Higher Education Research Collaboration to Enhance Knowledge Management:

An Example of Collaborative Change Management Research with the Australian Nonprofit Disability Sector

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Abstract: For a number of years there has been recognition of the widening gap between management research and practice. This often stemmed directly from research that failed to resonate with those who practice management. Compounding this theory-reality divide, are the challenges attributed to the use of academic language and the sheer numbers of academic journals that espouse volumes of information which practitioners often find daunting to digest. Research that better connects academics and practitioners to assist solving real-world organizational, management, and leadership challenges can best be underpinned by carefully structured and well-managed collaborations between academia and business. Such connections can also lay the foundations for improved structuring of curricula that better prepares students for dealing with the world of work. This article analyzes one such collaboration undertaken between researchers from two Australian institutions and numerous nonprofit disability service providers, for broader sector application, including for relevant Federal Government Agencies.

Keywords: Business Schools, Curricula, Collaboration, Research, Nonprofit, Change Management

Introduction

The gaps between management research and management practice is generally recognized as becoming a widening chasm that has very real implications for both management research and the manner in which tertiary educational institutions operate, especially business schools. Much has been written in this area, with a predominant view that also questions comparative value between theoretical and applied research in this sector (Hughes, O'Regan, and Wornham 2009). This gap appears despite an ongoing call for it to be addressed, especially in the management domain of tertiary institutions (Banks et al. 2016). As has been identified in prevailing research:

> The tension between the rigour and the relevance of higher education research remains an important and hotly contested topic among scholars, administrators, practitioners and policymakers. This debate is most evident in professional programmes in which scholars are challenged to pursue new knowledge independent of its immediate relevance to practice whilst simultaneously contributing actionable knowledge to their profession…business schools, and their respective professional disciplines, are struggling. (Finch et al. 2018, 152)

The question remains as to what research is actually useful in the context of educating and training executives, managers and management students? Contextualizing this debate, in terms of actionable research, originates from work originally defining key classifications of the ways in which research could be useful; namely symbolic utilization, instrumental utilization, and conceptual utilization (Beyer 1997). Symbolic utilization commits to using research in a manner that legitimizes a pre-existing position. Instrumental utilization focuses research on resolving a specific practical challenge or problem. Conceptual utilization connects practicing managers with the understanding of a phenomenonand is, therefore, considered more grounded in its application. The overlapping between conceptual and instrumental utilization focuses research as being actionable, meaning that it underpins the basis for teaching business and management students, whilst simultaneously reinforcing an understanding of the implications of their research (Pearce and Huang 2012).

Throughout this debate exist the ongoing challenges associated with academic publications, including the specifics and culture of often jargoned academic language, plus the often narrow and inaccessible refereed journals and monographs in which academics publish, all of which are related

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and tend to impact the practicalities of research as well as its application. The tertiary sector continues to be challenged by academics needing to publish in order to substantiate their professional careers, and doing so in high-impact journals, where some of the defining characteristics tend to be heavily geared toward quantitative and theoretical research (Harley 2019), neither of which tends to readily support practical application of their work. This makes it a "closed" environment in which management theory spins around in an overheated "spin- dryer," only to be extracted to support further modelling and theory development. The resulting positivist outputs tend not to sit comfortably with management practitioners, who are often less able to relate the highly technical research that flows from this process to their practical aims and objectives.

This further widens the research-practice divide underpinned by technical language challenges, narrowing the audience for this research, and skewing it more to other academics, rather than engaging with practitioners wanting to link research with real-life management and business challenges on solutions development rather than entirely on theory development (Busi 2013). It is, of course, not suggesting that there is no room for theoretical research in this equation. Rather, there is always a need for academics to focus their research on challenging the assumptions on which applied research relies, to maintain an independent and critical base from which to apply the rigor of theory onto research applications, a necessary responsibility of management scholars (Bansal et al. 2012) This approach effectively reinforces integrity in the overall process. Research in management-related disciplines, therefore, needs adequate attention paid to practitioner outcomes to ensure the links between applied and theoretical research are maintained, interdependently benefiting management theory and practice.

This article argues that appropriate, well-structured, and considered collaborations between academics and practitioners may lay the foundations for closing the widening gap between research processes and practice outcomes. By doing so it may underpin a broader incorporation of management research into management practice, reinforcing the important role that tertiary institutes, such as business schools, have in the widening of applied research, whilst underpinning more theoretical research that better informs application at the practitioner end of the spectrum. Indeed, Xie and Steiner (2013, 1) argue that relevant changes to pedagogy and knowledge creation and its management may provide further support to students' success by suggesting that: "effective change in management education could be made through joint creation of management knowledge between business schools and the business community."

