

CHAPTER 5

*Collaboration and the Production
of Management Knowledge in
Research, Consulting, and
Management Practice*

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ABSTRACT

For managers looking for management knowledge beyond their own experience, academics and consultants are two main resources. In this chapter, we focus on academic researchers and management consultants as producers of management knowledge and ask what the two can learn from each other. We suggest that there is a strong potential for collaboration in the triad manager–researcher–consultant, but we also acknowledge the institutional forces that make it difficult and discuss how they may be overcome. The chapter begins with an investigation into the knowledge-creating systems of academia and consulting, goes on to successful examples of knowledge creation in collaboration, and ends with a discussion of the tensions to be overcome, especially in the collaboration between academics on the one hand and practitioner-managers and consultants on the other.

The world of managers is increasingly knowledge intensive. Competition is growing and large organizations are becoming more global and complex, resulting

in a proliferation of new management models and tools. This makes it difficult for managers to keep up with the latest developments (Huczynski, 1993). Although the main source

of managers' learning is their own experience, this is becoming increasingly insufficient. Today's managers must search widely beyond their own experience for management knowledge that is relevant to their unique situations. They hire consultants, study for MBAs, attend executive education programs, and buy management books. As the demand for and debate about management knowledge has grown, so too have the supply and the number of actors involved in producing knowledge about management.

Management consultants and academic researchers from business schools are the main sources of management knowledge available to managers who want to obtain external knowledge input. Traditionally, management consulting and academic research have been depicted as distinct but complementary knowledge systems, with business schools and other disciplines acting as producers of knowledge that is turned over to consultancies, who then serve as disseminators to managers as the final customers. However, the past decade has seen this role division alter dramatically with academics and consultants now going separate ways to generate their own knowledge. Mainstream academics are now pursuing empirical research and publishing in their own journals for their own reading. The larger consultancies are also engaged in the creation of management knowledge (Davenport & Prusak, 2005) to enhance their marketing and provide solutions for clients. Managers, too, have occasionally become engaged in publishing knowledge from their experience in the form of books (Bossidy, Charan, & Burck, 2002; Welch, 2001). The popularity of these books indicates that many managers prefer the often simplified and unambiguous "practical" advice and knowledge presented in such books from consultancies and their managerial peers to the more ambiguous and complex knowledge disseminated from universities and business schools (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Many channels for disseminating

management knowledge are currently dominated by management consultants and practitioners. In a study of the German management magazine *Manager Magazin*, for example, practicing managers and management consultants were more often referred to as experts than were academics (Kieser, 2002b). Also, many consultancies publish journals containing informative articles written by their consultants based on research and consulting experience, which are widely subscribed to by executives and even academics. Examples include *McKinsey Quarterly* and *Strategy and Business*, published by Booz Allen Hamilton.

This chapter focuses on academics and consultants as producers of management knowledge. We acknowledge that in an increasingly complex world, professions and organizations need to specialize. But specialization also creates a need for integration. We consider the relative strengths and limitations of academics and consultants as current knowledge creators, and the potential value of collaboration between them and with managers in the conduct of future research. While the focus of our argument above has been on the drifting apart of consulting, research, and practice, there are examples of successful integrations of these systems, which have inspired our current argument. Influential researchers, such as Michael Porter, Michael Beer, and Susan Mohrman, have set up their own research institutes in which they integrate research and practice, and which increasingly (and successfully) compete with large consulting organizations. Also, some of the most influential developments in management research have been generated through consulting work, and breakthroughs in consulting organizations' knowledge have been created in collaboration with researchers. These collaborative activities will be exemplified by testimonials from Edward E. Lawler, Chris Argyris, and Edgar Schein later in this chapter.

It is useful to compare academics with consultants because each party has different concepts of the nature of knowledge and the best ways to produce it. We also recognize the third party to collaboration, the manager-practitioner, who holds the keys to access and data and is the ultimate judge of the usefulness and validity of the knowledge produced by consultants and researchers. Managers are the prime experimenters who put researchers' and consultants' knowledge to the test.

Our argument is structured as follows: After a brief discussion of how we view relevant knowledge in management research, we turn to the academic and consulting systems, respectively, in trying to understand their differing approaches to knowledge creation and collaboration. We then turn to a discussion about how collaboration between consultants, academics, and practitioners may be enhanced and provide testimonials of three successful cases, carried out by well-reputed academics. We conclude with a discussion of some of the tensions inherent in collaboration and how they may be overcome.

Our view throughout is that research collaboration involving all parties, given proper safeguards, is a highly useful way to produce new knowledge. Business school academics have much to give from their scientific theories and research methods, and consultants can provide their advantage of extensive experience with real-world issues, while practitioner-managers can offer access to their complex reality. Collaboration is the only way to expose researchers to (1) richer data about the total situation, (2) observation of the underlying dynamics at hand, (3) the uniqueness and specificity of each situation, and (4) the ability to test one's findings and conclusions through feedback from the subjects of study.

Unfortunately, as we shall see, many academics have withdrawn from collaboration with consultants and practitioners in their research efforts; furthermore, as a result, the latter two parties have avoided contact with academics for their perceived lack of

relevance. Perceived relevance is key to making one's knowledge heard among practitioners, and both researchers and consultants have to compete with the hard school of business life from which managers derive most of their management knowledge.

Multiple Meanings of Relevant Knowledge

The question of what is and is not knowledge often provokes debate among the different producers; they each have different criteria for what passes as "real" knowledge. In academia, knowledge is usually defined by the theories and methods used to produce it. In consulting, the focus is on the practical results that knowledge produces. For the purposes of this chapter, we view knowledge in terms of its perceived relevance (not always immediately apparent) to various consumers, who include not only managers but consultants and academics as well. This does not mean that knowledge must be stated in "how to do it" terms, but its consequences should enlighten and cause other reactions. This knowledge can appear in a variety of forms:

- *Research findings* from using scientific methods, usually conducted by academics
- *New theories and concepts* about the managerial world, generated by academics and consultants from their research and experience (e.g., Drucker, 1955; Porter, 1980)
- *Applied techniques, tools, and methods* created through experience, usually by consultants and managers (e.g., BPR from Hammer & Champy, 1993)
- *Best practices* developed from looking across several organizations to see what actions are associated with effective results, often by consultants and packaged as popular management books (e.g., Peters & Waterman, 1982)
- *Personal accounts* from experience, usually by CEOs (e.g., Bossidy et al., 2002; Welch, 2001)
- *Case histories* derived from a firm's experience, usually incorporated within the

knowledge management system of consulting firms or in teaching cases

- *Project reports* prepared by consulting companies based on client-specific data and general knowledge to solve a specific organization's problems
- *Critical reviews and commentaries* based on critiques of the literature and its research, largely done by academics such as in this book

No doubt some skeptics will claim that many of the above examples do not qualify as knowledge. Business schools have been frequently questioned about the usefulness of their research (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Starkey & Tempest, 2004), and consultants are often criticized for the standardization and faddishness of their knowledge. Negative assessments range from failure to adhere to the scientific method to publishing meaningless statistics to succumbing to personal bias and placing fashion over objectivity. Despite these criticisms, our preference is to regard all of the above examples as forms of relevant knowledge because each depicts and informs a slice of reality. Different forms of knowledge are often created by different producers, each having unique strengths and limits, and even different methods for creating knowledge. In the following we will look more closely at the different knowledge standards of academics, consultants, and researchers, as inherent tensions between these standards limit the opportunities for collaboration. Backing off the standards in one system to adapt to the standards in another involves considerable risk for the actors involved.

