**Categorical Entanglements of Scholarly Practice - re-connecting "L", "P" and "Q" in new ways**

**Abstract**

The starting assumption of this paper is that the management scholar-practitioner does not exist as a stable distinct category. Rather, scholarly practice may be better understood as the on-going entanglements between scholarly insight and practitioner knowledge. The learning that occurs when practitioners transition to scholarly-practititioners is explained with an alternative reading of the classic action learning equation (L = P + Q). In this new reading *scholarly-ness* is identified as the source of questioning insight (Q) and practitioner expert knowledge is equated with P. The mechanisms by which scholarly-ness provides questioning insight (Q), and the subsequent entanglement with expert practitioner knowledge (P), are then related to different process theories of change (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). In this I posit that the mechanisms and entanglements will be most effective if they are congruent with these underlying process theories of change. This framework allows different threads of literature on scholarly practice to be reconciled into one model.

**Introduction**

The Scholar-Practitioner has been defined as “an ideal of professional excellence grounded in theory and research, informed by experiential knowledge, and motivated by personal values, political commitments, and ethical conduct” (McClintock, 2004, p.393). Whilst such professionals emerged in the medical sciences, the idea has gained increasing traction within management contexts because it speaks to the perennial interest in the theory-practice interface for business and management schools (Tenkasi & Hay, 2004). Such writing has emphasised the agency of the scholar-practitioner; particularly in relation to solving organisational problems and effecting change. Explanations of what it means to be a scholar-practitioner are often accompanied by lists of attributes (e.g. Kormanik et al. 2009). And yet many of these competences might be claimed equally for "scholars" and "practitioners" (e.g. dealing with ambiguity, ethics and values, integrity and trust etc.). If the attributes of "scholar-practitioners" cannot be unambiguously defined then does the term have any real meaning in management, or is it only a rhetorical device?

In this paper I explore the learning that occurs as a practititioner endeavours to become a scholar-practitioner. I suggest that it is a journey that is never complete

because the scholar-practitioner does not exist in the sense of having a stable and unique ontology but rather is always a category that is "coming into being" (cf. Anderson & Gold, 2015. It has a *relational* ontology, one that is understandable only through consideration of the on-going entanglements between two more stable categories: the "Scholar" and the "Practitioner". Because it is a learning journey that does not reach a unambigous end state (i.e. the "Scholar-practitioner"), then I prefer to use the term scholar*ly*-practitioner. By this I seek to signify a starting point of an experienced, knowledgeable practitioner who has chosen to extend their repertoire of practice with the inclusion of scholarly activity. This is not to diminish management practice, or suggest it is somehhow incomplete by virtue of not being scholarly. Rather, this is one development strategy for improving management practice. As a consequence, this paper is not concerned with what the extant scholarship of academics brings to a given practice, but rather what the practitioner brings of their own practice, in light of their own scholarly activity.

The context in which I position scholarly practice is that of organizational change. This is because the complexity of the issues at play within organizational change processes create a potential role for both “practitioner” and “scholarly” contributions. There are other organisational issues with which the management practitioner is very familiar, e.g. production has stopped at the plant, or a customer has failed to submit an expected order. These sort of problems are the conventional day-to-day challenges of the professional manager, they are invariably solved by drawing directly on organisational experience of similar problems, and they are not considered further here. Scholarly practice is rather concerned with the intractable issues of organizing: what have be termed "wicked problems" (Mason & Mitroff, 1981). These problems defy unambiguous formulation as different stakeholders might articulate them differently; they are made complex by antecedents that are inter-connected or in conflict. Their solution may appear constrained by organisational or institutional factors. In order to make progress in the face of such "wicked problems" the Practitioner needs to think anew about their practice. This is the challenge with which action learning has always been concerned (Revans 2011). In this paper I consider the addition of *scholarly-ness* to a reprtoire of practice, and aim to surface the learning that then occurs by invoking the oft quoted equation of action learning (L = P + Q).

The primary contribution of this paper is a conceptual framework of scholarly practice: one that relates the entanglements of scholarly and practitioner actions to the learning that occurs when trying to effect organisational change. The structure of the paper is as follows. The next section justifies my starting assumptions and introduces the concepts that will be used to build the conceptual framework. The implications of these ideas for future research is outlined in a closing section.

