Chapter 20
Implementation Concerns of Scholar–Practitioners: A Pilot Study of the Link between Research and Practice

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ABSTRACT
The challenge of combining research and practice in HRD has led to continuing debate on who are scholar-practitioners and how they integrate research and practice in the workplace. This qualitative collective case study provides insights from seven scholar-practitioners to help HRD professionals and researchers understand implementation concerns of scholar-practitioners. The findings reveal scholar-practitioners’ perceptions of their roles, the link between research and practice, and actions they took to overcome barriers and challenges related to integrating research and practice. This pilot study can serve as a benchmark for future studies regarding successful integration of research and practice in HRD.

INTRODUCTION
Scholars have been trying to understand how professionals engage themselves in both research and practice to better disseminate research findings in the workplace. In this effort, many terms have been used to describe this group of professionals such as research practitioner (Lynham, 2002), scientist-practitioners (Brewerton & Millward, as cited in Hamlin, 2002; Muchinsky, 2004), scholar-practitioners (Graham & Kormanik, 2004), practitioner-theorists (Lynham, 2002), scholarly practitioners (Ruona, 1999), and reflective practitioners (Jacobs, 1999). Ruona (1999)
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theorized and differentiated HRD practitioners by
categorizing them into four types—atheoretical
practitioners, practitioners, reflective practitio-
ners, and scholarly practitioners.

- Athenetical practitioners were defined as
having very little grounding in theory, per-
haps no relevant educational qualifications
or affiliation with professional associa-
tions, lacking the knowledge of sound and
credible resources, and lacking the skills to
consult and interpret scholarly resources.
- Practitioners were defined as meeting the
minimum standards of the profession,
having a mastery of the common body of
knowledge, continually updating of that
knowledge, having a willingness to engage
in dialogue, having the ability to strategi-
cally and effectively analyze/use scholarly
resources and theory in practice, and the
ability to “sell” theory to gain support of
key stakeholders.
- Reflective practitioners were defined as
meeting the standards of the Practitioner
but also critically reflecting on their prac-
tice and consulting scholarly resources as a
basis for the improvement of their practice.
- Scholarly practitioners were defined as
meeting the standards of both Practitioner
and Reflective Practitioner, and also con-
tributing to theory through research, pub-
lication in both refereed and non-refereed
journals, involvement in scholarly confer-
ences, and having a goal of further devel-
opment of the field of HRD (p. 895).

We adopted Short’s definition and used it as
a guide for the selection of participants because
it encompasses Ruona’s reflective and scholar
practitioners definitions.

HRD scholar-practitioners operate as a bridge
between HRD research and HRD practice to
improve the understanding and practice of HRD.
They ground their practice in research and theory,
they are champions of research and theory in the
workplace and in professional associations, they
conduct research, and they disseminate findings
from their own research and practice. They are
partners with academics and with other practi-
tioners (p. 261).

HRD is not alone in its quest to understand
and define the link between research and practice
(Short, 2006b, 2006c; Short, Keefer, & Stone,
2006). In fact, the scholar-practitioner divide has
also been noted and explored across many different
fields including psychology, nursing, education
and business (e.g., Amabile et al., 2001; Argyris,
1985; Burack, 1999; Corwin & Louis, 1982; Dean
& Bowen, 1994; Gray & Wood, 1991; Hackman,
1985; Mohrman, Gibson, & Mohrman, 2001;
Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001; Van de Ven &
Johnson, 2006).

The gap between research and practice is
widely recognized by the HRD community and
we are constantly searching for ways to connect
the divide. From Estabrooks (1999) we know that
“many factors get in the way of using research,
and empirically, we know very little about what
makes research use happen or not happen” (p.
15). The HRD community remains unclear about
the role of HRD scholar-practitioners - how they
perceive the relationship between research and
practice and more importantly, how they combine
these two aspects in the workplace.

Implementation concerns contributes to the
gap between theory and practice, because theorists
“are relatively unconcerned with how their theo-
ries, principles and methods are put into practice
in arenas outside of academy study,” whereas
practitioners are “deeply concerned with matters
of implementation because what they do occurs in
arenas not created primarily for scientific study”
(Muchinsky, 2004, p. 208). Muchinsky further
suggested that there be a linkage between organi-
zational change and implementation and that the
scientist and practitioner both could benefit from
a better understanding of the linkage. Specifically,
Muchinsky notes that “issues of implementation
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