ACADEMIC PRODUCERS

Management research began as an applied science in which the worlds of academics and practitioners were closely interwoven, with each informing the other. The academic community developed through generating

new concepts from field research in organizations, the first classic exemplar being *Management and the Worker* (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1934). Later came Peter Drucker (e.g., 1955) in his long career and series of popular books on management. These scholars were interested in helping both managers and themselves to understand better such topics as leadership, organizations, and markets by creating new frames of reference with many practical implications. Their research methods consisted largely of observations, interviews, and discussions with practitioners as they went out into organizations, spent considerable time, conducted field experiments, and even consulted with them. A few managers also made notable intellectual contributions through reflecting on their experience (e.g., Barnard, 1938; Fayol, 1917). Much of this early work was published in books, not journals, to be read by scholars, consultants, and managers. Authors were inclined to view knowledge as part of a systemic whole, which required the full length of a book to describe and document the realities of organizational life (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Bennis, Benne, & Chin, 1970; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Miles & Snow, 1978). Many disciplines, from psychology to economics, adopted this approach to knowledge generation and distribution (Blau, 1963; Galbraith, 1958; Gouldner, 1954; Homans, 1951; Selznick, 1949), and it was highly influential on practice. The Hawthorne studies reported in *Management and the Worker* (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1934), for example, led to a whole new era in management—the human relations movement—that transformed the way management was perceived (Perrow, 1986).

However, beginning in the late 1960s, the academic community in business schools became increasingly concerned with gaining more respect as “scientists.” In the United States, Gordon and Howell (1959) criticized business schools for their lack of rigor and academic legitimacy. This made management

researchers look for more “scientific” approaches. Some turned to a field of research that had long been operating in the background with roots traceable to Frederick Taylor’s management engineering (Taylor, 1911). In this field, researchers were occupied with finding the optimal way to organize work, based on the scientific principles of the natural sciences.

This quest for the “scientification” of management was driven by a desire to legitimate the managerial occupation by providing it with a “rigorous” knowledge base. In mimicking the “big (natural and physical) sciences,” the professional status of management was to be established. The manager was to be made an “expert” who would use his or her own scientific knowledge base for taking action. A hierarchy of knowledge production was therefore established (or assumed), with the academic acting as provider and the manager as the consumer-technician (Kenworthy-U’Ren, 2005). At the same time, those in other scholarly disciplines, notably economists and behaviorists, similarly began to organize themselves into professional associations with their own in-house journals.

Academic research, in its drive to become a “real science,” has increasingly pursued the values of the natural and physical sciences, including universality (the “truth” of a certain knowledge should be established through universal criteria—irrespective of particular interests), commonality (results of research are a common good/property), unselfishness (the altruistic search for knowledge), and organized skepticism (refraining from premature judgments; reliance on scientific method and data) (Kieser, 2002b). For many scholars, the truth is to be found through adhering to the orthodoxy (theories and vocabulary) of a chosen discipline, which serves as one’s professional identity.

Our informal survey of the leading academic journals suggests that well over 90% of the articles are concerned with establishing

basic causality behind certain phenomena, such as what factors lead to greater commitment or motivation. Very few studies investigate whether a certain method or intervention used by management is effective or not, such as the introduction of a new goal-setting or reward system. This is in contrast to the medical field, where there is extensive investigation of the efficacy of experimental drugs.

While contemporary mainstream management research thus may have little to say to management practitioners, it is unfair to claim that the past 30 years of management research have passed unnoticed by management practitioners. Some instances of management research have been instrumental in shaping the managerial world by introducing new ways of understanding practice. Examples include modern finance theory, which has enabled the creation of a whole new financial industry, and the view of business as socially constructed, which has enabled new approaches to the challenge of innovation.

Collaboration and Academics

In striving for scientific ideals imported from the basic sciences, a set of criteria for “good management research” was created that has gradually moved academia away from practice, making it difficult for researchers to engage in such practice-oriented activities as consulting (Engwall, Furusten, & Wallerstedt, 2002; Stymne, 2004). This search for “objective” knowledge has created distance between academics and those being studied. Scholars are today pursuing large samples generated from archival or survey data, which are analyzed using sophisticated statistical methods. The advantage of this type of research is its ability to identify and describe certain patterns across large populations of people and/or organizations, which can be portrayed and compared at single or longitudinal points in time. Disadvantages, however, include the

inability to pinpoint causality behind surface numbers, and statistical levels of significance that become too easy to obtain in large samples, without representing practically meaningful relations. Studies of this kind also make it difficult to find applications to a particular organization.

Another “distancing” approach is the use of laboratory experiments under artificial conditions, especially when involving students with no prior relationship established. While these studies may reveal important aspects of interaction within a limited range of researcher-defined variables, they often overlook the more complex and systemic aspects of business reality (e.g., real managers and organizations) that may in fact explain more of the variance in real-world settings than do the experimental variables.

Engagement with practice through consulting is today viewed negatively by many academics. Collaboration with the subject of research is to be avoided because it produces bias and wastes time in data gathering. Academics are rewarded for staying away from managers. Prior to the 1960s, academic evaluations for tenure in Sweden, took into account engagement with practice, but thereafter only the scientific merits were considered (Engwall et al., 2002). As one might expect, managers have added to the distance gap because they attribute lack of relevance to academic research.

Kieser (2002b) identifies several characteristics that have shaped knowledge creation in the academic world, resulting in barriers between theory and practice. First, the academic system is to a large extent a self-referential system, where relevance and quality criteria are internally created and controlled by one’s scholarly peers. Only knowledge certified from within the system is regarded as “real” knowledge. The main vehicle for knowledge diffusion in academia is the scientific article, which is published for members of the academic system rather than

for practitioners, who rarely read these articles. Second, success in the world of management research is closely linked to publication and citations in a limited number of highly reputed “A” journals, as ranked by other academics. The success of a researcher in addressing the practical needs of managers is generally not regarded as a source of scholarly reputation. Instead, extensive engagement and popularity among practitioners might be a threat to one’s academic reputation. Consulting is typically treated negatively as an “income-earning activity” and a diversion from serious research. Third, a growing degree of specialization in management research, based on (most often) refined statistical methods, has resulted in a level of complexity that makes management knowledge increasingly hard to access and understand for outsiders to the academic system. The journal system rewards rhetoric that is abstract and full of technical terms. Academics, acting out of a need to demonstrate technical competence, impersonality, and systematic skepticism, make communication with practicing managers especially difficult. Finally, the dynamics of the scientific system and the protocol of many of its “A”-rated journals prohibit researchers from discussing applied implications and recommendations. Expressing disdain for the practical world, while not explicitly encouraged, is tolerated by editors of the academy’s publications.

These characteristics further isolate the academic world from practice, preventing collaboration with consultants and managers. As a result, the latter assume a reverse relationship between practical relevance and academic value (Kieser, 2002a). This in turn makes it hard for researchers to gain access to organizations where they might otherwise obtain rich data, much of it qualitative, for explaining the dynamics lying behind their statistical findings (Schein, 2001, 2004).

