

Bridging Research-Practice Tensions: Exploring Day-to-Day Engaged Scholarship Investigating Sustainable Development Challenges

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This paper adds to literature on engaged scholarship by exploring how previous experience, study expectations, and multiple identities are key factors that shape how management researchers perceive and experience the research-practice divide in sustainable development research. Highlighting ways to navigate tensions in engaged scholarship, the authors identify five major strategies: remembering the purpose of the research, emphasizing relationships, engaging in self-learning, practicing reflexivity, and framing emerging results. To do so, the authors draw on findings from three management research projects which sought to use engaged scholarship to address the sustainable development challenges of homelessness, Indigenous approaches to economics and development, and sustainability reporting in higher education. Taking a collaborative auto-ethnographic approach to analyzing their experiences as researchers, the authors demonstrate the potential for future management researchers to utilize a similar methodology to improve engaged scholarship research focused on sustainable development challenges.

Keywords: research-practice divide; engaged scholarship; sustainable development challenges

Introduction

Studies have shown that researchers and practitioners often have different expectations as to the purpose of management knowledge, strategies for handling problems that arise, and time orientations (Shapiro *et al.*, 2007; Bansal *et al.*, 2012; Schumacher, 2018). While management scholarship has widely discussed the research-practice divide, both in European and in North American Academies of Management (e.g., Vicari, 2013; Kieser *et al.*, 2015; Tsui, 2019), this study emerged out of our discovery that the literature did not reflect the tensions we experienced in attempting to bridge the divide as we took up engaged scholarship in our PhD studies. As Van

de Ven (2007) outlines in *Engaged Scholarship*, engaged scholarship is a promising approach to bridge the research-practice gap as it encourages management researchers to actively engage with other scholars and practitioners throughout the research process to understand a multi-faceted problem in a particular context. By obtaining the perspectives of a range of stakeholders, this approach can lead to results that are more insightful and multi-layered in comparison to when scholars work alone (Van de Ven, 2007, 2011; Hunt, 2008; Bansal *et al.*, 2018). And yet, in spite of the promises of engaged scholarship, the literature is largely conceptually focused (Hunt, 2008; Adelman and Spivack, 2009; Bansal *et al.*, 2012; Tsui, 2013; Bartunek and Rynes, 2014). As we began our own doctoral studies, we were still left wondering how researchers experience and manage research-practice tensions (see Hunt, 2008; Bansal *et al.*, 2012) when taking up this approach.

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The aim of this paper is to provide an autoethnographic account of our experiences utilizing an engaged scholarship approach and how we sought to navigate research–practice tensions. Through conversations reflecting on our PhD studies as junior faculty, we realized there were similarities in our research orientations; we each utilized inductive qualitative methods (Eisenhardt *et al.*, 2016) and took up engaged scholarship to address sustainable development challenges, namely: homelessness, Indigenous approaches to economic development, and sustainability reporting in higher education.

Engaged scholarship is well suited to investigate sustainable development challenges as they are highly complex and interdisciplinary (e.g., Bansal *et al.*, 2012; Tsui, 2013; Ferraro *et al.*, 2015). We define sustainable development as ‘a process of achieving human development in an inclusive, connected, equitable, prudent and secure manner’ (Gladwin *et al.*, 1995, p. 878), which encompasses a range of pressing global challenges, such as climate change and poverty (Christen and Schmidt, 2012; Ferraro *et al.*, 2015). There are limited management studies focused on engaged scholarship in a sustainability context, making it difficult to learn from others’ experiences. We, therefore, enacted a study using our experiences with engaged scholarship for our doctoral studies as direct sources of empirical data from which we unravel how bridging research–practice tensions play out in reality when investigating sustainable development challenges.

