

In recent years, scholars of public administration, public policy, planning, and related fields have turned to *narrative inquiry* to enhance our understanding of complex social phenomena. Because of our increased interest in this subject, the editors asked Sonia M. Ospina and her colleagues at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University, to write a series of articles explaining narrative inquiry and its contributions to theoretical and methodological developments in the field. The following article by Dr. Ospina and Jennifer Dodge is the last in a three-part series; the first two installments were published in the March/April and May/June issues of *PAR*. —LDT

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Narrative Inquiry and the Search for Connectedness: Practitioners and Academics Developing Public Administration Scholarship

Maintaining a vibrant field of public administration requires ongoing efforts to link the worlds of academic researchers and practitioners. We suggest that research itself, traditionally pursued by academics, is a promising mechanism for making this connection. In particular, researchers and practitioners in public administration can do research together in a way that enhances mutual learning, draws on the strengths of each to create useful knowledge of high quality, appreciates and tolerates of each others' worlds, styles, and contributions. Using research to promote connectedness means rethinking the roles that practitioners and academics play in generating knowledge in the field. In our project, insights from the assumptions and practices of narrative inquiry helped us to identify three research roles for practitioners: as sources of knowledge, as producers of knowledge, and as active consumers who inform the research process.

This article is the last in a three-part series about the potential contribution of narrative inquiry to public administration scholarship. In our first article, we focused on how and why narrative inquiry has been used in public administration studies. We argued that embracing such an approach makes the field stronger by nurturing pluralism in the academy and by helping academics address two key concerns in the field: doing high-quality scholarship while creating connections with practitioners. In the second article, we deepened these arguments by focusing on scholarly quality. We argued that as a form of interpretive research, the assumptions and practices of narrative inquiry illustrate ways to integrate rigor and relevance as two inseparable dimensions of quality.

In this article, we further our argument by focusing on the second concern: the field's aspiration for connected-

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ness between academic researchers and practitioners. We have learned through our research on community-based leadership that narrative inquiry can readily break down the roles that are typically assigned to practitioners and researchers.¹ Presently, researchers with academic credentials tend to do most of the research in the field. The credentialing process, therefore, establishes a subordinate role for practitioners in research, relegating them to potential consumers of academic findings.

Consistent with a growing body of literature (Amabile et al. 2001; Gibbons 2001; Gibbons et al. 1994; Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001; Schuman and Abramson 2000; Starkey and Madan 2001), our experience has taught us there is room for greater fluidity in these traditional roles. Taking seriously the practices and assumptions of narrative inquiry has motivated us to be systematic about how to give practitioners a more significant role in the research process. Even though engaging practitioners in research is not easy (Amabile et al. 2001; Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001), doing so can enhance scholarship in the applied fields by bringing practitioners' perspectives, local knowledge, and theories to bear on the cumulative knowledge of the field. This approach honors and adapts the field's early tradition of integrating scholarship and practice, when "pracademics" developed relevant theories and academic researchers used detailed case studies to produce insights that practitioners found helpful to their work.

To develop these ideas, we first discuss connectedness in public administration, identifying factors that thwart the ability of academics and practitioners to connect, and then review existing strategies to bridge the gap. We then use our experience to discuss what opportunities narrative inquiry creates for fulfilling the aspiration, reviewing three potential roles we found for practitioners in the research process. Finally, we discuss how our experience fits within broader trends toward opening up the research process in science and offer suggestions for enhancing connectedness in public administration through research.

We share our insights as an example of one possible path through which public administration researchers and practitioners can engage in a conversation that will lead to mutual learning, simultaneously producing good scholarship and supporting practice.

The Search for Connectedness in Public Administration

The desire to connect the academic researcher and the practitioner is shared by most knowledge fields that have a professional practice (Bartunek and Louis 1996; Feeney 2000; Hodgkinson, Herriot, and Anderson 2001; Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001). In contrast to the hard-science researcher in the laboratory, applied academic research-

ers interact with the inhabitants of the world they are trying to understand, regardless of whether they are interested in developing theory or informing practice. Hence, such researchers are committed to scholarship that addresses the double hurdle of practical relevance and theoretical and methodological rigor (Pettigrew 2001). Hodgkinson, Herriot, and Anderson call this "pragmatic science" because it strives to be "simultaneously academically rigorous and engaged with the concerns of wider stakeholder groups" (2001, S42). In light of this double aspiration, academic researchers in public administration try to develop knowledge by committing to work where the worlds of academe and policy and management meet (Huff 2000).

Developments in the Field

Consistent with developments in other applied fields, public administration has become increasingly specialized, so that the roles of its members have differentiated to a point that research activities risk exacerbating the science-practice gap. In theory, the relationship between members of the specialized worlds of practice and academe may take different forms (Barley, Meyer, and Gash 1988). In some cases, a gap may open so that they do not connect or influence each other. In other cases, asymmetrical relationships develop (either the academic world mostly influences practice, or practitioners mostly influence the world of academe). Both of these relationships reduce opportunities for healthy interactions. On the other hand, members of these two different groups can engage in relationships of mutual adjustment and influence, fulfilling the aspiration for connectedness.

The field's persistent aspiration to connectedness (Feeney 2000; Newland 2000) can be traced to its foundations, as illustrated in the role of "pracademics" in the early days of public administration. Founding fathers such as Gulick, White, and Merriam were themselves practitioners *and* scholars. They produced and consumed theory and research to synthesize their experience and to develop broader theories of administration in public contexts (Bolton and Stolcis 2003).

During the field's early development, connectedness also manifested itself in research practices such as in-depth case studies that offered rich descriptions, so that both researchers and practitioners could draw lessons for theory and practice (Somers 1955). Over time, as the field developed and roles specialized, the world of practitioners has distanced itself from that of academic researchers, and so has the potential for disconnection. With the discipline's aspiration to strengthen its scientific base, the dual role of pracademics was overshadowed by that of the expert-research scientist.² More positivist approaches to research were championed, and the ability of case studies to pro-

duce generalized theory was questioned. The specialized roles of producers and consumers of knowledge became increasingly differentiated for researchers and practitioners, respectively. Fixing the roles of different stakeholders created a tension between the field's aspiration to develop cumulative science and its aspiration to a strong connection between academic researchers and practitioners.

