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Enacting the Scholar–Practitioner Role

An Exploration of Narratives

Ilene C. Wasserman
ICW Consulting Group, Penn Valley, Pennsylvania
Kathy E. Kram
Boston University, Massachusetts

An essential part of Edgar Schein's legacy is his modeling of the role of scholar–practitioner. To better understand this legacy, the authors explored how being a scholar–practitioner is defined by those who ascribe to this role and the challenges and opportunities these individuals face as they go about their work. Their inquiry consisted of 25 interviews, a systematic reflection on their own professional journeys as scholar–practitioners, and a review of others' related work. The authors confirmed that scholar–practitioners identify with the primary tasks of generating new knowledge and improving practice, yet how they prioritize and go about their work varies with where they are on the scholar–practitioner continuum. The authors highlight five themes to clarify the complexities of the role, stimulate further inquiry, continue dialogue, and ultimately lead to the creation of new venues in which scholar–practitioners can thrive and enhance their contributions to the world.

Keywords: *scholar–practitioner role; scholar–practitioner continuum; role permeability and role segmentation; Edgar Schein impact*

> With this passion to make things clear goes a related passion to make them clear to the layman. For reasons that I do not entirely understand, I have never been interested in theory for theory's sake. I find I always want to go down on the abstraction ladder and use examples, metaphors, or other simplifications to make theoretical points. In other words, parsimony is very important to me, but high levels of abstraction are not. I believe that the interpersonal world and the underworld are basically simple if we can decipher its basic logic. I have always loved the work of Everett Hughes and Erving Goffman because of their ability to simplify and clarify extremely complex phenomena.
>
> —*Edgar Schein (1993, p. 40-51)*

Ed Schein defined the term *scholar–practitioner* as "someone who is dedicated to generating new knowledge that is useful to practitioners" (personal communication, 2007). Throughout his career, Schein consistently integrated the primary tasks of generating new knowledge and helping individuals and organizations enhance and

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develop their understanding and effectiveness. Schein particularly emphasized the value of the quality of the relationship between consultant and client, to better serve (Schein, 1969, 1993).

There are many terms used to describe those practitioners who participate in scholarly pursuits, including "researcher–practitioners" (Lynham, 2002), "scientist–practitioners" (Brewerton & Millward, 2001), "scholar–practitioners" (Graham & Kormanik, 2004), "practitioner–theorists" (Lynham, 2002), "scholarly practitioners" (Ruona, 1999), and "reflective practitioners" (Jacobs, 1999; Schon, 1983). Similarly, the dual agendas of developing new knowledge and influencing practice are alternatively referred to as "collaborative management research" (Pasmore, Woodman, & Simmons, 2008), "action research" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001), "action science" (Argyris, Putman, & Smith, 1985), and "insider/outsider team research" (Bartunek, 2008; Bartunek & Louis, 1996). The term *scholar–practitioner* is showing up more and more at academic and practitioner conferences as well as in the literature. Most recently, Tenkasi and Hay (2008), building on Aristotle's legacy, defined *scholar–practitioners* as "actors who have one foot each in the worlds of academia and practice and are pointedly interested in advancing the causes of both theory and practice" (p. 49). Yet despite its use, there has been a lack of clarity and agreement about what it means to be a scholar–practitioner and a lack of agreement about who qualifies. As words help to shape our reality and conversations create meaning, we took this call for papers from the editors of *JABS* as an invitation to explore how people currently working in the field, including ourselves, construe the intersection between what we *do* in the world, how we *know* what we do in the world, and consequently, how we generate new knowledge and frameworks. Specifically, our research question was, How do those who identify as scholar–practitioners define, navigate, and resolve the dilemmas and opportunities they encounter as they go about their work?

There is also an emerging body of literature that explores the value and need for spaces and frameworks where scholars and practitioners join (Anderson, Herriot, & Hodgkinson, 2001; Aram & Salipante, 2003; Barge & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008; Bartunek, 2007) and where people can translate their work from one venue to another (Allen, 2002). In this article, we make a distinction between *crossing boundaries* (e.g., exploring venues and possibilities that foster relationships and professional exchanges between people who primarily identify as one or the other) and *boundary spanners,* or people who are doing both.

The purpose of this article is to present a view of the scholar–practitioner role that takes into account critical variations of how the role is enacted, the dilemmas and opportunities that individuals experience, and the factors that shape individuals' professional identities. Our interviews with scholar–practitioners sparked much interest, curiosity, and energy, as the interviews offered those we spoke with an opportunity to reflect on their careers through a particular framework. At the same time, we were stirred to see our own lives through a new lens. The data are rich with

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territory that deserves further exploration beyond the limits of this article. Here, we shine a light on what we learned about this role from experienced scholar–practitioners and draw implications for creating intentional spaces for collaborative relationships and stronger connections between what we do in the field and how we conceptualize and articulate how we do what we do.

Our Approach

Defining Our Terms and Our Population

Our own collaboration inspired us to explore what the term *scholar–practitioner* means, who ascribes to this role, and how being a scholar–practitioner enables important and effective work in the world. We were exploring avenues for collaboration, having just reconnected after a brief contact 20 years earlier. One of us is a practitioner who, after years of working as a consultant, returned to the academy to more deeply explore the questions she encountered in her professional practice. One of us is a scholar who, after years in the academy, was pursuing opportunities to do more consulting that would inform her ongoing research and teaching. By all appearances, we were coming together from different social and professional worlds.

Appearances, like professional titles, belie the complexities of how we live our lives. As we pursued our collaboration, we noticed the many threads we each had been weaving in and out of the professional home of the other and the richness of what we were weaving together. Our side conversations moved to the forefront as we each noticed the rules and rhythms of the other's primary work context with novice eyes. We learned to notice our own taken-for-granted assumptions through the eyes and experiences of the other. We identified emerging themes as we reflected on our conversations as a parallel process to our efforts to understand what it means to live as a scholar–practitioner.

We began by examining our own definitions of the role, our own experiences at different stages of our careers, and the factors that shaped our careers over time. We suspected that the scholar–practitioner could best be understood as a *continuum of roles*, rather than just one identity where pure scholar and pure practitioner anchor each end of the continuum. Individuals may place themselves at different points on the continuum as the emphasis in their work shifts, their careers unfold, and they form different partnerships and collaborations.[1] As we were making sense of this continuum, we identified colleagues who met the criteria we had developed to interview them about how they enact the role. We also decided to interview each other.