Through this paper, we offer the following contributions to the literature. First, while previous research has mentioned aspects of practicing engaged scholarship (e.g., Van de Ven, 2007; Avenier and Parmentier Cajaiba, 2012; Bansal *et al.*, 2012), we offer a holistic framework of day-to-day engaged scholarship, including factors that shape how research–practice tensions are experienced and managed. Second, by utilizing autoethnographic examples from our doctoral research, we answer the call for more nuanced understandings of engaged scholarship in practice (e.g., Adelman and Spivack, 2009; Bansal *et al.*, 2012; Bartunek and Rynes, 2014; Lapadat, 2017). Third, while others have taken up a collaborative auto-ethnographic approach to analyze their experiences as researchers (e.g., Cohen *et al.*, 2009; Peticca-Harris *et al.*, 2016), we add to the literature an account of how management researchers can utilize a similar methodology to improve engaged scholarship research focused on sustainable development challenges. Finally, by drawing on our own experiences investigating sustainable development challenges, we affirm sustainable development as an important research context for management studies (Adler, 2016; Bansal, 2019), and we acknowledge the significance

of bringing context into our research (see Lee, 2018; McLaren and Durepos, 2019).

In what follows, we first summarize the literature and identify notable lacunae. Second, we describe the sustainable development challenges tackled in our PhD studies, and explicate our collaborative auto-ethnographic approach. Third, we discuss the research–practice tensions we faced in taking up an engaged scholarship approach. Finally, we offer implications of our study and areas for future research.

Literature review

Navigating research–practice tensions via engaged scholarship

Over the last three decades, management scholars have discussed ‘The Great Divide’: the considerable gap that exists between research and practice (e.g., Shapiro *et al.*, 2007; Kieser *et al.*, 2015). Researchers have proposed a variety of strategies and approaches to bridge the enduring research–practice divide (e.g., Avenier and Parmentier Cajaiba, 2012; Empson, 2013; Aguinis *et al.*, 2014; Schumacher, 2018). For example, Schumacher (2018) presents a collaborative research approach – *Practitioner-Practitioner-Researcher Inquiry Group* (PPRIG) – that involves practitioners as active partners. PPRIG consists of a structured, collaborative process where practitioners and management researchers share and explain their practices, leading to active contributions of practitioners to help understand, interpret, and change phenomena from the management field over a one- to two-year period. Empson (2013) employs autoethnographic accounts to detail her experience as an academic navigating identity conflict and how she sought to reconcile academic–practice identity tensions while engaging with management practitioners over time. In another instance, Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau (2018) report on their use of *doubly engaged ethnography* to work with vulnerable communities in a self-reflective manner. They build a framework to overcome the challenges of positionality, engagement versus exploitation, and ethical representation of vulnerable individuals, aimed at generating rigorous scholarship while simultaneously providing practical applications for real-world issues. A number of management scholars (e.g., Aguinis *et al.*, 2014; Bartunek, 2007; Bansal *et al.*, 2018; Thomas and Ambrosini, 2020) point to Van de Ven’s (2007) *engaged scholarship approach* as a means to bridge the research–practice gap because of its joint ability to produce knowledge that advances science and enlightens practitioners.

Given our emphasis on engaged scholarship, we further describe this approach. *Engaged scholarship* is a collaborative approach to research that can utilize qualitative and/or quantitative methodologies (Van de Ven, 2007) and take different forms depending on the perspective (i.e., detached outside or attached inside) and purpose (i.e., describing/explaining phenomena vs. designing/controlling) (Van de Ven, 2007, 2011; see Figure 1). Irrespective of form, one of the main aims of engaged scholarship is the *dual objective* of advancing fundamental understanding and achieving applied use (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). While engaged scholarship commonly is employed in studies intended to benefit practitioners (e.g., action research) and seldom used to advance academic knowledge (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006; Bartunek, 2007), our focus is on the perspective of the researcher who is engaged with practitioners to describe or explain phenomena, with the primary aim of advancing basic knowledge (Figure 1, quadrants 1 and 2).

Hatch *et al.* (2015) offer one of the few empirical examples in management studies reporting on their use of Van de Ven's (2007) engaged scholarship approach. The authors combine ethnography and grounded theory with engaged scholarship to study processes of organizational identity change in the Carlsberg Group. They explicitly note their use of engaged scholarship and include a key study informant as a co-author. Bansal *et al.* (2012) identify engaged scholarship as having anchored their study on the role of an intermediary organization to bridge the research-practice gap. While largely conceptual in nature, Avenier and Parmentier Cajaiba (2012) build on Van de Ven's (2007) engaged scholarship approach by offering a dialogical model for

bridging the research-practice gap with some illustrative empirical examples. Outside of a few examples, though, there is a lack of attempts by management scholars to take up engaged scholarship and analyze their use of the approach in detail (Bansal *et al.*, 2018).