This tension is reflected in a persistent debate about quality research in public administration and what kind of research should drive the field's development. The academy- or science-driven scholars, concerned with what they see as the poor quality of public administration research (Houston and Delevan 1990; McCurdy and Cleary 1984; Perry and Kraemer 1986; Stallings and Ferris 1988), have argued for more science. The practice-driven scholars, concerned with the consequences of a widening gap between academics and practitioners (Box 1992; Streib, Slotkin, and Rivera 2001; J. White 1986), have urged more integration.³ The two sides agree on the need to promote pragmatic science to advance the field. They disagree, however, on the relative weights that should be assigned to practice (and practitioners) in the process of theory development and knowledge production.

The tension between cumulative science and practice-grounded research poses a permanent threat to the aspiration to connectedness. It raises important questions that trigger disagreements that are capable of broadening the science–practice gap: Which of the two realms represents the legitimate source for knowledge production: the *discipline* of public administration or the *activities* of public administration? Who produces this knowledge, only academics, only practitioners, or both? For what reason do we produce knowledge: to build theory, to inform practice, or both? Finally, which users and consumers should the field target: other researchers doing cumulative science, practitioners, or students? How members of the field choose to answer these questions—and which answers become dominant—directly affects the field's ability to fulfill or reinforce the aspiration to connection.

Evidence of this tension continues to emerge periodically in the field. For example, the distance between research and practice in public administration is still the object of scholarly interest (Bolton and Stolcis 2003). Empirical studies about the nature of the topics discussed in *PAR* (Bingham and Bowen 1994; Box 1992; Streib, Slotkin, and Rivera 2001) and about the factors predicting practitioner utilization of research in the field (Landry, Lamari, and Amara 2003) echo a preoccupation with both research quality and relevance. The tension reverberates in conversations around the substantive questions of the field, how they should be identified and addressed, and who should be concerned with them (Behn 1995; Kirlin 1996, 2001; Lynn 1996; White and Adams 1994).

Links between researchers and practitioners persist in public administration despite the pervasiveness of this tension. This is a testament to the perseverance of some researchers and practitioners who, working against the specialization trend, find it worthwhile to connect as a way to bring insights into their practice. It is also evidence of the relevance of the original theory–practice integration as a source of strength in the field. Finally, connectedness is the product of explicit efforts of leaders in the field—in its associations, in its journals, and in its schools—to find a space in which these two key stakeholders can interact. Nevertheless, the idea of creating collaborations around research as an effective source of connectedness has, for the most part, gone dormant in the collective memory of the field.

The Role of Research in the Aspiration to Connectedness

This tension between cumulative science and practice-grounded research—and the consequent threat it poses to connectedness—are not unique to public administration. Two broader social trends have reduced the opportunities for interaction among the key stakeholders of any field as specialization threatens to make them drift apart. First, the dominant models of scientific knowledge production in the twentieth century are responsible for reinforcing a fixed division of labor, with academics as producers and sometimes disseminators of knowledge and practitioners as consumers and sometimes users of knowledge. Second, the obvious difference between the worlds of academics and practitioners and the nature of the work each does are exacerbated when this division of labor is taken too far.

A Dominant Mode of Knowledge Production. A distinct system of knowledge production characterized the twentieth century (Gibbons et al. 1994; Starkey and Madan 2001). Labeled “mode 1” (Gibbons et al. 1994), this mode of inquiry depends on highly trained individuals or teams doing discipline-based research in specialized institutions (typically a university, government research center, or corporate think tank). Research is led by credentialed academics who are accountable to their own intellectual communities and who disseminate their work in peer-reviewed journals and conferences. The emphasis is on the successful accumulation and refinement of theory over time (Barley, Meyer, and Gash 1988; Gibbons 2001; Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001; Starkey and Madan 2001).

In this mode, academics frame problems and solutions and generate theoretical knowledge; practitioners then try to make it work in the real world. Practitioners may be considered as sources of knowledge, but only as “subjects,” not as participants in the process (Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001). Practitioners consume knowledge outside the production chain of both applied and pure research. Hence,

mode 1 tends to discourage collaborative research practices that consider multiple perspectives and bridge different worlds. Although this mode is more typical of pure disciplines, it has also affected applied disciplines, especially as the latter have pursued legitimacy by copying the research paradigms of the former. There is an explicit threat to connectedness between researchers and practitioners associated with the incentive structures of research in mode 1.

Two Separate Worlds. In addition to these fixed roles, the worlds that academic researchers and practitioners inhabit “exist as separate but interdependent social systems characterized by different traditions, languages, interests, and norms” (Barley, Meyer, and Gash 1988, 25). There are differences in the goals for developing knowledge (building theory to advance a field versus improving a practice or solving a localized problem), the variables its members try to manipulate, the underlying logic of intervention they use, and the incentive structures that sustain the social systems where these communities operate (Bartunek and Louis 1996; Bolton and Stolcis 2003; Landry, Lamari, and Amara 2003; Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001).

Amabile et al.’s case study (2001) of the tensions created by a research collaboration between academics and practitioners illustrates the extent of these differences. Different expectations in the project led to disagreements about the pace and timing of the research. The practitioners wanted short-term milestones and proposed making the data public as they were collected. The researchers, on the other hand, viewed the release of unprocessed data as misleading and a violation of confidentiality requirements. They also questioned the practitioners’ involvement in the research decisions. Moreover, incompatible collaborative, problem-solving, and presentational styles led to conflict. For the practitioners, successful collaboration would yield fast, demonstrable results under rotating-team leadership, whereas the academics used long time frames and a top-down “principal investigator” model. The researchers leaned toward solving problems within established paradigms, in contrast to the practitioners’ paradigm-breaking orientation. Finally, the academics were used to presenting information, whereas practitioners preferred egalitarian, open-ended discussions.

Based on this description, it follows that part of the gap between academic researchers and practitioners stems from a lack of appreciation for the other’s perspective when there are no bridges that connect their worlds. Given the dominance of mode 1 knowledge production, any aspiration to connectedness requires developing a cross-cultural perspective so that both sides may respect the assumptions, values, and ways of being of the other (Barley, Meyer, and Gash 1988; Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001).

