the interrogations stemming from it—and the desire to find answers—are what drive the agenda of science (Peirce, 1992), and what drives many scientists to become

Table I. A Selection of Critiques of Management Research and Education.

Author(s)	Critique	Suggestion(s)
Dewey (1905)	Fundamental tensions in the “proper relationship” between theory and practice	Put inquiry in the center, activity-based learning
Lindeman (1926)	Academic system has developed in reverse order, teacher first	Experience is the adult learner’s textbook
Schön (1983)	Technical rationality is not the grounding of professional knowledge	Proposes an alternative epistemology of practice in which the knowledge inherent in practice is understood as artful doing
Hambrick (1994), Huff (2000), Ad-ler (2001), Van de Ven (2002), Bartunek (2003)	Seminal Academy wake-up speeches (e.g., “Why we must matter!” Hambrick, 1994)	Conceive new links among management research, management practice, and classroom; among researchers and practitioners, more sense, more responsibility, more mattering, more relevance, more essence
Blau (1994, pp. 279-280)	Academic institutional bureaucracy suffocates educational performance	“5 pathways of transformation” (e.g., expand developmental periphery to include outside organizations)
Duderstadt (2000, p. 104)	Differentiation between university and business school	Ongoing relationship with practice; closely coupled to needs of society . . . tightly linked to practice; respond more rapidly to changes in society
Huff (2000)	Theory–practice relevance gap	Restructuring of the knowledge production process
Priem and Rosenstein (2000)	Theory–practice relevance test based on one example of organization theory (theory-based performance rating)	Management theory is not obvious to practitioners, trained managers have applied it better, therefore we are useful
Lorange (2002, p. 17)	Rejection of M. D. Cohen and March’s (1974, p. 33) “anarchy” metaphor for business research and teaching	B-schools must be driven by market, directly address its needs, keep up with the thinking of its leading clients, acknowledge “economies of scale” as a value creator
Clegg and Ross-Smith (2003)	Management knowledge, as is disseminated through B-schools worldwide, is rarely surprising and remarkably formulaic	Distinguish science of objects, of subjects, latter being more appropriate frame for the discipline of management. Introduce “phronesis” (pragmatic, variable, context-bound)
Czarniawska (2003)	Body of organizational knowledge that offers insight and reflection on organizational practice is ignored (“for-bidden”)	Questions why modernist ideas of control and masculine ideas of mastery are preferred over reflection. Asks what theory is needed
Gosling and Mintzberg (2004, 2006)	Management taught: as if immaterial, abstract formulae, case histories, flow diagrams	Useful but if tested and put to use in practice. Seven principles for educators who want to be serious
Mintzberg (2004)	A general round blow critique of MBA education	More practice relevance, only postgraduate level management training and beyond
Ghoshal (2005)	By propagating amoral ideologies, B-schools have freed students from moral sense of responsibility	Away from “pretense of knowledge” toward acceptance of human intentionality and choice, and by that responsibility
Pfeffer (2005)	Affirming and reinforcing comment on Ghoshal (2005)	Management and organization science must be concerned with more than science and theory
Suddaby (2006)	(critique of GTM) “[researchers] tend toward purist idealism; repeat, reinforce many myths, rigid rules,” “fundamentalist drift toward positivism”	Avoid misreadings (and probable subsequent miswriting and misteaching of seminal texts); acknowledge context relation and human limitations
Whittington (2006)	Welcomes “practice turn” in strategy, but still incomplete	Proposes framework for strategy research that integrates intra- and extraorganizational levels
Van de Ven (2007)	Critical social issues are not addressed	Engaged scholarship: empirical research, in partnership with public and private stakeholders, with the goal of contributing to the public good
Raelin (2007)	Undervaluation of praxis in academic research and education	A new epistemology of practice
Bartunek (2007)	Scholars and practitioners are separated by language, intellectual structure, and so on.	Toward a relational scholarship of integration, beyond collaborative research projects
Rynes, Giluk, and Brown (2007); Cascio (2007); Lawler (2007); Saari (2007); D. J. Cohen (2007); Guest (2007); Rousseau (2007); Haimowitz (2007)	Ambidextrous scholars are heard by “neither tribe.” B-schools should promote dialogue so that ambidextrous researchers be heard. Research can be worthwhile without necessarily “contributing to theory”	This debate has gone on for too long, we should get over the identity-crisis and actually do something. Create a “tipping point”: evidence-based management. Criteria ask, “Does paper have likelihood of stimulating research that will alter management theory and/or practice?”