Investigating sustainable development challenges

Bridging the research-practice gap is particularly crucial to address sustainable development challenges (Bartunek and Rynes, 2010; Bansal *et al.*, 2012). Sustainable development requires collaboration between interdisciplinary actors in society, including academics and practitioners, to achieve holistic solutions to complex societal challenges (e.g., Ferraro *et al.*, 2015; Curseu and Schrujier, 2017; Bansal, 2019). However, it is challenging to create fruitful collaborations among scholars from different disciplines and knowledge traditions while also connecting the generalizing claims of academics with the experiential and contextualized insights of practitioners (Ghosal, 2005; Christen and Schmidt, 2012; Craps, 2019; Laasch *et al.*, 2020).

In the context of management research, scholars have advocated for the inclusion of multiple stakeholders (e.g., Winn and Pogutz, 2013; Ferraro *et al.*, 2015; Laasch *et al.*, 2020). For example, Winn and Pogutz (2013, p. 224) conceptualize that management studies addressing sustainable development challenges: 'absolutely require cultivating cross-disciplinary discourse, nurturing of multidisciplinary perspectives, and drawing on the innovative capabilities of the many practitioners developing new approaches on the ground'. Ferraro *et al.* (2015, p. 373) theorize a novel approach to tackling sustainability challenges that includes establishing a

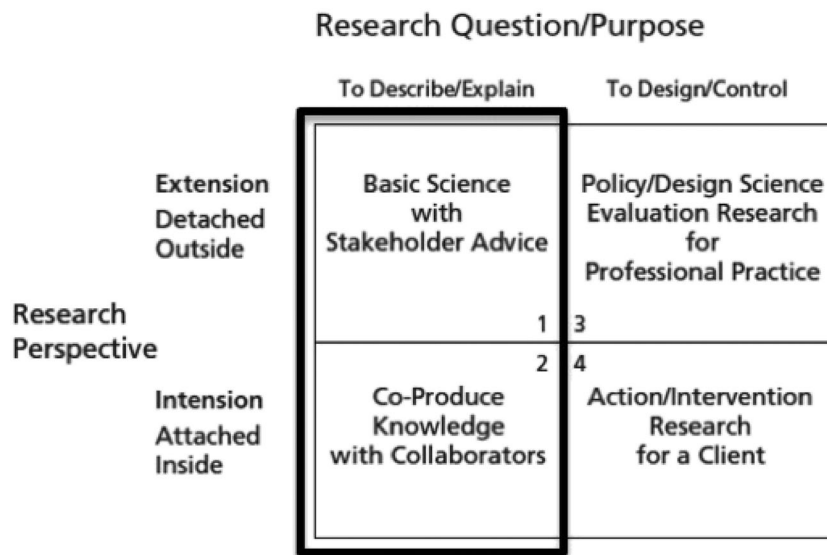


FIGURE 1 Alternative forms of engaged scholarship and focus of our study (Adapted from Van de Ven, 2007)

‘participatory architecture’, defined as ‘a structure and rules of engagement that allow diverse and heterogeneous actors to interact constructively over prolonged timespans’. Overall, though, there is limited empirical emphasis on how such collaborations can be carried out in actuality (Crane *et al.*, 2017; Bansal, 2019).

While the management literature lacks sufficient empirical investigation of research-practice collaborations, domains such as public policy, natural resources management, urban development, and community capacity building have long traditions in using collaborations to problem-solve sustainable development challenges (Curseu and Schrujier, 2017; Craps, 2019). For examples of such studies, see Gutberlet (2008), Von Korff *et al.* (2012), and Vangen *et al.* (2015). Some of the few empirical studies of collaborations in management include: advocacy groups in research consortia (Olsen *et al.*, 2016), a bottom-up governance approach to develop a circular economy (Aguinaga *et al.*, 2018), and the role of boundary spanning organizations (Bansal *et al.*, 2012). Specifically concerning engaged scholarship (Van de Ven, 2007), Bansal *et al.* (2012) highlight how the Network for Business Sustainability serves as a bridging intermediary organization, bringing together researchers and practitioners to co-produce sustainable development-related knowledge. However, budding scholars are left wondering how to respond to the calls of Bartunek (2007), Aguinis *et al.* (2014), and Bansal *et al.* (2018) to use engaged scholarship without having access to such intermediary organizations.