Fostering Connectedness in the Field. Leaders in public administration and related fields pursue deliberate ef-

forts to encourage connectedness between academic researchers and practitioners. Successful strategies include promoting journals that target academics and practitioners as both readers and contributors and convening spaces where academic researchers and practitioners can engage in dialogue to challenge the other’s views and come to understand each other better (such as symposia or mixed panels in research and professional conferences). Other strategies include engaging seasoned practitioners in the field’s academic training, encouraging younger practitioners to earn graduate degrees, and encouraging mixed committees to pursue initiatives designed to strengthen the field. Such efforts promote interactions that ensure the vitality of the field. But these instances of collaboration leave untouched an activity that is central to the field’s development: the production of knowledge through research.

At the same time, dominant research practices tend to reduce the impact of these explicit efforts to bolster connectedness. Some academic researchers contribute to the disconnection by engaging in various forms of dysfunctional scientific practices that alienate practitioners (Hodgkinson, Herriot, and Anderson 2001). One practice offers high methodological rigor but ignores relevance or connection to practice and is written in highly technical language aimed at specialized journals. Another is motivated by narrow practical needs and satisfies a few practitioners’ preference for quick turnover at the expense of producing knowledge with theoretical and methodological value to a broader community. Finally, some researchers pursue issues of no practical relevance and without rigor, which practitioners find useless.⁴

Practitioners broaden the gap when they buy into fads or dismiss the contributions of serious theoretical thinking. Some practitioners become fixated on urgent matters and are not willing to support research beyond their immediate needs. Their subjective and narrow definition of what is relevant removes them from worthwhile research and theoretical conversations (Lynn 1996; Weick 2001). In the worst case, practitioners do not turn to academic work to develop strategies and practices, and researchers ignore practitioners as a source of inspiration to frame their questions or to interpret their results (Weick 2001). In the end, the normative recommendations of researchers and actual management practices do not coincide (Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001), reflecting a widening science–practice gap.

In the case of public administration, scholars in the early debate about research quality made some important critiques of these dysfunctional forms of research. Yet the critics’ diagnosis gave primacy to positivist methodologies that encouraged detachment between researchers and their research subjects and led some scholars to push for high methodological rigor at the expense of addressing ques-

tions grounded in practice. Practice-grounded research, on the other hand, was mislabeled as narrow and less scientific. Some scholars failed to recognize how methodologies such as case studies, narrative inquiry, and other forms of interpretive research could bolster pragmatic science and create connections with practitioners. More recent trends, such as the turn toward narrative approaches and the wider application of collaborative forms of research, have brought attention back to the potential contribution of these diverse methodologies for generating pragmatic science. It is in this context that we call attention to the role of narrative research in promoting the field's persistent aspiration to connectedness.

Connectedness through Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry, by its nature, invites practitioners who are research subjects “in to the research process as people with a perspective and wisdom that are worthy of hearing” (Dutton 2003, 8). Practitioner stories are a powerful research tool “offer[ing] a window into ‘truths that are flattened or silenced by an insistence on more traditional methods of social science’” (Ewick and Silbey 1995, 199). They allow new voices to be heard that can inform how we understand life in organizations. In public administration, these new voices may come from the practitioners who experience the phenomena that interest scholars. Considering the assumptions and practices of narrative inquiry as our starting point, we use our story to illustrate three roles that practitioners can play in the research process—as sources of knowledge, as producers of knowledge, and as informed consumers of knowledge—and suggest how they foster connectedness.

Another Take on Our Story

In our previous articles in this series, we described in detail the motivations and assumptions guiding our research (Dodge, Ospina, and Foldy 2005; Ospina and Dodge 2005). Here, we provide a brief overview that gives context to our argument. We show how narrative inquiry offers practitioners and academics opportunities to interact and engage in meaningful ways, inviting their different perspectives to inform the research while maintaining a firm commitment to high standards of quality.

Our research is part of a larger leadership program that recognizes community leaders doing social-change work across the United States. The leaders participate in various program activities, one of which is the research and documentation component under our direction. Our guiding question is, in what ways do communities trying to make social change engage in the work of leadership? The leadership we study takes place within nonprofit organizations whose members work with vulnerable populations to ad-

dress an identified systemic inequity. To do so, they combine, in different degrees, activities of service delivery, organizing, advocacy, and community development. Table 1 offers an overview of the key design and methodological decisions informing the research.

Research overview	
Context	Sponsored research, part of a seven-year leadership program that recognizes five cohorts of community based leaders and leadership teams.
Goal	To develop practice-grounded theories of leadership.
Conceptual lens	Leadership is a collective achievement rather than an individual characteristic.
Research focus	The organization's work, not characteristics of visible leaders.
Implications	1. Study leadership <i>with</i> leaders, from the inside out. 2. Invite program participants to coproduce knowledge about leadership in their organization.
Research design	
Methods	Multiyear, multimodal research, triangulating three interpretive methodologies grounded in narratives: formal narrative inquiry, cooperative inquiry, and ethnography.
Sampling frame	Theory driven, opportunistic sample; about 150 individual leaders working in 81 organizations. Unit for narrative analysis: stories about the work.
Data collection strategy	Coresearch projects (narrative, cooperative, and ethnographic) with members of each cohort; new coresearchers and new projects added every year.
Analytical strategy	Comparative analysis of stories across organizations; integration of findings by projects and by cohorts over time. Phase 1: inductive approach for three cycles of coresearch (with participants from the first three program cohorts). Phase 2: deductive approach based on propositions derived from phase 1 (with participants of the last two cohorts).
Status	Cohorts 1 and 2 completed (37 organizations, 68 individuals). Cohorts 3 and 4 in process (55 organizations, 99 individuals). Cohort 5 has not entered the program.

Our research design is based on three key considerations drawn from the leadership literature (Northouse 2003): (1) Our goals can best be achieved by doing empirical research based on emerging theories that emphasize the relational and social nature of leadership (Drath 2001); (2) understanding how leadership works from this perspective means developing grounded accounts of the experiences of those making leadership happen in particular organizational contexts (rather than focusing on leaders' traits and detaching the research from the circumstances surrounding their work); and (3) incorporating voices and perspectives traditionally ignored in previous studies can enrich the research.

