

Why the ‘great divide’?

Within academia, research is being conducted on corporate issues that will someday drive effectiveness in organizations. Yet, there appears to be no deliberate means to keep corporate Canada informed of what is being studied, nor to keep academia informed of the research needs of corporate Canada.

How can we close what executive Edmond Mellina refers to as the “great divide”? He did us a service by curating a presentation allowing three academics to present their current research.

The unspoken question in the session was “Why the great divide”? Are academics deliberately withholding, waiting to release the next killer business book? Are they concerned about a loss of control? Are OD and OE practitioners deliberately not involving



Michael Clark
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themselves in academic research?

If both parties had the will, the solution would inevitably involve a closer alignment. Partnership would seem to benefit both parties: research funding in exchange for a strategic competitive advantage;

access to real-world data in exchange for new insights; and work for researchers in exchange for pre-recruited talent.

The presentations revealed some intriguing insights. Among the five research topics presented, two stood out from an organizational effectiveness perspective.

Catherine Connelly revealed a barrier to effectiveness that has been hiding in plain sight. Intentionally withholding knowledge, a common occurrence at organizations, creates distrust and interferes with potential. And though our natural tendency is to avoid difficult conversations by being evasive or playing dumb, it is by being forthright about why we are hiding knowledge that we negatively impact trust the least. Further, “hidiers” suffer a reduced ability to be creative.

Elizabeth Kurucz has an interesting perspective on complexity. Her thesis is that navigating complexity creates more stakeholder value than reducing complexity. We tend to react to complexity by simplifying the situation into trade-offs between stakeholders, whereas Kurucz’s model proposes that by holding the competing tensions in balance, more shareholder value is created.

Mellina’s session highlighted the need for a clearinghouse of corporate oriented research where academia and business can bridge the great divide.

Michael Clark is director of sales and marketing at Forrest & Company. Forrest is an organizational transformation firm, with over 25 years experience in developing the organizational and leadership capacity in organizations.