

Engaged Scholarship and the Creation of Useful Organizational Knowledge

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Engaged scholarship represents one way for making our research relevant to organizational practitioners by bridging the gap between theory and practice. Engaged scholarship is viewed as a form of collaborative inquiry between academics and practitioners that leverages their different perspectives to generate useful organizational knowledge. We explore the possibilities associated with engaged scholarship in three specific contexts: (1) theory-building and research, (2) pedagogy, teaching, and education, and (3) institutional opportunities and constraints as they relate to issues of tenure and promotion and creation of the engaged campus.

Keywords: Engaged Scholarship; Theory; Practice; Collaborative Inquiry

There is growing concern among industrial-organizational psychologists, management scholars, and organizational communication researchers about the relevance of the theory and research they produce in terms of informing practice, influencing the way organizations operate, and setting public policy (Anderson, Herriot, & Hodgkinson, 2001; Aram & Salipante, 2003; Shapiro & Rynes, 2005; Simpson & Shockley-Zalabak, 2005). The perceived lack of relevance of academic theory and research is often attributed to the chasm between theory and practice that is created by important differences in the epistemological and ontological commitments of academic and practitioner communities (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). Academic scholars have traditionally been concerned with the construction of scientific knowledge, which tends to be decontextualized and based on technical rationality, while practitioners are more concerned with practical knowledge that focuses on making moral choices about how to act in contingent situations. Scientific and practical knowledge tend to be viewed as mutually exclusive with scientific knowledge occupying a privileged position. Thus, we can make our scholarship socially relevant

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and meaningful to the public by translating our findings into practice and targeting relevant professional communities to disseminate this information (Petronio, 1999; Tracy, 2002).

The notion that we can bridge the theory–practice gap through the scholarship of translation represents an important strategy for addressing the issue of making our work relevant to the public. However, we suggest that there is a second strategy, which complements our current efforts to develop theory and research that addresses practical problems and enables practice—a strategy of engaged scholarship. We begin this essay by articulating the notion of engaged scholarship, and then explore how it may influence the way we conduct our research and educate others about taking a communication perspective toward organizations. We conclude with a discussion of the ways in which our academic institutions and professional organizations can facilitate the performance of engaged scholarship in research and pedagogical settings.

Articulating Engaged Scholarship

Since 2001 in Aspen, Colorado, a conference on engaged scholarship and organizations has been held every summer. Affectionately known as the “Aspen Conference,” these conferences have provided a valuable conversational space to explore what it means to do engaged organizational communication scholarship. Simpson and Shockley-Zalabak’s (2005) edited volume of essays emerging from those initial conversations at Aspen reflects the issues, concerns, and dilemmas associated with performing engaged scholarship. What is striking about this edited volume is how the contributing authors discourse engaged scholarship. Engagement highlights the importance of scholars being deeply passionate, dedicated, and involved in their subject matter. The idea of engagement also evokes a different kind of working relationship with stakeholders—a relationship that emphasizes reflexivity and collaborative learning with stakeholders that is aimed at developing theoretical and practical knowledge (Eisenberg, 2005; Seibold, 2005; Simpson, 2005; Stohl, 2005). The notion of scholarship appears to be relatively uncontested, and implicitly seems to be constructed as the production of some tangible artifact that is peer reviewed and is disseminated to an academic or professional community so that others can reflect on it, learn from it, and build on it.

The centrality of collaboration between scholars and practitioners to produce knowledge comports well with Van de Ven and Johnson’s (2006) definition of engaged scholarship as a, “collaborative form of inquiry in which academics and practitioners leverage their different perspectives and competencies to coproduce knowledge about a complex problem or phenomenon that exists under conditions of uncertainty found in the world” (p. 803). Using the concept of arbitrage, Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) contend that theory and practice reflect distinct forms of knowledge that need to be placed in a dialectical relationship with each other so that we can explore how each enriches the other. Putting theory and practice in relationship with each other is not an intellectual cognitive activity that can be

constructed in one's head; rather, it is an embodied relational activity that necessitates bringing members of scholarly and practitioner communities into conversation with one another. Engaged scholarship privileges the diversity of perspectives that theorists and practitioners bring to making sense of a problem and honors their unique knowledge and expertise as valid. The shift toward incorporating diversity into one's inquiry means that a crucial challenge of doing engaged scholarship is creative conflict management; potential conflicts over power and knowledge must be worked out among the investigators and stakeholders.