Our challenge was to ensure that our research was not only grounded in practice and relevant to practitioners, but

also embedded in the theoretical conversations with other scholars about nonprofit leadership and democratic governance. We started our project with powerful intellectual motivators that helped us meet this challenge: We had a hunch about the importance of practice for knowledge development; our theoretical lens demanded attention to the experience of practitioners; and finally, we received a two-part institutional directive (from our funders) to work with practitioners in the program and to generate new knowledge about leadership based on their experiences. These assumptions and motivators led us to choose a multimodal design comprising three interpretive methods that give primacy to narrative: formal narrative inquiry, cooperative inquiry, and ethnography (Schall et al. 2004).

In considering practitioners as coresearchers, we did not blur the lines between our worlds, but tried to create research tools that bring the two worlds together, drawing on the best of both. For the purposes of our argument, it is also important to recognize that our coresearchers were both the subjects of our research in the traditional sense, as well as the potential beneficiaries or consumers of our findings, along with our academic audiences. This situation is more common in management studies than it is in policy studies, where the subjects of the research may not be the audience. Our story, then, may be more helpful for public management scholars.

Finally, our experience is not about connectedness with the professional practitioner within a public administration unit. It is about practitioners who have traditionally distrusted academic researchers (because of negative experiences in the past), have a strong bias for action over reflection, and are reluctant to engage in activities that do not add direct value to their work. Hence, they represent an extreme case and offer an excellent opportunity to illustrate some of the challenges and possibilities of using research to promote connection. We use our experience to draw lessons for the field, which includes a broad range of practitioner types.

Narrative Inquiry, Relevant Knowledge, and Pragmatic Science

In the second article in our series, we argued that all forms of narrative inquiry have at least three assumptions in common: “First ... narratives convey meanings ... intentions, beliefs, values, and emotions that reflect situated social reality, rather than reflecting an “objective reality” per se. Second, narratives carry practical knowing that individuals have gained through their experience.... Third, narratives are constitutive, which means that they are not only *shaped* by individuals, but they also *shape* individuals” (Dodge, Ospina, and Foldy 2005, 290–91).

We labeled the first assumption “narrative as language” because it points to narrative’s function as a medium for

expression. The second assumption is about “narrative as knowledge” because it points to its function as a medium for explanation and learning. The third assumption is about “narrative as metaphor” because it points to narrative as a carrier of deeper institutional meanings.

Drawing on these assumptions, we can see a variety of new roles for practitioners in research. Narrative as language suggests practitioners are a rich source of knowledge and offer valuable insights gleaned from real-world experience. From the narrative-as-knowledge approach, practitioners can also become producers of knowledge for the broader community, whether in collaboration with researchers or not. Because practitioners in these two roles can participate in shaping and interpreting research and findings, they can also become more active consumers of research—another way of engaging practitioners in the field.

We offer three vignettes about our research experience (in italics), written in the voice of an academic researcher from our team. They illustrate how greater fluidity in the roles enhanced the research process and fostered connectedness between academic researchers and practitioners.

In the first vignette, we use an example from our narrative inquiry stream, in which the academic researchers were the primary producers of knowledge, but the practitioners shifted from detached subjects to active sources of knowledge. In the second vignette, we use an example from another narrative approach, the cooperative inquiry stream, in which the practitioners’ role shifted completely to that of knowledge producer. The third vignette illustrates the practitioners’ role as active and connected consumers of theory, situated within the context of an event designed to get their feedback about the first wave of integrated (and very tentative) research findings. These roles turned practitioners into committed stakeholders in the research process, which helped the researchers to better understand their leadership experience. In each instance, the meaningful connections yielded something of relevance to their practice and enhanced the quality of the insights produced by the research.

From Detached Subjects to Sources of Knowledge. Our narrative inquiry offered a systematic process for eliciting and collecting stories about the work in each program participant’s organization. We analyzed the transcripts to produce a unique leadership story presenting key elements of the leadership that drove its members to engage in action. We also used the material to identify patterns through cross-organizational analysis.

My job as a member of the research team was to help members of several organizations elicit stories in conversation and, later, to make sense of them. Assuming that program participant Salvador and his colleagues had important knowledge about how leadership happens in their

community, we held a series of conversations with them to tap into that knowledge and to learn from their stories. The protocols for these conversations were organized around key dimensions of their work, which they helped to identify as crucial to their leadership success. In analyzing the transcripts, I searched for what I thought were the central themes of their work and organized them into what is called an “analytical memo.” I developed these themes, referenced individual stories to illustrate them, and arranged them into what I hoped was a coherent picture of their work. The memo was to become the basis for writing the leadership story for Salvador’s organization.⁵

The next step was to share this memo with Salvador to check my interpretations before writing the final story. When we talked, Salvador hadn’t looked at the entire memo. (I knew he was busy with an important campaign, a key point to consider in researcher-practitioner collaboration.) Yet he expressed concern that I didn’t really get it. My description of his colleague as his “right-hand man,” he argued, indicated a hierarchical relationship that just didn’t exist. He suggested that as an outsider, I would not be able to understand. Because Salvador hadn’t yet seen the whole memo, we arranged to meet again.

When we spoke next, Salvador expressed surprise at how much I actually did get their work. He said I captured well the organization’s efforts to build a movement based on their identity as indigenous people while also being open to the white-neighborhood residents who became their allies in changing a city ordinance. He still had lots of feedback for me, but from there on we seemed to be on different ground. Our relationship seemed more open, even though he continued to challenge pieces of the writing and my understanding of their work. Our connection continued to develop as we negotiated the content and structure of his final story, which represented an integration of his and my voice.

The process of analyzing his stories, writing the memo, hearing back from him, and engaging in ongoing conversation challenged many assumptions I had drawn from my usual place at the academy. This helped me begin to understand something about his messy and power-ridden world and about his role as an indigenous leader making change in his community. Having to explain to me what was implicitly captured in the stories, I hope, prompted Salvador to see his work differently, too. These exchanges influenced my thinking about our leadership theories and the way I continue to do research in the project. Even if I couldn’t always articulate the significance of his stories or the nuanced reinterpretations he gave my understanding, I often go back to the insights from these conversations when doing organizational and cross-site analysis in other contexts. I was privileged to engage in conversations about his work and life.

