Over the past decade or so there has been a gradual, often structural, separation between research teaching. Despite the fact the many academics had entered the profession to teach, the route to academic status and success is now widely viewed as being inextricably linked to publishing. There is ample evidence that RAE has reinforced the conventional lack of parity of esteem between research and teaching of which there is such abundant, and continuing, evidence. The RAE has also damaged curriculum innovation.
Boyer (1990) offered a now widely adopted typology of scholarships of:

1. **Discovery (advancing knowledge)**
2. **Integration (synthesising knowledge)**
3. **Service (advancing and applying knowledge)**
4. **Teaching (advancing and applying knowledge about how to teach and promote learning)**

**Management Research – the ongoing debate**

Management research is in the throes of a healthy debate on both its ontological status and the appropriateness of various research processes. This debate has been prompted partly by a recurring concern that much of the management research appearing in top-rated academic journals is of little relevance to most practitioners (see Schein, 1987; Gopinath and Hoffman 1995; Starkey and Madan, 2001). More recently, the debate on research process has begun to focus on the differences between two distinct research approaches, which have been labelled mode 1 and mode 2 knowledge production (Gibbons et al, 1994).
The Researcher-Practitioner Relevance Gap

Some of the recent literature makes a distinction between Mode 1 and Mode 2 research (Gibbons et al. 1994), notably Tranfield and Starkey (1998). Mode 1 is discipline based and rigorous, while Mode 2 is transdisciplinary and focused on practitioner relevance. Tranfield and Starkey, following Becher (1989), argue that management research has a weak theoretical unity, with a low sense of knowledge progression, a lack of disciplinary cohesion and shared purpose for research, and has a low concentration of researchers on particular topics (see also Whitley, 1984).

Knowledge produced in the context of application

This emphasises the problem-solving nature of mode 2 in that knowledge production is organised around a particular application as opposed to the codes of practice of a particular discipline. It is perhaps this feature of mode 2 which most explicitly and directly links it to the perceived problems of user-distance and practitioner-irrelevance of management research.
Anne Huff addressed issues of practitioner relevance, drawing attention to “mode 1.5” as a term which she used to denote the combination of disciplinary scientific rigour normally associated with mode 1 and the practically valued problem-solving orientation of mode 2 (Huff 2000). Further reflection led to a call for “Mode 3” knowledge production (Huff and Huff, 2001). This highlights a growing interest in the nature and role of practice-oriented research.

The need for researchers to avoid becoming trapped in either practice or academia in which they risk the perils of “epistemic drift” or “academic fundamentalism” respectively.
Questions pertaining to the relevance and rigour (or lack thereof) of scholarly research in business disciplines have been the focus of numerous articles in academic journals (Ruback and Innes 1988; Shrivastava 1987; Thomas and Tymon 1982; Wells 1993a). Assessment of academic research in the business disciplines that have appeared in the business press have been particularly critical, characterizing most published research as lacking managerial relevance.

There is concern for the schism between research and practice, the inherent communication difficulties between disciplines (Rogozinski, 1985; Morley, 1990) and the economic realities associated with gaining funding for research.
Most academic institutions fail to make any thoughtful efforts to integrate practice and scholarly research.

The main worry is splitting of the professional school into two worlds inhabited respectively by discipline- and profession-oriented faculties, the social system of practitioners on the one hand, and the social system of scientists in the relevant disciplines on the other.
The imperative to be practically useful is the dominant consideration in framing research aims, questions and practices which, given the dynamic nature of most organisations, “are produced under an aspect of continuous negotiation.” (Gibbons et al 1994, p3)

A lack of marketplace-directed research is proving to be another barrier to business school response.
• We have to prove our worth in both the academic and business communities,
• Co-designing the future
  – A paradigmatic view
  – An academic responsibility
  – Ethnographically speaking . . .

• The double hurdle of academic rigour + managerial relevance!