Engaged scholarship conceptualizes the theory–practice divide as a knowledge production problem as opposed to a knowledge transfer problem. When we engage practitioners in our theory and research, we are more likely to ask and address important questions that are of interest to them and develop more robust analyses and theories that will have greater relevance and practical import to the public. The question becomes: Which practices facilitate the engagement of theorists and practitioners to produce robust and useful knowledge?

We use Van de Ven and Johnson's (2006) framework for pursuing engaged scholarship as a way of organizing a variety of strategies for working with the distinct perspectives of scholars and practitioners. We begin by exploring the performance of engaged scholarship as it relates to theory-building and research.

Theory-Building and Research

Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) highlight five strategies for encouraging and enriching the mutual engagement of scholars and practitioners. First, design research projects that address “big” questions or problems that are grounded in reality. When we ask big questions, they are likely to exceed our individual abilities, making it highly unlikely that we can answer them by ourselves. This requires us to reach out—to other scholars in the discipline, to scholars outside our home discipline, and to practitioners—to help us work out answers to our questions. Drawing on Caswill and Shove (2000), they point out that big questions are more likely to engage practitioners because practitioners are “often more attracted by new ideas and concepts than by empirical material” (p. 221). There are many sources of inspiration for creating big questions, such as focusing on concrete problems in the field, paying attention to popular discourses of organizations and work in contemporary publications, and moving out in the world and utilizing volunteer and consulting experiences (Barge, 1994; Cheney, Wihelmasson, & Zorn, 2002; Tracy, 2002). When we begin to engage with practitioners in the field, we begin to develop a better sense of the big questions that might attract the interest of both scholars and practitioners.

Second, design the research project to be a collaborative learning community. Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) argue that one of most commonly agreed-upon strategies for “improving the exchange and knowledge between researchers and practitioners is for academics to collaborate with practitioners in designing, conducting, and implementing research in real-world settings” (p. 811). By bringing in diverse voices from outside our disciplinary home, we can gain insight into the richness of the

phenomenon we are studying and gain clues as to how to integrate these different perspectives into a rich robust research question, design, and analysis. Weick (2007) argues that the richness of our interpretations depends on the variety of lenses we use to create different readings of the situation. Designing research projects as collaborative learning communities creates the possibility of positioning practitioners as fully-voiced partners in the development of actionable knowledge.

Third, design the study for an extended duration. Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) suggest: “[T]he time spent on site is likely to bring the researcher closer to the phenomenon he or she is studying, as well as increase his or her awareness of the ways in which organizational members are framing the topic or problem under investigation” (p. 813). They observe that spending extended time at the research site has two primary advantages: it increases the likelihood that the organization will implement the research findings (Lawler, Morhman, Morhman, Ledford, & Cummings, 1985), and it is more likely to be perceived as making a scholarly contribution (Rynes, McNatt, & Bretz, 1999). Counterintuitively, it may be more important for experienced scholars to stay longer in the field and get closer to the phenomenon of interest. Tracy (2002) points out that as scholars “become more experienced and specialized, the impetus for research direction has a tendency to shift from problems in the field to our files bulging with articles and past conference papers that neatly lay out favorite theoretical phenomena” (p. 86). The longer we stay in the field, the more likely we are to retain our curiosity about the uniqueness of the organization and the people we work with and let our curiosity, rather than our pet theories and frameworks, drive the research.