Narrative inquiry recognizes that practitioners such as Salvador have their own knowledge base, which has both explicit and implicit elements. Hence, their role in research goes beyond subject to *source* of knowledge; they engage in telling stories about their work as the basis for sharing knowledge about their practice. Given the inductive approach of our early research and our novel definition of leadership, it was quite helpful to use Salvador and his colleagues—practitioners in community-based organizations—as a source of explicit knowledge that we could identify to organize our interview protocols. Later, it was useful to analyze their stories for implicit knowledge about their own leadership practice which we then helped to make more explicit. These instances of exchanging explicit knowledge and transforming implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge represent powerful mechanisms for creating organizational knowledge (Nonaka 1994).

As narrative inquirers, we helped to externalize the practitioners’ implicit knowledge through a systematic process of data collection and analysis *in relationship with our practitioners* (Riessman 2002).⁶ Like other insider/outsider researchers, in creating the stories we emphasized “the importance of attending to insiders’ subjective meanings as fundamental in describing a setting” (Bartunek and Louis 1996, 3; see also Riessman 2002). To understand the intentions and meanings of Salvador and his colleagues, we avoided objective distance in favor of conversation and relationship (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Dutton 2003; Herda 1999; Riessman 2002; Rubin and Rubin 1995). Through the process of making Salvador’s implicit forms of knowledge explicit, we helped him to convert his intuitions and images into “tangible statements, metaphors, analogies, hypotheses, or models” that he and others could learn from (Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001, 348).

Our experience taught us that practitioners’ stories about their work can be a source of at least three different forms of knowledge. First, narrative inquiry taps into the intentions, beliefs, values, and emotions that reflect situated social reality (Riessman 2002). For example, as an organizational leader, Salvador represents a social actor in a specific context. He becomes a critical source of knowledge about the meanings of key relationships at work when he challenges and clarifies the researcher’s use of the term “right-hand man” to describe the link to his closest associate.

Second, narrative inquiry suggests that stories can be a source of information about practitioners’ know-how, skills (Nonaka 1994), or theories in use (Schön 1991). Salvador’s story tells about the artful management skills he uses to recruit people into the work of the organization—people who may not share the identities that give meaning to the actions of organization members. The give-and-take between Salvador and the researcher helped to unearth these

implicit know-how and explicit theories because sharing experience narratively and negotiating the meanings elicited provided “a solution to ‘the problem of how to translate knowing into telling’” (H. White 1989, cited in Riessman 2002, 219).

Finally, narratives can illuminate taken-for-granted assumptions and contradictions between assumptions and practice, helping to bridge the gap between daily social interaction and large-scale social structures (Ewick and Silbey 1995; Riessman 2002). As an outsider to the institutional and cultural arrangements that sustain the organization’s work, the researcher was able to negotiate her own insights, challenging elements of the stories as she negotiated her interpretations and voiced the final story.

Practitioners as Producers of Knowledge. *When we proposed to the practitioners in the program that they join us as co-researchers—to collaboratively engage in research about leadership with us—they often asked, “How can this kind of research really help me advance my work?” Some were skeptical that it could or that it would be worth their effort. “Isn’t this the researchers’ job?” others wondered.*

A small group, however, was intrigued by the possibilities of one of the projects we proposed. In this activity, six to eight participants get together to share their stories with each other to produce practice-grounded learning from their own perspective. This practitioner-oriented process, called cooperative inquiry (Heron and Reason 2001), moves between cycles of collective reflection (storytelling and analysis) and action (practice), centering on an issue the group has in common and that each person wants to improve in his or her own practice. In our case, the group would meet during two-day retreats, four to five times over the course of two years, reflecting on stories about their own practice and taking action in their own work to begin to develop new insights that would enhance their practice as they answered their inquiry question.

One participant, Vicky, was skeptical that anything valuable would come out of the process. Therefore, I expected she would not get involved in any significant way in the research activities. In the end, however, another participant, Larry, did persuade her to try cooperative inquiry, in part because she found the topic that he proposed relevant to her work.

Given Vicky’s initial skepticism, I was surprised, two years later, to hear her present the findings from her strategic thinking inquiry group. She talked about the important conceptual insights the group had produced and the value of the process itself. By the end of the inquiry process, she saw the value of academic–practitioner collaborations for her work. With the help of the group’s facilitator—a scholar who had brought in readings on adult learning and strategic thinking and challenged the group

to think critically about their practice—the group co-produced insights that have helped them to think differently about their work. In addition to the research report on their inquiry, the practitioners in this group have presented their experience at leadership conferences, are writing an article to submit for publication, and are producing a practitioner booklet to share their insights in the field.

In this form of narrative inquiry, practitioners are still considered an important source of knowledge. But their role expands, so that they also become producers of knowledge in collaboration with researchers. In Nonaka’s terms (1994), practitioners are more engaged in transforming their own implicit knowledge into explicit forms to enhance their own learning and that of others. Academics still play a role in the research: They provide expertise on the methodology, help the group to think critically about their practices, or bring in formal theory to help the group theorize about their experience and generate new insights. But researchers and practitioners working within this framework are open to each other and negotiate research questions and activities. In our case, we were able to negotiate with practitioners to find issues that were of immediate concern to them in their practice and that had theoretical relevance for us. In the end, there was shared ownership of the research processes and products.

Elsewhere we have discussed practitioners’ ability to produce knowledge independent of academics (Dodge, Ospina, and Foldy 2005). Reflective practitioners, for example, find lessons in their own experiences that might be extracted for other practitioners. Despite its value for advancing practice and for theory development (Schön 1991), we downplay this approach here because our focus is the role of practitioners in doing social science–based research. Cooperative inquiry, as a narrative approach to research, has made great strides toward connectedness between academics and practitioners in a social science context (Bray et al. 2000; Heron and Reason 2001). This reflects one of several approaches to inquiry that have found ways to engage practitioners in more fluid roles to produce better and more relevant research, establishing a strong bridge between researchers and practitioners in the knowledge-production process. They have in common the intention to give a voice to practitioners, expanding their role as research subjects to that of knowledge producers. Researchers, then, become catalysts “who make it possible for research to happen and for practitioners to examine their work in a reflective, self-critical fashion” (Milofsky 2000, 77). We will return to this broader trend in the discussion section of this article.