Another negative consequence of this ingrown academic system occurs subtly in the quality of research revealed in statistically based articles. On close inspection of statistical tables in most articles, one finds that the hypothesized predictions of the researcher frequently explain less than 10% of the relationship between causal variables and predicted outcomes such as productivity and motivation. All of this unexplained variance raises further questions about the relevance of research engaged in by academics. Distance from management phenomena is clearly inhibiting the development of more complete and enlightening academic knowledge.

CONSULTANT PRODUCERS

The second major group of producers of knowledge, management consultants, are often depicted by academics as downstream actors in the supply chain of management knowledge. Presumably, consultants take the knowledge produced by academic research and apply it to the practice of management (Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2005; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2001). Like the management sciences, consulting has its roots in Taylorism, with the central idea of designing more efficient work. In the early 20th century, the first consulting companies grew out of industrial engineering to make recommendations based on time-and-motion studies (Kipping, 2002). Ironically, for many decades that followed, consulting research closely resembled today's academic research, which is engaged in stand-off studies that rely on extensive data gathering and analyses presented in written reports.

However, in the 1990s the large consultancies became increasingly involved in the production of their own knowledge for wider distribution and public consumption. Continuing today, consultants publish books and their own journals under a rubric they call "thought leadership" (Davenport & Prusak,

2005; Pasternack & Viscio, 1998). These consultancies have exploited their vast bases of experience gained from client projects to offer "brandable" models, such as McKinsey's "7S," Porter's "Five Forces," and the BCG "Growth Matrix." Many popular books advocating models and methods for solving managerial problems have resulted from these efforts (Maister, 1997; Nadler & Nadler, 1998; Slywotzky, 2002). These publications not only serve as useful marketing and branding tools for the consulting firms, but also function as a learning mechanism for consultants and clients (Werr, 1999). In one notable and highly popular book, *In Search of Excellence*, the collaborating authors were a consultant and an academic (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Interestingly, academic research has been stimulated by these models, which, ironically, are frequently taught by academic researchers in MBA classrooms.

Knowledge production within management consulting takes place within a different context than the academic world. In consulting firms, two types of knowledge are emphasized (Greiner & Poulfelt, 2005): (1) functional knowledge about topics and issues (e.g., strategic planning and compensation systems), and (2) specific industry knowledge (e.g., financial services and biotechnology). While functional knowledge overlaps with traditional academic disciplines, specific industry knowledge is to a large extent lacking in academic research. In addition to the production of management theories and concepts, consultants are involved in developing detailed methods, tools, and approaches to solving contemporary problems, representing a different kind of knowledge, such as BPR and Six Sigma (e.g., Werr & Stjernberg, 2003). These practical accomplishments have often gone unrecognized or criticized by the academic world (Salaman, 2002).

Consulting projects and the resulting knowledge are generally aimed at implementing systems and "inducing action" by clients

(Kieser, 2002b). “Inducing action” means that knowledge may be used for a number of different ends, even including less legitimate ends such as focusing only on data that justifies a priori decisions made by management (Kieser, 1998). The focus of consultants on action can easily lead to oversimplification by portraying an organizational world that is formally structured with clear roles and controls (Huczynski, 1993). Although this knowledge may attract popular attention, its methodological underpinnings in scientific terms are frequently regarded as weak, and its conclusions dubious (e.g., Alvesson, 1993; Furusten, 1995). Consulting knowledge is seldom subjected to formal evaluation and scientific critique. Critics explain that managers, under pressure to succeed, embrace popular and simplified solutions from consultants that are anxiety reducing (Abrahamson, 1991; Huczynski, 1993). In uncertain situations, managers seek “quick fixes” (e.g., Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 1996; O’Shea & Madigan, 1997). Beyond simplification, the rhetoric of consulting knowledge is characterized by a certain level of mystification and personalization that underpins the consultant’s reputation of having superior expert knowledge and enhances his ability to extract fees (Clark, 1995; Clark & Salaman, 1996, 1998). This codification of consultant knowledge has even been criticized by clients for being too standardized and ill adapted to their needs (Greiner & Malernee, 2005).

Collaboration and Consultants

As the consulting industry has matured, it has developed a unique set of values that have pulled it closer to management practice, clearly distinguishing it from academic values. In the 1990s, with a strong focus on “client service,” the work of consultants has shifted from writing reports toward implementing solutions (Nanda & Morrell, 2002). Creating measurable value for clients is now an overarching goal of management consulting (Maister, 1993). Academics, on

the other hand, are governed more by the twin goals of creating what they regard as “true” knowledge and enhancing their reputations among academic colleagues.

Knowledge creation and learning in consulting are to a large extent based on collaboration between consultants and organizations where they consult. It is a customer-driven business, with client questions serving as a trigger for knowledge development. In dealing with short-term deliverables, consultants frequently use cross-functional teams composed of consultants and client employees to share and leverage their knowledge and expertise (Fosstenlökken, Löwendahl, & Revang, 2003). Besides being a source of consultant learning, collaboration is used to bring about learning for the client, an added example of value creation (Kubr, 2002; Schein, 1988, 1999).

Much of the consulting literature is devoted to understanding the characteristics of the consultant-client relationship, which facilitates results and applied learning. Kubr (2002) identifies three dimensions to this relationship: First, he emphasizes that “without client-consultant collaboration there is de facto no effective consulting” (p. 66). The second is knowledge transfer from consultant to client and vice versa. This leads to trust, the third ingredient, which is needed for achieving an open relationship that allows for knowledge exchange and mutual learning.

Table 5.1 summarizes and makes clear that academics and consultants indeed live and work in very different worlds, with unique task demands and goals that produce different kinds of knowledge (Kubr, 2002, p. 58). The comparison indicates that academics are scientific yet removed from the phenomena being studied, and that consultants are overly close to the action but lacking in scientific rigor. We next address this question: Can collaboration between these producers and with practicing managers help to build on their different strengths and correct for their deficiencies in the production of relevant knowledge?

Table 5.1 The Different Logics of Research and Consulting

	<i>Research</i>	<i>Consulting</i>
Main values	Universality, communality, unselfishness, organized skepticism	Client service, profitability
Structuring of knowledge	Disciplines	Functions and industries
Problem	Mainly fashioned by researcher, formulated and based in the scientific community	Mainly fashioned by client, sometimes on joint basis
Time scale	Usually flexible	Tighter and more rigid
End product	New theories and models, new knowledge, publications, and citations (and better management practice?)	Organizational action, happy clients, and repeat business (and better management practice?)
Ownership of information	Usually publicly available	Often confidential
Academic rigor	Methodology tight	Minimum level appropriate to problem
Evaluation	External, by peers in scientific community, policy makers	Internal, by company

SOURCE: Adapted from Kubr (2002, p. 58).

MANAGEMENT CONTEXT FOR RESEARCH

To better assess the conditions that are likely to facilitate or obstruct collaborative research between consultants, academics, and practitioners, we need to understand the nature and context of the management environment, its required skills, and its working processes. Whitley (1989) identifies five common characteristics of managerial tasks, which he defines as (1) highly interdependent, contextual, and systemic; (2) relatively unstandardized; (3) changeable and developing; (4) combining maintenance of administrative structures with their development; and (5) rarely generating visible and separate outputs that can be directly connected to individual inputs.

