Our interest is in management practising and knowing, not as separate entities but as entwined activities. While it is possible to conceive a dialogue between theory and practice, a fruitful alternative could be to seek to understand dialogic processes that incorporate both such that either each is transformed or a hybrid ‘knowing-practising’ is constructed, that is a dialogue of theory and practice.

The ‘relevance and rigour’ debate has been conducted for some time and the ‘two Rs’ have been regarded as double hurdles for management research to jump (Pettigrew, 2001) in order to produce actionable knowledge (Argyris, 2004) and to bridge the “knowing-doing gap” (Pfeffer and Sutton, 1999). Over the last forty years management researchers have pondered the extent to which their endeavours are valued by those in managerial positions (see for example Ordione, 1966; Susman and Evered, 1978; Kelemen and Bansal, 2002). Almost half the presidential addresses to the Academy of Management have revisited this theme since Donald Hambrick asked provocatively, what if management mattered? A typical aim of research that seeks to jump the relevance and rigour hurdles is to foster translation of management knowledge and
research into practice, and the question of why practitioners fail to take up research findings has been discussed extensively (see for example Guest, 2007).

An alternative view is to seek to foster the co-production of knowledge. Like the relevance and rigour literature, the co-production literature assumes that there are two separate identity groups involved: practitioners and researchers, but the co-production literature emphasizes a dialogue between the two groups rather than a hierarchical separation in which researchers produce knowledge and practitioners (ought to) put it into practice.

In this special issue of Management Learning we wish to propose a third perspective. In this, we want to move beyond the focus on two separate identity groups. We would see the dialogue as not between separate groups but as the incorporation of both knowing and practising. In the proposed special issue we want to take seriously the idea that, when it comes to management learning, all researchers are practitioners with imperatives on them to act, and all practitioners are researchers, making generalizations and theories from what they see happening. This means that our interest is in enabling dialogue between practitioners of theory with different foci, rather than the traditional wish to enable one group to better translate their ideas for the other. Hence, the focus is on generating, reforming and using thinking and action in an entwined way.

We deliberately focus on dialogue (Isaacs, 1999) because it is fundamental to the interactive nature of research that sees practice as incorporating theory (and vice versa), and which hence engages practitioners who carry different labels such as ‘academic’, ‘researcher’, ‘manager’, ‘policy maker’, or even ‘learner’. Dialogue shifts our focus beyond the perennial issue of translation (see Shapiro et al. 2007). Dialogue is a space of experimentation, it is central to practising, generating ideas, and new possibilities that open up the scope for re-search as a common practice that learners, be they academics, business practitioners and policy makers could effectively collaborate on.
This orientation towards collaborative research practice invites contributions that reflexively critique research practice and actively experiment with ways in which multiple aspects of their scholarship can make a difference. Contributions to the special issue might expand from “usual conventions in presenting research questions and findings” (Antonacopoulou, 2009: 427) in order to constructively criticise and develop innovative perspectives on management practising and knowing. The special issue would invite contributions that considered:

- Moving from Politics to Purpose in Collaborative Research
- Modes of collaboration in Management Research and Learning
- Stories that ‘move with purpose’, such that we might learn from them in a new context
- The interweaving of knowing, learning and practising
- The types of dialogues encouraged and entailed by differing practices
- Management practice and the process of knowledge ‘mobilization’
- The motivations, expectations and predispositions of those engaged in collaborative research and learning
- The impact of dynamics between
  - Practitioners and researchers
  - Researchers and Editors
- The roles of sense-making, sense-giving and sense-breaking in the dynamics of knowing-practising
- The management learning of practitioners

Those interested to submit to the special issue can contact the guest editors (Elena Antonacopoulou eagnosis@liv.ac.uk; Nic Beech pnhb@st-andrews.ac.uk; Robert Macintosh robert.macintosh@glasow.ac.uk; David Sims d.sims@city.ac.uk) to discuss ideas informally.

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References


