

IN SEARCH OF ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF COLLABORATIVE AND INFORMED RESEARCH IN THE *HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW*

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ABSTRACT

Engaged scholarship is a form of inquiry between academic and practicing professionals. To better understand its nature and scope, this study conducted a content analysis of the *Harvard Business Review*. The review of 287 articles published from 2006-2011 show that 16 percent of the articles were co-authored between academics and practitioners. Of the remainder, approximately 33 percent were authored solely by practitioners and 51 percent solely by academics. Research is now needed that investigates differences in the underlying rigor and relevance for these three segments.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of engaged scholarship has been proposed as a way of bridging the rigor/relevance gap [4]. Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) describe engaged scholarship as “a collaborative form of inquiry in which academics and practitioners leverage their different perspectives and competencies to co-produce knowledge about a complex problem or phenomenon that exists under conditions of uncertainty found in the world” (80). In doing so, it is thought to advance both theory *and* practice. As Van de Ven asks: ‘Don’t you think *if* we ground our research questions in practice, involve practitioners in problem generation, theory building, research design, and problem solving that management scholarship will flourish and the management profession will benefit?’ [2, p. 65, italics added for emphasis]. Unfortunately, Van de Ven did not address this question. But, if his premise is correct, an important first step is to determine the level of engagement between academics and practitioners.

To date only one study has attempted to address this issue. Specifically, Bartkus and Holland analyzed the authorship of articles published in three types of business journals: (1) primarily scholarly, (2) primarily practitioner, and (3) both practitioner and scholarly. The results provided preliminary evidence of engaged scholarship. [1]

Unfortunately, there are at least two limitations of the Bartkus and Holland study. First, the study only examined co-authorships. While this represents the most obvious and transparent form of collaboration, other forms should be considered as well. In particular, ‘informed research’ is an added type of engagement that is evidenced through such things as receiving financial support from a sponsoring organization.

A second issue concerns the selection of journals. In particular, one might question the absence of other relevant journals; most notably, the *Harvard Business Review* (*HBR*). The unique position of *HBR*

targeting practicing managers would lead one to presume that it would have a high level of engaged scholarship.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to extend the Bartkus and Holland study by (1) utilizing multiple measures of engagement and (2) examining the extent to which articles published in the *Harvard Business Review* reflect evidence of engaged scholarship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand the general nature of engaged scholarship, Van de Ven articulated four different forms: (1) informed basic research, (2) collaborative basic research, (3) design and evaluation research, and (4) action/intervention. [3] The following discussion is limited to the first two forms of engagement as they appear the most relevant to published research.

Informed basic research is defined by Van de Ven as:

a traditional form of social science where the academic researcher adopts a detached outsider perspective of the social system being examined but solicits advice and feedback from key stakeholders and insider informants. . . . The levels of this form of engagement may vary from simply talking informatively with a few informants to conducting more formal review sessions with appropriate stakeholders on each step of the research process. Whatever the level of engagement, the roles of informant and stakeholders tend to be advisory only, and the researcher directs and controls all research activities including authoring the final report [3, p. 261].

Unlike informed basic research, *collaborative basic research* is more direct and “entails a greater sharing of activities and control among researchers and stakeholders. Collaborative research teams are typically composed of insiders and outsiders, often from different disciplines, who jointly share in the coproduction of basic knowledge that describes or explains a complex problem being examined...” [3, p. 1018].

METHOD

This study uses the *Harvard Business Review* as the unit of analysis. Full articles for the years 2006-2011 were evaluated for evidence of collaborative and informed engagement. Informed engagement was operationalized as either access to information or financial support (or both). Such evidence is often presented in footnotes or embedded in the text, often in the method section.

The data collection process is a relatively straightforward counting exercise where the articles were content analyzed by one of the researchers and further validated by another. Any potentially discrepancies were discussed and further evaluated by the research team to ensure consistency.

