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Atlanta in International Ballroom North**

**Time is Ripe for Knowledge Synthesis:
(Re)inventing Technologies, Outlets, and Incentives**

Moderator:

Victor Zitian Chen, *University of North Carolina at Charlotte (Co-Organizer)*

Panelists:

Michael A. Hitt, *Texas A&M University and Texas Christian University (Co-Organizer)*
1997 AOM President

Denise M. Rousseau, *Carnegie Mellon University*
2005 AOM President

James P. Walsh, *University of Michigan*
2010 AOM President

Susan Jackson, *Rutgers University*
2011 AOM President

R. Duane Ireland, *Texas A&M University*
2014 AOM President

Division Sponsor: All-Academy Theme (ATT)

Panel Symposium

“Truth is found neither in the thesis nor the antithesis, but in an emergent synthesis which reconciles the two.” – Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

“Without a common framework to organize findings, isolated knowledge does not cumulate.” – Elinor Ostrom (2009: 419)

BACKGROUND

Herbert Simon (1967: 2) argues that the central design problem concerning “business school knowing” is the synthesis of the knowledge brought into the business school from “the world of practice” and “relevant sciences”. One fundamental conflict Simon indicates is that the utility of knowledge for “the world of practice” lies in a current and complete understanding of many complex problems as a totality. Whereas, academic knowledge based on “sciences” progresses by simplifying complex real-life problems into more readily examined fragments. This nature of the two knowledge bases creates barriers for communication and unintended misrepresentation, ultimately making synthesis difficult.

The scientific journal system was brought to management studies in the 1950s as a way both to introduce the selection pressure for rigor and to channel established scientific approaches and theories from foundational disciplines. In most research-oriented business schools, the primary academic currency is top journal publication (Davis, 2015), providing perhaps the most important channel for management faculty to prosper and advance.

Under their founding missions, these scientific journals seek to motivate management faculty to focus on rigorous research based on theory and evidence and to ensure that the research is consonant with more established disciplines (Agarwal & Hoetker, 2007). In this way, these journals are central to a vast knowledge network that connects cutting-edge knowledge in management research to both management teaching and practice.

Although we have much reason to celebrate the introduction of these journals for their impact on the research climate and contributions to our knowledge ecosystem, we should also acknowledge several deficiencies that make knowledge accumulation via academic journal publication exceedingly difficult to achieve. It has been almost six decades since academic leaders expressed the need to improve the intellectual climate in management scholarship and develop its closer relationship with foundational disciplines (Agarwal & Hoetker, 2007), highlighted in the Gordon and Howell (1959) and Pierson (1959) reports. Focusing on the roles of selected elite scientific journals in the overall management knowledge ecosystem, Chen and Hitt (2016) have identified six problems that constrain our knowledge accumulation: (1) limited updating of current knowledge from foundational disciplines; (2) over-emphasis on “interesting” and “counterintuitive” knowledge; (3) focus on single disciplines with a narrow theoretical focus; (4) lack of motivation for replication and integration; (5) over-generalizations of theories and finding from only a contingent sample or context; (6) lack of neutral views of research subjects due to discipline-related value biases.

These problems result in a fragmented and limited understanding of management in the scholarly community, while the practical demand for more useful comprehensive

guidance goes unmet. There is a risk of further widening this chasm if journals (and reviewers) overplay the importance of novelty, especially when there is such a low acceptance rate due to submission volumes and space limitations. A healthier balance can integrate publications emphasizing discovery of new knowledge rather than practical implications with those focused on synthesis of existing knowledge and its practical implications; development of new methodologies should be followed by updating old findings using these new methodologies; integration of knowledge leading to new understanding should be coupled with integration of knowledge contributing to a more complete structure (some new, some old).

A FORWARD-LOOKING AGENDA

One of the most salient consequences of the weak connection between management scholarship and practical knowledge is perhaps the difficulty in enacting “evidence-based management” as a way to improve the quality of teaching and application activities (Rousseau, 2006: 256). In contrast to the popular voices that blame our top journals’ irrelevance in providing practical value (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005; Chia & Holt, 2008; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002), the problem may lie in the fundamental conflicts between the inevitable fragmentation of our knowledge from the sciences and the practical demand for completeness. Management scholarship has made significant advances by no longer depending on managers’ own experiences and intuitions as a basis of our teaching and research, but in the process of advancing rigor the easy translation to practice may have been lost.