This article discusses one such exemplar of collaborative knowledge creation and use being a collaboration currently underway in the Australian nonprofit Disability Services sector. The case study used here to demonstrate engaged scholarship in a coproduction process to bridge the theory-practice gap, across academics, practitioners and educating students as the focus of management education, was chosen for two reasons. First there is a need for more research in the nonprofit sector; and second, because the introduction and implementation in Australia of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is the most momentous change and challenge in this crucial sector with enormous ramifications for a very large sector of the Australian population and the broader community.

Linking concepts of change management to those of knowledge management appears relevant from the perspective of the growing volume of academic research continuing to evolve on the former. Results of Google Scholar searches of "change management models" identifies in excess of 5 million scholarly articles and texts, suggesting a burgeoning growth in this field of study, and one which continues at pace. The issue of how such expanding knowledge is applied to the practice of change management may underpin the seeking of a more collaborative approach that closely aligns practitioners and researchers in better defining both the problems as well as the solutions, recognizing that singular solutions may not be the answer. Rather context may drive a better outcome.

This article discusses one such exemplar collaboration currently underway in the Australian nonprofit Disability Services sector. This sector provides the opportunity to consider such research from the perspective of generational change in the manner through which disability support services are now provided in a demand-driven market, as compared to the earlier supply-driven approach. Differing mechanisms to support planned organizational change provide an opportunity for deep collaborations between academia and practitioners, so that efficient and effective researched-based mechanisms can be identified and implemented. Given the substantial public policy implications, risk of failure is high on the organizational agendas of disability service providers, and therefore in the industry more broadly.

Methodology

This article identifies a particular example of research collaboration undertaken at two levels. On the one hand it describes "internal" collaboration, involving academics from two institutions, while on the other hand it describes the "external" collaborations, involving a number of formal industry collaboration partners together with multiple industry organizations, all of whom have engaged at different stages of the research. The purpose of these collaborations was not predicated on maximizing co-authorship (Katz and Martin 1997), but rather to provide research outcomes that focus on enhancing practitioner outcomes within the nonprofit disability services sector and expanding academic knowledge of change management within this sector. The central issue is the necessary commitment to partnering and collaboration with the disability services sector, offering to combine, through our case study, both academic and experiential knowledge and wisdom—an approach that provides opportunities and advantages to the academics and the sector alike without traditional degrees of separation (Xie and Steiner 2013).

This research was preceded by a scoping study that focused attention on organizational change management in the nonprofit sector, with specific emphasis on the implementation of Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) within two case study organizations. The NDIS represents a generational shift in the provision of disability services in Australia, from a supply-driven model to a demand-driven model, providing opportunity to study the impact of organizational change on service providers in this sector. This research further extended earlier planned organizational change management research undertaken within a single case study in a nonprofit hospital (Rosenbaum et al. 2017). By undertaking a scoping study leading up to the more extensive current research, the pilot study enabled the researchers to consolidate their positioning and substantiate their credibility within the sector. The preliminary findings obtained through the pilot study also supported the engagement strategies throughout the current research as organizations were keen to be involved in this current research, in some cases, as a consequence of the collaborative and theoretically based but outcomes-oriented reputation that the researchers had gained from that pilot study.

Using the approach that was adopted, a key interest of the researchers was to attempt to narrow the ongoing academic-practitioner divide in an application where applied research supports outcomes in an important area of management practice. The objectives of the research that was underpinned by these collaborations would advantage both the academics and practitioners undertaking the knowledge creation, and potentially impact government policy processes to the benefit of all. They are outlined as follows:

- To be able to identify how Nonprofit Disability Service providers have managed the transformational change processes resulting from their implementation of the NDIS and the manner in which these may be replicated on an industry-wide basis through the development of a sector-specific approach to the management of positive transformational change.
- To be able to identify the role that organizational culture and support have played in the transitioning processes, consistent with service program design and delivery outcomes, and the manner in which this may be replicated on an industry-wide basis, where the necessary cultural attributes are identified and integrated within transformational change settings.
- To be able to identify the relevant leadership characteristics that have been involved in the transitioning and visioning processes of organizations in this sector, and the manner in which such leadership attributes can be developed into a consolidated leadership model for ongoing use throughout this sector into the future.
- To inform Government agencies on their framing of responses to the broader nonprofit sector with regards to the strategic and operational characteristics of this sector, and the implications this may have when developing policy initiatives that require transformational change.

