



City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

Citation: Oswick, C. (2020). Practitioners Corner: A Call to Action!. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 56(2), pp. 137-139. doi: 10.1177/0021886320908633

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/24136/>

Link to published version: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0021886320908633>

Copyright and reuse: City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

City Research Online:

<http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/>

publications@city.ac.uk

Practitioners Corner: A Call to Action!

Cliff Oswick
Professor of Organization Theory

Cass Business School, City, University of London,
106 Bunhill Row,
London, EC1Y 8TZ
United Kingdom

Tel. +44(0)20 70408362
Email: cliff.oswick.1@city.ac.uk

Practitioners Corner: A Call to Action!

Abstract

This piece briefly discusses the nature of the relationship between scholars, practitioners, and practitioner-scholars in terms of the generation of behavioral science knowledge and the development of theory. It also discusses the scope for, and process by which, practitioners and scholar-practitioners can become more directly and actively involved in contributing to *JABS* via a new section called 'Practitioner Corner'.

Practitioners Corner: A Call to Action!

From Theory to Practice and Back Again

Kurt Lewin famously said that “there is nothing so practical as a good theory” (1951:169). If this is true, one might hope that at least some of the academic content in *JABS* has informed the way in which managers, consultants and other organizational stakeholders apply behavioral science knowledge and engage in processes of organizational change. However, this framing perhaps only captures part of the story insofar as it implicitly couches knowledge generation as a largely uni-directional endeavour (i.e. from academics to practitioners).

Lewin’s oft cited phrase has been cleverly inverted by Ployhart and Bartunek (2019), who assert that “there is nothing so theoretical as good practice” (p. 493). In making a case for phenomenon-based theory, they draw attention to how things that occur in practice drive theorizing and catalyze theory development. In effect, this challenges the notion that change theories arise as a result of academics contemplating the world (e.g. “sitting in dark rooms thinking”) or that they go into the field and make sense of, and give meaning to, the largely un-theorized actions and behaviours of organizational stakeholders (i.e. akin to a form of “academic missionary work”).

There are many examples of how practical insights developed within work settings have triggered the development of change theories and concepts. For example, conversation-based change techniques, formulated within consulting practice (e.g. world café and future search), have informed the development of an exciting body of theorizing which has come to be known as ‘dialogic OD’ (Bushe and Marshak, 2009). That said, it is overly simplistic to say that real world practice informs academic theorizing (or vice versa). In reality, knowledge generation is a result of an ongoing, multi-directional dialogue between the interpenetrating worlds of academe and practice (via academics, practitioners and scholar-practitioners). This

is particularly the case within the applied behavioral sciences. It is with this in mind that the *JABS* editor, and senior editorial team, have decided to further stimulate the correspondence between academe and practice by introducing a new section in the journal called *Practitioner Corner*.

A Call for Contributions

As Gavin Schwarz, the Editor in Chief of *JABS*, indicated in his editorial in the previous edition of the journal, we are interested in receiving:

“...insightful manuscripts from practitioners drawing in experiential knowledge in reflecting on topical practices and lessons learned. Using a scholar-practitioner model, these contributions advance debate by recognizing that scholarship often develops first in and through practice. Practitioner tales are invited by the editor, although suggestions for submission are encouraged.”

It may be helpful elaborate a little further on the scope and remit for the *Practitioner Corner*. It is anticipated that it will become a distinct section of the journal with regular contributions. The expectation is that the work published will be grounded and focused on articulating and discussing what is happening on the ‘frontline’ (i.e. in practice) in terms of emerging themes and recent developments. This can be contributions which report on innovative practices and radical ideas that are arising in consulting activity and/or within in-situ work settings. Equally, we are interested in contributions which question and/or build upon existing academic theories in terms of their relevance and impact in practice. Reflective pieces that critically analyze and problematize the experiences and challenges of traversing the worlds of academe and practice as a practitioner or scholar-practitioner are also welcomed.

Rather than being developed as conventional research-oriented papers, which adhere to an academic-style of presentation, the pieces for the *Practitioner Corner* should be: (1) relatively short (i.e. definitely no more than 800 words in length); (2) contain a limited number of references (i.e. typically no more than 3 or 4 in total); (3) opinion-based (rather than empirically-driven); and, (4) written in a clear, accessible and practical way.

The contributions will be selected based upon their potential to stimulate debate, trigger inquiry, and inform reflection amongst, and between, scholars, practitioners and scholar-practitioners. In addition to stand alone pieces, it is possible that there will be particular themes and topics that emerge within the *Practitioner Corner* as connected contributions and exchanges across different JABS issues. The section will comprise of a combination of invited contributions and submitted pieces. Submissions can be made in the normal way via the JABS website. Submitted work will be subject to an editorial review process.

Concluding Remarks

Academic journals typically promote correspondence within a particular academic community rather than encouraging correspondence between scholars and practitioners. The introduction of a *Practitioner Corner* is an explicit attempt to meaningfully address this predisposition. The success of this new initiative will be determined by the degree of ‘buy in’ from practitioners and practitioner-scholars. Hence, your participation going forwards is essential!

References

Bushe, G. R., & Marshak, R. J. (2009). Revisioning organization development: Diagnostic and dialogic premises and patterns of practice. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 45(3): 348–368.

Lewin, K. (1951). *Field theory in social sciences*. New York: Harper & Row.

Ployhart, R. E., & Bartunek, J. M. (2019). Editors' comments: There is nothing so theoretical as good practice. *Academy of Management Review*, 44(3): 493-497.