Schein's work had been consequential for both of us. His early books, *Career Dynamics* (1978) and *Organizational Psychology* (1980), introduced Kathy to the field of study that would become the foundation for her life's work. His book *Process Consultation* (1969) provided a guide map for being effective in her work

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with organizations, and his work since has consistently provided models of how to generate and disseminate new knowledge relevant to both scholars and practitioners (Schein, 1978, 1985). This same book influenced how Ilene established client relationships and designed her process of intervening. She approached her work with a flexible frame, ready to respond to what emerged in the ebbs and flows of the process. She viewed her relationships with clients and with others on the consulting team as data for what might be considered a parallel process to the client system. *Career Dynamics* was an important framework for how she worked with people as well as how she navigated and framed her own career and life path.

Later, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (Schein, 1985, 2004), "Clinical Inquiry" (cf. Schein, 2001), and "On Dialogue" (Schein, 1993) became primary resources for Ilene's work with clients on organizational development and culture change. Both of us continue to use Schein as a primary reference when we teach. Thus, the primary task is to model collaborative inquiry with our students and to structure opportunities in the classroom for them to develop skills in posing questions that lead to reflection and insight about themselves and about the world in which they live.

Concurrently, we conducted a literature search to explore how the term is being used and how it evolved. Our interview questions and our analysis were informed by Schein's work, specifically his classics *Process Consultation* (1969, 1995), *Career Dynamics* (1978), and "On Dialogue" (Schein, 1993). Following his wisdom on building authentic opportunities to learn from and with relevant organizational members, our questions were designed to stimulate reflection on the scholar–practitioner role, with the hope of fostering reciprocal learning (cf. Isaacs, 1993).

What follows is a description of who we interviewed, the questions we asked, and how we analyzed and interpreted what we heard. We identified five themes that highlight patterns we heard across the interviews. Based on these themes, we posed and drew implications for opportunities that support the work of the scholar–practitioner that are emerging and that need to be pursued with greater intention.

The Interview Process

Our approach to selecting the people we interviewed was opportunistic. Our sample selection was a recursive, snowball process. We generated a list of people in different worlds doing the same kind of work in a different balance from our respective networks of colleagues. We then identified criteria in response to the question, "Why did we select those people?"[2] This question, coupled with suggestions from people we interviewed, prompted us to add to the list of people to interview in order to enhance our sample.[3] The criteria that emerged for people we selected included the following:

1. We sought people who were interested in developing new knowledge and ways of being in the world to affect change.

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2. We sought people who had completed or pursued their doctorates, which was an indicator that they had a basic interest in learning, research, writing, and creating new knowledge.
3. We sought diversity in gender and culture.
4. We sought diversity with regard to age; however, we identified people who had enough of a professional identity to be able to reflect on their lives and their careers and the choices they had made. We, therefore, identified people who had been in the field for quite some time, rather than newcomers who were still defining their identities. The age range of the people we interviewed was early 40s to early 80s.

We attempted to categorize the people we spoke to as being either primarily scholars or primarily practitioners. We thought that the criteria of "works primarily in the academy" or "works primarily as a consultant" would be a simple distinction. However, of the 16 people we placed in the scholar category, 8 of them called themselves practitioners. For the most part, these 8 people teach in graduate programs that are explicitly called scholar–practitioner programs. Furthermore, of the 9 people who we placed in the practitioner category, 2 described themselves as academics because they work in contexts in which they are expected to practice from a theoretical orientation and to contribute to the scholarly literature.

Another consideration was how others in the professional community view these people. Most, if not all of the people we interviewed, are well known in their field as people who are both scholars and practitioners. Indeed, all of our interviewees were published authors. (Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this article to duly cite their relevant work.) Some of the people we interviewed talked about how they were perceived by their colleagues. Those who were frequent boundary crossers (i.e., practitioners who frequented academic conferences or scholars who mixed in the world of the practitioners) talked about the relevance of how others defined them in this regard. Furthermore, the boundary between these two groups is very permeable. A number of our interviewees had crossed this boundary at least once, and in some instances twice, during their careers. Many, from both groups, identified similar challenges making meaningful connections between theory building and practice.

Yet, despite the significant overlap with regard to definitions and dilemmas, we did identify some patterns that distinguished people who have spent most of their careers based in the academy and on a tenure track from those who have spent most of their careers working as consultants or as part of corporate or community organizations. The overlaps and the distinctions were themselves telling.

We asked nine questions:

1. In what way do you identify with the term *scholar–practitioner?*
2. How would you define the term *scholar–practitioner?*
3. How, in your understanding, has this term evolved over time?
4. Where might you place yourself on a continuum, with scholar being at one end and practitioner being at the other?

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5. What are the dilemmas that you face working in this space?
6. What opportunities do you see working in this space? How can you, and others, leverage these opportunities?
7. Given that this role spans two worlds and the particular challenges you outlined earlier, how do you support your ongoing learning and development?
8. Now that we have reflected on your experience, would you modify your definition of the term or the criteria for identifying someone in that role?
9. What else would you like to tell us about your experiences as a scholar–practitioner? Any other comments?

Our interviewees were thoughtful, reflective, and provocative.[4] With each participants' permission, we recorded the interviews so that we could systematically capture and analyze examples and insights after the fact. Studying these data, independently and together, led us to a shared view of critical insights that inform our understanding of the scholar–practitioner role.[5]

Our Analytic Method

We each shared responsibility for leading the interviews or taking notes. We were both present for most, but not all, of the interviews. In addition, each interview was audiotaped. After each interview, we debriefed what we heard and began to identify themes. Consistent with a grounded theory approach, we found that each interview shaped and sharpened subsequent interviews. We continued to follow our interview structure, and we began to probe more deeply in certain areas based on what we learned along the way (Boyatzis, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Our analyses of the interview tapes and notes led us to define five major themes that helped us to clarify, organize, and communicate what we learned from this group of professionals about the nature of the scholar–practitioner role.[6] As we completed our analyses, it became quite clear that the continuum that we initially envisioned did not adequately portray the complexities of the scholar–practitioner role that emerged in this study. Instead, we came to see the continuum as anchored on both ends by segmentation of the roles of scholar and practitioner, with the midpoint representing the scholar–practitioner who is able to integrate these two roles (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). Thus, our depiction, now represented in a Venn diagram (see Figure 1) changed to accommodate the range of enactments of the scholar–practitioner role.