In sum, practices documented in management research have not been sufficient to bridge the existing research-practice gap when investigating sustainable development phenomena (Ghosal, 2005; Crane *et al.*, 2017; Bansal, 2019). Even as they plead for engaged approaches, they fail to document what such collaborations may look like, and how individual researchers can learn to practice them to create knowledge relevant for theory and practice.

Method

Following Van de Ven’s (2007) *engaged scholarship* approach, the first and second author’s PhD research can be classified as ‘basic science with stakeholder advice’, since the researchers were outsiders to their empirical settings yet involved study participants in active advisory roles. The third author’s PhD research can be classified as ‘co-produce[d] knowledge with collaborators’ (Van de Ven, 2007), since she was an indigenous researcher and an insider of the empirical setting; she actively involved stakeholders in the research process.

The first author carried out a sixteen-month ethnographic study (Cunliffe, 2010) of a coalition to end

homelessness in Western Canada. She focused on how a multi-stakeholder partnership involving actors from public, private, and nonprofit sectors collaborate to solve a sustainable development challenge. At the onset, the first author worked with her doctoral supervisory team and the coalition in crafting the study to ensure that it provided theoretical insights while being beneficial to the partnership. Her data collection methods involved semi-structured interviews and participant observation. During the study, she worked closely with the coalition to ensure that her sense-making was reflective of their experiences in the coalition. As she analyzed the data and began to notice relationships among the emergent themes, she continued to meet with her doctoral supervisory team and study participants to obtain feedback and refine ideas about relationships among themes. For example, she realized early on that a variety of different views about homelessness existed in the coalition and she wanted to better flesh out these notions in conversation with coalition stakeholders. In this way, she engaged in a grounded theory process (Glaser and Strauss, 1999).

The second author’s PhD research investigated sustainability reporting in higher education and how it contributed to management control and organizational change. Her research was carried out within a business faculty and situated in higher education for sustainable development research – a multidisciplinary, normative, and policy-driven field (Figueiro and Raufflet, 2015). One component of her PhD was a case study on the organizational change potential of university sustainability reporting in Western Canada. She used case study methods to gain rich insights on the dynamics of the topic in a real-world context (Eisenhardt *et al.*, 2016). She conducted semi-structured interviews over the course of five months with the main actors of the sustainability reporting process, and used retrospective document analysis to complement her findings. The data analysis was done using qualitative content analysis for secondary data, while constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1999) was employed to analyze primary data. Throughout the study, she co-produced knowledge with her interdisciplinary doctoral supervisory team. Before finalizing the study, the findings were presented at the university itself, to gain additional feedback from the university’s members and study participants.

As an Indigenous researcher, the third author conducted her doctoral research in response to the call for more empirical and theoretical contributions to the academy to design research and produce knowledge that is by, with, and for Indigenous communities (Smith, 1999; Henry, 2017). The third author used oral history and autoethnographic methods to explore competing paradigms of development in indigenous communities and advance foundational knowledge in Indigenous

sustainable development – an issue that still lacks clear definition, boundaries, and purpose (Ruwhiu, 2014; Dockry *et al.*, 2016). She conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews exploring the layers of collective Indigenous knowledge that inform Indigenous definitions of wealth, wellbeing and freedom from the ‘voices of the ancestors’ (Sandoval *et al.*, 2016; Nicholson, 2019). Over 36 months, Indigenous autoethnography was used to explore inherited intergenerational knowledge (Whitinui, 2014) and redefine economic development processes by, with, and for this Indigenous community’s wisdom keepers that align with Indigenous philosophy. The data speak to novel findings from shared inquiry by both researcher and practitioner as endogenous insiders (Cook-Lynn, 1997). The findings are valued for their nuanced and contextualized articulation of life *in particular* (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008; Colbourne *et al.*, 2019).