The question that should be asked is: What is limiting our ability to close the gap between fragmented knowledge and the practical demand for comprehensive guidance for actions? Chen and Hitt (2016) suggest that there are at least three constraints.

The first constraint is about research technologies. We should start introducing new technologies to assist management research and to enable knowledge accumulation. For instance, a research project typically starts with a thorough literature review. For any research subject, the list of existing studies can be quite large. This alone suggests the need to shift our paradigm from “human agents” as researchers to “intelligent agents” (Detlor, 2004; Hitt, 1998). For artificial intelligence, such as IBM Watson, it may take a considerably shorter time to locate and perhaps even analyze a large body of research. For instance, in Jeopardy, a trivial question game on TV, IBM Watson would need only a second to process 200 million pages of unstructured information, involving high-quality and comprehensive work such as connecting similar concepts, analyzing logics, generating new hypotheses, and problem solving. In reality, no researchers or editors are likely to take many years to thoroughly review all the published studies, but instead will limit their focus to a short list of particular journals in certain discipline(s). As a result, any new publications remain fragmented and largely unconnected (or only distantly connected) to the full picture.

The second constraint relates to knowledge and publication outlets themselves. Only a few outlets are of high status for their contribution to novel scientific knowledge of the field. If we did more review syntheses, it would matter a lot less where something was published as long as it was peer reviewed by quality researchers. There is a lack of diversity in the outlets for impactful scholarly publications and knowledge sharing. Part

of the reason is that all business schools experience peer pressure and try to be similar to the elite schools in the media rankings, which reduces their innovations and diversity (Glick, 2008). We should think creatively about what novel forms of outlets could be created to undertake the daunting work of knowledge integration and knowledge management. One potential mode is an IT-enabled, typically Web-based knowledge portal, which has been widely used in the industry (e.g., the IBM Global Services K Portal) and in some other scientific communities (e.g., CancerMA for synthesizing results of cancer trials) (Mack, Ravin, & Byrd, 2001: 925). For the purpose of synthesizing fragmented knowledge, it could be designed to group similar concepts and constructs, and to connect these concepts and constructs using cause-and-effect relations, and finally to quantify all these relationships using meta-analysis. Ideas on the structure of this platform can be drawn from design sciences and evidence-based management (Rousseau, 2012). To train knowledge workers who have skills in creating and/or contributing to these new outlets, we may also need a rethinking of our existing doctoral programs, which tend to focus on theoretical and/or methodological breakthroughs rather than integrative thinking for problem solving or managerial performance enhancement. As Chen and Hitt (2016) have argued, performance enhancement of the “world of practice” and the knowledge breakthroughs in “sciences” are interdependent. The latter is a valuable input into teaching and application activities that develop human capital into practice, whereas performance enhancement has become an increasingly important revenue source to support business schools and their research activities (Chen and Hitt, 2016).

The third and most important constraint is about the research incentives in our field. Whatever new initiatives are designed, they will only emerge and become useful if

business schools can create incentives for faculty to create and use them. Currently, both business schools and PhD programs likely over-emphasize top scientific journal publications as the primary and most critical evaluation criterion for career promotion (Rousseau, 2012). As discussed above, our top management journals are structured to motivate new discoveries or new perspectives that are built on disciplines and specializations, which are certainly important but only part of the picture, rather than integrative efforts that contribute to a more complete knowledge structure. Our editors should promote impactful research, where “impactful” refers to reaching to a wider audience and consumers of our knowledge (e.g., George, 2016). To tenure and promote only people who focus on new discoveries and new perspectives basically eliminates or undermines others who seek to link all such new knowledge into an integrated framework, which as discussed may require more new sorts of outlets (and relatedly, new sorts of doctoral programs). Influential scholars are often best known for their frameworks that integrate dispersed theories published by other scholars. Examples can be found both in foundational disciplines and the management field, such as a general framework of Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) by 2009 Nobel Economist Elinor Ostrom (2015), strategy scholar Michael Porter’s five-force model (Porter, 2008), international business scholar John Dunning (1988)’s eclectic paradigm, and the several scholars with theories presented in the book, *Great Minds in Management* (Smith & Hitt, 2005). Relatedly, the knowledge portals and new technologies we have discussed can enable more effective and impactful knowledge integration, and can potentially serve as a new host of integrative scholarship.

PANELISTS

We have confirmed five very distinguished scholars, all of whom are also former presidents of AOM.