Fourth, employ multiple models and methods to study the problem. As Bateson (1972) argues, there is a difference between data, unconnected bits about a system (i.e., facts about a system such as “Our current turnover rate is 5%”), and information which connects two pieces of data together in a relationship (i.e., “Our turnover rate has doubled from 2.5% last year to 5% this year”). When we use one theory or method to explore a phenomenon, we are creating data in the sense that we have no basis for comparing our interpretation or data to another. When we use, compare, and contrast multiple models and methods, then we are able to develop and articulate competing explanations and make critical choices about which explanations we find more useful. As Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) contend, we are more likely to advance theory and practice when we test rival hypotheses because it “provides the insurance of a win-win outcome for investigators—no matter what test results are obtained, the research, if properly executed, will make an important contribution” (p. 814).

Finally, investigators should reflect on their assumptions about scholarship and the roles of researchers. It is tempting to equate the notion of engaged scholarship with action research, as it involves intimately working with practitioners and managing their participation in the design and conduct of the study. However, traditional researchers in the hypothetico-deductive vein may also use the idea of arbitrage and engaged scholarship as they conduct their research. Using Schon (1983) as inspiration, Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) note that traditional forms of research

and action research both emphasize the importance of the following: “to learn to observe, to develop relationships with clients and the people being studied, to listen attentively, to elicit information in conversations and interviews, and to use structured devices for gathering and analyzing data” (p. 815). Whether one adopts a more normative (Seibold, 2005) or critical-interpretive (Broadfoot, 2005) approach to organizational communication, it is still possible to engage in the kind of engaged scholarship envisioned here. What is subject to change is how scholars live out these ideas within their practice according to the research tradition they locate themselves within.

Pedagogy, Teaching, and Education

If we adopt a view of engaged scholarship as knowledge production and collaborative inquiry between scholars and practitioners, how does engaged scholarship connect with pedagogy, teaching, and education? To answer this question, it is important to distinguish among teaching, scholarly teaching, and the scholarship of teaching and learning (Fincher & Work, 2006; McKinney, 2004; Richlin, 2001). Teaching refers to the way learning activities and pedagogy are structured to promote learning about the important theories, concepts, and research that constitute disciplinary or domain knowledge. Scholarly teaching occurs when educators position themselves as reflective practitioners (Schon, 1983) by designing interventions that are purposefully structured to enhance learning, monitoring results such as student performance, inviting peer review of their intervention and its consequences, and altering their teaching in light of their findings. Scholarly teaching moves teachers to become action researchers and to inquire into their practice and its effects. The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) extends scholarly teaching by producing a tangible artifact that is subjected to peer review and is publicly disseminated so that others can learn from and elaborate on it. The normative behavior we might associate with the SoTL would include “publishing in pedagogically oriented journals, participating in teaching conferences, authoring chapters and books on the scholarship of teaching and learning, and serving on the editorial boards of pedagogical journals” (Henderson & Buchanan, 2007, p. 529).

These distinctions among teaching, scholarly teaching, and the scholarship of teaching and learning have three important implications for the connection between engaged scholarship and pedagogy.

First, when we embrace engaged scholarship, in our teaching we emphasize structuring our course content in ways that pay attention to how theory and practice intertwine in the material we present. A typical suggestion for creating theory–practice integration within pedagogical settings is to develop special topic classes that address real-world issues, problems, and dilemmas such as the new economy, the environment, globalization, quality of work life, and managing difference (Cheney et al., 2002; Simpson & Allen, 2005). We suspect that, similarly to practitioners, students are more engaged by new ideas and issues than by theories and research, so the quest becomes how to develop exciting topics, dilemmas, and problems for

discussion that create a context for showing how theory and research can be used to address them in meaningful ways.

A more radical alternative for structuring course content is to arbitrage the knowledge of differing communities of practice by involving them in course design. Blood (2006) suggests that we should move beyond limiting our involvement with practitioners to having them make classroom presentations and asking them to participate actively in the design of our courses. In a slightly different vein, Turner's (2005) issue-based learning model for designing undergraduate and graduate organizational communication classes invites students to become collaborators in determining areas of interest for the class. In both instances, by taking into account the interests and curiosities of differing communities of practice, educators should be able to generate course-level learning goals that contain actionable knowledge, about what students should be able to do in relation to the professional roles they are preparing for (Blood, 2006).