We collectively explore our experiences of conducting management scholarship at the interface of research and practice by asking questions such as, ‘What tensions did we face and how did we experience them?’ and ‘What strategies did we utilize to help bridge the research-practice arenas simultaneously?’ With these questions in mind, we each wrote an approximately 3,000-word summary of our experiences. Summaries included our purpose and motivation for investigating the sustainable development challenge, our methodological process related to engaged scholarship, and key challenges and strategies we used to navigate research and practice arenas concurrently.

Through this process, we developed autoethnographic accounts (e.g., Van Maanen, 1998; Holt, 2003) to surface how we each experienced our day-to-day scholarship (see Empson, 2013 and Cohen *et al.*, 2009 for similar methods). Autoethnography enables the researcher to gain deep insight into the relational ethics of inquiry that acknowledges the “self” (Learmonth and Humphreys, 2012; Lapadat, 2017). This introspective process allowed us to obtain a nuanced understanding of how we sought to navigate the research-practice arenas in our doctoral work. Consistent with Pollock and Bono (2013), we contend that by making our PhD research narratives visible as empirical data, the human element in our theorizing comes to life while maintaining a theoretical emphasis that goes beyond description.

After developing our narratives, we individually analyzed one another’s accounts thematically. In doing so, we looked for overlaps and distinctions (Miles and Huberman, 1994). We then engaged in Skype and email conversations to better understand how each researcher interpreted the data. These ‘living conversations’ (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 665) allowed us to share data insights from multiple angles, causing us to re-examine emerging themes from alternative perspectives (Easterby-Smith

et al., 2008). We took notes of our conversations and attempted to conceptualize our experiences into categories, focused on research-practice tensions we experienced and how we sought to bridge them, in order to create theoretical generalizations from our sample of PhD research experiences (Eisenhardt *et al.*, 2016). This enabled us to analyze the meaning of our experiences, ultimately resulting in a process model of our lived experiences navigating the research-practice divide.

Navigating the research-practice divide in our day-to-day scholarly work

We now present our emergent findings. Our dynamic process model, shown in Figure 2, details the most salient factors that affected how we experienced the research-practice divide, as well as the key strategies taken up to navigate the research-practice arenas in our scholarly work.

The process begins with each researcher attempting to straddle the worlds of research and practice to investigate a sustainable development challenge. While navigating between both arenas concurrently, three prominent factors affected how the researcher experiences the divide: *previous experience*, *study expectations*, and *multiple identities*. Where the perceived gap between research and practice was augmented for each given area (as indicated by the ‘+’ sign), the more likely that tensions experienced by the researcher were heightened. Conversely, where the perceived gap was narrower (as indicated by the ‘–’), the more likely that tensions experienced between the divide were lessened. For instance, previous professional experiences could serve to exacerbate research-practice tensions experienced by the researcher (+) or serve to lessen them (–). In seeking to navigate the divide, five core strategies surfaced: *remembering the research purpose*, *emphasizing relationships*, *engaging in self-learning*, *practicing reflexivity*, and *framing results*. These strategies can occur in concert and frequently throughout the research process, as opposed to being mutually exclusive or following a sequential pattern.

In what follows, we offer illustrative autoethnographic vignettes to unpack the factors that affected how we experienced the research-practice divide and the strategies we took up to bridge these two worlds.

Factors that affect how the research-practice divide is experienced

Table 1 summarizes the key factors, including describing its conceptualization, key features, and examples of how the research-practice arenas were experienced.