This research is being undertaken using a mixed methods approach. The qualitative component involved forty-six organization-wide interviews across seven geographically spread and differing-sized nonprofit disability service organizations. It used the key elements of grounded theory—being open coding, theoretical sampling, and theoretical sensitivity—and was supported by the approach of content and thematic analysis contained within a framework analysis process. The quantitative component currently underway involves on-line surveying across thirteen organizations, some of whom participated in a more limited capacity in the qualitative phase. The quantitative aspect of the research focuses on verification of principal findings derived from the qualitative processes, while also exploring further variables that may prove beneficial in consideration of final approaches being developed to support practitioners in the field with regards successful implementation of the NDIS. This approach conforms with the need to consider appropriate frameworks for effective knowledge transfer between academics and practitioners (Ranjan and Gera 2012). So, in these approaches, the disability sector and the academics were aligned and partnered first in the data analysis for the case study, then in discussion of the academic analysis of that data taking on board the practitioner comments in a combined meeting, and finally, both will be collaborating in structuring the quantitative survey (mindful of language used and communication strategies) in 2021 and again in its results. Finally, and an important component, academics and practitioners will be working together to use their collaboration to impact government policy through an array of communication and advocacy channels.

Research Findings

This research has identified an academic-practitioner collaboration pathway that has supported groundbreaking research into broad-ranging change management related strategies, necessary for successful implementation of the NDIS amongst Australian nonprofit disability service providers. Underpinning the development of this pathway has been recognition of the growing divide between academic research, especially in business schools, and management practitioners.

This pivotal growing divide has focused attention by the researchers on the development of an engagement framework that is recommended to contain a number of vital elements as identified below and highlighted in Figure 1:

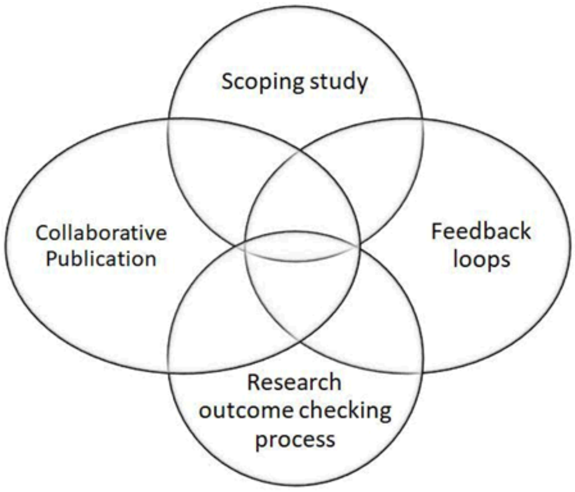

Figure 1: Research Engagement Framework for Practitioner Focus

Source: Rosenbaum and More

- Preliminary scoping study that can support expanded research while simultaneously extending the reputation of the researchers; as well as the research process, to a broader cross-section of potential research participant organizations, providing a broader base from which data collection and analysis can be derived.
- Developing research processes which incorporate 180-degree feedback loops between the researchers and the participant organizations, ensuring that these organizations become committed to both the process as well as the research outcomes. This lays the basis for trust in both the research and researchers.
- Undertake a detailed "research outcome checking process" at that stage of the research where model development has been achieved. The aim of this process is to expand participant organizational engagement to the point where a sense of ownership is achieved by these participants, resulting in valuable grounding of one's research model/s in the reality of the practitioner. To ensure maximum benefit from the research process, such checking can be undertaken in a workshop process where all participant organizations are given the opportunity to

participate. The rich discussions and knowledge transference will add substantial value to this grounding process, as well as ensuring the developed models are rigorous and meaningful to those being targeted.

- From an academic perspective, this deployed methodology supports the rigor required for successful research (Shah et al. 2011) and provides the necessary link between what practitioners are seeking to achieve from applied research, whilst additionally laying the groundwork for publishing in relevant academic and industry journals. To support the development of published papers, consideration should also be given to the inclusion of a small number of relevant organizational participants as co-authors. This further extends the link between practitioners and academic researchers.

Our NDIS research evidences these findings. The stages referred to above have been applied throughout our processes and have been fundamental to the attainment of our findings. In this regard the research into the disability services sector has highlighted an approach that could, over time, assist in addressing the growing research-practitioner divide and reinforce a central role for the tertiary business school's involvement in research that can be applied to real solutions that support public policy implementation.