Second, engaged scholarship focuses the attention of scholarly teachers to reflect on the kinds of learning strategies, interventions, methods, techniques, and activities that facilitate students' ability to integrate theory and practice and engage in *praxis*. Excellent teaching has always emphasized the importance of students being able to read organizational situations and develop lines of actions that address emergent issues. Engaged scholarship as it relates to student learning places an even higher emphasis on students being able to read *and write* situations. Developing *praxis* requires students to assemble an eclectic set of theories, tools, and concepts to draw on so they can make sense of situations and make wise choices about how to act (Morgan, 1999; Seibold, 2005). Students need to develop their phronetic capabilities to improvise, because wise action is never about the straightforward application of a single theory to sort out what to do next; wise action is about acting in the moment, improvising with the available theoretical and practical materials at hand, and engaging in *bricolage* to respond to the unique circumstances constituting a situation (Barge & Little, 2002).

Engaged scholarly teaching is concerned with creating spaces where students can reflect on their communicative experiences and practices with a variety of theoretical and conceptual tools that make "persistent patterns both visible and discussable by moving communication from practical (tacit) to discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1986)" (Eisenberg, 2005, pp. 115–116). A variety of pedagogical techniques exist for creating the kind of reflective space we are suggesting. Blood (2006) argues that we, as individual faculty members, can structure course projects and exercises around practitioner issues whereby students apply concepts to simulations, and structure learning experiences such that students must relate concepts to their own individual work situations. For example, Scott, Shaw, Timmerman, Volker, and Quinn (1999) offer a compelling example of how to use organizational communication audits to teach students and employees important principles and ideas concerning organizational communication. Mechanisms such as service learning, internships, and case work (Van de Ven & Zlotkowski, 2005) also allow students to become aware of both scientific and practical communities of practice. The integration of theory and

practice is one of the commonly cited benefits for including service learning projects in one's pedagogical practice (Oster-Aaland, Sellnow, Nelson, & Pearson, 2004).

Third, according to the SoTL, the lessons teachers learn about ways to close the theory–practice divide in the classroom need to be captured in the form of artifacts that can be distributed to others, so that others can learn from and build on these lessons in their own educational contexts. Engaged scholarship emphasizes the importance of teacher-scholars disseminating their learning to others through essays, books, and book chapters. For example, within the field of organizational communication, outlets such as *Communication Education* and *Communication Teacher* exist to provide organizational communication scholars with the opportunity to disseminate their scholarship related to teaching and learning. Outside our discipline a variety of journals such as *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, *Journal of Management Education*, and *Management Learning* offer opportunities to share our knowledge regarding theory–practice integration within pedagogical contexts. Books on case studies within the organizational communication discipline also offer the chance to share our scholarship in practical ways (Keyton & Shockley-Zalabak, 2007).

We also need to be proactive in helping our graduate students apply and use what they are learning in their coursework because there is a huge difference between studying organizational communication and doing organizational communication (Allen, 2002; Downs, 1999). When our graduate students can appreciate fully the way communication ideas, concepts, and principles are lived in practice by embodied persons, they gain insight that can improve their research and teaching. Consider Ashcraft's (2002) concern with the way graduate programs downplay the practical implications of scholarship:

I suspect our graduate program at the University of Utah is not the only one where students learn best how to contrast perspectives and paradigms, assume and defend stances, criticize (or reduce and demonize?) empiricism, and tout the glories of critical or interpretive approaches. I worry that by the time they reach comprehensive exams and dissertations we have placed too little emphasis on how to look for conceptual alliances, ask useful questions, gather and analyze data, and explain how research is practically meaningful. (p. 115)

Our graduate programs and pedagogy typically emphasize theoretical analysis and foreground the deconstruction of organizational life, but are relatively light regarding the ways practice can be used to reconstruct organizational life in ways that liberate human potential.