In the next section, we articulate several patterns in the experiences, dilemmas, opportunities, and personal drivers among this group of scholar–practitioners and the subtle variations that distinguished those rooted in the academy from those rooted in the world of practice. About midway through the interview process, we realized that a critical turn in our shared understanding had come about as a result of what we heard. Most participants articulated, explicitly or implicitly, a need to create more bridges, roles, and meeting spaces to support and connect the work of individuals

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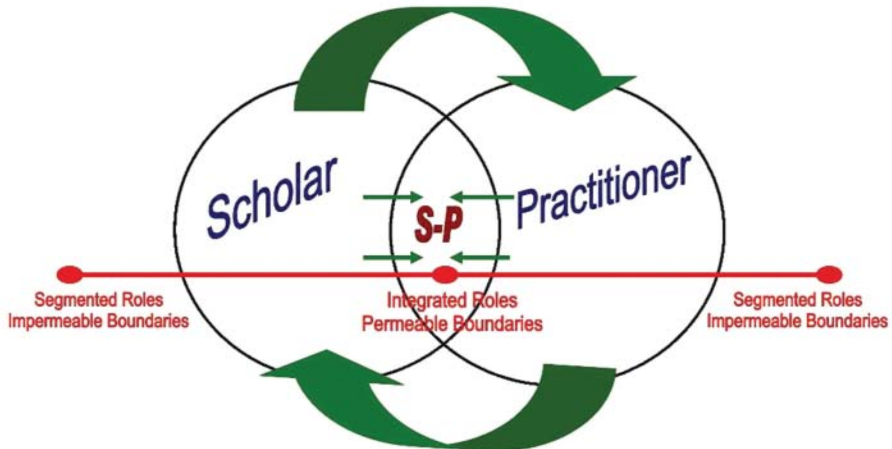
Figure 1
The Dynamic Role of the Scholar–Practitioner (S-P)



who value practice in the service of building new theory and those who value theory in the service of practice. Both the academic and practice subcultures were, in effect, undermining integration of these two aspects of the work and perpetuating considerable role conflict that was difficult to manage.

Living as a Scholar–Practitioner: Major Themes

The first theme we discuss is how people *defined the term scholar–practitioner* and how, in their awareness, the term has evolved. Here, we found a distinction between those we defined as practitioners and those we defined as scholars. Scholars and practitioners had a somewhat different story about the term. Many of the scholars defined the term in a manner that prioritized research and the generation of knowledge, recognizing that their work in organizations was essential to this task. There was a subset of both scholars and practitioners who noted that their definitions of the role were something that significant mentors and colleagues in the field passed on to them. This difference in how the two groups related to the term seems to be rooted in their professional socialization.

The second theme we call *narratives of the self.* We come to know ourselves in relationship to others and create a central narrative for the roles we assume (Gergen, 1994). Because many of the people we interviewed did not relate to the term *scholar–practitioner* until we introduced it to them, they reconstrued their

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narratives in relationship to the question we posed and made sense of themselves and their careers in ways they had not previously articulated. Many of our interviewees were quite touched by this opportunity to reflect. In all cases, more senior colleagues had served as role models, guiding them to incorporate the values of enabling change and transformation, while generating new knowledge and understanding of systems of individuals, groups, and organizations.

The third theme describes the *major dilemmas* that people experience having feet planted in both worlds while making their primary home in one or the other contexts. All of our interviewees seek to bridge the world of practice and the world of scholarship. Yet, these two worlds have different rhythms and different kinds of demands and require different types of focus. The dilemmas and opportunities that people identified were remarkably consistent across the board, although the texture of these challenges and their responses to them were very much influenced by the norms and values of the subculture of their home base.

The fourth theme, *motivations and drivers for the work,* describes what motivates people to do what they do and the way they do it. We included in this theme how people made career decisions at significant junctures in their careers. It appears that social and economic factors were a driving force at particular life or career stages. For some, a social action commitment pulled them to practice at a time when the academy represented the establishment. For others, the opportunity to be affiliated with an academic institution offered the opportunity for open exchange of ideas and the development of new frameworks. For some, the income potential of full-time consulting was more attractive than an academic position where generating new knowledge was expected and rewarded but where salaries were considerably lower. Some felt that academic positions were scarcer. Still others saw the income and rewards more secure in the salaried position of the academy. Both groups value generating new knowledge, yet it appeared that what constituted new knowledge varied by subculture.

We called the fifth theme *subcultures and places we call home*. Although the people we interviewed might encounter one another at a conference such as the Academy of Management or the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, the places they call home, or the venues in which they live, are different. There are different rhythms, somewhat different rules, and different priorities for engagement. Performance expectations and measures also influence what skills and competencies are emphasized and developed.

We explore each of these themes further as we seek to bring light to the role of the scholar–practitioner and the best way to optimize relationships and bridges across these different and complementary worlds of scholarship and practice.

Evolution of the Term *Scholar–Practitioner*

In our interview with Schein, he defined a scholar–practitioner as "a professional who knows how to abstract out new knowledge from experiences in organizations;

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someone who is dedicated to generating new knowledge that is useful to practitioners." He went on to say, "Of course, what is useful knowledge differs between subcultures" (personal communication, 2007). We heard echoes of this comment during our interviews. Those respondents rooted in the academy spoke of the scholar–practitioner in a manner that prioritized generation of new knowledge.[7]

> The scholar–practitioner is at the boundary of two worlds, at the nexus of scholarship and practice and committed to generating knowledge to share with the scholarly audience. For me, it involves being an actor in the world and studying the phenomenon as I experience.

> Someone who is dedicated to generating new knowledge that is useful to practitioners.

> Someone who is constantly interested in learning about the knowledge of that particular discipline and in applying that knowledge—going back and forth—[seeking] applications for *doing* in the world. There is a constant interplay.

> When I am on a project that I think of as pure research, one of the questions on my mind is "How can this be used—what are the intervention possibilities?" I think about integrating teaching with action work. I value integrating those.

A couple of the people we interviewed had done some extensive exploration of the topic from both a conceptual basis and a personal reflective one.

> There has always been a tension in the professional schools that goes back to the business schools, which until the early 60s were practitioner oriented. Then they wanted to be accepted by their colleagues, which created a split between practitioner-oriented doctorates, i.e., EdDs and DBAs, and PhDs. If theory is to have any relevance, there needs to be people that translate that into practice, and that training is different from what we need for research.

> Being an organizational psychologist, operating in the action science, ethnographic, appreciative inquiry paradigm, I am engaged in the hands-on work at every point of the research cycle, the educational process, and the communitarian enterprise. As a member of the scholar–practitioner tradition, I am involved primarily in theory building that has direct applications and applied work that contributes to the development of theory.