The above view of management as a local and idiosyncratic practice is further elaborated upon by Kotter (1982) in his study of general managers, where he found that most successful leaders had substantial experience in a specific organization or industry sector. This implies that general management knowledge needs to be adapted to the specific situation for it to prove valuable (Clegg & Palmer, 1996; Whitley, 1989). In addition, the reviewers of management practice point out that managerial skills are about dealing with a series of interconnected problems in a single system, where solutions to one problem may create new and unanticipated problems and solutions. Under these conditions, the situational validity of general management theories and models becomes

problematic, resulting in a lack of applicability in solving management problems. Generalized findings and theories, if they are to be useful, require inductive adjustment to account for local and systemic data.

Against this background of work characteristics, Schön (1983) severely criticizes the scientific/rationalistic model underlying most current academic research. Two central assumptions of this model are identified, which fit awkwardly with managerial practice: First, the model separates knowledge from action, implying that knowledge needed for competent action can be unambiguously stipulated by academic experts and then directly transferred to practitioners for implementation. The local and systemic character of management expertise makes this assumption highly questionable. A second criticism is the model's purported division between means and ends, which implies that a specific situation can be unambiguously identified as a specific problem to be solved (end) by the application of general knowledge (means). This assumption appears to be unrealistic, given the complexity and ambiguous character of today's management challenges. Instead, Schön emphasizes the constructive and interactive nature of the problem-solving process adapted to the situation. Scientific models and theories can play a role in this process through acting as a source of inspiration and insight for a manager's sensemaking. In this vein, Stymne (2004) argues for the conditional utility of academic research:

The management researcher, who has the ambition to contribute to the competence of managers, has to produce theories that are not necessarily fully based on empirical facts. Instead they should be suggestions to practitioners about suitable ways of reasoning on which to base their actions. (p. 51)

Both academics and consultants will find some comfort in the above observation.

Consultants can resonate with the importance of local knowledge, since they are required to operate in close proximity to managers and organizations. Academics, too, will find support in the notion that formal management knowledge and management research are needed to help consultants and practitioners to make better sense of the reality facing them (Czarniawska, 2001; Stymne, 2004).

TOWARD COLLABORATIVE KNOWLEDGE

These various descriptions of the managerial world suggest that complete and valid management knowledge cannot by itself be developed at a distance, but rather must be integrated with insights from more intensive exposure to organizational life (Schein, 1987; Schön, 1987; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). In our opinion, this means that collaboration in research must be moved to the forefront of the producers' mindset and approaches to knowledge creation. Schein (1987, 2001, 2004), in this vein, talks about "clinical research/process consultation," and Van de Ven and Johnson (2006), about "engaged scholarship." But this won't be easy, given the institutional barriers and personal limits mentioned earlier. We now turn to a discussion of what the various parties might do to learn and benefit from each other as they move toward collaborative research. In particular, we consider alternative ways in which the strengths of each can be combined to produce new knowledge.

Collaboration is composed of both an individual's attitude and his or her behavior intended to produce a "win-win" outcome for all parties. But this ideal condition is not easily achieved. For collaborative research to advance, the various collaborators must recognize their own personal limits and know their strengths; they also need to respect each other and value the others'

strengths; and they must be skillful in acting to bring synergy to the relationship (Amabile et al., 2001). This makes it important to carefully negotiate objectives and identities, roles of participants, rules of engagement and disengagement, and the dissemination and use of the findings of the collaborative research endeavor (Hatchuel, 2001). Figure 5.1 depicts the key parties involved in collaboration for knowledge creation, along with their potential contributions and gains.

While each of these collaborators clearly experiences a different reality, they all have something important to give to the others and share a common interest, around which they may unite, in better understanding the world of business. If one can satisfy both his or her own and the others' needs, it should advance the cause of collaborative research. We explore now what each party wants and

has to give back through interaction. Table 5.2 gives a summary of the various needs and strategies to satisfy the different needs of each party.

Alternative Forms of Collaborative Research

Personal and institutional limits often prevent full and complete collaboration. We previously have noted that academics are limited by university reward systems and journal requirements. Consultants are constrained by the client situation and pressure for immediate results, and practitioners by their involvement in a complex and demanding reality. So it helps to keep in mind a set of alternative approaches and sometimes more modest arrangements for achieving collaboration.

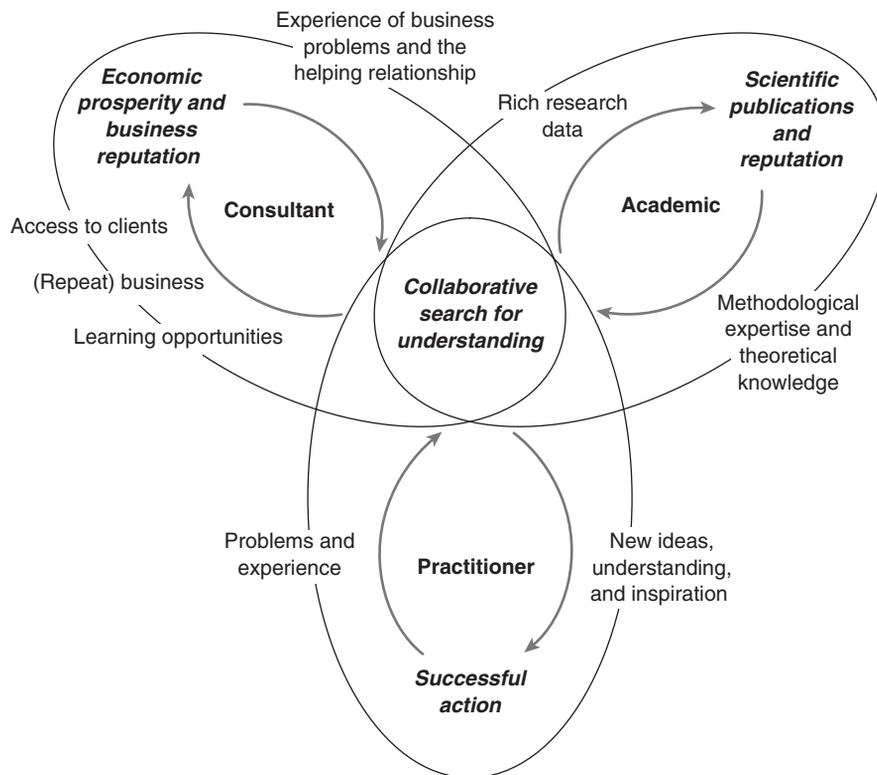


Figure 5.1 Profiles of Three Potential Collaborators

Table 5.2 Needs and Strategies for Collaboration

The Academic and the Practitioner	
<p><i>What the academic needs from the practitioner:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to rich (real-world, dynamic) data • Time with practitioners to review and validate the data (inductive + deductive) 	<p><i>What the academic can do to further collaboration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve the practitioner in designing research questions to ensure a relevant result • Respect the confidentiality and time constraints of the practitioner
<p><i>What the practitioner needs from the academic:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration must be relevant to the issues facing the practitioner • Approach and methods must be made clear to the practitioner 	<p><i>What the practitioner can do to further collaboration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to consider a long-term relationship with the academic, especially where problems are systemic or could benefit from the broader perspective that the academic has
The Academic and the Consultant	
<p><i>What the academic needs from the consultant:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation to participate in a research project • Access to consultant and client data 	<p><i>What the academic can do to further collaboration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with research on the client's problem • Engage in joint publications that are intended for a practitioner audience (and not solely an academic one) • Follow the consultant's lead and respect his or her sensitivities
<p><i>What the consultant needs from the academic:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide rigor to the data collection/methods • Write up or extend findings/insights from a portfolio of consulting projects 	<p><i>What the consultant can do to further collaboration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite the academic to work on a project • Provide data from consultant files and the client • Be open to academic topics and research methods
The Consultant and the Practitioner	
<p><i>What the consultant needs from the practitioner:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project with revenue • Interesting problem • Willingness to cooperate 	<p><i>What the consultant can do to further collaboration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include the practitioner on consultant team • Seek mutual agreement on problem definition and recommendations
<p><i>What the practitioner needs from the consultant:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insights into the problem at hand • Inclusion in the project • Specific recommendations leading to positive results 	<p><i>What the practitioner can do to further collaboration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate on consultant team and provide guidance • Provide sensitive data to the consultant • Arrange for frequent feedback from the consultant