If we take the integration of theory and practice seriously, what can communication graduate programs do to structure their curriculum to facilitate M.A. and Ph.D. students' ability to become engaged organizational communication scholars? Given our view that engaged scholarship regards knowledge production, it would be important for graduate programs to revisit their communication theory and research methods course sequence and to assess to what degree the coursework emphasizes such topics as theory–practice integration (Turner, 2005), forms of practical theorizing (Barge, 2001; Barge & Craig, in press; Craig & Tracy, 1995), and

collaborative research methodologies (Van de Ven, 2007). Similarly, designing topical seminars that reflect practical issues and course projects that move students to address theory–practice relationships would be paramount.

Perhaps the most important action that designers of graduate programs can take is to set up processes whereby students are positioned to reflect consciously and seriously upon what it means to be an engaged scholar as opposed to a researcher. Drawing on Russell Jacoby's (1987) *The Last Intellectuals*, Harmon (2006) argues that the politics of tenure has replaced the politics of culture in U.S. universities. Harmon (2006) explains:

Esoteric technical criteria governing the insulated world of academic careerism, he [Jacoby] argued, had driven out of the universities intellectuals who write, for an audience of broadly educated readers, about critical practice and moral issues of the day. Filling the void created by the exit of intellectuals, *research*, along with its concomitant preoccupation with method, came to be regarded in the most reverent of tones, while those few in the academy who continued to speak of scholarship risked being considered quaint. As a result the Ph.D.—which, it should be remembered, stands for Doctor of Philosophy—is now, and almost without objection from anyone, defined as a “research degree.” (p. 239)

Harmon's contention is that when we discourse ourselves as researchers, we may unintentionally foreground the importance of methods and problems that are of concern to a relatively small academic community, whereas the discourse of scholarship may foreground the centrality of ideas and their relation to larger cultural or societal issues. We suggest that an important way in which to focus future faculty on successfully bridging theory and practice is to get them to reflect on this issue at the beginning of their careers.

There are several possible opportunities for fostering graduate students' reflection on engaged scholarship, including departmental colloquia on the topic, inserting theory–practice issues into the required communication theory and research methods sequence, and the development of topical seminars. However, our sense is that if graduate students are to take the ideas of engaged scholarship seriously, then we need to move beyond offering the occasional special topics seminar on engaged scholarship and rework our existing procedures and institutional practices in ways that connect our students' development of professional identity with engaged scholarship. Specifically, we suggest that Ph.D. programs should pay renewed attention to program of study meetings and the construction of professional identity papers to develop the connection between professional identity and engaged scholarship. Program of study meetings offer a rich opportunity to engage students in important questions such as: What significant issues, problems, or dilemmas does your scholarship address? What is theoretically interesting about your work? Who would you like outside the academy to read your work? What new ideas, methods, or techniques does it suggest for other professionals and practitioners? If you were a wildly successful scholar and 20 years from now were asked to highlight three important learnings from your scholarship for practitioners, what would they be? What are the big ideas from your scholarship that would be of utility for

practitioners? Program of study meetings should be coupled with requiring students to submit professional identity papers. We are intrigued by the University of Colorado-Boulder's practice of having Ph.D. students write a professional identity paper throughout their program of study. At the end of their first year of study, Ph.D. students are asked to write a two-to-four-page, single-spaced paper that outlines their professional aspirations and what they see as the important burning issues that their scholarship addresses. This paper is revised every year until they complete the program. When program of study meetings focus on the theoretical and practical elements of students' scholarship, and there is sustained inquiry into their professional identity through the use of identity papers, we suspect that future faculty will be better prepared to do engaged scholarship.

Institutional Opportunities and Constraints

To this point we have been describing engaged scholarship from the perspective of the scholar in relationship to the creation of useful knowledge for both research and pedagogy. It is important to recognize, however, that scholarship, whether engaged or more traditional, occurs within the context of larger institutions where traditions, values, and constraints influence all forms of activity. To advance our argument for increased engaged scholarship requires us to examine opportunities and constraints within the academic institutions and professional associations in which engaged scholarship is most likely to be situated.