Previous experience addresses the level of prior knowledge and previous involvement that each

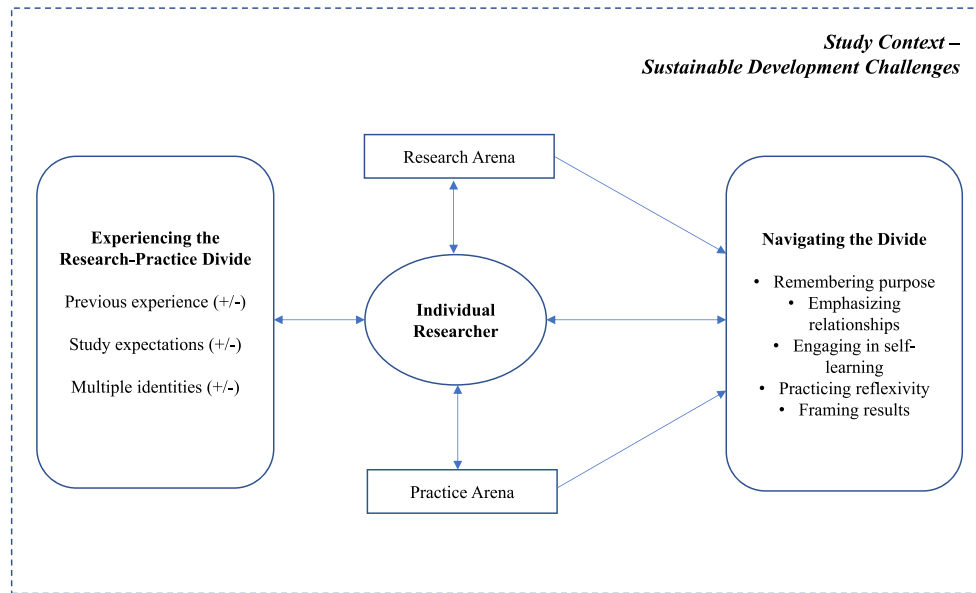


FIGURE 2 A model of day-to-day engaged scholarship

researcher had related to the sustainable development challenge and field site. These prior engagements, in turn, enriched how each researcher experienced the divide. For example, the second author had practitioner experience as a sustainability coordinator for a Belgian university, which influenced her desire to investigate sustainability reporting in higher education. While this experience provided her with in-depth background knowledge on the multi-dimensionality of sustainability reporting, her deep familiarity with the topic fueled a desire to work to solve the issues she surfaced. As she notes:

It was an advantage to understand the complexities of my research topic more easily because of my own professional experiences. However, it sometimes felt like a disadvantage, as I was eager to jump in and use my expertise to ‘resolve’ challenges present during the reporting process.

Similarly, the first author chose to investigate a multi-stakeholder partnership tackling homelessness, given her own experiences witnessing collaboration between diverse actors, both professionally and personally. While she lacked experience related to homelessness, she was familiar with many of the complexities of actors working across different sectors to tackle sustainable development challenges. Yet, her MBA background, which emphasized problem-solving, made it challenging not to approach her research from a consultant mindset:

Even though I was learning about homelessness, I had professional experiences working with collaborative

partnerships. This background, coupled with my MBA training, sometimes made it difficult for me to move past my initial assumptions to deeper analysis of what I was experiencing in the field.

In contrast, the third author’s interest in Indigenous sustainable development was fueled by her role as an insider. Her life experience as a community member and descendant influenced research design choices and informed areas where the research findings have influence in the community. Her community ties created ease of access to networks that mirrored the interconnected nature of the focal phenomenon. At times, the third author’s perceived tension conducting research across the research-practice divide was minimal because of her lived experiences in Indigenous community contexts. The research provided a forum to utilize this experience in her community to enhance knowing within the community and the academy.

Our previous experiences fueled our passion to investigate a sustainable development challenge and influenced how we experienced the research-practice divide. For the first and second author, previous professional experiences often exacerbated tensions faced, given the tendency to want to jump in to solve the issues surfaced from a practitioner standpoint. By comparison, the third author’s personal affiliation with the studied community lessened the research-practice tensions experienced.