Practitioners, on the other hand, had a definition of a recursive cycle where practice held primacy.

> A person who thinks about their practice from the point of view of their theory—what they do they do in a way that can be systemically characterized by a tradition of human behavior. Their theory shapes what steps they take in consultation and then they write

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> about it. The writing can be referenced in academic articles or case-based reports from the field.
>
> Someone who has an academic background and works in the world on a more every-day basis—the emphasis is on being a practitioner. The social scientist is the academic background I come from—that allows theory and frameworks to be actualized.
>
> The Lewinian concept of "there is nothing as good as a practical theory" expresses this; [intervening] coming first and the theory coming second. While a lot of the world thinks of the scholarly as primary and the application as doing as the primary causal effect—you think about things and then do.

Far more responded that they were not familiar with the particular term or that it was not part of their vernacular. Those who were more familiar with the term were associated with academic programs that describe themselves as scholar–practitioner programs, such as Fielding Graduate University or Columbia University Teacher's College, or they were members of organizations that explicitly aspire to link practice to scholarship, such as National Training Laboratories (NTL) and Center for Creative Leadership.

Some respondents from a primarily academic tradition talked about how the term evolved from the professional schools such as MBA programs, graduate education programs, and programs in public administration that were oriented toward training practitioners yet were seeking acceptance with their colleagues in the academy. The narrative they shared echoed a sense of marginalization, at least within the academy.

Despite some individuals' lack of familiarity with the term, people moved quickly to identify how they would define a scholar–practitioner. Criteria emerged from our interviews, such as the following:

- People whom, when working on theory building or research, ask themselves, "What can I learn from organizations to enhance my theory or model? How can this be useful to individuals and organizations?"
- People whom, when working with clients, ask themselves, "What models and theories inform our work? How does what we are learning and experiencing help pave the way for new models or theories?"

The term *scholar–practitioner* seemed to include, for all of our interviewees, a cycle of producing and consuming knowledge in service of continuously improving how we practice and the effectiveness of the organizations we serve. We noticed in the responses of both practitioners and scholars a clear ranking of these activities, where those rooted in the academy prioritize producing new knowledge and those rooted in the consulting world prioritize meeting clients' needs and expectations.

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Narratives of the Self

Our interviews inspired people to reflect on their careers through the lens of the topic. As people shared their stories of their career development, junctures along the way, and decision points, we listened for how people's narratives reflected different *career anchors* (Schein, 1990). A few of the people referenced the critical role that others played in defining who they were on the scholar–practitioner continuum, that is, the audience they were with defined them as *not like them* or as *one of them*. In more than one case, others would have defined the person as a scholar, yet the person saw him- or herself as a practitioner.

> I don't use the term [scholar–practitioner]. For me, my heroes and role models are people who develop new knowledge as they go about their practice. I don't accept some of the divisions that are made that research is higher order and consulting is basic practice. In terms of identity, I see myself so much as a professor—that is what I am most aware of. But the way I value the term goes back to my training and working with people like Schein, Bennis, etcetera, whose work integrated theory and action.

Many of the people we spoke to might be seen as pioneers in this territory. Having traversed a sometimes rocky terrain, they have found a peace and a sense of acceptance with where and who they are.

> I think of myself as academic and as a practitioner. I have a field I keep up with, teach at a graduate level, and the work I do is informed by theory. I bring frameworks that have context and history to the work that I do.

Although economic factors shaped individuals in unique ways, all mentioned them as factors that shaped early and midcareer decisions. Fewer than half of the people we interviewed whom we categorized as scholars followed the traditional path of only working in academia. The others worked either for nongovernmental organizations or in the corporate arena prior to completing their doctorates and joining academia. Those who followed the more traditional path might have more of a preference for security and a technical/functional anchor, whereas those who followed the less traditional path might have more of a preference for general managerial competence and service.

Many of the practitioners we spoke to describe their choice as a preference for *doing*.

> My training was as a journalist. I knew how to dig and get information. . . . I was grabbed by action research where you could study a problem and where study and researcher were collaborators to study and create change.

> A lot of the world sees scholarship as primary. I see myself as exploring things by doing first. The structure would be revealed in the process of gathering information and trying to intervene.

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Some people turned toward careers in business out of concern for supporting themselves and their families. This group included those who pursued careers in business before going on for their doctorates and those who did pursue graduate school after college but did not continue in academia. Some talked about the expectations of the tenured faculty role as being too restrictive. Thus, full-time consulting became their dominant career context, leaving little time for writing and research and more concern for income-generating activities.

Alternatively, some who chose the traditional academic route began to question, at midcareer, whether they were missing opportunities to have greater impact in the world of practice. One of our interviewees noted,

> In their 40s my peers went off to do full-time consulting, either because they didn't get tenure or they wanted to have more impact on organizations. They had opportunities to join consulting companies where they worked with important clients and earned lots of money. I thought about doing the same for the big salary but when I explored it I realized I wouldn't be happy with the loss of freedom and the claim others would have on my time.

This person credited a mentor who encouraged pursuing an academic track.

Still others found themselves in one area (academic or business) and pulled toward the other. One person said it this way:

> I couldn't see myself in the academic environment and felt pulled to apply what I was learning. [Once] I was told . . . "I have always liked your research and it is because there is always application in it. Now that I look at your assessment you are oddly misplaced as a researcher. You don't have the indicators of a researcher. You have always been good at weaving what you like to do in your work rather than liking what you do as your work. You ought to be a practitioner who does research rather than a researcher that does practice."

As we listened to him, the managerial and entrepreneurial career anchor qualities seemed to be pulling him in a direction different from one that would be satisfied in a traditional academic context.

One of the themes that echoed in our interviews, particularly from those who did not follow the traditional academic path, was a passion for approaching the field of practice but doing so from a scholarly perspective. Several noted,

> When I apply a framework, I try to understand where it has come from, what came before it, and the underpinnings of the frames and concepts. I look at what I see in the field in my consulting and try to make sense of it through what has already been framed and see whether there are other ways to think about it.

> I started as a practitioner first, and for many years used research-based best practices to assist leaders in achieving the results that they desired. I saw that it would take much

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> longer to achieve desired results (a longer cycle time) if you didn't have empirical evidence and if you applied ideas that were not grounded in theory and research.