Practitioners as Connected Consumers of Scholarship. *Toward the end of the research with the first group of participants in our program, we designed a workshop-like event to bring our community together to reflect on what*

we were learning about leadership. Given that this group of participants was about to exit the program, we felt it was an important moment to share our interpretations of their work and hear their reactions. Our goal was to make sure we had covered all emerging, relevant topics and that our preliminary interpretations were on target from their point of view.

We decided to present our early hunches in a newsletter, which forced us to translate our ideas concisely into a nonacademic language. This also forced us to make hard choices about the ideas that would serve as the focus of the conversations. We chose those that met three criteria: They should represent our most developed thinking grounded in the analysis of empirical data; they should have theoretical grounding; and they should feel relevant to the practitioners' work.

For example, we offered and discussed the idea of paradoxical leadership as the ability of organizational members and leaders to simultaneously honor two or more seemingly incompatible leadership challenges (Huxham and Beech 2003), such as committing to democratic decision making while also ensuring prompt resolution of issues to move the work forward. We also introduced the idea of the "appreciative model" which captures assumptions and practices that reflect the value community-based leaders place on the experience of the people they serve. We intended the newsletter (and the papers and posters) provided for the meeting to aid joint reflection, yet we were anxious about whether or not our design would work.

During the event, one participant, Dale, was immediately energized by the idea of paradoxical leadership, and he expressed his interest in taking it back to his community for use in staff training and development activities. He was surprised by the explicit articulation of something he had experienced daily as an implicit contradiction of this style, despite his gut feeling that it worked. He was thrilled at the possibility of reframing it as a strength of the leadership developing in his organization. On the other hand, we clearly heard that the framing of the appreciative model did not work. Several practitioners argued this language represented an outsider view that was contrary to the way they perceived their relationship with constituents. Perhaps the term "organic model" might work better, someone suggested, but we felt this would not capture the richness of the phenomenon. We have since dropped this label and have provisionally replaced it with the phrase "grounded humanism" until we engage in another feedback process.

Clearly, the practitioners in the vignette were not merely the subjects of inquiry, nor were they passive consumers of research that was handed down from the ivory tower. Instead, both academics and researchers were active participants in a community with a shared interest in learning about leadership practice.

Recent research about knowledge creation and transfer suggests that these kinds of collaborative efforts between academics and practitioners are valuable ways to create bridges between key stakeholders of the discipline (Amabile et al. 2001; Huxham and Beech 2003; Landry, Lamari, and Amara 2003; Mohrman, Gibson, and Mohrman 2001; Offermann and Spiros 2001). Several studies suggest that practitioners are more likely to use research when they have developed strong links with scholars (Amabile et al. 2001; Landry, Lamari, and Amara 2003; Mohrman, Gibson, and Mohrman 2001; Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001). In this literature there is a "persistent observation . . . that researchers and users belong to separate communities with very different values and ideologies and that these differences impede utilization" (Beyer and Trice 1982, cited in Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001, 341). It follows that knowledge utilization can be increased by bridging these differences, that is, by connecting academics and practitioners.

Nonaka's theory of knowledge creation can help us to understand why this might be the case. Socializing two groups into each other's world requires exchanging tacit knowledge through joint activities—for example, by spending time together or learning together. This helps to produce "some form of shared mental model, metaphor, analogy, or culture that can then serve as a framework for moving forward" (Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001, 347). Our collaborative event to discuss preliminary findings offered an opportunity for academics and practitioners to create a convergence of understanding about what topics were relevant for knowledge development in the community and how those topics would be framed (Huxham and Beech 2003; Mohrman, Gibson, and Mohrman 2001). Further, such collaboration increases the chances that "research will relate to the experience and perspectives of organization members, so that practitioners will be better able to understand and apply theoretically based research findings" (Mohrman, Gibson, and Mohrman 2001, 359), as was the case with Dale in the third vignette.

However, engaging in socialization processes that tune academics and practitioners into each others' worlds is not enough to ensure that research products will be useful to practitioners. The literature on collaborative research suggests that practitioners are more likely to use research products when they are also presented or translated in ways that are accessible, practical, and relevant to their work (Boland et al. 2001; Huxham and Beech 2003; Landry, Lamari, and Amara 2003; Mohrman, Gibson, and Mohrman 2001). Yet much of the applied research is presented in ways that are alien to practitioners.

Again, narrative inquiry, as well as other research approaches that rely heavily on narratives, offers opportunities for promoting connectedness. Interpretive or narrative presentation facilitates learning because it reflects situated

knowledge (Yanow 2004) and “culturally specific practices of language use” (Boland et al. 2001, 396) that may be more resonant for practitioners. Furthermore, these forms of presentation facilitate a process of knowledge creation that Nonaka calls *internalization*, whereby “explicit knowledge is converted to tacit knowledge through learning by doing” (Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001, 348). Because interpretive and narrative forms are both concrete—they contain familiar details of work life—and abstract—they convey an explicit lesson—they allow practitioners to engage as active consumers of the research material, making choices about what is relevant from the story and how it might be applied to their own work (Boland et al. 2001, 396). A similar analysis could apply to other qualitative approaches, such as case studies.

In our case, the insights from the integration event have helped to experiment with creating and disseminating products for practitioners. For example, we have invited a practitioner in our project to help us package the leadership stories in a way that will appeal to practitioner audiences. She encouraged us to see the value of “letting the stories speak for themselves” instead of providing explicit analysis for readers. An important caveat is required here: Boland et al. (2001) are careful to clarify that just because interpretive representations are more useful to practitioners, that does not reduce the value of more academically presented knowledge. Rather, they suggest that researchers translate their abstract knowledge by combining figurative and literal forms to ensure academic-to-practitioner knowledge transfer.

In conclusion, narrative inquiry encouraged us to think about how practitioners might be involved in our research as sources of legitimate knowledge, as producers of knowledge, and as connected consumers of pragmatic science. Although we have only preliminary evidence, we believe our project has generated concrete benefits for both stakeholders. We know that practitioners have gained an understanding of the academic world that has enriched them personally and professionally. They have become more tolerant of academic culture, with its slow cycles and stringent rules for generating learning. They have had an opportunity to reflect on their own work and have taken away products, such as the leadership stories, that have immediate application. We, on the other hand, have gained a greater understanding of the world of practice, which, we believe, makes us better applied researchers and allows us to offer a product that has greater utility to practitioners. The shift in roles, on the other hand, has not diminished our capacity and legitimacy to engage in independent thinking and autonomous research.

