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Abstract
General managers, restaurant managers, and corporate officers may have little enough time to stop and consider what kind of research projects in which to partake. After all, such research often yields only an incremental advance in theory, which is of seemingly limited managerial value. Nevertheless, a major component of the mission of many academic institutions is to conduct research, and to interpret and disseminate the findings. Many efforts have been made to bridge the divide between researchers and practitioners. This has included special research issues devoted to examples of researcher-practitioner collaboration, papers providing insights for enhancing the effectiveness of teaching organizational sciences, and books targeted at academics and intended to increase the practical nature of research. Notably missing, however, is work aimed at building the bridge from the other bank of this chasm. The strengthening of ties between researchers and practitioners requires effort on the part of both parties to create a successful partnership.

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hospitality management, research methods, research tools, hotel operation

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Comments

Building a Bridge from the Other Bank:

This Issue's Focus on Research Methods and Tools for Hospitality Management

BY MICHAEL C. STURMAN

Why should practitioners care about research? Why should practitioners know the fundamentals of research designs or familiarize themselves with research tools? General managers, restaurant managers, and corporate officers may have little enough time to stop and consider what kind of research projects in which to partake. After all, such research often yields only an incremental advance in theory, which is of seemingly limited managerial value.

Nevertheless, a major component of the mission of many academic institutions is to conduct research, and to interpret and disseminate the findings. This includes both applied and theoretical research. Why should practitioners care? If they do care, what do they need to know about how research should be performed? One of the goals of this special-focus issue is to address those questions. More important, this collection of articles is designed to address the question that should follow: why should practitioners want to get involved in both kinds of research?

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To a great extent, research and practice have diverged. More than two decades ago, Susman and Evered complained, "…there is a crisis in the field of organizational science. The principal symptom of this crisis is that as our research methods and techniques have become more sophisticated, they have also become increasingly less useful for solving the practical problems that members of organizations face."[1] While this issue has occasionally received attention in academic journals, it is particularly salient for a journal like *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*. As I wrote in the October 2002 edition,[2] the mission of *Cornell Quarterly* is "to pro-

[1] G.I. Susman and R.D. Evered, "An Assessment of the Scientific Merits of Action Research," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 23 (1978), p. 582.

[2] "Taking the Reins–With Pleasure," *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly,* Vol. 43, No. 5 (October 2002).

vide research-based insights for the practice of hospitality." As such, our content demands that research techniques be applied to practical problems and communicated in such a way as to be understandable—and more important, useable—by practitioners.

Many efforts have been made to bridge the divide between researchers and practitioners. This has included special research issues devoted to examples of researcher–practitioner collaboration,[3] papers providing insights for enhancing the effectiveness of teaching organizational sciences,[4] and books targeted at academics and intended to increase the practical nature of research.[5] Notably missing, however, is work aimed at building the bridge from the other bank of this chasm. To date, little work has aimed at informing practitioners on the value of research—in particular theoretical research—and how the research process can be implemented, how the results of research can be interpreted and applied, or even why practitioners should want to get involved in the research process. The purpose of this special-focus issue on research methods and tools is to begin building that bridge—to help make practitioners better consumers of research and (I hope) more interested in becoming involved in applied and theoretical research to help address the practical problems that they face.

This issue is divided into three sections. The first part describes the importance and implications of research. This section provides various perspectives as to what research is, why it is valuable, and the process by which it adds value. The second section offers information on various approaches to research—offering three different philosophies for investigating research questions. The third part details a number of specific research tools, including methods for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. While this is certainly not an exhaustive review, it does illustrate a number of tools that are or can be valuable to hospitality—and which for the most part are accessible to practitioners.

The Importance and Implications of Research

Broadly stated, there are two types of organizational-science research. First, there is theoretical research, also called academic research or domain-specific research. Generally, this type of research is aimed at providing a better understanding of the fundamental processes that lead to organizational success. Research of this sort may lead to new theories, adjustment to theories or models, new typologies for categorizing outcomes, or new methodologies for analyzing data. Articles about such research generally appear in academic journals and speak primarily to other academics (often a small subset of academics) who are doing related research in the specific domain. It is this sort of theoretical research that has been most criticized by those interested in greater collaboration between academics and practitioners. Despite being highly valued in academic circles, such research is often viewed as incremental and not always applicable to "real world" problems.

