

2007 ACIS conference

**Bridging the IS Academic-Practitioner Relationship
Divide: a Review, a Theoretical Framework, and an
Example of Interaction**

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Outline of this presentation

- Objectives of the paper
- Research background
- A way forward
- Research questions
- Literature review
- Theoretical framework
- AR case background
- Findings and conclusions
- Questions, comments, controversies

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Objectives of this paper are:

- Present an outline snapshot of the literature in a synthesized structured review
- Propose a theoretical framework for the IS academic-practitioner relationship divide
- Preview preliminary results from an Action Research project to test the theoretical framework

On The IS Academic-Practitioner Relationship Divide: Diagnosis, Exploration and Action Research

Background

- The 'IS Crisis' is a recurrent theme raised by many prominent academics, such as Robey and Markus 1998, Neufeld et al., 2007, Hirschheim and Klein 2003) . Key facets of this problem which have persisted over the course of the debate include:
 - the identity of the IS discipline (Agarwal and Lucas, 2005)
 - what the core of IS should be (Gray, 2003);
 - a lack of theory (Weber, 2003c, Markus and Saunders, 2007);
 - a lack of a '*cumulative research tradition*' (Benbasat and Zmud, 1999);
 - declining student enrolments (Hirschheim and Klein, 2003);
 - a lack of research relevance (Robey and Markus, 1998, Desouza et al., 2006),
 - **the focus of this study: the academic-practitioner relationship divide** Hirschheim and Klein: (2003) 'As an applied discipline, we need to better understand what each community expects from the other'

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A way forward...

- In their paper '*Crisis in the IS Field*', Hirschheim and Klein (2003) propose that taking corrective action through proactive change is one way to avoid such a crisis.

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Research questions

- **‘What are the characteristics of an effective IS academic-practitioner relationship?’**
- A research question specific to the preliminary results from the AR case is:
 - ‘To what extent is the ‘Academic and Industry Workshop’ approach effective in bridging the IS academic-practitioner relationship divide?’**

Literature Review

- ***Factors that contribute to the divide:***
 - Communication (Hirschheim and Klein 2003) (Glass 1996)
 - Trust and respect (Glass 1996) (Robey & Markus 1998)
 - Academic promotion, reward and tenure mechanisms (Davenport and Markus 1999)
 - Academic journal publication (Fitzgerald 2001)
 - Academic conferences (Amaravadi 2001)
 - Failure of academia to lead industry Saunders (1998)
 - Scholarship Amaravadi (2001)
 - IS discipline identity (Benbasat & Zmud 2003)
 - Falling student numbers and disappearing schools of IS (Hirschheim & Klein 2003)

Literature Review (continued)

- ***Proposed solutions to bridge the divide:***
 - Structural change and reward systems Fitzgerald (2001)
 - Researcher and student interaction with practice (Robey & Markus 1998)
 - Models of interaction:
 - *medical-model* (Davenport & Markus 1999)
 - the academic-consultant Davenport and Markus (1999)
 - Joint academic-industry research partnerships and alliances are another popular model proposed by many such as Robey and Markus (1998)
 - Publications Keen (1990)
 - Research methods, approaches and paradigms (Baskerville & Myers 2004)

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The Academic-Practitioner Interaction Theoretical Framework

- **The roles of Theoria and Praxis** (Mårtensson and Lee, 2004).
 - Theoria represents the world of science and the researcher.
 - Praxis represents the world of practice and practitioners
- **Interaction between academia and practice:**
 - Communication (Hirschheim and Klein 2003)
 - Mutual respect and benefit (Mårtensson & Lee 2004)
- **Underpinning influences on the research environment**
 - Social and historical context (Mårtensson & Lee 2004)
 - Ethics (Mumford 1996)
 - Knowledge creation and transformation networks Hirschheim and Klein (2003)
- **Management of the IS Discipline** (Saunders 1998)
 - Academia
 - Practice
 - Professional Associations

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Background to the AR case

- The case was initiated by practitioners who sought the support of an IS academic to lead a series of professional development workshops.
- The organizational setting is a medium-size, in-house ICT division where a restructure has resulted in a newly established team of Business Analysts.
- Series of workshops run in paired, half-day sessions a fortnight apart, extending over a one-year period. The workshop topics, and the order of priority, were practitioner driven.

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Preliminary findings 1

- **Communication:** Interviewee 1: *“...in this engagement our facilitator has actually spoken with us, not to us, which is fairly important, because sometimes academic rigour and experience tends to be expounded in one direction, and not receiving any feedback, and not allowing any tailoring.”*

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Preliminary findings 2

- **Mutual respect:** Interviewee 2: *“...actually looking at the theory and how you apply it - it’s been really good. Because when you are actually doing the stuff you don’t really think about the theory, and vice versa. So it was really good to have them both in the same context, to be able to see how theories are actually applied with the techniques that you are using. I found that reaffirming, that what we are doing is sound professionally, and it can stand up to critique, and that we do have a theoretical background that we can go back to and say: this is what we’re doing and why we are doing it.”*

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Preliminary findings 3

- **Knowledge creation and transformation networks:**
Interviewee 3: *"...I think the workshops have exceeded my expectations. One of the things that I got out of them that I probably didn't expect, was the tools that we developed... I have already used a few of them a number of times, and they get easier to use. They save me real time. I have also found that what we have learned has allowed me to conceptualise my analysis better, and certainly to break down the requirements better. And aside from that, it has just been very inspiring to discuss viewpoints with everybody and to feel that we have covered all the theory that is available there."*

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Preliminary findings 4

- **Ethics:** Interviewee 4: "...There is a lot of professional satisfaction knowing that you are looking at best practice based on current thinking...Having an academic who has access to a huge body of knowledge ... professionally, that's such a great base to work from. ...add to that the sort of pragmatism that we have in the work environment. We are actually looking at something which is a professionally high standard, but which is applicable in our current work environment in our current projects, to me that's very professionally satisfying. ... giving that confidence to tackle things and be able to defend work and present it in a professional way, I think that is great. I have developed ...respect for this group of people..... being able to tackle the really frustrating aspects of work ... and turn it around into something positive, and quite inspirational. I think that's fantastic."

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Conclusions

- early feedback from the BA workshop project is most encouraging
- For IS to survive (particularly the academic side), reform is unavoidable
- IS discipline possesses an opportunity to re-establish itself as a relevant and vital contributor to the contemporary world ... this may be achieved through academics and practitioners working and researching together...

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Questions, Comments, Controversies?

Thank you!

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