RESULTS

The results of the analysis provide additional clarification on the existence of engaged scholarship in business journals. Altogether, 287 articles were reviewed. For reference, we present the summary results of the Bartkus and Holland study in Table 1 and included relevant comparative data for the *Harvard Business Review*.

When we compare numbers, we find that the percent of articles that involve collaboration between practicing and academic professions is relatively consistent with those in the Bartkus and Holland study. Overall, 16 percent of the articles were collaborative in nature which compares to a low of 5.4 percent in the *Journal of Business Research* to 26 percent in the *California Management Review*.

Of the co-authored articles, 28.3 percent (13 of 46) listed the practicing professional as first author whereas 50 percent of the articles had the practicing professional as the last author. The Bartkus and Holland study was silent on the issue of the order of authors.

To better understand these numbers, we then examined the number of articles that had more than 3 authors. Approximately 43 percent of the collaborative articles had 3 or more authors (20 of 46). Of the 20, 15 listed practitioners as third or lower in authorship suggesting that the principal investigator was an academic.

Although not anticipated, we also found that 33.4 percent of the articles were written solely by practicing professionals whereas the percentage of articles that were authored solely by academic professionals was 50.5 percent.

In terms of funding, we could not identify a single article that reported receiving funding support. Alternatively, 33.8 percent of the articles (i.e., 97) acknowledged that the data was provided by a named organization. Of these, 34.8 percent were for articles that were authored only by practitioners, 48.5 percent for articles authored only by academics, and 17.5 percent for articles co-authored by practitioners and academics.

DISCUSSION

This investigation was designed to provide additional insight into the phenomenon of engaged scholarship by extending the Bartkus and Holland study. [1] We surmised that the professional standing of the *Harvard Business Review* among practitioners and academics would have resulted in a higher percentage of co-authorships than those found in the Bartkus and Holland study. While 16 percent of the articles were collaborative (which is higher than the lowest percentage found in the Bartkus and Holland study), it is still lower than the high of 26 percent found in the *California Management Review*.

Although we do not have any additional evidence to explain this apparent discrepancy, we can offer at least one potential explanation. Specifically, given the relatively large number of articles that were authored solely by practicing professionals, it could be argued that the 16 percent figure is a lower bound on engagement. Practicing professionals, by nature, are less likely to engage in scholarly research. As such, their engagement, even without collaboration with academics, signals a desire to conduct research that bridges into the academic side.

We also found that for collaborative research, practicing professionals were less likely to be listed as first author. This makes some sense when one considers that scholarly writing is more aligned with academics than practitioners.

With regard to informed engagement, we found that almost 34 percent identified a source, but none cited financial support. We were somewhat surprised by this latter finding. Since it is fairly common to

receive financial support for research published scholarly journals, further investigation is needed to better understand how *Harvard Business Review* differs from these other publications.

Perhaps the most interesting finding was that approximately 33 percent of the articles were authored solely by practitioners. When one considers that collaborative research between academics and practitioners constitutes another 16 percent of the articles, it is apparent that there is a relatively strong practitioner representation at *Harvard Business Review*.

Finally, we want to place the results of this study in perspective. First, some of the articles did not involve data collection and, as such, the percentage figure for the source of the data is probably underestimated. Second, we used only one journal which, by definition, limits the ability to make comparisons. While some comparisons could still be made with the Bartkus and Holland study, we believe our study design should be adapted to future research so that a comparative analysis can be made.

TABLE 1: COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

Journal Name	Number of Articles	Number of Collaborations	Percent of Collaboration
Scholarly Orientation			
Decision Sciences	57	5	8.8%
Academy of Management Journal	104	10	9.6%
Scholarly/Practitioner Orientation			
Business Horizons	84	7*	8.3%
Journal of Business Research	338	18	5.4%
Practitioner Orientation			
<i>Harvard Business Review</i>	287	46	16.0%
Long Range Planning	58	12	20.7%
California Management Review	57	15	26%

*One article had three practitioners and no scholars

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