Dilemmas of Being a Scholar–Practitioner

All of the people we spoke to were people who have come to a place in their careers where they have been able to pursue both scholarship and practice, and they spoke about the trade-offs that one has to make living in the scholar–practitioner precipice. Doing so clearly presents both opportunities and challenges. Although those opportunities and challenges differ for scholars and practitioners, there are some parallel experiences that are noteworthy. Each group perceived the other group as being more valued in the world. This seemed to be related to incentive and reward systems that, regardless of where one lives, recognize and value only a part of what one does. This frequently led to a sense of marginality, regardless of whether one was rooted in the academy or in the world of practice. For example, from those rooted in the academy we heard,

> I knew that I would not have the normal career rewards for either and that there were names for intermediary roles; people who were basically translators.

> I am aware, though, that in working with organizations on applied collaborative research, I have less time to devote to developing and writing new theory. . . . I am concerned that this makes me less of a thought leader.

> Who's on top . . . the scholar or practitioner? The scholar is the more intellectually superior, and the practitioner comes up as more successful in economic terms. There is desire to have both.

From those rooted in the world of practice we heard,

> You are sometimes viewed as either or and not either—too academic in the eyes of business world and too practitioner oriented for academic world.

> We live in a world where people want you to be one or the other. I am not sure if I am in shuttle diplomacy or on the margins. I don't know if I am in the space in between or in neither space.

> I can't keep up with the research, and when I attempt to do so I find myself feeling inept and asking others for help. It is hard to sit on the fence—if you are not in an environment where you can keep up and do it all the time.

Most of the people we spoke to, be they the "scholars" or the "practitioners," felt pulled.

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> Where do I put my energy—do I write an article or do a consulting engagement? What conferences do I go to? Do I attend for business development or to exchange ideas with colleagues?

Performance trumps everything in the world of practice. Revenue targets of clients are the top priority, and if one does not demonstrate value, particularly in tight economic times, that person is gone. In contrast, in the academy, there is a premium on knowledge for knowledge's sake and taking in new models in order to generate further knowledge.

Once a person focuses on primarily one context or the other, the opportunities for honing skills differ. Practitioners hone the skills of balancing multiple projects, having to travel steep learning curves to best serve their clients. They often need to multitask and move quickly from one area to another. Academics hone the skills of going into depth in their areas of expertise, pursuing opportunities to write, speak, and research while working with students.

Schein spoke of these dilemmas when we spoke with him. Early on in his career, he noticed that there was a tension between writing up the practical information for managers or consultants and writing up new knowledge for scholarly audiences. These processes were very different, with distinctive expectations and language usage. Over time, he found himself reading only scholarly work that had practical implications. Yet Schein always saw himself as a translator of new knowledge, a clarifier, a bridge between theory and practice. Indeed, scholars and practitioners alike read many of his articles and books. He found a way to communicate with both audiences in his writing.

Despite the conflicts, most of the people we spoke to are at a point in their careers where they have found a way of either being with or managing these tensions and even leveraging the complementary roles. From those in academic roles we heard,

> I am a scholar—I got hooked on the scholarly part of it. I enjoy the teaching, research, and learning part far more than the practice.

> I've always thought of scholars as being brilliant. A few years ago, I decided that I wanted to be near thought leaders so that I could maximize my own learning. It is great to have thought leaders down the hall now and to be considered one of their colleagues. I have designed my role to include teaching, writing, working with students, and building new programs (which makes great use of my product–performance orientation).

> Being in the academy allows me to integrate the roles—research, teaching, and action. I see my self as a scholar doing each of these activities. What brings them together is the writing I do that incorporates what I am learning in each domain.

Those in practitioner roles had equally positive views of their home base.

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> Theory is great for normalizing dysfunction. If we are talking about patterns that are not only showing up in our organization, that there is a bigger universe in which these behaviors can be understood, and that gives people hope to move on.

> I can give people materials to read—and for the people who learn in those ways it is very helpful to them. In the culture in general there is an anti-intellectual orientation, and it is helpful for people to have something to read and have a place outside their own orientation to learn from.

Exploring how they have come to integrate and prioritize the competing roles is a critical contribution to those who want to explore ways to enact this role in a manner that aligns with their competencies, needs, and values.

Motivations and Drivers

There are different motivations and drivers for people to pursue both scholarship and practice and unique ways those distinctions manifest, depending on where you live. For people in the academy, having an area of expertise that one researches and writes about, that one is known for and sought out after, is a fundamental criterion for success.

> The quality of my research as judged by a community of scholars would be the most important aspect to defining my legitimacy and accomplishments over my being seen as a really great consultant.

> At this point in my career I am most concerned about my legacy and the impact I can make on both theory and practice. Writing is important to me because I believe it has a multiplier effect. I appreciate the university platform as my students move on into positions where they can have impact, too. I also enjoy projects where we are a diverse group of collaborators that bring multiple perspectives to the work.

Others appreciated the variety and diversity of types of projects that being a practitioner afforded them.

> Every project opens new doors for me. In the academic world you are obliged to stick with one topic.

> I did not have to put in the years of doing the dumb "turning the crank" work that scholars have to do.

Some talked about the value of being a bridge between the two worlds and being the unique specimen in each. Others talked about the value of bringing current scholarship to support the work of their clients. Four interviewees expressed the value of bridging the two worlds in these ways:

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> You can be a practitioner and be rigorous in your approach. You can help clients use critical thinking and to recognize their biases by presenting new frameworks for thinking about a problem.

> What got my attention was action research—where you can study a problem and where study and research were collaborators to create change.

> Given the issues of impact or legacy, I am more appreciative of being in a university setting because there is the effect you are having on other people and students, and you have a chance to see what they do with their careers.

> Scholar–practitioners value bringing scholarship to practice and practice to scholarship and facilitating experiences that give more meaning to experiences and offer ways of understanding and interpreting them.

In contrast, some of those in the academy noted ideas such as this:

> [I] appreciate the university platform as my students move on into positions where they can have impact, too. I also enjoy projects where we are a diverse group of collaborators that bring multiple perspectives to the work.

Both found alignment with the needs for autonomy and variety yet in quite different contexts.

As the people we spoke to reflected on their careers and the choices they made along the way, their self-perceived competencies, motives, and values seem to have become clearer over time. As Schein (1978) suggested in his writing on careers, what really matters gets clarified as individuals reflect on each new job experience and as one's life unfolds. This seems to explain many of the choice points that our interviewees faced along the way. For example, some at midcareer left the academy to better meet their family obligations, whereas others left the consulting world to join the academy, where they perceived they could better meet family needs. Alternatively, some chose to stay right where they were, noting that their unique combination of competencies, values, and motives, that is, their career anchors, were best aligned with where they were situated. Thus, the same opportunities in a particular context were assessed differently, depending on each individual's unique combination of values and needs.

