Achieving effective academic/practitioner knowledge exchange in marketing

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Abstract:

Marketing management research and teaching has been criticised for some time as being divorced from practice. However, there has been little research into the nature of knowledge exchange between academics and practitioners in the marketing field. In the exploratory research reported in this paper the authors conducted interviews with academics and practitioners. A number of different routes to knowledge exchange are identified and discussed. The effectiveness of the different routes is reviewed in relation to the circular process of turning learning into better practice and turning practice into better learning. Overall four broad factors (individual, institutional, content and relationship) are identified as being of prime importance in creating mutual value in knowledge exchange. A number of implications are then drawn out in order to aid academics, practitioners and policy makers in improving knowledge exchange in the marketing area.

Keywords:

Knowledge exchange; academics; practitioners; engagement

Authors’ biographies:

Dr Tim Hughes is a Reader at Bristol Business School. Previously he worked for many years within large companies in senior marketing positions and also set up his own consultancy. He has published in areas such as relationship marketing, customer relationship management (CRM) and the impact of e-commerce on marketing. The current focus of his research is on academic/practitioner knowledge exchange across the range of management disciplines.

Professor Alan Tapp is a Research Unit Director at Bristol Business School. He is the author of ‘Principles of Direct and Database Marketing’, a book based on his 9 years commercial experience as a marketing executive and joint author of ‘Revolution Marketing’, written with colleagues at IBM. Alan has published over 50 refereed articles in leading journals and international conferences. Much of his research has been sponsored by organisations.

Rebecca Hughes is a Senior Lecturer in Marketing at Bristol Business School. Previously Rebecca spent ten years in senior marketing roles for a number of blue-chip organisations and global brands. Her current research interests include relationship marketing, consumer behaviour and the academic/practitioner gap.
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Introduction

One of the ironies of marketing myopia is its relevance to the generation, dissemination and sharing of marketing knowledge between academia and practice. Academic management research and teaching in general has been criticised, over a long period, as having become myopic in that it is seen as increasingly divorced from practice (Leavitt, 1986; Porter and McKibben, 1988; Bailey and Ford, 1996; Mintzberg, 1996; Starkey and Madan, 2001; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Van De Ven and Johnson, 2006). The marketing discipline is included in this criticism (Baker and Erdogan, 2000; Polonsky and Mankelow, 2000; Piercy 2002; Katsikeas et al. 2004; Mentzer and Schumann, 2006). While there has been much high level debate about the role of business schools in teaching and research there has been less research into the actual practice of knowledge exchange between academics and practitioners. There are no clear models of the development and dissemination of management research between academics and practitioners (Starkey and Madan, 2001) and further research is needed to better understand the relationship between academic quality and practical relevance (Baldrige et al. 2004). There is therefore a knowledge gap relating to understanding the process of development and exchange of knowledge between the two groups.

The specific objective of the research reported in this paper is to understand better how knowledge is created, shared and disseminated between academics and practitioners in the marketing field. On the basis of developing a better understanding of the key issues and dimensions our aim is to make a contribution to the debate with regard to how academics and academic institutions could become better knowledge partners with practitioners. The following two research questions provide the starting point for our research:
1. How is marketing management knowledge exchanged between academics and practitioners?

2. How effective are the different routes to academic/practitioner knowledge exchange?

In the section below we briefly review the literature giving the background to the topic and the reasons why this is important to the future health of the discipline. Following this we set out our research approach and methodology. The research findings are then outlined under each research question. We finish with a discussion of the findings around four common factors (individual, institutional, content and relationship) that emerge from the research as key in impacting on the effectiveness of academic/practitioner knowledge exchange.

**Literature on the relationship between marketing theory and practice**

An area of considerable debate has concerned the way in which the subject and profession of marketing are regarded in the world of practice. In both the US and Europe a large proportion of chief executives are reported to be unhappy with the performance of their marketing executives, according to Webster et al. (2005). However, academia rarely addresses these concerns – for example implementation issues are under-represented in marketing research and courses (Dibb and Simkin, 2003). Piercy (2002) cites the concerns of a number of major contributors to the discipline, such as Deshpande and Sheth, that marketing academia is not meeting the needs of major organisations and practitioners. Contemporary marketing managers are said to have little awareness of current research and thinking partly because there is a conflict between the perceived idealism of academic research and the need of managers to focus on problem solution (Ankers and Brennan, 2002). According to Webster (essay in Bolton, 2005), the emphasis on scientific rigour over problem importance and relevance has meant that the marketing discipline has not progressed to keep pace with a
rapidly changing market environment. The research process is particularly singled out for criticism in that academic institutions globally encourage publication in the most prestigious journals to the detriment of influencing practice (Polonsky and Whitelaw, 2005).