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Author(s)	Critique	Suggestion(s)
Chia and Holt (2008)	Profound questioning of the nature of the knowledge researched and taught at business schools	Proposition to replace, or complement, knowledge-by-representation by knowledge-by-exemplification, the latter being demonstrative, creative, and performative
Navarro (2008)	We are still locked up in functional silos as our dominant research and teaching design	Proposes more holistic approaches, and a strong accent on institutional social responsibility
The AACSB (2008)	Several obstacles: for example, existing faculty policies and systems, not fully developed channels of communication, much that is not understood about role of research	Seven “progressive yet controversial recommendations”
Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman (2009)	Lack of critical approaches	Propose the concept of critical performativeness
Ashcraft, Kuhn, and Cooren (2009)	Identifies problems of organizational communication, not enough moral, too moralizing	Propose the materialization of the communication on urgent societal and organizational phenomena
Hatchuel (2009)	Tactical criteria to judge research are incomplete, they sanction relevant research	Proposes new approach built on a new epistemology of collective action; “foundationalist research perspective,” redefinition of identity, rigor, and relevance
Kieser and Leiner (2009)	Relevance gap is unbridgeable as social systems are autopoietic	Researchers and practitioners cannot produce common research but only irritate each other. But sometimes irritation inspires
Hodgkinson and Rousseau (2009)	Evidence of inconsistency of the Kieser and Leiner (2009) claim	Detail diverse examples of successful, useful, and rigorous scholar-practitioner collaborative research
Bartunek and Rynes (2010)	“Implications for practice” reflections in research are beneficial	Through concepts, practitioners become more reflective and effective. Theory has conceptual, instrumental, and symbolic value for practitioners
Peng and Dess (2010)	Relevance discussion is irrelevant! Reflects lack of understanding of scholarship	We should be proud; scholarly competition is like Olympic Games, spirit of research; purpose is search of excellence
Heracleous (2011)	This article poses the problem and introduces a special issue	Summarizes propositions around artifaction, use of metaphors of making waves, and microstrategy
Romme (2011)	Argues the impracticability and/or theoretical insignificance of most organizational development research	Defines key elements of an artifaction theory. Four dimensions are distinguished: ascription, fabrication, displacement, and reinterpretation
Antonacopoulou, Dehlin, and Zundel (2011)	Articulates the nature of the challenge of the academic-practitioner divide as one of delivering impact	Drawing on a metaphor of making waves, they suggest that possibilities of academic impact emerge from day-to-day engagements between scholars and organizational practitioners whose efficacy depends on the creation of shared understandings and personal relationships
Nicolai, Schulz, and Göbel (2011)	In an empirical case study of one of the oldest management journals in the world, the authors show that the demands of academic and practitioner reviewers are hardly compatible, and, to some extent, inversely correlated	In contrast to other studies, here reason for tension does not lie in differences in evaluation criteria of each group. Rather, the different worldviews lead to different interpretations of these criteria and a striking incongruence between each group’s ideas of practical relevance
Hutton and Liefoghe (2011)	Scholar—practitioner, theory—practice, and relevance—rigor are terms within a never-ending debate	Theory and practice of new OD and CDA is proposed as sources of insights into approaches to OD and change, and as pointers to the gaps along the way
Splitter and Seidl (2011)	By focusing on “what people do in relation to strategy,” research does not become particularly relevant to practitioners	Scholarly unawareness of “scholastic view” (Bourdieu) leads to two related fallacies: epistemic doxa and scholastic ethnocentrism
Markides (2011)	There is growing concern within the Academy of Management that a big and growing gap exists between management research and practice. In fact, the gap is not between rigorous and relevant research; it is between relevant and useful knowledge	For our (relevant) research to become managerially useful, it still needs to go through a transformation. Unfortunately, academics are not good at this transformation process. This has a serious implication on what we actually need to do to make our research more managerially useful

Note: GTM = grounded theory method; AACSB = Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business; OD = organization development; CDA = critical discourse analysis.

practitioners. This, to them is what Ackoff calls a “meta-ideal,” where ends and means converge and become the same: “One can desire nothing without desiring the ability to satisfy it. The ability to satisfy all desires is an ideal necessarily shared by all men at all times” (Gharajedaghi, 1983, citing Ackoff in a discussion in 1978).