Study expectations is concerned with how the researcher conceptualizes the study timeline, goals, and outcomes in comparison to practitioners. For example, the first author’s field notes reveal that there were often

TABLE 1 Elements that Affect How Researcher Experiences the Research-Practice Divide

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Conceptualization</i>	<i>Key features</i>	<i>Examples of experiencing research-practice arenas</i>
Previous experience	Addresses the different experiences related to the focal grand challenge and/or the field site under investigation	- Level of familiarity with focal grand challenge - Past related professional experience - Past related personal experience	- Able to understand the complexities of the grand challenge more easily due to previous exposure - Want to solve the issues at hand - Passion to address pressing issues faced by society
Study expectations	Addresses the different ways in which the researcher views the study timeline, goals and outcomes in comparison to practitioners and/or other scholars involved in project	- Expectations of research participants - Expectations of scholarly community - Length of time needed to understand grand challenge in multi-faceted manner	- Extended length of time needed to carry out indepth scholarly research versus faced-paced nature of field site-Participants viewed researcher as management consultant
Multiple identities	The perceived congruence the researcher experiences between research and practice identities	- Strength of identification with researcher identity - Strength of identification with practitioner identity	- Concern and trepidation about outsider status - Juggling desire to be useful to participants in the present while making a long-term impact to research field - Translating scholarly emerging research ideas into useful language for practice - Insider status in field site took precedence over researcher identity

different study expectations between the participants and her scholarly aims:

I thanked [the administrative assistant] for sending me the meeting materials. She said that she was surprised that I was still coming to meetings as I had been engaged in my project for quite a while. I smiled and clarified that I was taking a very in-depth view. I'm not sure if this really resonated with her.

The above excerpt was a common experience for the first author throughout her doctoral work. Even though she repeatedly explained that this was a longitudinal project, participants frequently asked her to draw concrete conclusions between emerging themes and the coalition's level of effectiveness.

The second author experienced similar challenges. As she notes:

It was challenging to stay engaged with the participants, as there was a time gap between the interviews and my request for their feedback on transcripts or findings. In organizations, everything moves so much faster than in research. When I finished my analysis, the university was already in a new sustainability reporting cycle, and some participants had moved on to new positions.

The above quotes point to different expectations related to time. Practitioners often expect practical solutions in a timelier manner. These differences in norms and operating assumptions can augment the tensions the researcher experiences in navigating the research-practice divide, as was the case for the first and second authors.

For the third author, her embedded relationships in the community created tensions concerning how to approach

potential interviewees from a research standpoint given that pre-existing relationships are bound by community ties. Consider the following field note excerpt:

The process of finding interviewees involved a form of kinship endorsement because I was approaching participants with a direct link to my father's credibility and reputation. The process needed to be carefully managed and sufficient time given to explain to the elders why their contributions were important. My relationships within the broader Coast Salish community mattered.

The third author's experience illustrates divergent expectations for ways to initiate research relationships when they are embedded within long-standing family networks that extend beyond the research timeframe. This example demonstrates that although the research relationship is temporally bound to align with doctoral degree requirements, research and practice assumptions often overlap and conflict. If overlooked, the impacts of such tensions can be felt in both research and practice, especially for a researcher who is also an embedded community member.

Multiple identities deals with the perceived congruence the researcher experiences between her research and practice identities which is affected by the strength of identification to each identity. For instance, although the second author had professional experience related to sustainability reporting, she viewed herself foremost as a researcher trying to make scholarly contributions. At the same time, she wanted to engage in research that offered managerial implications and would be useful to the participants. As she notes:

I found it difficult to accept for myself (as a researcher who wants to have an impact on society), that the study's findings appear very general for practitioners, who likely benefit from recommendations that are directly applicable to the case at hand. So from time to time I had to take a step back and reflect on my main identity as a researcher.

The first author also viewed her primary identity as a researcher who works with and is relevant to practice. She often experienced feelings of uncertainty and discomfort in her 'outsider' status. While this subsided over time as she built relationships with participants, she continued to feel distant from those involved, as revealed in her field notes:

As I headed downtown to park at my usual spot, I thought about how I felt more comfortable in both my understanding of the coalition and with the general cast of characters involved. At the same time, I thought about how I am still very much an outsider as a researcher.

By comparison, the third author's strongest identification was to her Indigenous identity, which allowed her to feel and understand the multifaceted barriers to sustainable development faced by Indigenous communities across Canada. Her experiences reveal moments of incongruence between reflecting on the effects of sustainable development challenges as a community member and understanding the nature of the challenge as a researcher. There were also layers of complexity that developed within each identity as the research progressed. As an Indigenous scholar, and a community member, the third researcher was conducting research at 'home' in her community. At the same time, she was an 'outsider' as a University of Auckland PhD candidate situated overseas. The third author reflected on how she experienced these identities:

When I conduct interviews with Coast Salish wisdom keepers, I am seen in relation to the invisible ties to the academic institution where I chose to do my research training; however, more salient are the invisible genealogical ties connected to my being and belonging within the community.