The contemporary model of marketing scholarship in American and European business schools was developed in response to calls for a move away from vocational training to a more rigorous scientific approach. In this model scholarly research is seen as taking precedence over teaching and dissemination (Mentzer and Schumann, 2006). This dominant model has come under increasing scrutiny and criticism on the basis that it is increasingly divorcing the research conducted in business schools from the realities of practice (Polonsky and Mankelow, 2000; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Piercy 2002; Bennis and O’Toole, 2005). The need to address this dichotomy is reflected in calls for better integration of theory and practice. This is considered to be the most important issue for marketing academics, both in the UK (Baker and Holt, 2004) and in the US (Bolton, 2005). On this basis, marketing scholars have an obligation to undertake work that is relevant as well as rigorous (Katsikeas et al. 2004). Critics of closer integration note that the domain of marketing is not solely about marketing management, but also covers social, political and economic issues relating to consumption that are of interest to policy makers, politicians and the public in general (Wensley, 2002; Hunt, 2002). However, marketing management must be considered a large part of the subject’s domain, as we are reminded by the American Marketing Association’s definition of marketing as an organisational function (www.ama.com).

We should not underestimate the challenges for academics in working with practitioners in developing and utilising marketing knowledge. Dissemination of knowledge to practice often takes time (Hansotia, 2003) and may be indirect (Brennan, 2004). Theory can be highly
complex and practitioners are often limited in time and focused on dealing with more immediate business priorities (Ottesen and Gronhaug, 2004).

Methodology

Research method

In conducting this research we took a realist approach. Realism is well established as one of the major research paradigms (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). It takes the point of view that there is a real world to discover, but it is only imperfectly understandable (Godfrey and Hill, 1995; Tsoukas, 1989). The social world consists of abstract ideas born out of peoples’ minds, but exists independently of any one person (Magee, 1985). In-depth interviewing was the method of research used in our study. This method is appropriate for theory-building within the realism paradigm and allows the researcher to probe into a complex social phenomenon (Healy, and Perry, 2000). The in-depth interviews were conducted with people who have roles that have involved working across the academic/practitioner divide: for example on courses and programmes aimed at practitioners; in networks; or on consultancy involving practice and academia. The approach of selecting interviewees on the basis of their credibility and expertise in the area of research is well established (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). It stresses the validity of the research through getting close access to the phenomenon under study (Gummeson, 2002). This closeness together with the richness of data that can be derived from in-depth approaches makes qualitative research valuable in studying an applied domain such as management (Carson et al. 2001).

The authors were keen to get a balance of views from different perspectives on the academic/practitioner divide. Hence the interviewees came from three groups: academics, practitioners and consultants/experts. The consultants/experts group needs a little
explanation. This consisted of commercial consultants working in the marketing field and also other expert commentators not directly falling into either the academic or practitioner groups. The authors felt that it was valuable to include the consultants/experts group because they could give third party perspectives from a position outside of either academia or practice. The interviewees are detailed anonymously in Appendix 1. Each individual respondent is identified according to the group to which they belong. So the first academic respondent is identified as Aca1; the first practitioner is identified as Pra1, the first consultant/expert as Con1 and so on. The interviews were either conducted face to face (10 out of 21) or over the telephone (11 out of 21).

**Analysis**

We took the approach of analysing the data throughout the research programme in an iterative process building our understanding progressively from the interview data as it become available. The authors believe that the project benefited by following a process of constant development of knowledge through the researchers interacting with the data throughout. In conducting this type of research protocols and processes need to be in place to ensure dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This requires careful control of the way the data is collected, coded, sorted and analysed (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The interviews were semi-structured, based around a framework designed to get the participants talking about their experiences of academic/practitioner knowledge exchange. In this way the authors aimed to ensure that the interviews covered common areas, while also allowing interviewees to go into as much depth as they liked in areas of particular interest to them. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Initial coding was conducted in parallel between the collaborating researchers and then common themes and codes were
agreed to ensure consistency of coding. The Nvivo software package was used to facilitate this analysis.