The unfolding relationships developed with the program participants—as illustrated by Salvador’s vignette—reaffirm Clandinin and Connelly’s point that in narrative in-

quiry, “at first the forces of collaboration are weak and the arrangements feel tenuous” and that “the negotiation of a research relationship is on-going throughout the inquiry” (2000, 72). Our experience suggests that such negotiation is well worth the effort. Tapping into the experience and meanings behind the leadership practices of the program participants, fostering their own independent production of knowledge, and engaging them as active consumers and potential users of our tentative research findings helped us to develop new insights about leadership that have implications for both theory and practice.

But more importantly, the various forms of collaboration that have produced a win-win situation have also, in the process, strengthened the connections between members of two distinct worlds. We have developed better understandings of each other and an appreciation of the separate worlds we come from and a greater level of mutual trust. In the case of Salvador, for example, the relationship has led to other collaborations over time. He attended a workshop at a research conference to explore the participatory nature of our research, and later he became the co-author of a report about the challenges we faced in doing collaborative research. He pushed our discussion by bringing in a power analysis that shed an entirely new light on the questions we were addressing (Ospina et al. 2004). We continue to engage in similar collaborative efforts with other program participants.

Discussion: Research as a Source of Connectedness

In using our experience to argue that research between academics and practitioners is an effective way to foster connectedness in the field (and an undervalued way to heal the science–practice gap), we do not mean to suggest that narrative inquiry is the *only* research approach that does this. For many years practitioners have been an important source of knowledge and active consumers of research that draws on diverse methods from case studies (Bock and Campbell 1962; ICMA 1972; Radin 2002) to surveys (Ammons and Newell 1989).

In our first article in this series (Dodge, Ospina, and Foldy 2005), we argued that case studies draw on a common assumption of other forms of narrative inquiry—what we call *narrative as knowing*—to indicate that stories about practice contain useful knowledge for building theory and informing practice. Case studies have been an invaluable tool in the field, not only as a source, but also “a means of applying substantive knowledge to concrete situations” (Somers 1955). In these cases, practitioners may be sources of knowledge, consumers of knowledge, and perhaps even producers of knowledge. Yet narrative inquiry as *collaborative* research between academics and practitioners deep-

ens these roles and helps to bridge the gap in unique ways, as we have illustrated in our story.

Our claim is that when we bring practitioners back into the research process in various capacities—rather than considering them merely as consumers of research findings—research of any type can become an effective source of connectedness between academics and practitioners. Using research for this purpose implies loosening the traditional roles that both stakeholders have played in the production of knowledge in academic and other specialized research contexts. This is not a simple task because the sharp division of labor espoused by mode 1 research has strongly influenced the incentive structures and procedures in applied disciplines such as public administration. But it is possible, especially considering that broader changes in scientific practices are moving in the same direction.

A growing literature on knowledge transformation in science has documented the emergence of alternative approaches to mode 1 research and promotes quality scholarship while opening up the research process to establish a direct connection to practice. Labeled “mode 2” (Gibbons et al. 1994), this approach is driven by application (not just applied research) and uses multidisciplinary views to address research problems. In mode 2, groups with members from both academe and practitioner worlds produce knowledge that is distributed through their interaction in networks spanning beyond academic researchers. Multiple stakeholders have a say in assessing the quality and relevance of the research process (Gibbons 2001; Gibbons et al. 1994; Starkey and Madan 2001).⁷

Taking a similar direction, a group of social scientists has coined the term “interactive social science” to refer to “a style of activity where researchers, funding agencies and ‘user groups’ interact throughout the entire research process, including the definition of the research agenda, project selection, project execution and the application of research insights” (Scott et al. 1999, cited in Caswell and Shove 2000, 154). As an example of this open research, Rabeharisoa, Callon, and Demonty (2000) describe how French patient associations support research that focuses on diseases they care about. Apart from funding scientific and clinical research, these associations actively participate in orientating the research and producing and disseminating knowledge. These diverse modalities of involvement support entire fields of research and create new links between science producers and users.

Attempting to apply these concepts to the business school setting in the United States, Huff (2000) proposes a third, hybrid approach to research, called mode 1.5, which integrates the best features of modes 1 and 2.⁸ She describes it as practice-oriented research that uses traditional academic skills to develop definitions, compare data across settings, and suggest generalizable frameworks for further sense

making, in a spiraling cycle of inquiry fed by ongoing conversations among academic researchers and practitioners.

Opening up the research process to practitioners does not require completely breaking with the assumptions of mode 1. Researchers in management have reported on mode 1 collaborations with practitioners, suggesting they make their research stronger (Amabile et al. 2001; Mohrman, Gibson, and Mohrman 2001). With all actors engaging in data collection, interpretation, and presentation of research findings, these collaborations have produced better scholarship from the perspective of both academics and practitioners.

Finally, various established forms of collaborative research with a long tradition in academe also offer models to connect academics and practitioners (Bartunek and Louis 1996; Caswell and Shove 2000; Greenwood and Levin 1998; Milofsky 2000).⁹ For example, in “transparent research,” subjects are fully involved in the research process, from its design to presentation (Milofsky 2000). Because practitioners are often professionals who are no less educated, informed, or sophisticated than their research counterparts, this is viewed as a partnership between stakeholders with complementary forms of expertise rather than one “between experts and lay consumers of knowledge” (Milofsky 2000, 66).

These approaches loosen the fixed roles of academic researchers and practitioners in the knowledge-production process while staying firmly rooted in the scientific paradigm. They value the sophisticated insider perspective that practitioners bring to the research process and practitioners’ ability to theorize in ways that inform the process and enrich the final products (Amabile et al. 2001; Milofsky 2000; Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001).