Central to making collaboration of any kind happen is the practitioner-manager, who controls access and is concerned about solving a problem. Nothing will happen unless he or she is willing to invite academics and consultants into the setting. Many practitioners are skeptical about consultants who have a partly deserved reputation for high fees and questionable value. Managers are also likely to be skeptical of academics, whom they are inclined to perceive as wasting their time by asking theoretical questions and requesting certain kinds of data not easily available. This skepticism has to be overcome by helping practitioners to see the potential benefits of collaboration in terms of new ideas, new ways of understanding the situation, and inspiration to act.

For a research project to be perceived as relevant by managers, collaboration must possess a number of characteristics, several of which are often overlooked by academics, though rarely by consultants. First, any collaborative attempt needs to be perceived as addressing the reality of the issues facing the manager-practitioner. Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) advise us to focus on the “big questions” that “have no easy answers and seldom provide immediate payoffs to practitioners or academics” (p. 810). Second, the approach and methods of the collaboration must be understandable and workable from the manager’s point of view. Third, the collaboration must add to the manager’s knowledge base, that is, question or confirm some of the manager’s “taken for granted” assumptions (Weick, 1979). This may be achieved by formulating different versions of the problem and examining them from different perspectives (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). Mohrman, Gibson, and Mohrman (2001) note that practitioners are more inclined to view the results of research as useful when they are involved in discussing and interpreting the findings. Taken together, researchers and consultants alike must demonstrate to the practitioner that their efforts can yield greater insight and more successful action.

For the needs of the consultant, who ultimately struggles for economic prosperity and business reputation, the practitioner can offer the revenue from a sale, a problem to be solved, and a willingness to cooperate in a study. From this collaborative process, the consulting firm can add to its revenue and its knowledge base—and, if the client is satisfied, to its reputation. The consultant may bring to both practitioner-managers and academic research a rich experience of business problems and knowledge and skills of how to realize the helping relationship. Consultants are generally highly skilled in how to interact with their clients in order to create perceptions of value (Clark & Salaman, 1996).

As for the academics, who are driven by a quest for scientific publication and consequential reputation, the practitioner can open the door to the “real world,” which includes rich data from observations and interviews about the dynamics of events that are taking place. This may provide material with good publishing potential. The academic might be easily satisfied by simply gaining access to an organization with its data. However, to get even closer to the phenomena in ways that earn trust from the manager, the academic must become more involved; he or she has to be willing to listen and to give and receive feedback in a spirit of reflective learning. Research projects should be designed as collaborative learning communities in which the diverse knowledge of practitioners and academics, possibly from different disciplines, may interact to form an understanding of the problem (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). This exchange requires academics to use terminology that resembles the practitioner’s lexicon in helping to solve a client’s problem. The academic will not gain much cooperation if he or she is perceived as lacking respect for the practitioner. Instead, academics can add value to knowledge creation with their methodological skills as well as their knowledge

from research findings in areas of concern to the practitioner.

Academics can further collaborate in research with the consultant without even having to become involved with managers. They can incorporate their research questions into a data-gathering process that is being conducted by a consultant for a client. Further, although the fact is often unrecognized by academics, consultants possess a reservoir of untapped knowledge about management, which because of their project demands they don't find much time to write up and publish. Academics can therefore work with consultants to draw out their knowledge and jointly publish it, potentially adding to the reputation of both the consultant and the academic. They can also ask consultants to suggest researchable problems and solicit their feedback and alternative explanations to those they have proposed in journal drafts they are preparing for scientific publication.

A more complete form of collaboration involving all knowledge producers is advocated by Schein (1987, 2001, 2004) with a model he calls "clinical research/process consultation." According to Schein, management knowledge cannot be produced *for* managers; rather, it needs to be produced *with* them. In this truly collaborative model, the elements of knowledge production, research, consulting, and practice are integrated into a joint effort to better understand and deal with issues of concern to all parties. The nexus of this relationship is a practitioner's problem and the consultant's and researcher's genuine willingness to help the practitioner understand and solve the problem (see also Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006).

Paramount to Schein's mode of full collaboration is a genuine search by all parties for mutual understanding about what is "really" going on in the situation; this objective is in line with the basic academic value of searching for truth, with the consultants' striving to earn reputation by demonstrating true commitment to solving the client's problem, and with

the practitioners' search for more successful action. However, unlike in positivistic academic research, practitioners (consultants and managers) become involved in the process as both providers and interpreters of data. Data in this process comes voluntarily as all participants gain by revealing more about themselves as they seek to understand their reality. Even though academic involvement in the research site violates the values of "objective" research, we all remember Lewin's famous axiom that by trying to change a system one learns more about it. This knowledge is produced from richer and deeper data than is typically available in surface statistical data (see also Schein, 1987, for a more thorough discussion of the "quality" of knowledge produced through a clinical approach). Another scholar, Donald Schön (1983), calls this process "reflection in action," which emphasizes openness, spirit of inquiry, and authenticity of communication. Client anxieties related to revealing more about themselves are overcome by establishing an open and trustful relationship. Van de Ven and Johnson (2006), in their discussion of collaboration between researchers and practitioners, further emphasize the potential of having actors with different perspectives look into the same problem in the collaborative research process. This may require collaboration not only between academics, practitioners, and consultants but also between academics from different disciplines. Such a process may create conflict, but this is likely a prerequisite for more productive inquiry.

To conclude, there are multiple advantages for academics to engage in high levels of collaboration, including the identification of research questions, access to organizations, and availability of a test site to interpret findings (Amabile et al., 2001). Prior research suggests that academics who spend more time in organizations report greater personal learning and a higher frequency of citations for their publications (Rynes, McNatt, & Bretz, 1999). They also find that academics' involvement in organizations increases the

likelihood that their findings will be implemented by manager-practitioners. The academics' theoretical and methodological skills become valuable by ensuring the quality of management knowledge produced, although the quantitatively oriented management researcher may need to add some qualitative tools (see also Schein, 2001, 2004). Clinical researchers can still engage in surveys, perform interviews, or act as participant-observers. The difference from mainstream research is that "total collaboration" is accomplished with a focus on a problem defined by the practitioner and with a mindset to help the client deal with that problem.