**Theoretical Background**

In this section, I introduce the theoretical apparatus I will use to explicate the scholar-practitioner. The starting point is to suggest some descriptors for the categories "Scholar" and "Practitioner" as they apply to research conducted in connection with organizational change (Table 1). Whilst recognising that the term "scholar" might itself be seen as a complex construct entailing a number of different practices (e.g. Boyer, 1990), it is used within this paper to signify pure, disinterested research: what Boyer terms the "scholarship of discovery". In the case of the "Scholar" of Table 1 then the archetypal illustration is the university researcher engaged in scientific work that results in the publication in academic journal. By contrast, I suggest that the defining idea of practitioner research is that it is very much interested in the solving of organisational problems. An indicative example is that of the problem-solving manager; an "insider" who works for the organisation and knows it intimately. The problem-solving of the pure "Practitioner" also entails research, but of a different character to the "Scholar" as elaborated in Table 1. Such practitioner research might include the form of inquiry inherent in Revans (1982) classic account of action learning (Marsick & O’Neill, 1999, 161). With the transition from Practitioner to Scholarly-Practititioner I am considering an individual who holds a comprehensive stock of practitioner resources, and decides to embark on a development journey that involves, in an instrumental sense, the acquisition of a scholar’s resources (Table 1).

Table 1

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Scholar** | **Practitioner** |
| **Research goal (link to an organisational change)** | Advancing scientific knowledge, evidenced by a contribution to the academic literature | Making improvements with an organisational issue, as evidenced by a positive change in the performance of an organisation. |
| **Resources** | Extant scientific knowledge, i.e. theories and findings available from the extant research literature. Knowledge and experience of research methodologies accepted by the community of scientists. | The organisation's repository of documentary information. Experiential knowledge held by the individual practitioner. Cultural resources (Swidler, 1986) associated the focal organisation. |

The "scholarly-practitioner" is neither of these categories (Table 1). Rather it derives its ontology through on-going associations and disassociations between material artefacts and social processes that are identified with each category (Garud et al, 2010). These entanglements become manifest in action as the manager (insider) deploys scholarly resources and/or practitioner resources in seeking to progress organizational change. At some point the category of "Scholar" may seem to dominate whereas at others it is the "Practitioner" that comes to the foreground. This implies that the category "Scholar-Practitioner" is never stable; rather, it is always in flux.

In order to explain the learning that occurs during these categorical entanglements, I suggest a new reading of the classic equation of action learning: L = P + Q (Revans, 1982). In this equation Revans identified P with the scholar and the programmed knowledge evident in text-books, courses and research papers. He held such claims to expertise in low regard, and advocated the questioning insight (Q) that could be brought to bear by a group of “comrades in adversity” working together to progress organisational problems, and learning from practical action toward improvement. In this paper I propose an alternative reading of P and Q, that I suggest is more relevant to the process of becoming a scholarly-practitioner.

Programmed knowledge, or P, is founded upon a claim to expertise that is, in some sense unjustified. Conventionally, it is identified with “Professors” whose generalizable knowledge claims are always likely to be inadequate when confronted by the intractable isues of a specific organisational problem. To the extent that P represents extant scholarship and simplistic attempts to apply such scholarship as solutions to organisational problems, then I agree with this conventional meaning. However, in the transition from Practitioner to Scholarly-Practitioner then I argue that P also includes the practitioner resources inasmuch as these represent the (insider's) knowledge held within the organisation and by its actors, at the outset of the change process, and is considered by then insufficient to effect change. This deficiency implies a motivation to pursue new insights. Therefore, I identify P with extant practititioner knowledge, in order to draw attention to the Practititioner's emerging *scholarly-ness* as the key source of "questioning insight" (Q). The rigorous research methodologies and critical orientation of the scholar hold out the potential to disrupt established ways of thinking and acting. The "Learning" (L) of the scholarly-practitioner can thus be understood as emerging from the entanglement of scholarly-ness (Q) and practitioner expertise (P).

In developing this argument we need to condider the nature of the "+ sign" in the classic action learning equation. What are the mechanisms by which scholarly-ness provides questioning insight? and how is such scholarly-ness entangled with practitioner expertise? To explain these mechanisms it is productive to consider different underlying processes of organisational change, that provide the context for the transition from the Practitioner to the Scholarly-Practitioner. In this, I draw upon Van de Ven and Poole's highly-cited typology of the processes of organisational change (1995). These authors argue that there are four basic theories that explain the processes of organisational change: teleology; dialectic; life-cycle; and evolution. They present these theories as a 2x2 typology (Van de Ven & Pool, 2005: 520) based upon dimensions of the mode of change (whether it is prescribed or constructed) and the organisational level associated with the change (a single entity or multiple entities). The authors identify the context of organisational change in which each theory applies. In the following paragraphs, I explain Van de Ven and Poole's typology drawing attention to the particular circumstances of organisational change. I then elaborate the implications for the mechanism of scholarly-ness.

