

SCHOLARS VS. PRACTITIONERS: THE GREAT DIVIDE AN EXPLORATION OF MARKETING SCHOLARS AND PRACTITIONERS: THE IMPACT AND PERCEIVED VALUE OF SCHOLARLY RESEARCH ON MARKETING PRACTICE AND PRACTITIONERS

Kristin R. Watson, Angelica Bahl, and Wossen Kassaye Metropolitan State University of Denver

Abstract

This session will discuss views of theory versus practice, types of practitioners, competencies and their influence on academia and marketing practice. The impact and perceived value of scholarly research on marketing practice and practitioners will also explore and discuss The seven reasons Peter November (2004) believes marketing practitioners should continue to ignore marketing academic research, as well as marketing managers' media preferences for receiving academic research information, will also be discussed (Gray, 2005).

Theory versus Practice

Although rating the relative importance of theory versus practice seems to be a contentious discussion across many (if not all) disciplines, it seems as though this is much more of a concern in the world of academia than the business/professional world. The perception of most people (other than professors) is that the primary role of professors is to educate and/or teach college students, preparing them for their chosen profession. However, those whom are more intimately familiar with college environments realize there can be a great deal of pressure for professors to be published, which often becomes a higher priority than educating students. An inherent requirement of being published in the world of academia is that writings are based on research, both secondary and primary. In addition (and maybe even as a result of), a large percentage of professors/scholars seem to have a purely academic background, often with little (if any) business/professional experience. Careers of professors can be directly dependent on their ability to do research and get published.

Conversely, students continually express the desire and need to be taught by people with 'actual' experience in their chosen field of study. Many business professionals choose to teach at the college level after extensive experience as practitioners, often with the primary motivation of 'teaching' students, not necessarily even aware of this 'publish or perish' conundrum. Additionally, while practicing, many professionals/practitioners are actually published in a multitude of mediums. However, although considered extremely credible in the professional/

business world, these articles, books, etc. may not necessarily be based on ‘formal’ research nor do they need to be – many are opinion and/or experience-based.

These can be some of the factors which are contributing to this debate of theory versus practice in the academic world, which is essentially non-existent in the professional/business world; often resulting in tension between pure academics/scholars and professionals/practitioners, as both meet (and sometimes collide) in the academic world.

According to Kuchinke, there is a perception that research is dated, not solution driven and lacks best practices information. Practitioners are not rewarded for using theory, and researchers are not rewarded for directly addressing practitioners; researchers are rewarded for research itself. Organizations do not always value research – a bottom-line performance-driven culture looks for short-term, immediate solutions.

Although little research within marketing exists, according to Gray, Ottesen & Matear (Gray, 2005) some attribute this to a range of factors including language, barriers and poor communication between the academic and practitioner communities.

According to Bassi, the quick fix solution pattern of practice serves to further distance practitioners from the research. Practitioners often do not have the time or the resources to investigate research findings. Thus research is perceived as valuable only if it supports the organization’s bottom line (Keefer, 2009). Although business professionals/ practitioners tend to disagree with these statements, which appeared in academic literature, it is illustrative of the perceptions of academics and the divide alluded to.

Practitioner Types

According to Ruona and Gilley (Ruona, 2009), both theory and practice are part of a vital cycle that allow ideas to be progressively refined. Consequently, Ruona and Gilley constructed a model to depict that theory and practice are in relationship to one another. They delineated four types of practitioners based on how they engage around theory and practice which include: atheoretical practitioners, practitioners, reflective practitioners, and scholar practitioners.

Perspectives

A panel of scholars and practitioners will share their experiences and perspectives on the scholar practitioner divide, as well as the impact and perceived value of scholarly research on marketing practice. Panel participants will include:

- 1) Scholar
- 2) Scholar- Practitioner
- 3) Practitioner-Scholar
- 4) Practitioner

Summary

Hubbard and Norman (2007) compared the relative impacts in the academy of work published by practitioners, practitioner-academic alliances, and academics. Hubbard and Norman concluded that visible attempts to bridge the gap between practitioners and academics can be made by encouraging collaborative research between the two groups. This should be the most symbiotic of relationships, and the evidence offered here attest to this claim. They support cooperative research among practitioners and academics to direct attention toward the solution of managerially-relevant problems.

References available upon request