We argue that many of the challenges concerning the rigor-relevance dichotomy that scholars face can be overcome, or attenuated by reverting to Pragmatism, especially John Dewey’s Pragmatism. Dewey’s ontology and epistemology on theory, on knowledge and on action, and on the relationship between them, gives us important clues on how we could shape our inquiry to be both scientifically sound and matter to the practitioner. Jarzabkowski et al (2010) situate the problem as being philosophical, theoretical and empirical. A rigor-driven stance essentially strives to rely on a stable, objective world, on universal principles and on knowledge that objectively represents the world “out there”. The world presents itself before us, waiting to be discovered, measured, explored and conceptualized. Concepts are expected to be impartial and universally applicable across diverse realities. In this logic, action succeeds precise, exact management knowledge (Jarzabkowski et al 2010).

On the other hand, a stance tending toward relevance sees reality as a phenomenological “life world” (Husserl 1970) highly contingent and fortuitous, and fairly skeptical of all theorizing demeanors. Knowledge is local, intrinsic, contingency and context-reliant. The researcher and the research are inseparable. Knowledge results from action, which is sought to be directly practicable. These two logics appear irreconcilable at first sight. However, through John Dewey’s pragmatic epistemology a third way, or rather a reconciliation appears to be possible. In Pragmatism, there is indeed a world “out there”, but it has sense and meaning only in relation to man. Likewise, theory is omnipresent, but not as absolute and universal laws, but rather as explanations of phenomena and their relationships. Dewey introduced the “warranted assertion” as research product. This assertion has a generalized role and a particular one as well. Warranted assertions merge truth and inquiry together in such a way that correspondence to an external world is no longer the principal point. Instead, interdependency of truths and the processes of inquiry are just as central. The momentary satisfaction of a solved problem in a world that is not set apart from the knower’s uses of or places in that world. This is different from both idealists’ and realists’ description of epistemology as way of determining knowledge. It is not « knowledge » that represents the focal point of epistemology for Dewey, but rather “knowing”. “Knowledge” represents the end of inquiry but for Dewey it is more, it has meaning of its own, disconnected from the inquiry. So much so, that inquiry is subordinated to the final result called “knowledge.” With “knowing” on the other hand, Dewey defines inquiry in a world that is not static. He means inquiry into things that humans live, experience. He means

experimenting with problem solving in such a way as for the action to be entailed in the solving of problems, which is inquiry itself, and warranted in the assertions made about the solved problem when it is solved, « solved » being nothing more than the door to another inquiry and so on. Accordingly, in the “living” of life, problems will be faced and solved—often in serendipitous ways—such that achieving “justified true belief” (as traditional epistemology expects) is not useful. As Dewey put it: “[Warranted assertion] is preferred to the terms belief and knowledge [because] it is free from the ambiguity of these latter terms, and it involves reference to inquiry as that which warrants assertion. When knowledge is taken as a general abstract term related to inquiry in the abstract, it means “warranted assertibility.” The use of a term that designates potentiality rather than an actuality involves recognition that all special conclusions of special inquiries are parts of enterprise that is continually renewed, or is a going concern (Dewey 1938).

Clearly, the outcome of such inquiry goes beyond “rigor” in terms of precise and exact knowledge to be applied across diverse settings and situations, and also beyond “relevance”, as a solution to an immediate practical problem. Rather this notion of knowledge is “useful” in every sense of the term, be it epistemological (is this credible, well-founded and trustworthy?) but also normative (does this help us advance in our preoccupations?). It does not put action and knowledge into a preset sequence. Dualism is not inevitable nor is it a compulsory starting point of all philosophical thought: “What have been completely divided in philosophical discourse into man and world, inner and outer, self and not-self, subject and object, individual and social, private and public, etc. are in actuality life transactions. (Dewey & Bentley 1949)”. Dewey talks of knowledge and action, rather than rigor and relevance, and did not specify that one necessarily precedes the other, but considered them rather as iterative, as intertwined, as a permanent conversation.