Discussion

Two principal considerations regarding the outcomes of this research become highlighted. On the one hand is the widening gap between management research and management practice, while on the other the need to better connect academics and researchers that may result in improving student learning outcomes through better focused academic research. Critically, as Burton, Gruber, and Gustafsson (2020, 351) suggest, there is an important place for using "academic-practitioner workshops to co-create value for academics, practitioners and wider network actors through promotion of research relevance and sharing of problems, ideas and data".

This is epitomized in our work in the workshop with disability organization representatives involved in the first phase of our research—qualitative, following interview data collection and analysis—while the second and third workshops will be involved in the quantitative data collection and analysis points in relation to our 2021 survey.

The Widening Gap between Management Research and Management Practice

From the above we can see a division between knowledge serving the academic community and that which reveals application to a broader community including professionals (Finch et al. 2018). If the former is emphasized to the detriment of the latter, though acknowledging complexities and nuances abound in the relationship, then this must affect management education, student learning, and consequent employability (Trapnell and Showalter 2015). As has been identified in recent research:

Business schools are educating students to go into businesses or to take up management or other professional positions in industry. As lecturers have less and less practical understanding of the world into which they are sending their students, problems must arise. (Perea and Brady 2017, 1062)

In a classic article regarding the challenges facing business schools (Bennis and O'Toole 2005), the authors explored the reasons they believed that business schools had lost their way, failing on many grounds, including providing useful organizational skills, ethics, leadership preparation, and paths to desirable jobs and careers. They pinpoint the root cause in changing business school culture to a scientific discipline and away from what is relevant to professionals and practitioners as professional education, having the effect of inappropriate curricula that impacts leadership and the way organizations are managed.

Later, under the growing rigor-relevance debate, it has been suggested that while grounded in scientific and methodological rigor, management research was considered to have little relevance to management practice (Panda and Gupta 2014). This rigor-relevance dichotomy needs to be closed through making such research more relevant to both practitioners and organizations. This is further cited in the research which emphasizes the need to bridge the knowledge gap that exists between study and professional practice (Gill 2016). Demonstration of the complexities in simple dichotomies are evident: "the notion of rigour versus relevance needs to be replaced with the recognition that achieving relevance is dependent upon rigorous thought and action, focused upon addressing the complexity of practitioner situations and perceptions" (Fox and Groesser 2016, 7).

Action research has been offered as one solution to the gap (Nijhawan 2017), while emphasizing that knowledge for practice and knowledge in practice are, in fact, embraced in knowledge of practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999). Indeed, Wahlgren and Aarkrog (2020) reveal in a recent article how the research-practice gap has been bridged with teachers using research-based knowledge in an action research project examining student dropout, involving cooperation between researchers and college teachers as practitioners.

Some have highlighted the lack of transformation of business schools by technology that has occurred elsewhere, denying increased competencies across knowledge, skills and attitudes (Shrivastava 2019). A critical lack of integration of corporate needs in business schools' curriculum and a failure to integrate knowledge from a holistic market, by focusing on functional areas and thus away from the real work environment, has also been identified as an issue (Gupta et al. 2019). Others have claimed that we should be teaching organizing rather than management, itself a subset of organizing, asserting there are ideological bases (corporate capitalism) to the hidden curriculum of business schools (Maddern 2018). More recently, Schlegelmitch (2020) also calls for radical innovations for business schools undergoing paradigmatic changes and suggests using an analytical framework focused on customers, competitors, and company.

Some dimensions of the problem can be addressed through bridging the gap between theory and real-life application, through internships/work-integrated learning, collaboration with external organizations and experiential learning with real world case studies, as envisaged in both classic and recent work in this area (Green and Erdem 2016; Kolb 2014). However, is this adequate given the ongoing focus on research vs. teaching excellence in ensuring that graduating students are prepared for their professional careers (Frankham 2017; Grant 2006)? The collaboration case study reported here emphasizes much more the coproduction process to bridge the academic theory-practice gap for academics, students and practitioners in truly engaged scholarship wrought through research-practice partnerships.