The second type of research, referred to as applied research, is targeted at specific managerial problems. Such research is intended to address questions of interest to practitioners. This sort of work may emerge from academics, practitioners, or collaborations between academic and industry researchers to solve a specific problem. Such work may be generalizable to other situations, but otherwise it is simply useful as a demonstration of a method to solve practical problems. Applied research has been criticized for not contributing to any theoretical knowledge base and for its contextual limitations. That is, applied research is practical because it can help solve a specific difficulty facing a company in a specific context, but because applied research is problem-focused, it often does not lend insight into the processes that explain organizational or individual behavior. Thus, it often does not advance the level of knowledge in such a way that helps

[3] See, for example: *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2001); and *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (1996).

[4] See, for example: S.L. Rynes and C.Q. Trank, "Behavioral Science in the Business-school Curriculum: Teaching in a Changing Institutional Environment," *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 24 (1999), pp. 808–824; and C. Lundberg, "Techniques for Teaching OB in the College Classroom, in *Organizational Behavior: The State of the Science*, ed. J. Greenberg (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994), pp. 221–244.

[5] See, for example: J.P. Campbell, R.L. Daft, and C.L. Hulin, *What to Study: Generating and Developing Research Questions* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1982); and K.R. Murphy and F.E. Saal, *Psychology in Organizations: Integrating Science and Practice* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1990).

to solve problems that inevitably will arise in the future or that may arise outside of the context that was studied.

One way to improve the value of research to hospitality practitioners is to dovetail theoretical and applied work. This position is presented in this issue by James Van Scotter and Patrick Culligan, who describe ways in which theoretical research and applied research can contribute to better management in the hospitality industry. They suggest a balanced approach between applied and theoretical research. Specifically, although practitioners will likely be much more interested in the immediate benefits of applied research, improvements in theory may be a prerequisite for long-term advances in applied research. Van Scotter and Culligan recommend an approach to research that combines both types of research to provide short-term solutions to practitioners as well as long-term benefits to the relevant knowledge base.

Gabriele Piccoli and Erica Wagner offer an extension to the argument proposed by Van Scotter and Culligan. Using the example of information-systems research, they describe how academic research ultimately contributes to the applied-knowledge base. They also provide examples of how researchers and practitioners have collaborated to benefit domains of interest to both parties.

In the final article of this section, Judi Brownell describes the role that communication plays in the transfer of knowledge from research to practice and in the application of research from knowledge to deed. Her paper details how improved managerial communication effectiveness enables practitioners to realize the benefits of their discipline knowledge as they work to improve individual and organizational performance.

Approaches to Research

The second part of this issue presents three different approaches that research can take in tackling a problem. The article by Matthew Schall discusses the fundamental matters involved in designing and using surveys. Using the example of guest surveys, Schall highlights the major issues that must be considered if valuable information is to be derived from a survey. This article should prove useful for those interested in a research approach designed to provide data on the current status or opinions of a specific population.

Kate Walsh's article discusses the use of qualitative methods. Her article suggests that the use of qualitative methods is most appropriate for the creation of new knowledge. Walsh argues that if one is interested in understanding new, confusing, and arguably "messy" problems, then qualitative-research methods are the appropriate first step to gain a better understanding of the issues involved. The use of qualitative methods can then lend insight into the creation of more quantitative approaches to studying the problem once it is understood well enough for such quantitative approaches to be applied.

The third article in this section, by Ann Lynn and Michael Lynn, discusses the use of experiments and quasi-experiments as an approach to determining the causes of phenomena. Using marketing issues as examples, Lynn and Lynn explain how experiments can lead to a better understanding of the cause-and-effect relationship between marketing or managerial actions and customer or employee responses. Their thesis is that experimentation is the most appropriate method when one seeks to predict how people will react to given stimuli or choices. Their article also articulates the major issues involved in the successful creation of experiments.

Research Tools

The third part of this issue builds on the ideas presented in the previous articles by detailing six different research tools. While there exist research-based methodologies other than these six that could prove valuable for hospitality practice, the purpose of this section is to provide an overview of research tools that may specifically be of interest to *Cornell Quarterly*'s audience.

Gary Thompson and Rohit Verma discuss the use of computer simulation as a research tool. They argue that simulation can be valuable because it allows one to try various alternatives without actually having to implement them in practice—and bear the risks and costs. Simulations can be used to help model complex environments and reveal the implications of chance fluctuations. The authors illustrate this tool with a restaurant-table simulation (i.e., managing demand for available seats at different times of the day).

Vincent Magnini, Earl Honeycutt, and Sharon

Hodge describe the use of data mining. Data mining is the automated process of using statistical analyses to sift through large datasets to detect "interesting" relationships or patterns in the data. They discuss how data mining can be useful for situations like hotel marketing, where massive customer databases may exist but the value of which remains largely untapped.