Analysis also meant assessing the significance of what was said by the research participants. The authors’ collective experience of the politics of practice and academia was found to be invaluable in this regard. The three authors have decades of collective experience in practice as well as academe, and this added considerable value to the interpretation of the data.

**Findings**

*RQ1. How is marketing management knowledge exchanged between academics and practitioners?*

In many ways this first question was about “mapping out the territory”. Figure 1 summarises the main routes of exchange identified through the research.

**Figure 1 Routes to knowledge exchange between academics and practitioners**
The “Courses and programmes” route to knowledge exchange

Our research found examples where practitioners and consultants felt that academic courses had directly impacted on their practice. Pra1, a practitioner, found that a part-time MBA provided him with models that helped him simplify real business problems and solve them. Many of these were simple models that people within his organisation (one of the largest global blue-chips) were not aware of. For Con3, a consultant, having recently completed an MBA it served to remind him of the basics and refresh his thinking. However, Con3 felt that the downside of doing a course was that it tends to be a one-off event and therefore the link with academia is not long term:

They are bite sized chunks for short periods of time and whether this is my own way of dealing with it or not, but I find those kinds of linkages have degraded pretty quickly (Con3).

Another consultant (Con1) was able to take the learning from a DBA course and integrate it to such an extent that it led to a whole new business opportunity:

I started to wake up to the fact that what I was doing on the doctorate in terms of evidence based change management and what was going on in the DTI ….there’s a business here actually and we can structure this differently to other people in the market place (Con1).

However, embedding the learning from courses and programmes in organisational practice is often not that effective:

It needed the organisation to actually understand that knowledge was critical to its future and it needed the university to understand that working together with the business was critical to its future and it didn’t quite work that out (Con5).

The “Publications” route to knowledge exchange

More than three-quarters of our respondents made comments suggesting that academic language and the structure of academic papers are barriers to dissemination to practitioners. For example:
One of the big barriers with academia and practitioners is the language…(In the) first couple of months (of a DBA) probably one of the hardest things was trying to get my head round the language and the whole structure of academic papers. (Con1)

All of our academic interviewees recognised this as a problem, as typified by this comment from Aca4 (a world class academic who also has a high profile within his sector of practice):

I think a lot of it is about language … it is written in a language that is inaccessible and published in journals that practitioners never come across in a life time. (Aca4)

A summary of the views expressed in the interviews is that academic journals are inaccessible to practitioners because of their language, style and readability and there is a need for translation to distil the information into a meaningful and relevant framework.

Popular business publications disseminate information much more widely, often having much larger circulations than academic journals. However, our interviewees made some relevant points concerning their limited role in disseminating academic research. The popular business publications were mainly seen to be the domain of journalists, containing relatively few articles from academics. As a result there are few common publication arenas where academics and practitioners debate or share knowledge.

The “Conferences” route to knowledge exchange

This problem of lack of common areas where academics and practitioners might maintain a dialogue was also evident in the interviewees’ comments on the conference arena. Academic conferences are mainly confined to the academic community while practitioner conferences are often industry specific and not attended by many academics. Aca5 contrasted this with the medical profession:

The analogy I always use is, if you go to a conference of medical research, it’s full of people who are treating patients, if you go to a business academic conference; it’s full of people who are business academics. (Aca5)
While we did find examples of conferences set up by academics for both communities it can be difficult to attract large numbers of practitioners. In particular, the input from academic speakers needs to be credible and relevant if attendees are to feel that they have gained value:

    You have to know that what you are providing is something they will find of value and if you haven’t done your homework you really aren’t up to speed with what is going on in professional practice they will crucify you. (Aca4)