EXAMPLES OF COLLABORATION: ACTING AS BOTH CONSULTANT AND ACADEMIC

The overarching implication of this chapter is for academics and consultants to reevaluate their roles and identities as participants in the research process. So far we have discussed each party as if they are separate people, which is usually the case. But there is evidence that the two roles can be integrated within a single person and that such a combination may be a powerful enabler of a collaborative knowledge creation process. Many well-known management scholars have produced some of their most influential findings through acting at the same time as both consultant and researcher; examples include Chris Argyris, Michael Beer, Warner Burke, Thomas Cummings, Edward Lawler, Paul Lawrence, Jay Lorsch, Henry Mintzberg, Susan Mohrman, David Nadler, Jeffrey Pfeffer, Michael Porter, Robert Quinn, Edgar Schein, Noel Tichy, and Dave Ulrich in the United States and Andrew Pettigrew, Richard Normann, and Eric Rhenman in Europe. We have asked three of these—Edgar Schein, Chris Argyris, and Edward Lawler—all highly regarded in academic and consulting circles, to provide personal

examples of how they have used the combined role to create collaborative processes toward creating new knowledge. While their experiences are different, they all take advantage of gaining access to field situations, and they use collaboration to create not only local solutions but also broader knowledge.

LIVING WITH LIMITS AND BRIDGING TENSIONS

The above comments by three successful researcher-consultants illustrate the potential for collaboration in producing new knowledge. They illustrate that collaboration may simultaneously contribute to the creation of more valid *and* more useful management knowledge. The cases illustrate how collaboration with practice may alert academics to new and important research areas (such as HR business process outsourcing), and how it creates a more complex (but probably also more valid) understanding of organizational phenomena. Both in the case of Exult and HR BPO and in the case of the bank and its resistance to technological innovation, a complex set of systemic and cultural factors, such as skills, role perceptions, occupational identity, and assumptions of authority and career development, were found to interact in creating barriers to change. These factors, and their interaction, were identified based on a thorough and longitudinal engagement with the research sites and would have been difficult to identify through a more distanced research approach. As illustrated in the story told by Edgar Schein, other kinds of explanations, covering up the underlying cause, would have been readily available to a more distanced researcher. Furthermore, the collaborative process gave researchers such as Chris Argyris the opportunity to test and refine research-based tools and techniques to help consultants in Monitor become more efficient, both internally, as a learning organization, and externally, in providing value to their clients.

Example 1

Edward E. Lawler III— Understanding Business Process Outsourcing in HR

When the Exult Corporation was founded in 1998, there were no companies focused on human resources business process outsourcing (HR BPO). HR then, as it is now, was frequently criticized for its failure to become a strategic partner with line management, and for being mired in administrative trivia. Exult saw an opportunity to change this situation and built a business model based on their taking over the administrative parts of the HR function for major corporations.

I heard about Exult in 2000 from a number of HR executives who were intrigued by their business model. I made contact with them and was invited to join their advisory board. It was a distinguished group, including Dave Ulrich and Jac Fitz-enz.

At the time I joined the board, I had already done a number of studies on the role of the HR function in U.S. corporations. These studies consistently showed that HR was not transforming itself from an administrative function to a strategic function.¹ The Exult approach appeared to me to offer an opportunity to reposition the HR function in major corporations as a high value-added strategic partner. My initial role with Exult was to meet with clients, consult with Exult on the design of their HR systems, and give talks about HR outsourcing.

As I learned more about HR BPO, it became apparent to me that there was an opportunity to do a research study that evaluated the effect of utilizing HR BPO in major corporations. After some discussions with me, Jim Madden, the president of Exult, was eager to support a research project. Discussions with Dave Ulrich and Jac Fitz-enz led to an agreement that the four of us would do research and write a book on the impact of Exult's HR BPO system in four of their major corporations: BP, Prudential, International Paper, and Bank of America. We got a financial grant from Exult to fund our work and hired a case writer to do in-depth reports on each of the four cases. In addition, I used the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California to collect survey data from HR executives in each of the four companies.

We were able to collect enough change data to justify publishing a research-based book on business process outsourcing.² It was the first book to focus on the impact of HR BPO and to make a significant contribution to our understanding of its impact on the HR function.

There is no doubt in my mind that if I hadn't had a consulting relationship with Exult, the opportunity to do this piece of research would never have appeared. The consulting relationship helped build trust with the management of Exult and made them more receptive to our needs for financial support in order to do the research.

On the personal side, I learned a great deal about HR BPO from my consulting work with Exult that greatly enriched the book. There were a number of unexpected findings that I most likely would not have identified if I had not had a good working relationship with Exult. Just to mention one, we found a type of co-dependency between HR managers and line management in the companies we studied. Both decried the traditional relationship between HR and the line as mired in administrative trivia and, at times, even conflict, but when freed of this, both parties were unable to abandon the old. In many cases, they simply did not have the skills or the concepts needed to redefine their relationship to one where HR was more of a strategic support function for the line.

Example 2:

Chris Argyris—Understanding the Learning Organization³

About two decades ago, the top board members of the Monitor Group, a consulting firm, invited me to assist them in becoming a first-class learning organization. I asked, and they agreed that we should begin with the board.

The major research procedures that were used were observing and tape-recording their meetings. We were able to map the board members' interactions to show how they inhibited the kind of double-loop learning they sought.

We also used this knowledge to create an intervention, at the top, to strengthen their productive interactions as well as to create new ones. As the success of this intervention was documented (through the tape recordings and observations), it was used throughout the company, beginning with the immediate reports to the board members. The intervention, changed through our learning, continues to be used in the hiring and training procedures.

A second result was the development of diagnostic and change instruments and procedures that would be offered to clients. I believe that it is fair to say that these procedures created a quality of services that benefited the effective implementation of the recommendations in the client organization.

I believe that the foundation of my two decades with the firm as well as the continued deepening and expansion of our relationship after I became less active was due to the fact that the research was based upon a model of consulting. This made it necessarily acceptable for Monitor to continually confront us on the advice that they were receiving. It also made it possible for us to make demands to collect data (e.g., through tape recordings) and to design interventions that, in addition to helping them, could be used to test out theories of effective action and learning.

Example 3: Edgar Schein⁴—Deciphering a Failure to Implement a New Technology

For several years, I was a process consultant to a senior manager in a bank operations department, helping him with a variety of projects. One of his main goals was to introduce an effective new information technology system for handling various financial transactions. Several years had already been spent on developing the technology, and contract research had been done to determine the feasibility of introducing the technology to the clerical workforce. The essence of the new technology was to have fewer clerks handling many more tasks rather than having specialists for each task.

As the new technology was being installed, it became evident that many fewer clerks would be needed, and it was then discovered that the bank had an unbreakable norm that nobody would be laid off. Everyone was to be retrained and given other jobs in the bank. At the same time, it was discovered that my client would not be able to relocate or retrain the many persons who would be displaced by the new technology because either the retraining would not suit given clerks or there were no alternate jobs available. The existence of the "no-layoffs" norm was well known, but no one had any idea of how powerfully held it was until the technological change was attempted. No one realized how overstuffed all the other departments of the bank were. The new technology was at this point abandoned as impractical.

In the traditional research model the existence of this norm would be a sufficient "explanation" of the observed phenomenon that a potentially useful technology failed to be adopted. But what I learned as a consultant to the head of this unit "deepens" our understanding considerably. Once we discovered that the no-layoffs norm was operating, I began inquiries about the source of the norm and learned that it was strongly associated with my client's boss. He had been in his job for a long time, and for him "no layoffs" was a central management principle that he had made into a sacred cow. I had assumed from prior knowledge of social psychology that norms are upheld primarily by group members themselves. I found, instead, that in this situation it was the boss's fanaticism that was really the driving force, an insight that was confirmed three years later when he retired. All the attitudes about layoffs changed rapidly, the department was now ready to lay off people, but, surprisingly, the new technology was still not introduced. My previous two explanations had both been wrong.

