

ODN Conference 2014 Open Space Notes, 10/18/2014

Theme: How do we connect practice and theory?

Convener: Eric Sanders

Participants: Natalia Martynova, Seth Keil, Jackie W., Tom Van Dijck, Catherine, Ireti Akinola

Discussion/Recommendations:

We had a great discussion, and captured the following points. We did not come up with a recommendation of how to proceed in connecting practice and theory.

- 1) There is a disconnect between classical academics and practitioners.
 - a. This is especially apparent with adjunct faculty members who are practitioners, teaching in a Master's program.
- 2) How long does it take to develop a good theory?
 - a. Warner Burke has been studying learning agility for five years, and is still working on a good theory for it.
- 3) Practice calls for problem solutions. Theory supports those solutions.
- 4) Case studies report best practices, and may or may not connect them to theory, depending on who is writing them.
- 5) Theory may be wrong (e.g. Maslow's hierarchy of needs), but practitioners still may find it useful.
- 6) A caveat about theory: All models are simplifications of reality.
 - a. Theories cannot be all-inclusive, and account for every possible variable.
- 7) See Schein's "Clinical Perspective on Fieldwork" (1986) for an excellent example of applying social psychology theory in field research.
- 8) Context matters (for practice and theory). For example, "benchmarking" best practices in one firm (or set of firms) may not apply to other firms.
- 9) Books are written for particular audiences
 - a. Texts are generally written for scholars and not for practitioners.
 - b. "Business books" are generally written for practitioners and not for scholars.
- 10) Some professionals bridge the gap between the two camps, called by different names: Hybrids, scholar-practitioners, practitioner-researchers, intervener-researchers, etc.
- 11) Academics force scholars to be "narrow and deep" (focused), while practice requires us to be "broad" (with varying depth).
- 12) Bridging process
 - a. Academics can take a sabbatical to take the practical knowledge gained through client work, reflect and write for both communities (e.g. Chris Worley).
- 13) Scholar-practitioners who excel in bridging between academia and practice include Edgar Schein, Peter Block, Jim Collins, Ed Lawler, Chris Worley and David Sibbet.

Theme: How do we as OD practitioners show results that matter to our clients?

Convener: Eric Sanders

Participants: Shirley Grass, Alicia Smith, Kevin Lamb, Don Humpet, Aurora Almand

Discussion/Recommendations:

Unfortunately, I lost my notes for this session. You may at least want to record the names of the participants.