Reflection is important in inquiry, but its value can be best assessed if it is put into practice, hence his focus on the notion of “usefulness” and purported to move away from “knowing as an aesthetic enjoyment of the properties of nature as a world of divine art, to knowing as a means of secular control – this is a method of purposefully introducing changes which will alter the direction of the course of events (Dewey 1924)”.

From these approaches – that transcend ontological fundamentalism and inane debates on whether action precedes knowledge or knowledge precedes action – we construe elements of academic redesign and a portfolio of research behaviors that satisfy academic rigor and have a potential for relevance and practicability.

Getting One’s Feet Wet

To many academics, a (re-)turn to practice means getting close to where the action is, and generating theoretical

contributions grounded in observation of actual managerial practices, rather than based on aprioristic notions (see, for example, the collection of papers edited by Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001). These approaches frequently rely on some variant of the *participation-observation method*. This method is directly descendant from John Dewey's. The researcher somehow participates alongside managers in their work, and observes what they do. Care is taken through a variety of stratagems to minimize the well-known disruptive effect of participation. But there are limits to what can be done: A couple engaged in an intimate act is likely to not behave as usual if there is a third party present as an observer, let alone as a participant. Candid cameras and hidden mikes are either unknown to the subjects, and therefore unethical, or known and producing disruptive effects akin to direct observation. In sum, managers are reluctant to tolerate a redundant researcher in tow and there is no extra seat on the corporate jet—but, they often appreciate a second opinion or even a helping hand.

This is well understood by constructionist scholars advocating such research methods as *narrative interviewing* or *ethnography* in which the researcher's footprint is not only acknowledged but also sought. Such narratives

present the doing of the field work, rather than simply the doer or the done . . . [and they are meant to be understood as] representational means of cracking open the culture and the field worker's way of knowing it, so that both can be jointly examined. (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 120)

The benefits of this inevitable interference by the researcher are equally well understood and, more so, sought by academics that can be classified as “action researchers” and/or “action learners” (Argyris, 2000; Lewin, 1948). They advocate in one way or another getting involved with managers in solving their problems—becoming part of the system—and learning from their experience as well, not just that of others. The action learner combines individual and organizational change of practical knowledge by getting involved in everyday organizational challenges (Brooks, 2004; Dick, 1997; Revans, 1991, 1998) through different types of action learning (Yorks & Marsick, 2002): scientific, experiential, and critical reflection (Marsick, 1988; O'Neil & Marsick, 1994; Pedler, 1991). With Marsick and O'Neil (1999), “action” is no more and no less than the starting point of any inquiry (Marsick & O'Neil, 1999): Actors critically reflect on experience with the support of others. This reflection—doubt—is followed by further action, which represents change, rather than simply repetition of patterns. Although guided by strategic intent, the outcome is purposely not fully controlled because the status quo is challenged and the researcher and/or learner are actors in the change process.

The *action researcher*, similarly, has a double agenda: that of a consultant or hired hand who works for the manager, and that of a researcher who seeks to further

theoretical understanding. The client-manager is not involved with the second agenda, and hopefully gets to see the researcher as a valuable resource, maybe even find a seat on the corporate jet. The ability to simultaneously help solve difficult business problems, conceptualize actions and reflections into theories and models, and thus develop people and organizations combine to form the attractiveness of the action researcher (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985). In a time of rising complexity, characterized by alternative explanations and multiple ways of perceiving and explaining, and in a business context where blueprint answers no longer suffice, the idea of connecting researchers and actors to solve these very real problems is enticing (a seminal example of such a rich research endeavor is Watson, 1994). The researcher gains much greater insights, while such insights may be less structured, less systematic, and not necessarily well documented.

Donald Schön (1987) described the way in which practitioners (engineers, doctors, architects, managers) work, proceeding on intuition (tacit knowledge), seldom explicitly stating their assumptions and theories until they run into unexpected trouble or some situation that arises their doubt. It is then that they reflect upon and improve their models, becoming “reflective practitioners.” This suggests that simple observation of practitioners during the times of routine or tacit activities will not reveal much, unless, of course, one assumes that the observer is a lot more knowledgeable and astute than the manager, and has figured out explicit theories and models long before the manager had. This works for observing young children, perhaps primitive tribes, but is not very promising when dealing with cutting-edge management practitioners. The researcher to truly understand managers would probably have to become one, at least temporarily or on a part-time basis.