This is equally important for higher education institutions per se as is evidenced by the Australian government's increasing pressure on these institutions to ensure graduates do indeed have workplace-ready skills through its performance related funding, responding partly to graduate employment outcomes statistics. Community is also raising expectations of real returns for educational investment. The recent Australian Qualifications Framework Review highlights this issue:

To retain their relevance and effectiveness, qualifications will need to respond to current and emerging workforce and social needs, be delivered in ways that meet learners' needs and circumstances, and be trusted by learners, employers and the community generally. The traditional role of formal qualifications is challenged by the ready availability of information through the Internet, declining trust in institutions and traditional sources of authority. Many people gain skills and experience in a variety of settings outside the formal education and training system. (Noonan 2019, 7)

Further, the existing Australian Qualifications Framework identified three separate domains that risked "Knowledge, Skills and Application of knowledge and skills being considered in isolation from each other, when, in practice this is not the case" (Noonan 2019, 28).

Accordingly, it has been proposed, as identified in Figure 2 below, that the domains of Knowledge, Skills, and Application be linked through the common denominators of action and reflection.

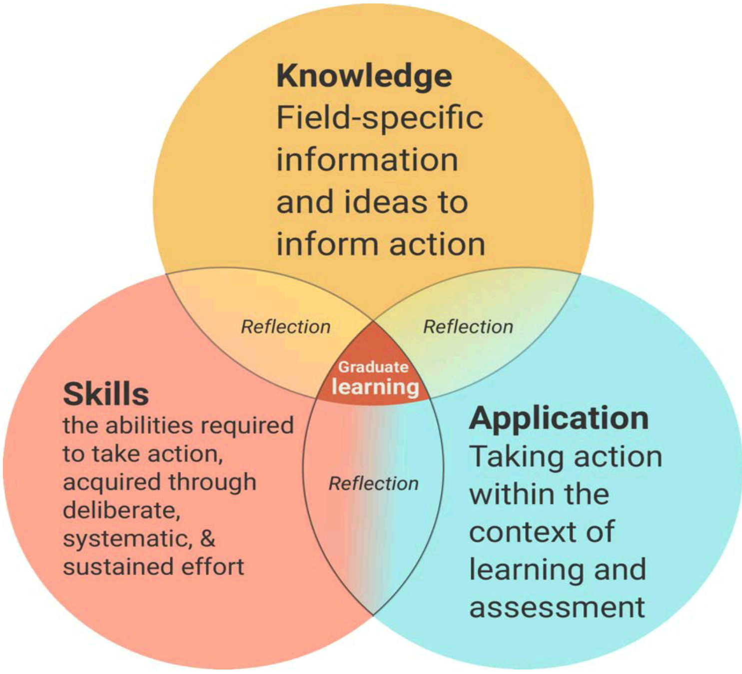

Figure 2: Domain Definitions Linked through Action

Source: Noonan 2019

If management research fails to undertake research for pragmatic impact in collaboration with external organizations, then it is less likely to impart to students those very skills required in their current and future professional lives outside of education for the real world through real world learning. Moreover, governments are increasingly requiring research to have more pragmatic outcomes (Fox and Groesser 2016). Indeed, this is echoed in recent work by Kritz et al. (2020, 1) stating that "management researchers and management practitioners increasingly appear to be talking past each other. A solution lies in understanding that interactive management education has an important role to play in bridging this divide." In our disability case study, we aim to illustrate how its approach can help to bridge traditional differences in this gap.

Research that Better Connects Academics and Practitioners

Recognition in extant literature has been accorded to the boundary-spanning characteristics of the scholar-practitioners (Carton and Ungureanu 2018) who appear to be operationally differentiated from the generally accepted traditional categorizations associated with scholars and practitioners. In essence, scholar-practitioners appear to occupy that space between these two traditional categories, not through any means of extraneous activities and responsibilities, but rather by effectively leveraging both positions and merging them into a new category that seeks to bridge the widening gap that appears to be plaguing the tertiary research sector from the management practitioner sector.

In this manner, the gap that continues to widen is potentially being filled by a new category of professional, able to display a range of characteristics, including linking professional identities of academic and managerial roles (Simmel 2011); developing practices and knowledge systems that reflect their hybrid characteristics within these two historically diametrically positioned views (Vermaak and de Caluwé 2017); and, permanently positioning themselves in a liminal state, which is both functional as well as optimal in terms of addressing the well-recognized academic-practitioner divide (Ybema et al. 2011).

The extent to which the academic-practitioner dilemma is a challenge of our own making cannot be entirely ignored. The research-practice paradox (Bansal et al. 2012) feeds the beast that has exacerbated the extent of the problem, especially in the context of the Australian tertiary education system that faces funding challenges resulting directly from the move away from public funding to a less than nuanced financially competitive structure. The publish-or-perish conundrum (De Rond and Miller 2005) further complicates the competing requirements in this dilemma as the required shorter timelines for practice outcomes challenge the necessary longer timelines that are usually fundamental for relevant research outcomes (Bansal et al. 2102).