Pettigrew’s notion of the “double-hurdles” facing management research, and in particular the need for scholarly quality to be combined with practitioner relevance.
The academic research process (in Social Sciences) is turned to the past-conceptualization, literature review based on existing bodies of knowledge, “adapted” modelling, replication, similar research designs, (non-probabilistic sampling), equivalent measurement scaling, traditional/accepted/”fashionable” statistical analysis … and scant/limited “management implications … The “further research” syndrome is circular and self-fulfilling … All geared to find solid and robust academic foundations, but these cannot “shape” (react, anticipate, influence) the future in most cases …

We need to challenge conventional wisdom and try to generate new ideas and knowledge. If we insist on having just references, there will be no new knowledge and the discipline will suffer.
• We should endeavour to provide a way of making sense of contemporary management thinking and action so that business may have the benefit of ideas that can stimulate a process of critical strategic reflection.
• Academic research and innovation depend on cooperation, collaboration and sharing.

Couple research agenda with business realities.
While authors from academic institutions will always dominate the research literature, collaborative publications between practitioners and academics are likely to include greater consideration of management.

A review of empirical research on scientific publication led to the following conclusions. Three criteria are useful for identifying whether findings are important: replication, validity and usefulness. A fourth criterion, surprise, applies in some situations. Based on these criteria, important findings resulting from academic research in marketing seem to be rare. To a large extent, this rarity is due to a reward system that is built around subjective peer review. Rather than using peer review as a secret screening process, using an open process likely will improve papers and inform readers. Researchers, journals, business schools, funding agencies and professional organizations can all contribute to improving the process. For example, researchers should do directed research on papers that contribute to principles. Journals should invite papers that contribute to principles. Business school administrators should reward researchers who make important findings, and professional organizations should maintain websites that describe what is known about principles and what research is needed on principles.

(Scott B Armstrong, Journal of Business Research, 2002)
What is happening out there is different from what we are teaching in our textbooks and researching in our papers. We are missing important trends taking place in technology, in the organization, in operations and in the nature of competition, as well as in consumer behaviour!

- Is there a tendency in academic marketing curricula at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, to pay lip service only to the reference, or cognate, disciplines of, for example, accounting, finance, operations management and technology management?
- If there is, this tendency leads to the likelihood of academic researchers in marketing “reinventing the wheel” and being overly introspective and narrow in their treatment of their chosen topic.
- Encouraged by the RAE, many management academics are retreating further into the groves of the specialisation in which we write for and talk to ourselves . . .
- Much management research is directed to technical refinement which produces low-risk, “quick win” publications that are largely irrelevant or incomprehensible to practitioners . . .

(Hugh Wilmott 1998)
• It can be argued that much of the history of academic work within marketing has been of much detailed empirical work with occasional, often more conceptual excursions with a broader domain (Wensley 1995)

• It can be reasonably argued that, in general, much of better research in marketing can be characterised as empirically based and at a reasonable level of sophistication in terms of both method and techniques (Day and Wensley 1983)

• Despite these advantages, much of the research has failed to really illuminate the nature of a dynamic interactive process between informed participants and responsive markets (Wensley 1995)

• Our contribution and influence is increasingly confined to the role of operatives in teaching and research factories where the value of the product is identified by its label (e.g, four articles in “top refereed journals”, etc.) not its content or its use …

• Paradoxically, in an “age of information” where “knowledge management” is deemed to be crucial, the voice of academics is becoming weaker . . .

(Hugh Wilmott 1998)
Why? Academic Sense of
• Safeness
• Belongingness
• Referral
• Scientific research orientation in management has a rear-mirror . . .
• The traditional “turn to the past” (LR) can stifled innovative futures research . . .
• Memory instead of seminal thought?
• Dismissal of industry Anticipation Moves

There is a tendency among some to view relevance as being more important than rigor.
Ruback and Innes (1988), commenting on scholarly research in psychology noted that relevance of scholarly research to practitioners is a function of (1) the number of policy variables used as predictor variables and (2) the extent to which the dependent variables are of interest to practitioners. Along similar lines, the managerial relevance of scholarly research in business disciplines has been viewed as a function of the extent to which the research focuses on factors that managers can influence and examines effects that are of interest to managers.