Ma Academia Is a Hard Nut to Crack

While a handful of business schools thrive on close practice contact, most of academia today is not at the leading edge of management practices (Kumar, Scheer, & Kotler, 2000). Most management innovation happens in corporations, consulting, and other professional services companies, and the word is then spread by gurus, rather than academics (Huczynski, 1996). Academia is more often than not relegated to studying innovations introduced by others, and reporting on them with mind-numbing delays due to the mercilessly lengthy publishing process. Many innovations analyzed by academics are long forgotten by practitioners, or substantially modified, by the time they get reported. Despite the ritualistic lip service paid to “accelerating rate of change and explosion of knowledge generation,” many academic journals resemble historical archives of management ideas. In the 19th century, a fellow living in the Australian outback could hope to read a London newspaper

describing an occurrence in his neighborhood in less than a year after the event—a few months for the news to get to London, 24 hr to print it, and another few months for the newspaper to reach the reader. This is the speed of light compared with the academic publishing process. The material transmitted to students, via textbooks and cases, is not much more up to date, and misconceptions or errors are propagated from one generation to another, because academics have so little chance to confront them with reality (see, for example, Dunning, 2006, for a critique of textbooks on intercultural management; and Holden, 2002, for a critique of *a priori*s in intercultural management research). We agree with Blau (1994), when he claims that “bureaucratic features of academic institutions have deleterious consequences for educational performance” (p. 279), but in the light of academic publishing processes of sometimes several years, we cannot but disagree with his statement that research is not concerned, because “research can be separated from an institution’s administrative machinery while education is intricately enmeshed in it” (p. 280).

On July 6, 2006 in Bergen, in a keynote address to a thousand organizational scientists assembled for the annual European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) Colloquium, James March observed that the agenda of organizational research is seldom driven by a demand from managers “out there in the real world,” but rather by the spectacular growth of management teaching that creates the need for professors that in turn need to publish. A look at the many business school strategy documents that are published on the Internet shows that while they pay lip service to “contributing to societal knowledge about management,” they view the primary role of research as supporting development of faculty, not as a service to broader society. Academia remains the proverbial ivory tower, and isolates itself by a myriad of elaborate, frequently ornamental and usually ossified values, organizational rituals, procedures, and routines that penalize a true dialogue with real management. Interestingly, March’s (2008) malaise is not a lack of relevance but a lack of essence, as becomes evident from his intervention at the 2008 Academy of Management (AOM) Meeting: “not ‘essential’ in the sense of being necessary to achieve some desired end, ‘essential’ in the sense of being a necessary property, without which something is not what it claims to be.” This is an intriguing and gripping standpoint that merits an inquiry of its own elsewhere.

The related concepts and other recent endeavors to reduce the relevance gap, such as *engaged scholarship* (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006), *collaborative research* (Shani, Mohrman, Pasmore, Stymne, & Adler, 2008), and *design research*, are welcome developments. But they remain for now anecdotal and academia by and large a closed system. Like all closed systems, it elaborates myths about itself. The ones we like most are the long catalogs of knowledge and skills that are deemed essential for managers. The lists vary from one institution to another, and probably by pure coincidence

often reflect the relative power positions of various departments and important professors. But it is always too long, and consumes all the time available to students. Of course, the overwhelming majority of managers practicing in the world today have no formal business education at all. Some of them fail these requirements as miserably as possible—not knowing about them at all—and yet they thrive in their business environment. Think of the fellow who sold you a trinket at the bazaar in Marrakech. By contrast, the young graduates of business schools are all but managers. Their heads are stuffed (or not) with lots of knowledge, but they know little about working with unstructured situations such as those encountered by managers. In an ultimate perversion of the system, the best among them may have been selected by professors for cloning, and trained to become future professors, not managers.