Researchers in public administration and related fields have used some of these—case studies, narrative inquiry, and action research, for example—but the field has been timid in encouraging its members to use more open approaches to research that encourage a real shift in roles around knowledge production. Although encouraging efforts to promote, fund, and support researcher–practitioner collaborations have been reported in the nonprofit sector (Schuman and Abramson 2000), there is plenty of room for more experimentation. Our experience, embedded within the developments described here, suggests that more fluidity in the roles that practitioners play in the research enterprise is not only possible and desirable for enhancing the products of research, but also may be an excellent source of connectedness in the field. Healthy debate, the cultivation of practitioner–researcher dialogue, and, we argue, developments such as turns toward narrative and collaborative inquiry in public administration have helped to bolster the field’s potential to produce high-quality pragmatic science that connects the two worlds.

Strategies to Facilitate Connectedness through Research

There are many ways to immediately start enhancing connectedness through research. As preconditions of successful collaboration, researchers need to appreciate the knowledge base that practitioners bring as insiders; trust practitioners' ability to be reflexive and sophisticated about their practice and to locate practice within a broader context or "big story" (Weick 2001); believe that practitioners' perspectives can enhance their research design and contribute to building theory; and create incentives for practitioners to participate in research, whether through compensation or by committing to create concrete products or processes to improve their work.

From the practitioner side, preconditions include understanding and appreciating the reasons and logic behind research standards; accepting a different pace and rhythm in the collaboration process; and respecting researchers' expertise and availability to carry on the research process rather than minimizing, devaluing, or silencing this authority (Ospina et al. 2004). At the same time, practitioners must authorize themselves to negotiate ways to enhance the overall project, and they must be willing to transcend their individual ideas of relevance.

Researchers employing mode 1 research might create more active roles for practitioners as users and consumers so that they can influence design choices, and they might create joint forums or translate research findings into language and frames that are more appropriate to practitioner audiences to facilitate knowledge transfer and dissemination (Nonaka 1994; Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001). Researchers in mode 2 could take care to avoid narrow, short-term, or commercially profitable projects and consider the interests of employees, citizens, or the broader society, not just those of management or policy makers. They also need to find ways to manage external restrictions on data collection, interpretation, or dissemination that hinder scientific progress (Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001).

Conclusion

A strong field of public administration requires attention to the interface between academic researchers and practitioners. Reynolds and Vince suggest that "academics and managers do what they do because they like doing it, and neither tribe is universally attracted to the habits and discourse of the other" (2004, 454). Connectedness in the field requires an awareness that members of these stakeholder groups work in different worlds, yet each offers contributions that complement the other's ability to produce knowledge that is relevant and rigorous. Drawing on this diversity in the research process offers promise to the field's aspiration to connectedness.

Weick (2001) suggests that solutions to the science–practice gap demand as much attention to the traditional role of the knowledge consumer (the practitioner) as we pay to the traditional role of the producer (the researcher). We go further here to suggest that one way of reducing the gap is to challenge this traditional division of labor to allow for more fluidity in the roles assigned to stakeholders in the research process. Engaging practitioners more substantively in research will nurture cross-cultural sensitivities to reduce the gap.

Our story about narrative inquiry shows enhanced connectedness between practitioners and our academic research team in the service of a common research agenda about community-based leadership. The assumptions and practices of narrative inquiry encouraged us to challenge the traditional roles of both groups in the process of knowledge creation and to adopt more fluid ones. Practitioners became engaged as sources of knowledge, as co-producers and collaborators, and as active users and consumers who provided a critical feedback loop to close the research cycle. As a result of this process, we developed processes and products that we hope will make a substantive contribution to theories of leadership while enhancing our collaborators' practice. As an additional benefit, we established a significant level of connectedness with this group of practitioners, one that has transformed our way of thinking and doing research.

Our experience with narrative inquiry gives us an opportunity to speculate about the contribution that research can make to the persistent aspiration to connectedness in the field. This contribution was at the core of the field's development in the early years, yet, in our view, it has diminished over time. In addition to the important efforts to promote connectedness in other realms of the field, academic–practitioner interactions around the research process itself represent an important source of connectedness that has been forgotten, but is still buried in the collective memory of the field. Our experience coincides with broader trends in the development of scientific research in contemporary society that open the boundaries of the research process to a broader set of stakeholders. Therefore, we urge scholars in the field to consider engaging in research with practitioners, and we encourage practitioners to take up their offer. Collaborative research drawn from a variety of traditions and grounded in practice can make great contributions to the field. Doing research that brings the practitioner back in may serve not only to maintain the vitality and relevance of our applied field, but also to produce a type of scholarship that bridges the gap between theory and practice.

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Notes

1. We assume that practitioners are the decision makers, managers, policy makers, and professionals in the field. Other groups in the world of practice may be the focus of research, such as unskilled employees and recipients of public services. Because this article addresses the connectedness between researchers and practitioners in public administration, we limit our discussion to these groups.
2. Some PhD programs in public administration and management still value this integration and explicitly create practitioner-scholars (Salipante and Aram 2003), but the tendency is to separate the two roles. An idea that still has currency is that of the academic-turned-practitioner who takes on a “critical participative researcher” role while working in a real job (Watson 2000).
3. See the excellent overview of the debate and a brilliant critique of its original narrow focus in Box (1992). White and Adams (1994) offer a good compilation of articles reflecting both sides of the debate. For a recent summary, see Streib, Slotkin, and Rivera (2001).
4. Hodgkinson, Herriot, and Anderson (2001) label these dysfunctional types pedantic, popularist, and puerile science, respectively.
5. The same process was repeated with each of the program participants.
6. Riessman (2002) calls this “correspondence,” that is, taking results back to respondents to ensure the meanings in the stories are expressed as they intended, even if they disagree with the researchers’ interpretations.
7. For an overview of this literature, see the special issue of the *British Journal of Management* published in 2001.
8. Both mode 1 and 2 have advantages and disadvantages. Mode 2 makes knowledge production timelier, more practical, and more inclusive, but is subject to market forces and cooptation by political, corporate, or bureaucratic interests. Mode 1 may be slow, inward looking, and exclusionary, but it also protects independent experimentation, guarantees autonomous thinking, and attends to questions of public interest or to critical questions that do not have an immediate application (Grey 2001; Huff 2000; Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001).

9. Examples are insider/outsider research (Bartunek and Louis 1996), transparent research (Milofsky 2000), action research (Greenwood and Levin 1998; Huxham and Beech 2003), and cooperative inquiry (Bray et al. 2000; Heron and Reason 2001).

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