*The “Knowledge networks” route to knowledge exchange*

Demonstrating value to practice was also found to be a key factor in determining the success of knowledge networks. Typically the networks described by our interviewees focus on a particular sector or area of interest and primarily play the role of knowledge broker and a forum for communication between members. Proof that knowledge networks can work effectively in promoting and maintaining academic/practitioner engagement was provided by four successful examples described by our interviewees. The first has been running for over 13 years providing an industry forum involving major organisations from the sector, academics working in the area, and policy makers and regulators. This is managed by Aca3, who put its continued success down to very active management and a willingness to evolve its role in order to provide continuing value to its members:

    I am just about to start a programme of spending three or four months visiting all of our members…..If I see members being disinterested and leaving I have to find out why… I act as the primary catalyst for change but we do make it our business to get a lot of feedback from our supporters (Aca3).

The network mentioned above is quite formal, involving a significant level of funding from its members; the other examples from our research were less formally structured. Aca1 is a professor who has been running his own knowledge network for many years. This predominantly involves business people from some of the main companies involved in Information Technology and Customer Management and provides a range of opportunities for academics to present ideas and gain up to date insight into the challenges faced by
practitioners. However, Aca1 makes the point that his network is unusual, as the majority of academics would not have the motivation or business experience to run this type of network. Running a network takes considerable effort and the skills to liaise with a number of different parties. This investment in time and energy can be well rewarded. For example Aca4 partly attributes his very successful academic career to having established and run a network within the not-for-profit sector. By liaising extensively between practitioners and policy makers in his area of interest Aca4 plays a central role in setting research agendas and is much in demand as the academic expert in his sector. Our fourth example was built up by Pra1, a practitioner. This network links managers in his organisation with a number of different academic and business communities. Pra1 saw his network as an example of an effective “link point” between academia and practice, but admitted that these are few and far between and “they are easily broken, easily lost”.

The “Professional bodies” route to knowledge exchange

It might be expected that professional associations would be best placed to develop knowledge networks and generally promote joint agendas between academics and practitioners. Con4, representing one of the professional bodies within the UK marketing field, argued for the allocation of more resources to these bodies:

They are more used to the commercial environment, they have a membership which they can work with, they have a reach to the market and understanding of the market and can apply the money in a much more professional way to get results which can then be applied and put in practice (Con4).

However, other respondents cited the problem of fragmentation between the different professional bodies in the marketing field as a limitation on their potential impact. Membership of any one of the professional bodies within marketing was not generally seen as essential to practice and hence membership penetration remains low.
The “Academic consultancy” route to knowledge exchange

At their best, academic consultants were seen to be capable of making a very real contribution to practice through widening the intellectual resource available to the client, bringing an objective expertise and acting as a knowledgeable facilitator. At worst academics might be brought in to “rubber stamp” a sales pitch for a client or to provide a credible spokesperson for a PR story (Aca6). Our respondents suggested that academics vary greatly in their ability to undertake direct consultancy. Aca1, an academic who has had a long and successful consultancy practice stressed the importance of engaging with practitioners on an equal footing rather than acting like a guru. He believed academics should take part in:

Frequent in depth consulting, in which you are looking at the issues and arguing the toss and not behaving like a guru, but as a peer amongst senior people where you are open to be questioned. (Aca1)

The consultancy route posed the most ethical dilemmas for academics in relation to their own independence and the motives of the client for using them. At the same time our interviewees mentioned the opportunities that it could sometimes provide for joint publication and conference presentations.

The “Commercial consultants” route to knowledge exchange

Three of the commercial consultants interviewed (Con1, Con2 and Con3) acknowledged the role that academic knowledge plays in their business. It provides credibility (through access to latest theory) and a stimulus to ideas and models to utilise with their clients. Con2 recognised that his training consultancy had been lucky in working with a leading academic who acted as a bridge in interpreting academic material. Con1 and Con3 also acknowledged the benefit of having access to the latest academic research, in one case through taking an MBA and in another case through taking a DBA. In both cases these consultants talked about
how they play an important translation role making relevant academic theory usable, for example:

It is actually about getting it into a language and to a framework that is meaningful to practitioners… for most managers the translation process is very important, but that translation in context, I think, is quite critical and in a way that they take ownership of it, rather than just being told it. (Con1)