Overcoming this dilemma may require either a rethink of the role of business schools vis-à- vis the commercial, nonprofit and public sectors, or at the very least, a clarification of what the role should be, especially with regards theoretical and applied research. A continuum approach along an active spectrum of development may assist in conceptualizing the manner in which the academic-practitioner gap may narrow over time. There is little doubt that theoretical research is needed to continuously challenge the basis upon which our assumptions, as academics, are developed. In the absence of such rigor in continuously challenging our understanding and the manner in which we have developed these, we effectively diminish the overall value of our intellectual capabilities, which can result in intellectual stagnation (Collins 1992). This is not a characteristic of a society that thirsts for knowledge.

Consideration also needs to be had with regard the application of, and the best use for, this theoretical knowledge, and from the business school perspective, how can it best be applied to improve a wide range of operational and strategic challenges of management practice that feeds into the betterment of both organizational and societal outcomes. This recognizes the pivotal linkages between social innovation and organizational sustainability (Dawson and Daniel 2010). Bemoaning the fact of management research deviating from its essential purpose of aiding efficient and effective management practices, Drnevich, Mahoney, and Schendel (2020, 35) argue that research should be "based on the logic of discovery of real-world phenomena and strategic problems…a pragmatic, engaged, and problem- focused process..can produce both scientifically rigorous and practically relevant research".

The ongoing requirement of many business schools for their academics to publish in "A" journals has focused attention on successfully expanding theoretical research, at a cost. These journals tend not to be practitioner-friendly due to their complexity (Editorial 2017); hence restricting the accessibility to such research and therefore its application in management practice. While evidence has now been provided as to the incorporation of such research into undergraduate management programs (Editorial 2017, 1), the wider promulgation of practice- based research may need acceleration. An ongoing focus of narrowing this academic- practitioner research gap may perhaps benefit from research that is undertaken by academics in conjunction with practitioners and focusing on practitioners, as distinct to academics focusing on research that speaks entirely to other academics.

Improving Student Learning Outcomes through Better-focused Academic Research

As has been evidenced in ongoing discussions regarding participative learning methods (Harrison and Edwards 2012), a predominant focus on action learning, for instance, has underpinned successful program development amongst Master's students. This approach relies heavily on the integration of student learning with action learning facilitators able to integrate relevant knowledge with industry experience whilst guiding students through active and meaningful discussions. The strength of this approach, including the interconnections between

knowledgeand its application, have been well documented, including within the tertiary education sector, where a range of formal qualifications for tertiary educators in Australia have been linked directly to the inclusion of action learning as a fundamental aspect to such qualifications (Chang et al. 2003).

While there appears to be a generally recognised preference in academic teaching, especially in the field of broader management studies, for the integration of theory and practice, a stronger and more obvious link between academic research and practitioner application may also provide a more focused approach to teaching the principles and their application to future early career practitioners. This would also apply to those more mature-aged students who are returning to tertiary studies in order to enhance or consolidate their careers. Interestingly, this may have implications on the structure of academic research which, in order to be more effective, may need to be occupied more by those who are neither pure academics nor pure practitioners (Busi 2013), necessitating far more integration between these participants.

Considerations that focus research which better integrates academic and practitioner interests may, therefore, provide a stronger platform from which early career students and mature-aged students can be the recipients of stronger learning outcomes, where such outcomes are predicated on curricular that better integrates theory and practice. As an example, the original action learning equation (Revans 2011) stipulated that learning was seen to be achieved through a combination of available programmed knowledge, which Ravens identified as "the stuff of traditional instruction" (Revans 2011, 3), and questioning and exploratory insight, something which can engender the imagination of both students and practitioners alike. The extent to which closer collaboration between management academics and management practitioners can underpin this approach may be important for ongoing curricular development, as perhaps alluded to in the AQF domain definitions which were all linked through action (Noonan 2019), and potentially becoming a major refocus in business schools.