Getting One’s Hands Dirty

Business schools aspire to educating managers, or, more ambitiously yet, *leaders*; but the job they do reasonably well is educating technical professionals who are needed by businesses in great numbers: accountants, financial analysts, market researchers, logistics dispatchers, database administrators, and so on. In that, the business school is not that different from an engineering school. With time, many graduates end up working as managers, but engineers harbor no illusions about having been trained to do so, whereas business school graduates do. We do not object to getting hold of some very young people, teaching them actuarial techniques over 2 or 3 years, and sending them off to the insurance industry. We also agree that, as in the case of engineering students, it is good to provide these young people with a smothering of general business notions, with courses addressing such issues as “working with humans,” “working with humans of different colors that eat stinking food,” and “working for inhumans that are obsessed about keeping to a budget,” sensitizing them to the environment in which they will operate. But perhaps we should moderate our pretense of certifying as managers let alone leaders 22-year-olds by the hundreds of thousands unless we want their rank and file end up read such books as “how to work for an idiot” (Hoover, 2004).

We advocate, with Mintzberg (2004), that there be no undergraduate management education. We argue a bit crudely that if it were a good idea to teach sex to toddlers, then so would teaching management to 18-year-olds. Their education could be left to traditional disciplines like mathematics or history, even economics, and a lot of hands on entrepreneurship. And, why not, philosophy—and professional certification as discussed above. What we consider essential is that undergraduates not only learn the requisite body of knowledge but also—and beforehand—*learn to learn*, that is, reflect on knowledge, question it, learn to find sources of knowledge that is new to them, and autonomously

Table 2. Some Pragmatic Suggestions of Management Research Redesign.

Critique	Suggestion(s)
<p>Dysfunctional relationship between management research and the practice of management, namely,</p> <p>1. Management professors are often quite far away from practice and unfamiliar with, sometimes uninterested in, the management realities</p>	<p>1.1 Academia and praxis follow two different types of logic and produce two different types of knowledge, and both are necessary. To be both rigorous and relevant, a researcher might want to discover both</p> <p>1.2 Management professors might be advised to adopt a stance rooted in pragmatism, that is, confront themselves and their certitudes with reality, reality being the principal source of doubt, which is the driving force for inquiry</p> <p>1.3 Professors of management should also be—or have been and be again—managers, just like professors of medicine are also medical doctors</p> <p>1.4 Accept the complexity and speed of cutting-edge management in a globalizing world and invite these multiple realities into the classroom—and bring the classroom to them—rather than covering anachronistic canons of seemingly essential knowledge skills for managers</p> <p>1.5 Management development practice, institutions, and companies would benefit from developing systems that allowed for a lifelong easy to and fro between academia and practice</p>
<p>2. Management needs to be learned not taught, management education must be rooted in action</p>	<p>2.1 Management education should begin at post-experience graduate level, that is, at a time when it can be reasonably expected to be understood and useful</p>
<p>3. Management research should focus less on linear regression and more on qualitative, interpretive, single-case research, and especially, rediscover action and collaborative research</p>	<p>3.1 Management researchers should embrace the subjectivity of most types of management research (usually relying on some form of participant observation method), and develop new and appropriate validity and reliability criteria that ensure scientific rigor in new ways</p> <p>3.2 Management scholars should understand and exploit the benefits of this researcher interference (as in action learning/ action research, engaged scholarship, collaborative research, design research, etc.) as a source of organizational change and innovation as well as of management development</p> <p>3.3 Theoretical integration between academia and practice can be achieved with action research and design-driven approaches</p>
<p>4. Innovation of management practices is happening, but mostly in practice, not in academia. Academia is often lagging behind</p>	<p>4.1 Speed up and simplify the academic publishing process to bring it closer to reality</p> <p>4.2 Exploit the “mass-customization” potential of Internet to accelerate, generalize, and/or specialize research publication and, especially, to accelerate and intensify debate and knowledge exchange</p> <p>4.3 Drop some anachronistic publishing guidelines that date from the days of the typewriters and enter the real-time era of Internet</p>

choose to acquire it or not. We argue that the acquisition of a requisite body of management knowledge prior to the acquisition of the competency of learning to learn and of critical action learning (as described above) may be one cause of decreasing entrepreneurship and rampant managerialism.² This requirement has profound implications for the teaching process, especially in some European countries, and many emerging ones as well, where, as stated above, over one century after Dewey’s plea that learning be rooted in action, the tradition of spoon-feeding students is still going strong and little attention is paid to developing their reflective

autonomy. The “proper relationship” between theory and practice seems not yet found.