**RQ2 How effective are the different routes to academic/practitioner knowledge exchange?**

What do we mean by effectiveness in knowledge exchange? More than half of our interviewees made comments relating to the importance of knowledge being developed and used in the context of application. A synthesis of the collective argument might go as follows: On the one hand, academics often see theory being used badly and inappropriately by practitioners, who take an uncritical and piece meal approach. Practitioners, on the other hand, argue that they are primarily interested in theory as far as it is meaningful to their particular context. We would argue that this is a gap that can only be bridged through a genuine two-way exchange between academics and practitioners. At this point it is relevant to refer to the work of Gibbons et al. (1994) who stress the importance of Mode 2 knowledge which can only be developed in the context of implementation. We have adapted this idea in considering the effectiveness of knowledge exchange to be a circular process between academics and practitioners. In this, effectiveness is about turning learning into better practice and practice into better learning, as illustrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2 Effectiveness in turning learning into better practice and practice into better learning**
We have taken this model as the basic criteria to judge the different routes through which knowledge may be exchanged. In Table 1 we summarise our findings.

**Table 1 Effectiveness of different routes in turning learning into better practice and practice into better learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Routes to knowledge exchange</th>
<th>Turning learning into better practice</th>
<th>Turning practice into better learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courses &amp; programmes</td>
<td>Great variability in application into practice</td>
<td>Can be a “touch-point” with practice, but not a systematic source of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication</td>
<td>Main target for academic publication (RAE publications) very limited direct dissemination to practice</td>
<td>How much practice is captured? Lack of joint agenda on what is important for research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>Limited number of conference forums that crossover between the two communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge networks</td>
<td>Where active can be effective way to disseminate relevant theory and models to interested parties</td>
<td>Where active can provide a forum for dialogue and a source of support for relevant research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional bodies</td>
<td>Mainly foundation level teaching, less effective for higher level ongoing practice</td>
<td>Limited research links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic consultancy</td>
<td>Impact depends on type of consultancy and overcoming practical and ethical barriers</td>
<td>May be very limited because of commercial confidentiality and because agenda largely set by requirements of the client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial consultants</td>
<td>Can play an important role in “translating” theory for practitioners</td>
<td>More limited role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Derived by the authors from the research data

We can see that each route has different strengths and weaknesses which need to be taken into account in looking at how best to follow knowledge exchange agendas.

**Analysis and discussion of findings**

Our focus so far has been to identify the different routes to knowledge exchange and to consider the effectiveness of each in terms of the process of turning learning into better
practice and practice into better learning. There appear to be four common factors that impact on the quality of knowledge exchange across all the routes. These common factors all contribute to the idea of “perception of value”. By this we mean that the willingness of both academics and practitioners to engage in the process of knowledge exchange will depend on how far both parties believe that they are getting value out of the exchange. The four factors are summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Factors in effective knowledge exchange

![Figure 3 Factors in effective knowledge exchange](image)

**Individual factors**

There is a strong perception coming from our research that in many cases academics are not equipped to engage with practice. Table 2 summarises the criticisms of academics in this regard and demonstrates that these criticisms came as much from the academics in our research as from any of the other two groups.
Table 2 Criticisms of academics in relation to engaging with practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Each X represents an interviewee who made a comment related to the category in the left hand column</th>
<th>Academics</th>
<th>Practitioners</th>
<th>Consultants &amp; experts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of practical experience</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge not up to date / Not in touch</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not understand context</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflexible</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow focus (discipline and expertise)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guruism (don’t listen)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dull presentation style</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediocrity</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Derived by the authors from the research data

Equally on the practitioner side we found a strong perception (interestingly from all three groups) that many practitioners are not inclined to engage with academics or academic ideas.