Analysis of Collaboration Case Study

We began this research with a great desire to assist the non-profit sector with the key challenge of managing a generational transformation, resulting from the requisite change management necessitated by the introduction of the NDIS. The challenges associated with this transformation were predicated on transitioning from a supply driven to a demand driven structure for services sought by people with a disability and provided by disability service providers in a vastly more open marketplace. We also wanted to discover if these change processes, mainly across culture and leadership, might be replicated on an industry-wide basis through the development of a sector-specific approach to the management of positive transformational change. Our intention was to also utilize the findings of this study to inform government agencies on their framing of responses to the broader non-profit sector with regards strategic and operational characteristics of the sector, and any implications this might have when developing policy initiatives that require similar transformation change.

In so doing we blended two key passions of the researchers—change management and the non-profit sector. As such, we pursued this management research drawing on relevant change management theory and anchored in a key issue relevant to management in this sector—thus fulfilling Sannö et al.'s (2019) calls for collaboration between academe and industry through collaborative coproduction, though acknowledging, as they do, that such collaboration poses management challenges. As Yu (2018, 1) points out "coproduction centres on the production of research as an interactive process where academics and practitioners collaborate across all phases of a research project." We have used their Knowledge Foundation model as below to guide us:

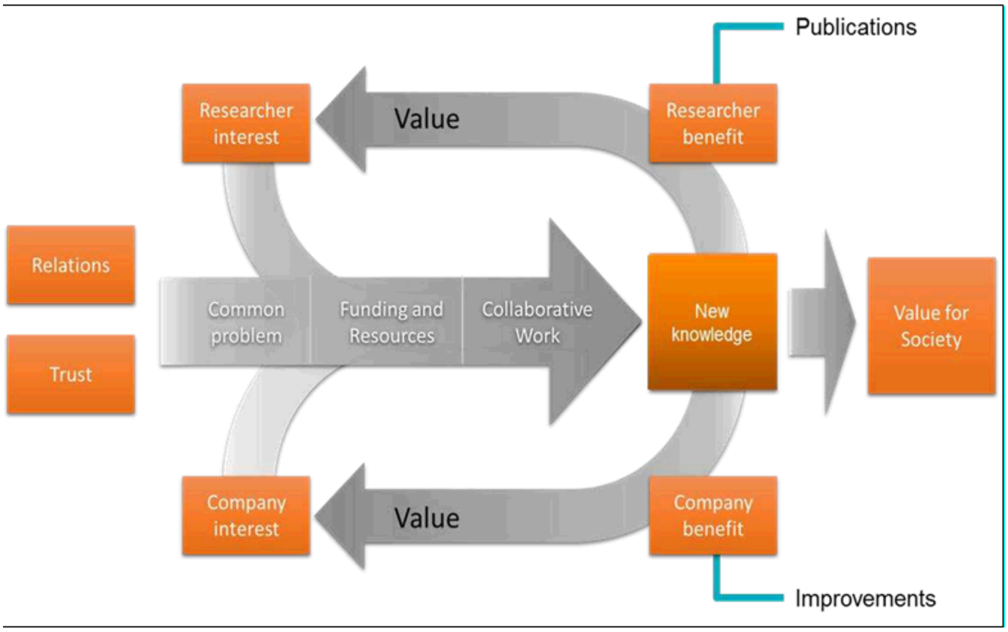

Figure 3: Knowledge Foundation Model

Source: Sanno et al. 2019

Its key phases are best described as follows:

- Phase 1: Common problem with interest to both academics and organizations. Change management in the nonprofit sector with the introduction of the NDIS represents mutual interest given its broadening of the understanding of change management in the nonprofit sector, as well as the substantial organizational and societal impact on change failure of this initiative.
- Phase 2: Funding and Resources. Both academics were funded by their organizations and only in the current phase (quantitative) is limited external organization funding provided. Previously, organizations had provided their resources where required, mainly in terms of people and place, but not financial.
- Phase 3: Collaborative work. The first two phases emphasised data collection from the organizations, first in a pilot study of two organizations, and then extended into seven more nonprofit organizations, and finally in a survey. The research project was undertaken over three years, ongoing in this year, 2021. In 2018 the pilot study with two organizations was undertaken, whilst in 2019, having learnt lessons from the pilot study, we embarked on interviews with seven more organizations. In 2021, we have set up a survey involving participants from the organizations already interviewed, with four additional organizations that have joined the study as collaborative research partners. Once data and analysis are complete, we will engage with key representatives from each of the participating organizations to work together on devising a pragmatic change management model for the sector that will assist in this and potential future large-scale changes.
- The final collaborative work will involve presentations to Boards and staff of the organizations involved, and then to key policy makers in government, to ensure widespread understanding of the key findings.

Table 1 further identifies the key engagement steps involved in this research study.