It should also be noted that, as a traditional researcher, I would not have been allowed to hang around for so long, so I would not even have discovered that the constraint on the new technology was something other than the no-layoffs norm and the presence of its

powerful originator. To explain further what was happening, I had to draw on some other knowledge I had gained as a member of the design team for the initial change. I remembered that the group had had great difficulty in visualizing what the role of the new operator of such a computer program would be and especially what the role of that person's boss would be. The group could not visualize the career path of such an operator and could not imagine a kind of professional organization where such operators would be essentially on their own. I asked a number of people about the new technology and confirmed that people did not see how it could work, given the kinds of people who were hired into the bank and given the whole career and authority structure of the bank. Low-level clerk specialists were easy to manage and their careers were well understood. Superclerks of the kind that would be created by this technology would have to be better educated, would want more pay, and would be autonomous operators operating essentially from a principle of "self-control" instead of managerial control.

So what was really in the way of introducing the new technology was not only the norm of no layoffs, but some deeper conceptual problems with the entire sociotechnical system, specifically an inability to visualize a less hierarchical system in which bosses might play more of a consultant role to highly paid professional operators who, like airline pilots, might spend their whole career in some version of this new role. In fact, the no-layoffs norm might have been a convenient rationalization to avoid having to change deeper cultural assumptions about the nature of work and hierarchy in this bank.

What the clinical process revealed was that the phenomenon was "overdetermined," multiply caused, and deeply embedded in a set of cultural assumptions about work, authority, and career development. We were dealing with a complex system of forces, and once this system was understood as a system, it became obvious why the bank did not introduce the new technology. Attributing it to the boss with his norm of no layoffs would have been a misdiagnosis even though all the surface data indicated that this was a sufficient explanation.

The clinical process also revealed the interaction of forces across hierarchical boundaries, the operation of power and authority, the role of perceptual defenses, the linkages of forces across various other organizational boundaries, and the changing nature of those forces as the situation changed. Human systems are complex force fields, and many of the active forces are psychological defenses and cultural assumptions that will not reveal themselves easily to uninvolved observers, surveyors, testers, or experimenters. It is too much to ask of the traditional research process to reveal this level of dynamics, yet without understanding organizations at this level, how can we possibly make any sense of what we observe around us?²⁵



The cases also illustrate what practitioners and consultants may have to gain from a deeper collaboration with academics. In all cases, the actions by the researchers were informed by academic thinking and methodology, pushing practitioners to search for solutions to their problems beyond the obvious. In the cases of both Exult and the bank, the collaborative process created an understanding of the causes of observed problems, which went beyond what the organizations themselves would have been able to achieve on their own. In the case of Monitor, the research-based interventions by Chris Argyris directly helped the organization become more efficient, internally as well as externally.

Finally, the cases illustrate some of the enabling factors of successful collaboration. In all three cases, the academic researcher's primary goal is to be helpful to the manager-practitioner and the organization. In the case of Exult, it was about helping to design and sell the product; in the case of Monitor, to create a learning organization and more effective procedures for creating client value; and in the case of the bank, to help senior management with the implementation of a new IT system. This initial focus on being helpful created trust between academics and the organization, which opened up an opportunity for the academics to address more of their research agenda—and gain both access and financing for pursuing it.

While the above cases illustrate successful examples of knowledge development in collaboration, achieving this is not always easy. Both the amount of time needed to realize such collaboration and the focus on a single or a few organizations may be important barriers. Research universities and “A” journals today are unlikely to accept articles based on exclusive use of such a research model, unless the sample of firms is larger and the patterns in findings across them appears profound. Nor are skeptical consulting firms and practitioners likely to open

their doors wide to academics for conducting extensive collaboration. Interestingly, the authors above are all senior professors who have attained tenure and successful reputations, which allows them to take risks by engaging in collaboration.

Still, some modest movement toward promoting collaboration can be made, though it takes political will and a sense of personal security. On the institutional front, editors of top-rated journals can insist on accepting only studies that support and interpret the dynamics behind the reported statistics, which would likely cause more field research involving collaboration. These editors could also ask for more articles that evaluate interventions by management or consultants, using methodologies like field experiments. They should require a section at the end of each article that discusses and speculates about the practical implications of an article's findings—presently, only passing and rather superficial references are made to what managers might do with the findings. In addition, the reward and promotion systems of universities could be adjusted slightly to elevate the status of books with theoretical significance, as well as according articles in highly regarded publications such as *Harvard Business Review* (HBR) the same status as articles in “A” journals. The acceptance ratio for HBR is likely more rigorous than for most “A”-level journals. Business schools can also act to remove “faculty consulting” from their “dirty word” list, making these schools more congruent with the warm welcome they typically extend to consulting firms during recruiting season.

As for consulting firms and their consultants, they can reach out to receptive academics to encourage books and articles to be written jointly with them. They might also invite academics to serve in residence during sabbaticals while performing research on the firm's knowledge system. They could ask academics to join them as part-time research

advisers to their projects on relevant methods and theory, as was illustrated by the role of Chris Argyris in relation to Monitor above. They could further evaluate a project's results, since consultants rarely ask for an assessment of their work. In reaching out to clients, as in action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001), consultants can include client members on the consulting team to conduct interviews and provide and interpret data. They can also give lectures of practical significance and organize retreats with intensive discussion and problem solving.

Even these minor changes are likely to threaten the status quo now producing resistance, so consultants and academics will need to make up their own minds about how far they are willing to proceed. No doubt some small steps are possible for many of us, which can lead to major results. For example, one of the authors of this chapter, Larry Greiner, had an MBA student, who became a consultant and then a CEO, who invited him in to help in a collaborative way to solve some strategic problems. Greiner and his colleague Arvind Bhambri kept detailed notes on what happened, leading eventually to an academic paper that won the McKinsey prize at an SMS (Strategic Management Society) conference, and to a publication in *Strategic Management Journal* (Greiner & Bhambri, 1989). Another example is provided by the other author of this chapter, Andreas Werr, who was involved through an executive Ph.D. student in an insider/outsider action research project (Bartunek & Louis, 1996) in the student's organization. While helping the organization deal with the issue at hand, the project also resulted in several academic papers, one of which was eventually published in *MIT Sloan Management Review* (Sandberg & Werr, 2003). Other small steps for academics to take include occasional uses of collaboration with consultant friends to explore what's behind statistical findings. Also, going out to write a

teaching case can lead indirectly to interesting research ideas for follow-up. Academics might also initiate a larger study of "consultant knowledge" about management, industries, and implementation, since consultant experiences are much closer to these phenomena.

In all these efforts at collaboration, the involved parties will likely encounter and confront tensions that are not easily resolved. Everyone will have to find his or her own resolutions. Academics and consultants who fall at the extreme ends of these tensions might occasionally consider moving more toward the middle, which would be beneficial for both research quality and knowledge creation. Some of the major tensions facing these various producers of management knowledge are presented in Figure 5.2.