In a very real sense the opportunities for academic institutions and professional associations to support, encourage, and value engaged scholarship are as significant as the opportunities for individual scholars and students. Criticism of higher education echoes in the popular press and the halls of government, and is heard from the public at large, parents, and students. The last decade has seen the largest decline in public financial support for higher education in the history of the country. In his powerful call for change, Ernest Boyer's (1990) seminal *Scholarship Reconsidered* describes higher education's inability to tackle significant issues. Boyer contends: "[R]arely have members of the academy succeeded in discovering the emerging issues and bringing them vividly to the attention of the public" (p. 105). Simpson (2005) frames the criticism from a communicative perspective: "[T]he university, as an institution, has often been criticized for being more 'rhetorically engaged' than 'really engaged'" (p. 260). In response to these criticisms and concerns, DeWine (2005) concludes: "Calls for scholarship of engagement in many ways are calls for higher education to be a better citizen. We are asking faculty to make a commitment to solving more of society's problems and enhancing our lived experiences" (p. 199). In essence, DeWine is describing the opportunities academic institutions and professional associations have for transforming themselves by placing renewed value on the ways in which the creation of knowledge serves the world.

The challenges to this transformation are numerous. Academic prestige, its definition and processes to support the enhancement of prestige, may be one of

the most significant obstacles to change and transformation. As DeWine (2005) suggests:

Academic administrators want faculty activities and research to bring recognition and prestige to their campus. The degree to which administrators can increase the national profile of their institutions can also have a direct correlation on their individual reputations. Some senior faculty members may also believe their personal prestige will be enhanced if junior faculty members get their name and institutional affiliation published in mainstream journals. Frequently, those who are conducting action research, community-based research, or applied research have been told that their research does not “count” in any significant way and that they should abandon such lines of research if they want to achieve tenure. (p. 192)

DeWine concludes:

Sometimes, this narrow definition of research is established by administrators and sometimes by the faculty members themselves but the results are the same. A major study of 1,424 faculty members in five types of colleges and universities and four academic disciplines (Braxton, Luckey, & Helland, 2002, p. iv) provides evidence for this claim. The study concluded, “the scholarship of discovery persists as the most legitimate and preferred objective of faculty scholarly engagement across the spectrum of institutions of higher education ranging from liberal arts colleges to research and doctoral-granting universities” (p. v). The reason this attitude persists is because of perceptions of what makes research prestigious. (p. 192)

Simpson (2005), in describing significant obstacles to transformation, claims:

Institutional resistance exists in many guises: There are few, or poorly accessible, “roadmaps” for rigorous and successful change; “engaged” work is often more time-consuming than “traditional” work and still seen as “extra”; the real and perceived pressure of the tenure clock can be a powerful dissuader; the aura of “pure research” still imbues a perceived prestige associated with some kinds of work or institutions more than others; organizations with which/whom scholars engage may want or expect the “quick and dirty, razzle-dazzle,” and learning to really listen and learn even as we teach can be a challenge; despite the good work of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation graduate education and socialization still often works against engaged scholarship, often out of a protective spirit tied to institutional challenges already listed. (p. 260)

Even for faculty and administrators willing to support the significance of engaged scholarship, issues remain. How can engaged work be evaluated for quality? What constitutes a legitimate outlet for engaged work? How do assessment and accreditation evaluators perceive an “engaged curriculum”? What type of faculty development is required to support excellence in engaged work? What resources are required? How do promotion and tenure criteria reflect these potential transformations? What role do professional organizations have in supporting engaged efforts? While the questions and issues are real, the transformation of academic and professional institutions may well rest with our abilities to address these complex challenges.

Most academic institutions periodically review tenure and promotion criteria at both institution-wide and department and college levels. With senior faculty and

academic administrative support, engaged scholarship can become an increasing part of these documents. Specific criteria for tenure can embrace multi-disciplinary, engaged work and curriculum transformation. Promotion and tenure criteria can specify how quality issues will be addressed for both research and pedagogy, and establish outlets for engaged scholarship which will “count” for tenure. Qualifications for peer reviewers have been expanded to consider engaged scholarship, and in some limited cases, the public impact of engaged work is assessed. The University of Colorado (2006) tenure review study and resultant changes in promotion and tenure criteria is but one example of changes made throughout a multi-campus university system.