Table 1: Key Steps in the Research Study Modeled on Sanno et al. 2019

Steps	Method	Participants	Time-frame	Impact
Data collection	Qualitative pilot study of two organizations (32 interviews) Extension to 7 new organizations (46 Interviews) Quantitative Survey, adding 3 new organizations not part of phases 1 or 2	Two researchers Two researchers Three researchers	2018 2019 2020	Academics and students re methodology
Reflective observation	Meetings, documentation, coding, analysis	Three researchers	2018 2019	Academics and students re methodology
Abstract conceptualization	Presentation to the Boards of the two Pilot study organizations Conference presentations (2018 and 2019) Debriefing with Executive Teams and Boards to discuss key findings	Researchers and practitioners Two researchers Researchers and practitioners	2018 2019 2021	Practitioners and academics
Active experimentation	Workshop/s to test key findings and consider any additional input from practitioners and collaboratively creating a new pragmatic model of change management for the NFP sector	Two researchers Ten organisation representatives	2021	Academics, practitioners, and students

Source: Rosenbaum and More

In the current phase of this research project, coproduction comes to the fore, in working with key representatives from the organizations who were interviewed in the first and second phases to come together in co-producing a solution to the research problem of how best to manage the transformational change required by the introduction of the NDIS in the nonprofit sector. Yu's research (2018, 1) found that "successful academic-practitioner collaborations require three elements: a champion in the practitioner community to advance the coproduction partnership; tenured stakeholders; and compromise amid the two communities to advance knowledge".

In our case study we believe that these elements—seven champions in our disability organization leaders, tenured stakeholders in these organizations and the academics across the two organizations, and ongoing compromise in the research phases from both communities—assist in potentially bridging the academic-practitioner divide, especially with regards this current research and its outcomes.

Conclusion and Future Developments to Address the Divide

Business schools are facing a wide range of challenges as the broader tertiary sector continues an evolutionary process that, to some extent, has accelerated over the last few decades. Much of this has been foisted upon the sector as a direct result of challenging financial and service delivery models that have forced it to rethink their modus operandi. The COVID-19 pandemic will likely increase these challenges, but it is already in some disciplines bridging the research- practice divide of necessity.

A further element of concern has been the manner in which these schools have potentially justified and maintained their relevance, in a society which continues to value knowledge being gained and applied. While the epistemological underpinnings as to understanding knowledge definition and acquisition have not changed over the centuries, their application has evolved over time, and the essence of this development and application is the subject of this article. We have argued that research that better connects academics and practitioners to assist real-world organizational, management, and leadership challenges is best considered through carefully structured and well managed collaborations between academia and business. Additionally, such connections provide the framework for improved curricular development, which of course improves outcomes for students in an iterative manner that further informs better academic and practitioner outcomes.

To some extent, ongoing academic research focus on frameworks, rigor, and relevance should perhaps not be considered in isolation, but rather should be widened to consider issues of responsibility, public value, cognitive justice and public engagement (Irwin 2019). Seen in this context, broadening the focus by balancing academic requirements with practitioner relevance could perhaps refocus the research efforts of business schools and, in the process, re-establish their broader relevance. We also want research that is useful and agree with Conaway (2019) that if we want research to matter for policy, we need to devote resources to building relationships and strengthening organizational practices in service of building organizations that learn. This will require researchers, universities, policy makers, practitioners, and professional associations "to reconsider their activities and priorities and create new ways of working across sectors. This work will be complex, messy, and at times uncomfortable. But it is work worth doing" (Conaway 2019, 2). Our case study of research-practice partnership aims to take up this challenge in the hope that this relationship can improve academic and practitioner practice and build learning organizations.

Valuable further research in this area would include a two-way approach. On one hand, gaining a jurisdictional benchmark of existing business-school research and the manner in which it has originated, including the nature and extent of practitioner collaborations, would provide some guidance as to the extent and structure of existing collaborative research. On the other hand, the development of normative guidelines for effective and efficient collaboration processes and structures could assist business schools, while encouraging practitioners to initiate and maintain involvement in such collaborative processes.

While a predominant focus in this article has been tertiary business schools in the Australian context, there are other relevant issues which may require further investigation in order to determine impact on the research-practitioner divide. These include such issues as the impact on the use and application of academic language, the role of communication especially in the context of how findings from academic research are best disclosed in a wide range of academic journals, as well as the relevance of methodological approaches and the impact these have on the manner in which practitioners engage with research findings.

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