The life-cycle process theory concerns modes of organisational change that are prescribed in the sense of having to proceed through a necessary sequence of steps (ibid, 2005: 513). Such steps may be defined by an overarching institutional framework, for example the US Food and Drug Administration mandates the process and performance milestones that pharmaceutical companies are required to follow in developing new medicines. Organisational change in such contexts is a process of "compliant adaptation" (ibid, 2005: 520). The evolutionary process theory is also concerned with prescribed change, but in this case the underlying mechanism is one of environmental selection acting upon a number of organisational entities. Organisations are not complete masters of their future, as changes take place within their operating environment (e.g. new technologies, or demographic changes in the customer base) over which they have no control. Whilst organisations might implement different strategies, "variations" in the external operating environment will act so as to "select" which strategies win. Knowledge of the latter will induce organisations adapt their activities as part of their on-going stategy-making. Thus, the change process proceeds through an on-going cycle of variation, selection and retention that results, over time, in an accumulation of small changes. Indeed, to a first approximation both of these process theories are associated with incremental changes in organisations.

The teleological process model depicts organisational change as proceeding through the purposeful enactment of a cycle of: goal formulation; implementation; evaluation; and modification of goals (Van de Ven & Poole, 2005: 515). The associated change process proceeds by means of purposeful social construction involving actors within an organisation, who have in mind some future end state (e.g. level of organisational performance) that they are seeking to attain. The organisation's resources or environment may place a constraint upon what can be achieved, but this theory of change suggests actors make use of the contraints in order to achieve their purpose. The dialectic process model also follows a constructed mode of change, but unlike the teleology theory, it relates to change involving multiple organisational entities (ibid, 2005: 517). This process of change proceeds through a cycle that entails the confrontation of different viewpoints (i.e. thesis and antithesis), and their subsequent synthesis; which then becomes the thesis in the next cycle. The particular circumstance of change relevant to this theory is associated with a balance of power between different organisational entities or viewpoints. The constructed mode of change , given the reduced influence of the constraints associated with the prescribed process, can generate more extensive or disruptive organisational change.

The organisational change context for the transition from Practitioner to Scholarly-Practitioner could be understood in terms of one of Van de Ven and Poole's four "motors of change" (1995). I suggest that the mechanisms by which scholarly-ness provides questioning insight (Q) will be most effective if they are congruent with the underlying motor of change. For example, if the organisational change context is driven by a teleology motor, then the scholarly-ness will be most effective if its mechanism is teleological in nature. In the next section I discuss the literature touching on scholarly practice in order to propose the scholarly mechanism associated with these four motors of change, and how the scholary-ness is entangled with practitioner knowledge.

**A conceptual framework for the categorical entanglements of scholarly practice**

In this section, I discuss notable contributions to the literature touching upon scholarly practice and relate them to the earlier discussion of motors of change. At the outset it is important to emphasise that these different mechanisms seek to elicit questioning insight (Q) and not (directly) solutions to the organisational problems. The latter are the outcome of the entanglement between scholarly-ness and practititioner expert knowledge.

With their social-construction mode of change, the teleological and dialectical process theories are the ones most thoroughly evident in the literature of scholarly practice. Tenkasi and Hay (2004) present a detailed account of how scholarly and practitioner resources (their term is "theory-practice linkages") are *integrated* throughout an organisational change project, in which original scholarly research is conducted by a Practitioner. They explain integration of scholarly research findings and practitioner knowledge as proceeding through the mechanisms of "turns" and "scaffolding". "Turns are reframing moves and tools that help make an element familiar, legitimate, and potentially more palatable to the concerned audience" (ibid, 2004: 197); and "Scaffolding typically involves the creation and/or use of a theory-based or practice-based platform at an earlier stage to influence its complement at a subsequent stage" (ibid, 2004: 198). They emphasise an agentic role for the scholar-practitioner, integrating original research with organisational practices and leading change that diverges from the existing order.

Not all disruptive change requires the knowledge created through original scholarly research. Paton et al (2014). describe how, in the context of an executive education programme they managed to disrupt the current thinking of a group of executives by exposing them to extant research that offered counter-intuitive viewpoints. The intention was not to apply (in some sense) this research to the organisation, but rather to create dissonances in the mind of the executives, and thereby prepare them for previously unconsidered avenues of change. Facilitated using critical action learning practices (Trehan, 2011), these authors coin the term "relevating" for the mechanism of using (nominally irrelevant) extant research to stimulate new questions about organisational problems.

In having an inherent prescribed mode of change, the life-cycle and evolutionary change models present different challenges for scholarly practice. The ability of the manager to effect change in these contexts is constrained by forces outside anyone’s control. It could be that the practices described above that closely align with either the teleological model or the dialectical model might continue to prove a strategy for managing prescribed organisational changes. However, another possibility is one that seeks to “ride the wave” of the forces prescribing the course of organisational change. Such an approach to scholarly practice might be more responsive in nature, and contingent on the circumstances at a given point during the cycle of change. In this scenario scholarly-practice is less a matter of purposeful questioning, than of responsive questioning.