Table 3 Criticisms of practitioners in relation to engaging with academics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Each X represents an interviewee who made a comment related to the category in the left hand column</th>
<th>Academics</th>
<th>Practitioners</th>
<th>Consultants &amp; experts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time pressured</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short termism</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little critical thinking</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Fashion” prone</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often not open to new ideas</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of usage of basic principles</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silo thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Derived by the authors from the research data

The criticisms in Table 3 broadly cover two areas firstly, relating to individual attitudes and motivations and secondly to the time pressured context of business life. In terms of attitude and motivation practitioners do seem to fall within distinct groups. There are practitioners who embrace the link with academia and are sometimes proactive in developing these links. There seems to be another group who are sympathetic to academic work, but do not maintain these links on an ongoing basis (half of the practitioners and consultants in our study had
completed an MBA or similar masters level business related course and this seemed to be a contributory factor in encouraging a positive attitude towards the academic side). Finally, our research identified a group of managers who are highly cynical about academic work in the management area and highly resistant to approaches from academics. There would seem to be a very strong argument for conducting further research to quantify the size and characteristics of these groups and to test the link between education experience (such as having taken an MBA) and attitude towards links with academia. The practical implication of understanding the different groups better would be that it would help the academic community in promoting more effective exchange, clarifying attitudes by different segments of the practitioner population.

**Institutional factors**

Individual motivations to engage across the academic/practitioner divide can be seen to be impacted considerably by institutional environments. On the academic side individual institutions encourage or discourage academic activity through recruitment policies, promotion criteria, and support given for research activities. In turn government policy impacts on individual institutions in controlling research funds. Being a successful academic may well hinge on the ability to access funds. Within the UK the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) can be seen to be a major influence on institutional and individual priorities. The criticism of the RAE is that it encourages publication in academic journals to the exclusion of more practice orientated activities. Our research suggests that this narrow measure of academic endeavour does little to encourage applied work and little to encourage knowledge dissemination and debate outside the academic community. While academic publication should still be encouraged, a more balanced approach in rewarding other activities as well might stimulate a wider range of engagements with practice. It is
encouraging that the current RAE system is up for review (Time Further Education Supplement 8th December 2006). The practical implication for knowledge exchange is that suitable metrics need to be established that will encourage research that is both rigorous and most importantly useful to the wider community.

The RAE is just one institutional mechanism for directing funds for research and the various institutions awarding research grants have considerable power in deciding what types and areas of research to support. In setting agendas, funding bodies could put greater emphasis on research that is supported by practitioner organisations both in the private and public sector. Research outputs could also be specified that require the researcher to disseminate findings more widely and incorporate practitioner interpretation of the implications.

At the level of individual universities and business schools the traditional model of taking one-off courses to get qualifications still seems to predominate and perhaps needs to be reconsidered in relation to engagement with practice. In the fast changing world of contemporary marketing our research suggests that there is a need to develop new models of business education that support individuals at different stages in their career and provide mechanisms for interpreting the latest advances in knowledge in the work context that they operate. In our research we also investigated a number of other routes for knowledge exchange that could be further developed. We found examples of healthy academic/practitioner/policy maker networks operated by academics that were supported by their respective universities. These seem to work most effectively where a clear agenda has been mutually agreed and they provide access to applicable knowledge. This leads onto consideration of the next crucial factor, that of the content of the knowledge exchange.
Content factors

This relates to the appropriateness, applicability and accessibility of the subject matter to the needs of the parties involved in the knowledge exchange. Outside of individual participation in courses and programmes, achieving a wider engagement with the practitioner community can be difficult, as discussed under RQ1. In this it would seem to be very important for academics and practitioners to develop joint agendas in order to provide value to both sides. Often the academic needs to be proactive in this. In the successful knowledge networks identified in our research it was invariably academics who had taken the lead in working with a range of practitioners and policy makers in developing common agendas for future research. Such networks, where they exist, appear to be providing an ongoing dialogue and the opportunity to improve mutual understanding around agendas and issues. These networks can also provide a means to access research subjects amongst network members and a forum for disseminating and discussing the implications of the research results.

Another issue relating to content is that of accessibility of relevant knowledge. As previously discussed, academic publications are written in a language that is difficult for practitioners and getting hold of relevant articles is problematical. There is a need for translation, synthesis and interpretation if academic research is to be more effectively disseminated outside the academic community. One suggestion that does emerge from our research is that the academic can provide a valuable knowledge broking role. This is more than teaching and research. It requires the business school to understand the knowledge needs of its communities and to support academics in serving the needs on an ongoing basis. The business school then becomes the preferred point of contact in particular knowledge areas for its clients. In this we would not wish to underestimate the challenges in establishing the links
with practitioner communities. Relationships need to be proactively developed as discussed below.