Papers coming from the social science, economics, management and marketing disciplines exhibit no change in emphasis away from a descriptive focus towards results orientation, methodological consideration or theory development.
One avenue by which life-world colonisation may be interrupted is through a critical interpretive praxis where change occurs though active intervention and disruption of dominant discourses, both in the academic world and the social world of practice.

Daft and Lewin report the lack of relationship in theories of organization between usefulness and validity, observing that ‘the body of knowledge published in [organizational] academic journals has practically no audience in business or government’ (1990, p1).
For instance, Lee (1999) labelled as the instrumental model of practice research that entails the formulation, testing, and validation of a theory that specifies independent variables, dependent variables, and the relationships among them. Here, the dependent variables represent outcomes that practitioners are interested in achieving, and the independent variables represent factors that can be manipulated by practitioners.

Thomas and Tymon (1982) delineated the following as necessary properties of managerially relevant research:

- **Descriptive relevance**: the accuracy of research findings in capturing phenomena encountered by practitioners in organizational settings
- **Goal relevance**: the correspondence of outcome variables in a theory to factors that practitioners wish to influence
- **Operational validity**: the ability of practitioners to implement action implications of a theory by manipulating its causal variables
- **Nonobviousness**: the degree to which a theory meets or exceeds the complexity of common-sense theory already used by practitioners
- **Timeless**: the availability of research findings to practitioners in time to use them deal with problems
From A to Z, practically every topic that is the focus of scholarly research in marketing (e.g., advertising, branding, channels, distribution, e-commerce, franchising, global marketing, innovation, marketing ethics, new product development, pricing, quality, retailing, sales promotion, and strategy) is either integral to the practice of marketing, has public policy implications, or affects society at large. Consequently, as a field of study, marketing offers extensive opportunities for scholars to engage in research that has managerial, public policy, and/or societal relevance. Yet questions and concerns regarding the relevance of scholarly research in marketing persist.

For instance, it has been suggested that research participation and involvement in certain activities can be conducive to the grounding of scholarly research in managerial relevance.
Rigour

Research rigour is construed as encompassing careful design, execution, analysis, interpretation of results, and retention of data (Academy of Management 2002). Zmud (1996), characterized rigor as soundness in theoretical and conceptual development, methodological design and execution, interpretation of findings, and use of findings in extending theory or developing new theory. Shrivastava (1987) suggested the following criteria for assessing research rigour.

- **Conceptual Adequacy**: the extent to which a research program is grounded in a base discipline and uses a conceptual framework consistent with existing theories in the field
- **Methodological rigor**: the extent to which a research program uses analytical methods and objectively quantifiable data to empirically examine research questions
- **Accumulated empirical evidence**: the extent to which a research program has generated a substantial amount of accumulated empirical evidence supporting it.
Conceptual Rigor – Quality of Conceptual Development

- Consideration and treatment of relevant literature – concepts and theories
- Attention to definitional issues – precision and clarity of conceptual definitions
- Use of evidence to support position – conceptual reasoning underlying conceptual model and hypotheses
- Objectivity in the treatment of complementing and competing perspectives

Methodological Rigor – Quality of Empirical Research

- Appropriateness and robustness of research design
- Attention to measurement-related issues – construct operationalization, validity, and reliability
- Sample appropriateness, characteristics, and representativeness
- Appropriateness of methods of analysis/statistical procedures
- Accuracy and completeness in the reporting of results and procedures leading to the results
- Reliability and validity of empirical findings
Relevance Versus Rigor: The Tyranny of the “Or”

As pointed out by Hunt (2002), the rigor-relevance dichotomy wrongly assumes that research cannot be both rigorous and relevant.