In developing her ideas of a "scholarship of practice" and making a provocative use of theory, Ramsey (2011) explains how original scholarly research should not be understood in simple terms of something that should be applied to the solving of organisational issues (cf. Revans definition of "P"). Rather, she explains how an on-going dialogue between original research and practice can enable a constant testing of ideas that over time results in an accumulation of incremental changes.

In cases where the incremental change might unfold following unexpected changes in the external environment (cf. evolutionary modes of change) then a dialogue with a single piece of extant research may not continue to be relevant. In such lengthy change processes the questioning insight ("Q") might require the use of multiple (extant) literatures. Whilst not, to my knowledge, used in debates on scholarly practice, the mechanism of "bricolage" might be salient to explain the selection of extant literatures in these cases. Levi-Strauss (1967) coined the term "bricolage" to denote the innovative combination of existing resources that are "at hand". It is an idea that has found extensive application in organisational studies (Duymedjian & Ruling, 2010), particularly in relation to practices for developing innovations (e.g. Garud and Karnoe, 2003) or institutional transformation (e.g. Desa, 2011). Invoking this idea is salient to organisational change effected by prescribed processes as it allows for the Practitioner to use (in principle) the entire body of management research in order to question some arena of practice that is itself changing due to evolutionary pressures. The forgoing discussion of the mechanisms of generating questioning insight through scholarly-ness, and the proceeding entanglement with management practice is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 - a conceptual framework for the categorical entanglements of scholarly-practice

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| **Motor of Change** | **Mechanism of *scholarly-ness* that generates Q** | **Entanglement with *practice*** |
| Teleology | **Scholarly framing** of the organisational change...to generate questions that...seek a scientific understanding of the change problem | Original findings are integrated with extant practice through "Turns" & "Scaffolding" (Tenkasi & Hay, 2004). |
| Dialectic | **Provocative** use of extant scholarship...to generate questions that...originate from a completely different perspective on the change problem | Disruption of existing thinking about practice to elicit radical ideas |
| Lifecycle | **Dialogue** with extant scholarship...to generate questions that...originate from a comparable perspective on the change problem | On-going testing of practice leading to an incremental accumulation of new ideas |
| Evolutionary | **Bricolage** with extant scholarship...to generate questions that...suggest possible solutions to the change problem | Resourceful combination of elements from extant scholarship and practitioner knowledge in a manner that adapts practice to external change |

**Concluding remarks and implications for researching scholarly practice**

My starting position in this paper is that we do not need to create a new category of the "scholar-practitioner" in order to account for the use of both scholarly and practitioner resources in solving organisational problems and effecting change. Rather, I argue that the "scholar-practitioner" is not a distinct and stable category. It has a relational ontology, and implies that scholarly practice might be better understood in terms of the on-going *entanglements* between scholarly-ness and practice.

I re-connect the classic action learning equation (L = P + Q) to better reflect the learning during an individual's transition from Practitioner to Scholarly-Practititioner. In this I equate P with all claims to expertise (including practitioner knowledge), and suggest that insighful questioning results from the new scholarly activitity being adopted by the Practitioner. Learning results from the on-going entanglements between extant practititioner knowledge, and the questioning insight derived from the scholarly-ness of the Practitioner.

Finally I propose a framework (Table 2) that relates the mechanisms by which scholarly-ness provides questioning insight (Q), and the subsequent entanglement with expert practitioner knowledge (P), to different process theories of change (Van de Ven & Pool, 1995). In this I posit that the mechanisms and entanglements will be most effective if they are congruent with these underlying motors of change. This framework allows different threads of literature on scholarly practice to be reconciled into one model.

There are a number of implications for research on scholarly practice implied by the ideas developed in this paper. Firstly, most of extant literature assumes a teleological motor for organisational change. That is, agency is assumed in the category of the "Scholar-Practitioner" with change proceeding by a process of purposeful social construction. Real change is more complex involving other processes of change, and even combinations of different processes (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, 528). What is the nature of scholarly practice in these other modes of change? Secondly, I note that much empirical research in this area is dominated by samples involving managers connected with business school programs. More research is needed that explores scholarly practice that is conducted independent of business school programmes. Such contexts may be very difficult to find, and one initial avenue could involve studying the ways in which graduates of our programmes deploy scholarly resources after they have graduated.

The subject of scholarly practice has acquired greater contemporary interest within business schools. Since 2014 the Research Excellence Framework (REF) has placed significant emphasis on the impact of academic research. The newly instituted Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) will also require business schools to present the case for the impact of their teaching. In the discourse surrounding the REF and TEF, a sharp division of academic work between research and teaching seems increasingly untenable. I suggest that these debates relating to research, learning and professional practice are integrated within the ideal of scholarly practice. It is for this reason that the on-going entanglement of scholarly insight with practitioner (insider) knowledge will remain an important feature of a modern management education (Anderson et al., 2017; Milano et al., 2015).

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