Despite the distinctions, we heard echoes of shared values. These included a passion for inquiry, exploration, questioning, and making a significant contribution to theory, knowledge, and the next generation. Scholar–practitioners are consistently motivated more by intrinsic drivers, for example, to improve the human condition and to learn more about the self and the world. In some ways, people who choose to hold the place of the scholar–practitioner make some sacrifice, be it financial or some imagined diminished view in the eyes of their colleagues.

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> I am not sure if I am in shuttle diplomacy or on the margins. I don't know if I am in the space between or in neither space.

How the conflicting values of the different subcultures contribute to this tension is explored in the next theme.

Subcultures and Places We Call Home

Although there were many shared values among the people we interviewed, the places where people lived, or called home, shaped the rhythms they were accustomed to and the standards by which they evaluated themselves and were evaluated by others. Home also influenced how they perceived themselves to be judged by the culture at large. These predictable intergroup dynamics show up in how members of each group assess themselves in the imagined eyes of the other, as well as how they judge those in the other group (Adlerfer, 1987). If they remain unaddressed, these judgments can potentially undermine collaborations. We frequently heard comments from those rooted in one subculture (the academy) about those in the other (consulting) and vice versa. These served to reaffirm one's career choices.

> Scholar or practitioner careers are mainly temperamental choices. I have a limited attention span and don't like to focus on one thing for multiple years. I value the lucid writing that scholars not only don't value but disparage. I like synthesis, and academics are not taught to synthesize.

> Every project opens new doors for me. In the academic world, you are obliged to stick with one topic.

> It is very exciting to have a thinking person's practice—to conceptualize why you did what you did. There is always the risk that in practice you become unconscious with regard to why you are doing what you are doing.

> I appreciate the university platform as my students move into positions where they can have an impact too. I also enjoy projects where we are a diverse group of collaborators that bring multiple perspectives to the work.

> I did not have to put in the years of doing the dumb "turning the crank" work that scholars have to do.

As we completed our interviews, we came to appreciate how scholar–practitioners consistently wrestled with a sense of marginality in their home base yet also found particular advantages when contrasting their world with that of the other possible home base. Several had also discovered how partnering with someone in the other subculture had the potential to enhance both their respective learning and the effectiveness of the work they did together.

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Acknowledging how the rhythm of the academy is very different from the world of practice, one of our interviewees (based in the academy) said,

> What enables me to practice is to have a partnership with a practitioner. [You cannot tell your client,] "Sorry I cannot be there I have to teach a class!"

The different rhythms were a salient part of our conversations as we explored working together. As a practitioner, Ilene was very familiar with the pace of servicing multiple clients. As she started teaching and presenting at scholarly conferences, she found that she had to learn a different way of budgeting her time. At the same time, Kathy was all too familiar with the academic rhythms and consistently wanted to preserve time for writing, reading, and reflection while also being available to students and clients. She frequently underestimated the time needed to do this work and to be open to new projects in organizations that would enhance her learning along the way.

As Ilene began to carve out time for writing papers and attending and presenting at academic conferences, it occurred to her that she was doing so on her own time and at her own expense. Although she felt a sense of personal and professional satisfaction in doing so, she soon realized that she was living between worlds. As an adjunct faculty member and with running her own consulting business, there was no one measuring her on how many presentations she made at academic conferences or on how many publications she had accepted by referee journals. Furthermore, the time she was spending on her academic work was encroaching on her consulting time and on her income. Kathy, on the other hand, having earned a tenured full professorship as a result of her teaching and publications record, was wary of losing her standing and respect among her academic colleagues if consulting and action research impinged too heavily on her research and writing time. For both, moving toward the center of the scholar–practitioner continuum promised both new learning and some diminished rewards.

We heard this described by many of our interviewees as well. Interviewees, based in the world of practice, lamented,

> It is hard living in a world that wants you to be one or the other.

> I don't know if the term *scholar–practitioner* is an ideal from the mythical past and no mere mortal can live up to it. In the past there were giants who walked among us as men, and now we do things and no one can have that title because no one qualifies.

There was a strong sentiment in our interviews that embodying both was quite a worthy aspiration yet very difficult to achieve with excellence.

The power and influence of the evaluation system resonated as people talked about priorities and choices they had made during their careers and how they viewed

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themselves. Those who took the traditional academic track emphasized research, writing, publishing, and working with students. Practice had to be in the service of those pursuits in order for them to achieve tenure and career stability. Some of the practitioners either started in the academic arena or chose not to pursue that context because they were drawn to the applied world. They were clearly more attracted to the pace, rhythms, and rewards of the world of practice.

The context one chooses as home base determines opportunities to sharpen some skills and emphasize particular values and priorities while necessarily reducing the opportunity for others. The norms, rhythms, and incentives of one's home culture both enhance some capabilities and diminish others. For example, many interviewees mentioned writing as a challenge. The style of writing for practitioners is very different from the style of writing for a scholarly audience.

> The generic pattern in scholarly writing . . . calls for cautious, carefully circumscribed statements consistent with systematically analyzed data. . . . Not so when writing for practitioners. . . . While there may be intellectual interest in the theory and analysis, what readers seek are detailed particulars that speak to their situation. They want an action plan, advice on what will work, and evidence that the plan will solve their practical problem. (Cuban, 1992, p. 5; Schein, 1969)

As Marv Weisbord (1974) suggested more than 30 years ago, this difference in pacing can impede the value that scholars and practitioners provide to one another.

Discussion

Ed Schein was among the first to articulate the inherent tensions between the subcultures of academia and practice (Schein, 1969). In response to our emerging sense of a scholar–practitioner continuum and the boundary-spanning role required to truly integrate aspects of both scholar and practitioner, he said that he would place himself squarely in the middle and that he has always been there. In describing how he goes about his work, Schein said, "I generate new knowledge by spending time observing and talking with individuals in organizations. I then reflect, systematically extract themes and new knowledge and draw on others' work to develop new insights and theory" (personal communication, 2007). To a person, all of our participants strive to live this same vision.