So, perhaps management education ought to be restricted to graduate level, requiring students to have had some management experience before engaging in it. To stay with our prior metaphor, this is like having sex before studying some enhanced techniques on the subject matter. Teaching people who have experienced the thing is vastly different than trying to convey some theoretical abstractions (here we speak from our experience as managers and management educators only). This is easier said than done: Despite some efforts in

recent years, the attitudes in many European workplaces and the continuing inflexibility of labor markets make it still difficult for young people to move back and forth between work and study. A thorough reform of business education may not be possible without a redesign of labor practices.

Ideally, the bulk of management education would happen in parallel with work, the two intertwined and feeding each other. In other words, we aspire to abolishing the distinction between full-time and part-time education. The idea is to teach Kamasutra in practice sessions, not with blackboard and chalk, not even with an animated PowerPoint. All types of work-study schemes exist already and professors generally are impressed with how much better students do in those situations. And that is without professors changing much to who they are, nor to what they do. Working students do better in conventional knowledge-transmission courses taught in majority by professors with no business experience. Imagine what could be accomplished if one changed the professors and what *they* did!

This is what makes us argue that perhaps management professors might more often be practitioners, just as medical professors are. Mind you that there would be far fewer of them if, as we suggested, management education separated from entrepreneurship and education for business-related professions. There are several ways in which professors can also be practitioners—and in many cases are today: they can work in two places on a part-time basis, they can switch back and forth during their careers, and they can be consultants. One can even imagine some sort of conglomeration between business schools and companies that would make the moving back-and-forth easier. To be a professor, one would have to be academically qualified, which usually means holding a doctoral degree. Professors would be “very reflective practitioners” to build on the term used by Schön (1987), and engage in furthering the practice and publishing about it. Ideally, some practitioners would also move between worlds, which would require such worlds to be redesigned as well. This might not be for tomorrow, and meanwhile we suggest increased use of collaborative research and engaged scholarship, with information collection, analysis discussion, and/or conclusion perfectly shared among academics and practitioners. These practices permit to change roles, to look upon strategy and management through diverse prisms, and thereby advance in understanding and designing effective and sustainable management, strategy, and entrepreneurship.

Last but not least, we argue that publishing should change dramatically. We propose to distinguish between at least two roles played by academic journals. They publish and disseminate information, producing (for now) physical volumes and delivering them to subscribers and libraries, and thus assuring perennial access. And they organize an editorial process, giving—at least in theory—some intellectual coherence to the collections of papers, screening for quality,

assisting authors in improving their presentation, and promoting readership and “citationship” of their journals.

If contemplated unemotionally, it seems clear that the first role, that of physical production, dissemination, and storage, is vastly obsolete in the era of Internet. This does not mean that coherent periodical volumes should not be published. There arguably can be some value in presenting a collection of papers together. And their publication on fixed dates allows some readers to absorb novelty in chunks rather as a continuous stream, and some authors to accelerate their final touches and get their study out, both of which may be helpful in organizing their respective working lives. But a publication via Internet would do just fine.

Thus, journals would be reduced to their essence: a group of like-minded academics who come together as an editorial board to provide guidance and a stamp of approval to what is being put out there for public consumption. This opens the possibility for many more different kinds of journals or special volumes, with a variety of editorial policies and philosophies. For example, for the run-of-the-mill academic paper that is not related to any other articles appearing in the same issue, one could envision a self-editing journal: A paper is accepted if it is accompanied by statements from three bona fide academics, each from a different institution, or even from a different country, that clearly indicate why they think the article is worth publishing. These statements would be published along with the article, putting thus online the reputation of the reviewers. One could also require a statement from the home institution of the author that the paper was professionally edited for English, proper references, and so on.