On relevance sans rigor:
Unsubstantiated findings, conclusions with no adequate statistical support, and poorly developed concepts can mislead the reader, and if accepted and acted upon might lead to disastrous results. (Wind 1979:10 [editor, Journal of Marketing, 1978-1981])
On rigor sans relevance:
We should not abandon scholarly and rigorous scientific analysis. However, if these efforts result in modelling, explaining, or describing something that is not, then little if any managerial relevance can be extracted from these monumental efforts. (Lusch 1997:2 [editor, Journal of Marketing, 1996-1999])

The ultimate objective of marketing research is to enable marketing managers and public policy makers use their understanding of marketing phenomena to make more effective marketing decisions. (Weitz 1992:2 [editor, Journal of Marketing Research, 1991-1994])
BEYOND MANAGERIAL RELEVANCE: THE EXPANSIVE SCOPE OF MARKETING RELEVANCE

As pointed out by Hunt (2002), most marketing practitioners and some marketing academicians tend to perceive the entire scope of marketing to be profit/micro/normative (i.e. the entire domain of marketing to be the analysis and improvement of the decision-making processes of marketers).

Construing the managerial relevance of scholarly research in management solely in terms of the extent to which it focuses on decision variables that managers can influence and examines outcomes of interest to marketing managers may be restrictive and limiting. Studies that focus neither on actionable decision variables nor on outcome variables of interest to marketing managers can be managerially relevant too.
Scholarly research studies that enhance managers’ understanding of the organizational and environmental context in which firms operate and make decisions fall in this genre (e.g., research focusing on contextual factors such as the culture of countries in which a multinational firm operates). The potential contribution to management knowledge of such research resides in its extending extant theories by providing evidence of moderator variables that hold implications for actionable management practice.

In reference to managerial relevance, variants of the phrase “research focusing on decision variables that managers can manipulate and outcome variables that managers are interested in” are commonly invoked. However, it is reasonable to assume that the intended message is “research focusing on decision variables that managers can manipulate and/or outcome variables that managers are interested in.” In fact, by design, the scope of a large body of research with a measurement focus is often limited to either factors that a decision maker can influence or effects that a decision maker is interested in.
As Hunt (2002) pointed out, first, as members of the academy, we have a responsibility to respect, uphold and abide by the university’s core mission, that is, retailing, warehousing, and producing knowledge. Second, we must uphold its “grand compact” with society, that is, in exchange for academic freedom, we must strive for objective knowledge. Third, as a professional discipline we have a responsibility to keep in mind that society is the ultimate client of the knowledge we produce and management practitioners are intermediate clients.

The Many Facets of Relevance
Consider, for instance, the following facets of relevance of scholarly research in general:
- Direct versus indirect relevance
- Latent relevance
- Relevance articulated ex-ante by the researcher versus becoming apparent ex-post to the reader
- Immediacy of relevance
- First-order versus second-order relevance
- Breadth of relevance
- Conceptual versus instrumental relevance
- Duration of relevance (enduring versus limited)
Direct versus indirect relevance. The managerial relevance of a significant body of scholarly research in business tends to be indirect and somewhat removed rather than direct.

Latent relevance. The notion of latent relevance serves to underscore the inherent challenges that journal editors and reviewers are faced with when striving to make an objective assessment of the magnitude of potential relevance of a research study.
The editor of any journal cannot ignore that many innovative concepts and techniques, like fresh teabags in hot water, at first appear colourless and only with time reveal their impact. Hence, an assessment of the long-term impact and relevance of creative thinking in a manuscript may not be apparent in the review process. (Mahajan 1995:iii [editor, Journal of Marketing Research, 1994-1997])

**Immediacy of relevance.** There is often a tendency to make an assessment of the value of a scholarly research study from the standpoint of its potential relevance in the immediate time horizon.
Much of intellectually exciting research in marketing is in areas where short-term application is not likely to occur. While research impact is always satisfying (after all, we work for business schools), there should still be room for research contributions that do not have obvious, short-term uses. As always, the market mechanism (scholarly journals and research supplier adoption) provides an evaluation of research paper quality, relevance and impact. (Green 1997)

“The university is one of very few social institutions where immediate usefulness is not a requirement. Scholarship that is not immediately useful may elevate society” (Wells 1993b)
First-order versus second-order relevance. In addition to intended relevance articulated ex ante, it is conceivable that ex post, the potential relevance of a specific research endeavour in other contexts might become apparent.