Current trends in national assessment increasingly focus on student learning outcomes (Leskes & Miller, 2006). These criteria and others generally support a more engaged curriculum for students (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, 2007; Engineering Accreditation Commission, 2007; Higher Learning Commission, 2007). Although national efforts such as those sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and the National Communication Association (Morreale & Applegate, 2006) have focused on faculty development for engagement, more attention is needed in order to determine faculty development needs and the resources necessary to support excellence in engaged research and pedagogy. Some limited grant programs exist and more institutions than previously are creating multi-disciplinary research centers where engaged work is encouraged and supported.

Many faculty and administrators (DeWine, 2005) believe that an engaged curriculum and engaged research programs enhance the perceived value of academic institutions among some of their most severe critics in government, business, and industry. Just as engaged scholarship privileges the diversity of perspectives that theorists and practitioners bring to making sense of a problem and honors their unique knowledge and expertise as valid, engaged academic institutions are in conversation with diverse communities on issues of significance which matter to both.

Professional associations such as the National Communication Association and the International Communication Association provide outlets for presenting engaged work. Increasingly, the editorial review boards of professional association journals provide guidance regarding the submission of applied and engaged work. Professional associations also have the opportunity to increase contact with multiple stakeholders to identify the “big” issues and questions of future importance. Professional associations’ support of engaged work provides legitimacy and prestige, contributing to the valuing of such work in academic institutions.

Simpson (2005) identifies the opportunities:

The vision of an engaged university, and of engaged scholarship, is rooted in a call to re-conceptualize higher education, and to re-envision the triumvirate of teaching, research, and service. This re-visioning recognizes the isolation that has sometimes developed between disciplinary units, departments and divisions across campuses, and attempts to describe a scholarly context made of more fluid

boundaries, greater opportunity (and reward) for collaboration, and enriched experiences and opportunities for students and scholars alike. (p. 261)

Boyer (1990) takes the call for change beyond the university: “[A] new vision of scholarship is required, one dedicated not only to the renewal of the academy, but, ultimately, to the renewal of society itself” (p. 81).

Discussion

Organizational communication scholars have always tried to make their research and teaching relevant to practitioners, students, and the general public. We believe that engaged scholarship and its emphasis on knowledge production represents an important approach for making our research and teaching more relevant to audiences outside academe. The theme of finding creative ways to integrate theory and practice and to make our theory and research of greater interest to public audiences is present throughout our field’s history, and we suspect that many people will recognize the ideas, arguments, and positions we present in this essay as existing already either in the discipline or within their personal practice.

We do not believe that we are saying anything that is radically new or offering a completely novel set of strategies for pursuing engaged scholarship. We already know intuitively or consciously many of the things we have outlined in this essay. However, many of us, the authors included, do not always do the things in our practice that we espouse in our academic writing. We find Blood’s (2006) story of the Midwestern farmer a useful reminder of the importance of following through on what you already know:

It’s spring, and Farmer Fred is plowing a field. The county extension agent drives up and walks over to the fence as Fred comes by. Fred stops the tractor and goes to see what the agent has on his mind. “We haven’t seen you at the monthly meetings for a while, Fred. We’ve got some new ideas we’ll be talking about Thursday night that could increase your corn yield. You should come by.” There was a pause, and then Fred responded, “Shucks, Archie, I don’t need any new ideas. I’m not farming as well as I know how, as it is.” (p. 210)

The point of the story is that we already know what we need to do. The issue is what we are willing to do in our professional lives, our classrooms, our departments, our universities, and our professional organizations to move engaged scholarship from the realm of good intentions and dreams to concrete embodied practice. Our hope is that this essay begins to identify some possible pathways and concrete suggestions that can generate engaged scholarship.

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