Michael A. Hitt (1997 President of AOM) is University Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Texas A&M University and a Distinguished Research Fellow at Texas Christian University. He is a former Editor (1991-1993) of Academy of Management Journal and a Founding Editor of Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal (2006-2010). In addition to the presidency of the AOM, he also served as the President of Strategic Management Society. He received best paper awards from Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Executive, Journal of Management, and FBR. He is an elected Fellow of Academy of Management and Strategic Management Society. He was named among the top scholars in Economics, Finance and Management by Times Higher Education, Thomson Reuters Highly Cited Researcher and Irwin Outstanding Educator Award of the Academy of Management.

Denise M. Rousseau (2005 President of AOM) is the H.J. Heinz II University Professor of Organizational Behavior and Public Policy at Carnegie Mellon University's H. John Heinz III College and the Tepper School of Business. She was the 1998-2007 Editor-in-Chief of Journal of Organizational Behavior. Rousseau founded the Evidence-Based Management Collaborative, a network of scholars, consultants, and practicing managers to promote evidence-informed organizational practices and decision making. Her publications include over a dozen books and 200 articles and monographs in management and psychology journals including Administrative Science Quarterly, Academy of Management Review, Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Perspectives, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Management. She

is a two-time winner of the Academy of Management's George Terry Award for best management book. Rousseau is an elected Fellow in the Society for Industrial/Organizational Psychology, the American Psychological Association, the Academy of Management, and the British Academy of Management. She has received the Lifetime Career Achievement Award from the Organizational Behavior Division of the Academy of Management, for Career Research by the AOM Careers Division and the Distinguished Scholarly Contribution Award from the Academy of Management.

James P Walsh (2010 President of AOM) is an Arthur F. Thurnau Professor and the Gerald and Esther Carey Professor of Business Administration at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business. His research explores the purpose, accountability, control and success of the firm, and even more generally, business itself, in society. Considering these issues with his students, he does his best to prepare them to lead in and for society. A founding co-editor of the Academy of Management Annals, a Senior Editor and Associate Editor-in-Chief for Organization Science, a Consulting Editor for the Academy of Management Review, and an Associate Editor for the Strategic Management Journal, Jim is currently a Consulting Editor for the Journal of Business Ethics. A recipient of the Academy of Management's Career Distinguished Service Award, he has served both as the Dean of its Fellows Group and as its 65th president.

Susan E. Jackson (2011 President of AOM) is Distinguished Professor of Human Resource Management in the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers University. Her primary areas of expertise for teaching and scholarship include managing for environmental sustainability, work team diversity, and strategic human resource management systems. She has published more than 150 scholarly articles and chapters on

these and related topics, and is the author or editor of several books. An active member and 2011 President of the Academy of Management, she has served in numerous editorial roles, including as former Editor (1994-1996) of Academy of Management Review. She is an elected Fellow of Academy of Management, Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Association for Psychological Science, British Academy of Management, and India Academy of Management. She received the Michael R. Losey Human Resource Research Award of the Society of Human Resource Management 2015 and Herbert Heneman Jr. Award for Career Achievement by the Human Resources Division of the Academy of Management 2008.

R. Duane Ireland (2014 President of AOM) is Executive Associate Dean in Mays Business School, a University Distinguished Professor, and holds the Benton Cocanougher Chair in Business at Texas A & M University. He is a former editor (2008-2010) of Academy of Management Journal. He has authored or co-authored many articles appearing in journals such as the SMJ, Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Academy of Management Executive, Administrative Science Quarterly, Journal of Management, among others. He received awards for the best article published in Journal of Management (2016), Academy of Management Journal (2000) and Academy of Management Executive (1999). He is an elected Fellow of the Academy of Management and Strategic Management Society. He has been named as one of the world's top scholars and was selected as a "Highly Cited Research in Business" by Thomson Reuters Highly .