In the field of marketing, it is not uncommon for a research study focusing on a substantive issue in a particular subfield within marketing (e.g., advertising) to have a significant impact on future research in other subfields within marketing as a consequence of its methodological contribution.
For example, it is conceivable that the first meta-analysis study on a substantive issue in marketing provided the impetus for researchers to undertake meta-analysis studies of other substantive issues in marketing such as customer satisfaction, innovation, market pioneering, pricing, and sales management.

Such possibilities point to the potential first-order relevance (the potential contribution of a particular research study to knowledge in a subfield within the substantive domain of management) and second-order relevance (the potential impact of the study on future research in other fields of study within the domain of management).
RELEVANCE AND RIGOR OF ACCUMULATED KNOWLEDGE AT THE DISCIPLINE LEVEL

Consider, for instance, the implications of the following on the advancement of the field of management;

• Conceptual definitions and construct operationalizations being idiosyncratic to individual studies (or subsets of studies), coupled with the tendency to propose new definitions for even fairly well established constructs, building on numerous other definitions of the construct advanced to date.

• Proliferation of new constructs, coupled with lack of clear articulation of how a newly proposed construct aids in enhancing our understanding of a phenomenon of interest, and is conceptually distinct from related constructs.
Kmetz’s (2002) enumeration of the following as impediments to the advancement of the field of organizational science seem to ring true in the context of the field of management as well:

- Lack of baseline nomenclature and operationalizations inhibiting meaningful comparison and cumulation of research across studies
- Absence of standardised definitions and operationalizations resulting in a lack of a common basis for interpretation of research focusing on specific variables and relationships
- Ambiguity concerning what exactly is being measured due to the absence of standardised definitions.

In this regard, Kinnear (1999), a former editor of the *Journal of Marketing* and the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, noted, “At the most elementary level, it is almost impossible to do high-quality research that builds the state of knowledge without a set of agreed definitions.” (p. 113).
There are multiple (far too many) definitions and operationalizations of constructs central to our field of study. Also, proliferation of new constructs whose conceptual distinctiveness relative to extant constructs and their potential to shed new insights into understanding of a phenomenon not being clearly articulated.

The longitudinal tracer is a middle range methodology for involving practitioners more closely with the research process.
‘move toward theories of the middle range … Theories [that] are solutions to problems that contain a limited number of assumptions and considerable accuracy and detail in the problem specification. The scope of the problem is also of manageable size. To look for theories of the middle range is to prefigure problems in such a way that the number of opportunities to discover solutions is increased without becoming infinite. (Weick, 1989, p. 521)’

The tracer is a methodological middle-range approach that takes account of relevancy and which involves practitioners in the research process. The methodological approach is consistent with middle-range theory and thinking, and involves skeletal prior theory, tags, a practitioner network, and continuous reflexivity. The longitudinal tracer study can be a useful middle-range solution to help close the researcher-practioner gap.
The question is how to bridge the researcher-practitioner gap. One solution is middle range thinking.

Middle Range Thinking

Bacharach (1989) argues that management researchers who seek to influence practice are really craft-persons who look for limited or middle range explanations for organisational phenomena. Typically, rigour is to some extent compromised for relevance and the achievement of solvable problems. Weick (1989) suggests that organisational research should.
The gap can only be bridged by a position that is high in both theoretical/methodological rigour and practical relevance.

One of the important questions relates to the concentration of research 1) might academic research be marginalised compared to other research sectors in the near future, and under what conditions? 2) will academic research become more concentrated in a few institutions in the future (or carried out by specialised staff within institutions) and will the distinction between “research” and “scholarship” spread in the future? and 3) how might this affect the profiles of research in different countries?
Academic leadership and research excellence depends on having a sense of the big changes and acting on them before they are obvious to everyone else ...! ... Yes, No or Maybe!