**Relationship factors**

Academics and practitioners seem to belong to two largely separate communities and cultures. The problem with the lack of direct interaction between the communities is that the tacit elements of knowledge exchange are often missing and there is a lack of dialogue and debate that is essential for the effective development of the discipline. The development of Mode 2 knowledge comes through the parties involved working together and this requires an ongoing dialogue which supports the development of common insights and understandings across the academic and practitioner communities.

The development of more productive relationships between members of the two communities emerges from the research as something that needs to be encouraged. This is recognised by Aca3 who manages a long running and successful network: “We have put a huge amount of effort into broadening and deepening the relationship between members and the Forum”. The point to note here is that these relationships do not necessarily emerge and sustain themselves automatically. Active management of these relationships may be required to support knowledge exchange. This raises the point about ways in which business schools and their academic staff can be most effective in reaching out to the various communities that they serve. While we found some individual academics that had intricate webs of practitioner and policy maker relationships there would seem to be the potential for business schools to be more proactive in broadening and deepening the links and involving many more academic staff in this. This will require significant investment of time and resources on the part of individuals and institutions. Again the will to make this investment will depend on individual
and institutional priorities in relation to the perceived importance of crossing the academic/practitioner divide.

**The perception of value and research approaches in marketing**

The factors above all relate to the overall idea that for knowledge exchange to be effective it needs to offer value to both sides. In this respect we would argue that there is a fundamental problem in relation to much research within marketing and other management fields in the value balance as illustrated in Figure 4.

**Figure 4 The balance of value for marketing management research and practice**

Academic researchers in the area of marketing management require managers in organisations to give up time and energy to take part in research. Yet time pressure was one of the big issues for the practitioners involved in our research and therefore we should not be surprised that access is often a problem and response rates are often low. We have to ask the question: What does practice gain from most research? The answer often is very little, because the aim of much research is to produce generalisable theory rather than in trying to understand the operation of marketing in the specific contexts in which it is applied. We
would therefore argue that we need to emphasise research approaches that address this imbalance as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4 Comparison of research approaches in relation to contextual understanding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“Pure science”</th>
<th>Pluralism of research approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic assumptions</strong></td>
<td>Positivism- everything reducible and measurable</td>
<td>Post-positivism, realism, interpretivism- Human systems complex and dynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim</strong></td>
<td>Looking for exactitude and simplicity mainly through use of quantitative techniques to test and measure phenomena</td>
<td>Gaining better understanding of a complex reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of the academic researcher</strong></td>
<td>Separate from the phenomena, scientific observer</td>
<td>Need to get close to the phenomena under study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Output</strong></td>
<td>Establishment of generalisable theory across industries and sectors</td>
<td>Rich data seeking to explore and explain usually within particular sectors and contexts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed by the authors

Co-production of knowledge is vital in Mode 2 research and to be successful in this we need to use research approaches that help developing our understanding in context and enable us to deliver better value to practitioners working in this context.

**Conclusions and limitations**

The link with practice is no small matter for the academic marketing discipline. What marketers do is a form of reality; therefore the link is at the heart of the issue of how close we get to reality in our research. Therefore it is an ontological issue. If we maintain too great a distance from the subject of our research we are not close enough to properly research it and we are too far away to address reality. Despite all the potential pitfalls and ethical dilemmas inherent in working with practice we would argue that on balance we must work in ways that create effective knowledge exchange around the full circle of turning learning into better practice and practice into better learning. Littler and Tynan’s (2005) paper identifies the problem for marketing academics of being seen as of low worth in academic community.
while at the same time as making only a low contribution to practice. We would argue that the mistake has been to move too far towards the scientific model to get academic credibility and this has not helped our relations with the commercial, public or non profit worlds of practice. We need to regain recognition for our contribution to the professional practice of marketing. This touches upon a continuing and long standing problem that has already been much discussed in the literature (Brady and Davies, 1993; Moorman and Rust, 1999; Webster et al. 2003; Bolton, 2005); that of the lack of understanding of marketing at a strategic level in many businesses in the UK. Those working in the marketing field still have much to do in demonstrating to senior management how implementation of marketing theory can be beneficial.