We recognized early on that the underlying metaphor of this exploration was that of a container where one was "in one world or another" or "straddled two worlds" or "in one world and then moved into the other." David Brown (1989), in an article reflecting on his own career, suggested,

> I expect that others who seek to combine action and research will be stimulated by the challenge of meeting the different standards of academics and practitioners. . . . But I

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> believe there are also significant rewards for those who are willing to combine research and action and bridge multiple worlds. Such boundary-crossers can play a seminal role in a world of increasing organizational and global interdependence. Growing interdependence makes inevitable the collision of perspectives from disparate worlds. Out of that confrontation may come polarization and rigidified boundaries, or the creation of new visions and concepts that define a better future. We inhabit many social worlds, but we live in just one physical and ecological world—and that one world is shrinking rapidly. Inquiry and action enable creative integration of ideas from our many social worlds can play a central role in creating those new visions and concepts. (p. 380)

Some have written about the tensions between scholarship and practice as existing between and among people. In doing so, they speak about suspicions, judgments, and rankings of priorities and valued outcomes. As Eriksson and Sundelius (2005) explained, academics sometimes see themselves as intellectually superior to their problem-focused colleagues. They also noted that policy experts can be equally self-righteous. Practitioners often argue that they deal with the "real" world and, unlike scholars, do not waste money being "ivory tower" academics. We detected such biases in our interviews as well. Practitioners suspected that academic work is not always as objective or independent as it is presented and that it is biased in favor of some ideology or political interest. Likewise, those based in the academy hinted at some negative stereotypes of practitioners by suggesting that some practitioners they knew have settled for a worldview on which they base their actions, holding on to it very rigidly, without considering the possible intellectual obsolescence of their knowledge base as new knowledge emerged from research.

The early work on roles as the basic building blocks in social systems (Katz & Kahn, 1978) and the recent work on role identity and role transitions (Ashforth et al., 2000) helped us to move beyond our descriptive findings to a set of propositions intended to guide future research and action (see Table 1). These authors pushed us to consider how the particular career histories of our interviewees, their drives and motivations, and the subcultures in which they live influence their unique responses to the boundary-spanning conditions they regularly encounter.

Proposition 1: The professional context in which individuals start their careers defines the nature of the role conflicts that they experience and their paths to role integration.

The characteristics of the role conflicts that our interviewees described were typically shaped by the norms of their initial home base. For example, the individual who started in the academy found it difficult to assume projects in the world of practice without experiencing conflict and perceived threats to future success. Similarly, the practitioner who wanted to spend time on research, writing, and teaching experienced conflict when such efforts made him or her less accessible and responsive to clients' requests. Ultimately, the challenge of role integration is about strengthening the skills and competencies that are not valued by one's home base to be able to engage in the world of the other.

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Table 1
Propositions for Future Inquiry

Proposition	Implication	Next Steps
The professional context in which individuals start their careers defines the nature of the role conflicts that they experience and their paths to role integration.	The emerging literature that explores bridging these roles suggests that graduate programs authorize these roles to mitigate role conflict.	Continue to refine the definition of scholar–practitioner and authorize this role as distinct from scholars and practitioners who collaborate. Expand professional development and academic programs that develop and strengthen the integration of the scholar–practitioner voice.
Those who integrate the roles of scholar and practitioner create and practice rituals to link the two worlds and to transition between them.	Our proposition, based on that of Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate (2000), suggests that people create rituals to mark the bridge or transition.	Further research should explore and identify what rituals and practices people have developed to support role integration and boundary spanning. We need to create venues that bring to life ideas that support boundary spanners.
Talking about the work with others who want to integrate the two worlds validates the boundary-spanning role, leading to self-authorization.	Providing career narratives of those who integrate the roles of scholar and practitioner provides a guiding vision for future scholar–practitioners.	Continue to collect career narratives of people who identify as scholar–practitioners and disseminate to future scholar–practitioners as part of their learning and development.
As the context for dialogue among scholar–practitioners broadens, individuals will experience less segmentation and less role conflict.	The role of a scholar–practitioner as boundary spanner is central to the integration and synthesis of new knowledge.	Conferences and venues, as well as professional practice, should create support structures for those who pursue this path.

Considering the tension that exists between those who embody the role of scholar or practitioner, what does this suggest for people who are attempting to hold both within themselves (i.e., the scholar–practitioner)? Where do scholar–practitioners go once they finish a doctoral program that values both roles where they can be fully recognized for the dual goals and multiple skills they intend to enact and develop?

Given the principle that we enact that which we name, we asked ourselves what we might call the space where people live together. How might we name the relationship that illuminates this space between in the most appreciative and generative

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way? What can practitioners offer scholars and scholars offer practitioners in order to foster collaborations that elevate and articulate what we are learning as we do this work in the world? These are critical questions that we have not yet answered, although their importance and complexity have been clarified in this study.

Many of the people we interviewed were mid- or late career people and, as such, seemed to have achieved the developmental stage of self-authorization (Kegan, 1994). They are intentionally exploring the territory of the space of scholar–practitioner and pursuing work and contexts that bridge the two. They are less vulnerable to the normative pressures of their home base. They are intentionally seeking and forming partnerships and collaborations across the contexts to leverage the best of both. As one participant said,

> What enables you [as a scholar] to practice is to have a partnership with a practitioner so you can come in and out of the practitioner space. And what you each bring to the partnership is invaluable. Our clients (more European than American) appreciate the help in getting a good program design and the theories behind it.

Another noted,

> At this point in my career [late 60s] I feel like I am at the top of my game. . . . Resources are plentiful, I have lots of freedom, and lots of projects where I get to have impact and to generate new knowledge through collaborative research. I am aware, though, that in working with organizations on applied collaborative research, I have less time to devote to developing and writing new theory. . . . I am concerned that this makes me less of a thought leader.

Proposition 2: Those who integrate the roles of scholar and practitioner create and practice rituals to link the two worlds and to transition between them.

Ashforth et al. (2000) used boundary theory to discuss how people engage in role transitions as part of their work life. In our interviews with people, as well as in our own experience, we noted processes and rituals that people engaged in to move in the space both between and in and out of the different worlds. For some practitioners, professional conferences were a stimulus for bridging consulting and scholarly activities. Such conferences gave them a focus and stimulus for writing and collaboration. For some academics, a consultation served the same role in reverse.

Our view is that fostering the scholar–practitioner role requires more than self-initiated collaborations, although clearly these have contributed greatly to the quality and breadth of work that contributes to both theory and practice (cf. Adler, Shani, & Styhre, 2003; Shani, David, & Wilson, 2003). It seems clear that contexts that value equally the generation of knew knowledge and efforts to improve the effectiveness of organizations, although growing in numbers, are still undernourished. Our interviewees share our view that these new contexts should offer the incentives, supports,

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and opportunities to hone new skills relevant to the work of scholar–practitioners and minimize costs to professional advancement or loss of the esteem of one's peers and the constituencies that we serve.