Once we accept that the Internet is the publishing medium, there is a host of other suggestions that come to mind: accompany each article with a website, including a forum for public exchange of comments; and work in progress on a blog and/or other forms of knowledge sharing, such as, perhaps, Wikipedia-type communities of research practices. The Journal board could moderate such forums, or delegate that responsibility to one of the reviewers. The website could also include additional information for the very motivated reader, including some of the original data based on which the article is written, increasing thus the transparency and the probity of the research process. Also foreseeable—and probably inevitable—are unmonitored, Wiki-type communities-of-practice/research on a selection of subjects.

And this would be a great opportunity to going back to a more intelligible way of presenting articles. We love footnotes!!! They let one write sentences that flow without interrupting them with long parentheses with a bunch of names and dates. Most people are not interested, and those who are can look at the footnotes. Footnotes also allow the writer to make disclaimers or some parenthetical points without sacrificing readability of the text or its length. Footnotes were banned at the time when technology did not place them

automatically and typesetting labor became very expensive. Those times are gone! Forever, we venture to think. And while we are at it: Why still submit papers in double-spaced format with “insert figure about here” tags? Reviewing such papers is a pain. Again, adapt to the technology!

Authors may take advantage of their sense of humor, if they are lucky to have one. They do as public speakers or as lecturers. One can do serious business and have fun doing it. Authors should every now and then have the guts to advance their convictions and stop being so tentative in the name of academic rigor. If one thinks that one’s thoughts seem like they might possibly lead to a potential and gradual shift of certain limited areas of thought, then one should keep that thought to oneself, and keep on thinking. Objectivity does not repose on the lone shoulders of each author. It results from interplay and dialogue (see Sachs, 2003, on this point). If one is wrong, there sure is someone out there to point this out. If somebody bothered to answer, then the article did stimulate somebody somewhere—and did its job.

Summary and Conclusion

We have evoked the pervasive dysfunctional relationship between management research and education on the one hand, and the practice of management on the other. We exposed some views on the intellectual and sociological roots of the malaise and advocate a philosophical stance rooted in Pragmatism and particularly in John Dewey’s pragmatic stance. We explain how Dewey’s Pragmatism – particularly his understanding of action, his notion of usefulness and his experimentalism can help us to unmask the apparent dichotomy between rigor and relevance and come up with a scientifically sound and yet practicable research behavior. Based on this, we outline a number of essentially workable, albeit for debate’s sake provocative proposals for the redesign of academic institutions and of their publishing process. We sketch out a radical redesign of academia – with, inter alia, a) permeable academic and practical careers, so that executives and scholars could move between and act within each others’ realities b) a focus of management education on post-experience graduate level, and c) an academic publishing process worthy of the real-time era of the Internet.

Summarizing is not necessary if an argumentation is short and clear. And not all conversations lead to a conclusion. Still, Table 2 is provided that summarizes our proposals, which we do by no means consider conclusive but rather an invitation to debate.

Author’s Note

This is an opinion paper based on the stance that objectivity does not repose on the lone shoulders of each academic author but can—and does—emerge from interplay and dialogue. If one is wrong, there surely is someone out there to point this out. If somebody

bothers to answer, then this article did stimulate, and permit advancement—and therefore served its most noble purpose.

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Notes

1. We do not attribute the notion of doubt only to pragmatism. Doubt is also present in the theories of Popper (1935), who sees scientific progress in focusing on unresolved problems, curiosity, and the things we do not know.
2. “Managerialism” is defined as viewing organizations from the exclusive perspective of the administrator-manager, functional agent of an administered system, whose purpose it is to ensure the “survival, growth, profitability of the organization” (Boje, 2002) and to “satisfy the immediate demands of shareholders, customers and (to some extent) workers” (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996, p. 161). Managerialist ideology became apparent in early 1900s, when corporate capitalism superseded family (entrepreneurial) capitalism. Max Weber (1947) infused managerialism with a masculine and paternalistic ethic (Martin & Knopoff, 1995). Marcuse (1964) viewed managerialism as being decidedly functionalist, as it signifies the shift from the owner to the professional manager and by that it helps to legitimate the control of individuals, societies, and their organizations in the interest of capital (Davis, 1997). For Enteman (1993), managerialism is an upcoming ideology that describes the fact that executives are endowed with a responsibility to balance the interests of all stakeholders and, by being responsible to everyone, end up accountable to hardly anyone but themselves.

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