Our research makes a contribution to understanding how this engagement might be more effective. The provision of more opportunities for greater interaction with practice might in itself overcome some of the criticisms that academics are out of touch with reality. For academics wishing to interact more our review of the effectiveness of the different routes to knowledge exchange gives “food for thought” on what works effectively. For policy makers our research underlines how the established systems of reward and promotion are impacting on individuals and institutions in many cases not encouraging knowledge exchange. On the practitioner side there is considerable resistance to engaging with academia by many individuals. Yet there are potentially great benefits for practitioners in creating the time and space to step outside their day-to-day problems to think creatively and to network with others. In this it is crucial that the content of the knowledge exchanged in engaging with academia is seen as relevant. This will be more likely where academics and practitioners have worked together in closer relationships to create joint agendas.
The realism approach that we took in our research, using in-depth interviews, has a number of advantages, but also some limitations. It is strong on contingent validity in getting information from appropriate information rich sources and allows for multiple perceptions of a single reality (Healey and Perry, 2000). We interviewed relevant respondents who had views on engagement from the different viewpoints of both academics and practitioners and also that of consultants/experts in the marketing field. The main limitation in our research approach relates to the generalisability of our findings. For example we identified that different attitude groups appear to exist within the practitioner community, but a quantitative study would be required to measure and test this phenomenon. We are also very aware that much of the ground covered in our research of the marketing field also relates to a significant extent to other disciplines in management. Hence a major opportunity for further research is the opportunity for replicating this research in other disciplines. Furthermore, our research is limited to the UK and replicating this research in other national contexts would also be beneficial for comparison.

Our research interviews highlighted positive and negative aspects of knowledge exchange. The good news is that our interviews confirmed that there is a gap that academics can fill, where critical reflection and knowledge of fundamental principles may be vital in dealing with contemporary business challenges. However, making it work will require a change in mindsets on both sides of the fence.

References
Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1989), *Qualitative Data Analysis*, Sage, California
### Appendix 1 Details of the interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of interview</th>
<th>Number of years relevant experience</th>
<th>Role and experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aca1</td>
<td>Telephone 35 years</td>
<td>Professor; company director; runs academic/practitioner network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aca2</td>
<td>Face to Face 20 years</td>
<td>MBA director; trustee of marketing professional body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aca3</td>
<td>Telephone 25 years +</td>
<td>Visiting professor; chief executive of an academic/practitioner forum; runs a university based consultancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aca4</td>
<td>Face to Face 15 years +</td>
<td>Professor; runs an academic/practitioner network; researches and publishes extensively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aca5</td>
<td>Face to Face 20 years</td>
<td>Programme director for marketing course; academic consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aca6</td>
<td>Face to Face 25 years +</td>
<td>Professor; extensive research and consultancy experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aca7</td>
<td>Face to Face 10 years</td>
<td>Senior lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practitioners</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pra1</td>
<td>Telephone 25 years</td>
<td>Executive within international company; completed MBA around 15 years ago; co-author of a number of business articles and books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pra2</td>
<td>Telephone 14 years</td>
<td>Executive with varied experience of working with academics in various capacities and of involvement in university run executive courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pra3</td>
<td>Telephone 16 years</td>
<td>Senior copywriter and creative in direct marketing agency; has worked in partnership with academics in the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pra4</td>
<td>Face to Face 28 years</td>
<td>Executive within major insurance company; fellow of CIM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pra5</td>
<td>Telephone 14 years</td>
<td>Executive with international company; marketing degree; experience of taking part in company sponsored university executive course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pra6</td>
<td>Telephone 5 years +</td>
<td>Executive within the food industry who has recently completed a part-time masters degree in a marketing related area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pra7</td>
<td>Face to Face 10 years +</td>
<td>Executive with extensive experience of working in direct marketing across a number of sectors; recently moved to work in the university sector in developing relationships with external organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consultants/experts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con1</td>
<td>Face to Face 18 years</td>
<td>Partner in consultancy; recently completed a DBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con2</td>
<td>Telephone 25 years</td>
<td>Partner in training consultancy; previously executive in international blue chip company; author of a number of business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con3</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con4</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con5</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con6</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con7</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>25 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>