Proposition 3: Talking about the work with others who want to integrate the two worlds validates the boundary-spanning role, leading to self-authorization.

Fortunately, we see evidence of emerging spaces for scholar–practitioners that value and encourage the integration of scholarship and practice. Phil Mirvis (2008) reports on three types of initiatives that involve scholars and practitioners coming together to share their perspectives and develop new ones that reflect scholar and practitioner concerns. In providing some detail on each, he demonstrates the potential of structured opportunities of this kind. Others are writing about collaborations (Barge, & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008; Shani et al., 2003; Tenkasi & Hay, 2008). Similarly, many universities are establishing roundtables and research centers whose mission is to bring academics and practitioners together for the purpose of solving problems and generating new knowledge that will be responsive to leading-edge challenges (e.g., Boston University School of Management, University of Southern California School of Business). There are examples like these that are rooted in consulting firms, think tanks, and nonprofit organizations as well (e.g., Catalyst, the Hay Group, Center for Creative Leadership).

Proposition 4: As the context for dialogue among scholar–practitioners broadens, individuals will experience less segmentation and less role conflict.

Also noteworthy is what a number of universities are doing to expand the dialogue within traditional academic venues. Non–tenure track faculty appointments are being implemented that are designed for those who either come out of the world of practice or prioritize their clinical practice over writing and research. Many doctoral programs in organizational behavior and education are building more internships and field requirements into the early years of doctoral training. Sabbaticals that give academics the opportunity to work in a corporate setting or that give executives the opportunity to teach on a university faculty are becoming more available. Several schools are implementing doctoral programs whose primary and stated purpose is to train scholar–practitioners (e.g., Case Western University Executive Doctorate, Columbia Teacher's College Doctorate in Adult Education and Leadership). There is also evidence of entirely new settings (in the past 20 years) solely devoted to the training of scholar–practitioners, such as the Fielding Graduate University, Teacher's College at Columbia University, and American University/NTL.

Finally, professional conferences that encourage scholar–practitioner work and collaborative work among scholars and practitioners are growing. We see traditional conferences expanding their reach and mission (e.g., the Academy of Management)

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and relatively new conferences whose primary mission is to foster and support such work by providing an ongoing venue for dialogue and collaboration (e.g., the Transformative Learning Conference, Society for Organizational Learning). In turn, these conferences are now sponsoring journals that welcome submissions that speak to both academic and practitioner audiences (e.g., *Academy of Management Journal of Learning and Education; Reflections; Human Resources Management Review*). It is the efforts of individuals, such as those we have interviewed, that are responsible for these new trends.

Conclusion

Our hope is that this article helps to create a shared understanding among all of us who identify with the scholar–practitioner continuum of where our experiences, priorities, and pressures connect and diverge. Jean Bartunek (2007) suggested that we need a "relational scholarship of integration" in which such forums are created and individuals have the self-awareness, social skills, and commitment to build and nurture relationships that span the subculture boundaries we have identified. This work is not easy, but it must continue if the scholar–practitioner role is to thrive and have the impact that we all desire.

Indeed, we must heed Schein's concern about emergent roundtables and other venues. In our interview with him, he noted that these contexts would work "only if the two subcultures can really listen to each other and value each other. If they are at odds, or not valuing their differences, not much new will come of them" (personal communication, 2007). Perhaps, as we move forward in our efforts to generate new knowledge and improve individual and organizational effectiveness in a variety of settings, this shared understanding will foster new venues in which we can learn from and collaborate with those who differ because of their professional socialization and what they currently call home. The two subcultures represented among our interviewees reward and emphasize particular and complementary knowledge and skill sets. Imagine the potential when these are brought together around the primary tasks of generating new knowledge and serving organizations.

We have personally experienced a new level of discourse between us in writing this article. The dialogue has expanded with touch points at the recent Academy of Management professional development workshop (August, 2008) and with a professional development workshop proposal submission by young colleagues (August, 2009). If the patterns and implications reported here foster more of this shared inquiry among a broader audience, we will have succeeded.

Notes

1. We later altered this depiction, based on what we learned from our interviewees. Although the continuum influenced our opportunity sample, it did not adequately portray the nuances of the scholar–practitioner role that crystallized during the study.

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2. We are aware that there are many fields other than management and organizational consulting where people fit the criteria of scholar–practitioner. We hope to continue this path of inquiry and explore patterns within and across these differences.

3. Originally, our vision was to interview about 10 individuals (due to the time constraints we faced in completing this study). However, as we began the inquiry we were compelled to do as many interviews as we could because each one was rich with insight, helping us to deepen our understanding of the complexities of the scholar–practitioner role. Furthermore, we could have systematically cited most of the people we interviewed, as they are well published. Ultimately, we interviewed 25 individuals and have a growing list of others we would like to have interviewed had we had more time. We hope that this article will inspire all of them to join the dialogue we hope to have begun with this article.

4. On reflection, we noticed that our process for selecting people to interview mirrored the data. For example, after interviewing several individuals rooted in the academy, we wanted to interview full-time practitioners next in order to get some balance and points of comparison. Thus, we were continuously informed by our experience, we abstracted patterns and principles from our approach, and we used what we learned from our reflection to inform further action.

5. As we reflected on our own collaboration, we noted that we posed different yet complementary follow-up questions to our interviewees, indicating that we actually enhanced the insights we developed by both being present for these conversations. Similarly, as we developed our themes and began our writing, we brought different strategies, assumptions, and skills to this work. It was our shared commitment to reflective inquiry that leveraged our respective strengths and past experiences. Had we not examined and articulated our differing assumptions and practices, the quality of our work would no doubt have suffered.

6. Although we reached some level of theoretical saturation with our sample of 25, we are keenly aware of the many questions raised by this study that call for further inquiry. In this article, our intention is to start the dialogue with interested readers and to inspire further inquiry that will enhance our ongoing learning and have an impact going forward.

7. Note that we only identified the source of a quote when it was from Ed Schein or when the quotes were obtained from published material. In all other instances, we noted whether the interviewee was rooted in the academy or in the world of practice.

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Ilene C. Wasserman, PhD, is an adjunct faculty member, Teachers College at Columbia University and Haub School of Business, Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, and the principal and founder of ICW Consulting Group in Penn Valley, Pennsylvania.

Kathy E. Kram, PhD, is a professor in the School of Management, and a professor of Organizational Behavior and Everett Lord Distinguished Faculty Scholar at Boston University.

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