PANEL FORMAT AND QUESTIONS

This panel will take a moderated, semi-spontaneous roundtable discussion. The format of the 90-minute symposium will be as follows:

- Brief introduction to the topic and the panelists (10 minutes) by Victor Chen
- Moderated panel discussion (70 minutes). Throughout this discussion, the panelists are encouraged to interact with the audience following a prepared list of questions.
- Concluding statements from the panelists (10 minutes)

Questions to be covered in the panel include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Many mature fields related to professions (e.g., medicine, law, engineering, etc.), strive to balance new knowledge creation and existing knowledge synthesis, in order to constantly channel knowledge flows between practice and science. How do we embrace this model in our management field?
- 2) How can we encourage more knowledge synthesis to close the gap between increasingly fragmented new knowledge and the practical need for comprehensive guidance to enact the goal of evidence-based management?
- 3) Many critics of the field call for research that combines science-based principles as well as being actionable. However, how do we manage the increasing complexity in both science and action, which seems to call for a (re)focus on each and a (re)division of labor in two opposite directions (e.g., specialization vis-à-vis integration)? How do we draw experiences from similar and more mature fields such as engineering, medicine, and law?
- 4) What new technologies are available or should be created to facilitate knowledge synthesis? What new publication outlets should be (re)invented to host these technologies? What new forms of publications might be available that would enable

constant updates and integration of academic findings?

- 5) Who are, and who should be, responsible for inventing, hosting, and maintaining these new outlets?
- 6) How do we evaluate the quality (and publishability) of synthesis-based research? If it is related to performance prediction, how do we measure a research's comprehensiveness in predicting performance measures? And what performance measures should we adopt, given that science-based principles are supposed to be value-neutral?
- 7) What research incentives should business schools (re)invent to divert some of scholars' attention, energy, and resources into inventing/learning these new technologies and contributing into these new outlets?
- 8) How would these new initiatives on knowledge synthesis complement, rather than compete with, the current top scientific journal-centric system, whose role in new knowledge creation is always critical?
- 9) Any other questions raised by the panelists and/or the audience.

All panelists have agreed to participate. See their email confirmations attached in the end of this proposal.

INTEREST TO SPONSORING DIVISIONS

It is timely to revisit Herbert Simon (1967)'s concern of persistent gaps between "the world of practice" and the "sciences" of business scholarship given this year's theme of "At the Interface". Our forward-looking agenda on creating a knowledge synthesis ecosystem (e.g., new technologies, outlets, and incentives) addresses the knowledge interface for scholars, educators, and practitioners. Therefore, our topic fits well within

the ATT. In general, our topic deals with some serious issues concerning the future infrastructures of management knowledge as a whole, and therefore should be of interest to all divisions and members of AOM. In particular, we see relevance to four divisions. We seek to discuss new research technologies, which falls within the domain of the RM division. We suggest ways in which we integrate multiple organizational and management theories into meta-theoretical frameworks, which falls within the domain of the OMT division. Also, because the purpose of having this knowledge synthesis system is to better distribute and manage knowledge for both education and practice, our panel is also relevant to the MED and SAP divisions.

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EMAIL CONFIRMATIONS OF THE PANELISTS

From: Ireland, Duane <DIreland@mays.tamu.edu>
Date: Tue, Jan 3, 2017 at 12:03 PM
Subject: RE: Invitation to be a panelist in 2017 AOM Panel Symposium on Knowledge Synthesis

Hello Victor (and Mike):

Thank you for sending the proposal to me and for the opportunity to participate as a panelist.

Here is a message indicating my participation:

I confirm my participation with this proposed panel-based symposium.

Best,

Duane

From: Susan Jackson <sjacksox@smlr.rutgers.edu>
Date: Tue, Jan 3, 2017 at 6:01 PM
Subject: Re: Invitation to be a panelist in 2017 AOM Panel Symposium on Knowledge Synthesis

Hi Victor: Through this email, I confirm that I will participate in the panel symposium titled, "Time is Ripe for a Knowledge Synthesis Ecosystem: (Re)inventing Our Technologies, Outlets, and Incentives for a Renewed Purpose" if it is accepted for presentation at the 2017 AOM annual conference.

Susan E. Jackson, PhD

Submission # 12347

Distinguished Professor
School of Management & Labor Relations
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ USA

From: Jim Walsh
Sent: 2017 January 5th 10:20
Subject: RE: Invitation to be a panelist in 2017 AOM Panel Symposium on Knowledge Synthesis

And yes, I confirm that I will participate if this symposium is accepted...and yes, I confirm that this submission does not violate my rule of three.

Jim

From: Denise Rousseau <denise@cmu.edu>
Date: Fri, Jan 6, 2017 at 4:01 PM
Subject: Re: Invitation to be a panelist in 2017 AOM Panel Symposium on Knowledge Synthesis

Dear Victor,

I am happy to participate in the knowledge synthesis symposium if it is accepted. I think the proposal reads quite nicely, thank you.

Denise