I contributed the next article, on the technique known as utility analysis. Utility analysis is a tool for quantifying the value of management interventions (in this case, interventions relating to human resources, such as a new staffing program or a new training program). The technique is designed to put into dollar terms the net gain associated with specific human resource programs. The article is intended to be useful to managers and practitioners who want to think more quantitatively about their investments in human capital.

The fourth article in this section, by Robert Kwortnik, describes the technique of depth interviewing and interpretation for hospitality research. Depth interviewing is a qualitative research methodology that is especially appropriate for investigating and understanding the "fuzzy" processes behind individual behavior and motivation. Kwortnik provides detail on how to conduct depth interviews, analyze the data that emerge from them, and interpret such data to yield valuable information on consumer psychology or behavior. This research tool is often best applied when research problems are not well defined or no guiding theory exists to help explain an important phenomenon.

The methodological tool of data-envelopment analysis is introduced by Dennis Reynolds. DEA allows for the evaluation of operational efficiency using multiple inputs and outputs, as illustrated by Reynolds's example of comparing multi-unit restaurant operations. Reynolds shows how DEA can reveal information that would otherwise be missed if efficiency were evaluated based on a single ratio or individual perceptions. He also argues that DEA can prove more useful than other research approaches, such as multiple regression, for purposes of evaluating the performance of different units.

The final article in the issue is by Jeffrey Harrison, who describes strategic analysis. Harrison's article differs somewhat from the others in this section in that the research tool he describes largely reflects an overall rational process used by decision makers in organizations to evaluate new strategies, ideas, or directions that an organization may take. The process includes (1) evaluating the broad environment in which the organization finds itself, (2) analyzing the industry environment and organization's various stakeholders, and (3) analyzing the internal resources available to the organization. The process of strategic analysis can use many of the other research approaches and methodologies presented in this issue. Ultimately, strategic analysis is a process to help organizations achieve their goal of improved organizational performance by potentially using different research approaches to understand the nature of the organization's current situation and the implications of potential courses of action.

Where the Bridge Leads

Researchers and practitioners have distinct jobs, and often the two groups can operate without paying much attention to the other. The articles in this issue are intended to demonstrate how the two can benefit much from each other, and I join the call of many academics for the building of stronger ties between the two groups.

The strengthening of ties between researchers and practitioners requires effort on the part of both parties to create a successful partnership. While a number of the articles in this issue do speak to the need for academics to consider applied problems of interest to the industry, the theme of this issue is to help inform practitioners of the research approaches and tools that exist to make them more effective consumers of research. The purpose of this issue is to describe to practitioners the goal of research, the research process, and the value of some specific research tools. The aim is not necessarily to educate practitioners on how to do this research by themselves. However, this collection of articles should shed some light on the value, approaches, and tools that are available to address compelling problems. I hope that readers come away more informed and even more excited about the prospects of research. So, what should you do after you read this issue? Where does this bridge between academics and practitioners go? It is my hope that this issue will encourage practitioners to make an effort to collaborate with academics with the objective of addressing practically and theoretically interesting questions with regard to hospitality practice. But what specifically can one do if this issue does spark some interest in research?

First, *Cornell Quarterly* provides contact information for each author. If an article sparks your interest, I encourage you to contact the author(s). Each of the authors in this issue has much more to say about the topics introduced in their articles. As part of the job of being academics in applied programs like Cornell's School of Hotel Administration and many of the other institutions represented by authors of this issue, researchers are often interested in practitioner cooperation to test new methods, theories, and research approaches.

Second, you should consider collaboration and cooperation with academic institutions, such as through ties with specific academics or with centers like the hotel school's Center for Hospitality Research.[6] Centers of this kind provide a means for organizing synergies between academics and practitioners that can benefit both through the development of applied and theoretical research.

Finally, consider where research can take you. There should be sufficient information in this issue to allow practitioners to initiate their own research ideas. I am certainly not advocating that practitioners simply open their companies as working laboratories to academics to study whatever topics they please, but a research relationship between academics and practitioners can be useful. While I have many times contacted practitioners with the hope of gaining some sort of access for the purposes of doing my research, far less common has been practitioners initiating contact with me or my peers to articulate where they could use some research help. While there is no guarantee that any given connection between a practitioner and a researcher will yield the development of applied or theoretical research programs, we are more likely to see fruitful relationships if they are initiated from both sides, thereby building the bridge between the hospitality academic and industry communities. ■

[6] See: www.chr.cornell.edu. The article by Piccoli and Wagner also provides a list of centers that may prove of interest to practitioners seeking greater collaboration with academe.