Involvement Versus Distance. At one extreme is the academic value of assuring objectivity through distance from the subject being studied. In order to gain "true" knowledge, the system must be studied "unobtrusively" (as if the act of studying has no effect) so as not to influence its "real" workings. For resolution, academics need to recognize that involvement may be not only unavoidable but also a source of important questions (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006) and rich data (Schein, 2001, 2004). At the other extreme, consultants are not always conscious of how their involvement and desire to please the client can bias their objectivity. To overcome this problem, consultants can invite academics to advise them on research methods, such as triangulating interviews with numerical data. Weick (1979) argues for diversity in research approaches and perspectives to match the diversity and complexity in the phenomena being studied (see also Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006).

Academic Versus Practical Relevance. Academic reputation is currently derived from contributions to intellectual discourse

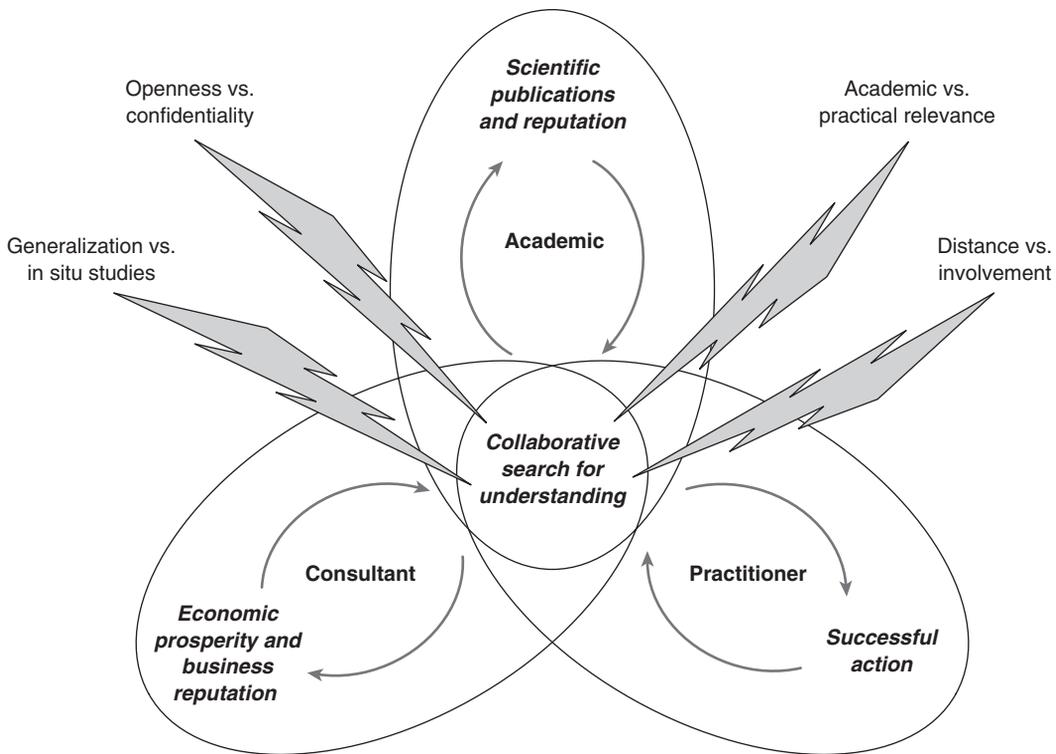


Figure 5.2 Tensions Challenging the Collaborative Search for Understanding

rather than to practice. Academics purposely avoid normative conclusions in their research, which makes it hard for them to be perceived as relevant to practitioners. Ironically, academics teaching cases in the classroom typically ask students for their “action plans” and are not reluctant to give their own remedies to problems. This suggests that academics are not immune to an interest in practical consequences. So, if interested, academics might approach consultants to indicate their willingness to work with them in framing research projects to deal with both practical and theoretical problems simultaneously. On the other hand, consultants can improve their analyses of client problems by gaining additional insight from academics drawing on the latest research.

Openness Versus Confidentiality. Practitioners understandably want to protect information, either positive or negative, from leaking out within the firm or to the public. This causes problems for both academics and consultants who may be interested in publishing research based on client data. Academics must respect the confidentiality concerns of both consultants and practitioners. This responsibility can be dealt with by aggregating data over several cases while making the sources anonymous.

Generalization Versus In Situ Studies. Universality is a strong value in the academic community that causes academics to shy away from generating deep knowledge from a single case. However, several cases can be compared in order to identify patterns that yield more generalizable insights (Eisenhardt,

1989). Single cases can be used to refine theories and conceptual models. Turning to consultants, they too have a mutual interest in discovering generalizable knowledge, such as “best practices,” which they can brand, publish, and use in other engagements. Both parties should be open to the opportunity for joint publication.

MOVING AHEAD

As we have seen, collaborative research may involve three distinct professions—academia, consultation, and management—all operating from different thought worlds (see also Amabile et al., 2001). We have argued for the potential benefits of knowledge creation through collaboration across these worlds while working singly or in pairs or triads. However, as we have observed, there are serious institutional obstacles to making collaborative research happen. Recognizing these limits, individuals must decide how far they personally wish to go. As one ventures forward, it is important to realize that collaboration involves additional responsibilities such as understanding the other party’s frame of reference in searching for a “win-win” outcome.

It is an advantage that all the knowledge producers are united by their common focus on knowing better the managerial world, which still remains a combination of science and art. For practitioner-managers, individual success is linked to their organization’s growth and success (Whitley, 1989). They are judged by the results they produce, which, it is hoped, will stimulate a search for better understanding of the messy reality being faced. The problems encountered by practitioners become the motor and enabler for collaborative research. In addition, academics and consultants must carefully select among practitioners for those who have a keen appreciation for the importance of

research, and who enjoy working with and learning from people different from themselves (Amabile et al., 2001). The kinds of processes we have discussed above bring together different perspectives and thus make conflict an unavoidable but potentially rewarding part of the inquiry process (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006).

The consultant’s world is dominated by an overall need to secure an inflow of new assignments, which means keeping clients satisfied while building the firm’s reputation and brand image in the business world. In their relationships with clients, consultants derive knowledge from their experience with numerous cases, which is sometimes formalized into books, tools, and methodologies. They hope for satisfied clients who will purchase their services again and refer them to new clients. However, not all attempts at collaboration by consultants live up to being “helpful” because the pressure to sell becomes a barrier to achieving a truly helpful relationship (Schaffer, 2000; Schein, 1988, 1999). Consultants who engage in a collaborative relationship will have to give up some of their need for control and make themselves more open and vulnerable to influence from academics and manager-practitioners. Engaging in collaborative processes with academics can also help consultants to validate their models and experience, allowing them to improve their concepts and methods (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2001). Both academics and consultants are likely to gain through joint publications, a commonly shared goal that enhances both their reputations (Davenport & Prusak, 2005).

This nexus and spirit of helpfulness and risk taking in bringing together academics, practitioners, and consultants in collaborative research relationships promises, we believe, to open up new opportunities for further learning and the production of valuable and useful knowledge that will benefit all involved.

NOTES

1. Lawler, Boudreau, and Mohrman (2006).
2. Lawler, Ulrich, Fitz-enz, and Madden (2004).
3. Argyris (1993, 2004) and Edmonson and Moigeon (1996).
4. Schein (1999, 2001).
5. See also Schein (2003) for another illustration of how one extensive longitudinal case study may produce genuine new theory.

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