Her research identity was more ambiguous, impermanent, and institutionally bound compared to the steadiness of her cultural identity, revealing a decoupling of the two identities at times.

Even as we exhibited different degrees of identification with our research and practice identities, the underlying aspects of positionality (Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau, 2018) were similar for all of us. At times, we perceived incongruences between these identities that affected how we experienced the research-practice arenas.

Strategies to bridge research-practice divide

We now turn to the strategies we utilized to bridge the research-practice divide. Table 2 provides an overview of the key strategies, including highlighting the specific features of each one, that may occur simultaneously and frequently in seeking to navigate research-practice arenas concurrently.

Remembering the purpose of the research is focused on recalling the main reasons for engaging in the research. For example, the second author noted that she needed to remember that her research was designed to address research and practice aims simultaneously. Consider the following reflection:

Sustainability in Higher Education research is linked to practice and policy development and has dual aims: advancing scholarly knowledge, and enabling change. During my PhD, some colleagues were reluctant to see the relevance of studies that included practitioners in the process. While often this created doubt and discouragement, I learned along the way that I had to convince my colleagues of the relevance of my work, by better clarifying its purpose, and being transparent about its aims.

In another example, the third author reflected on an emotionally challenging interview in which she was confronted with the heaviness of the stark reality of her community members. She wrote:

It gives me chills throughout my body to remember how he answered so clearly and definitively. He said freedom is not a luxury that we have as First Nations people in Canada. The notion of unfreedom would eventually become a coded theme across the interviews, but emerged at the outset with a clear statement that we [Indigenous Coast Salish] are not free people.

Although there were implications that unfolded in the process of coming to terms with how freedom and unfreedom emerged theoretically, the power of this moment early in the data collection process shaped subsequent conversations as a generative concept to consider dimensions of freedom worth exploring from an Indigenous perspective. These concepts were grounded in concrete examples in the interviews that served as a constant reminder to return to the research purpose as a way to improve the circumstances of her community toward greater opportunities for freedom.

For the first author, her research purpose came from a deep desire to make a difference in how people collaborate to address sustainable development challenges. In addition to considering theoretical aims, she generated practical aims at the onset in collaborating with the coalition, including, for example, 'a better understanding

TABLE 2 Strategies to navigate the research-practice divide

<i>General approach</i>	<i>Conceptualization</i>	<i>Specific features/tactics</i>
Remembering purpose of the research	Reminding oneself of the core reasons why one is engaged in the research process when it becomes difficult	- Reflecting on passion for tackling grand challenge - Recalling the scholarly research aims - Remembering relevance to practice
Emphasizing relationships	Working to develop personal connections with involved stakeholders	- Developing trust with participants - Practicing respectful engagement - Engaging in ongoing and transparent communication
Engaging in self-learning	Engaging in an ongoing learning process about the grand challenge and field site under investigation, the involved participants and oneself	- Being open to others' perspectives - Learning about oneself as a researcher and practitioner - Being patient
Practicing reflexivity	Understanding and unsettling how one constructs reality	- Developing a comfort level with ambiguity - Being mindful of one's role(s) in the research project
Framing of emerging results	Presenting the results in a way that will be meaningful and valuable given the stakeholders	- Being aware and reflecting upon one's limits - Being mindful of multiple aims of study - Clarifying study results to participants - Being adaptable in communicating research in different ways given the stakeholder group

of how the coalition has developed over time'. Reviewing these goals throughout the research process was particularly important when she felt that she was being pulled in multiple directions simultaneously.

Reflecting on the overall reason(s) for engaging in our research served to fuel us forward, even when bridging the research-practice divide seemed particularly challenging. For the first and third authors, engaging with practitioners reminded them of the participants' realities and the benefits of pursuing their research beyond advancing theory. For the second author, revisiting literature noting the importance of normative research aims provided her with encouragement to continue pursuing her dual research aims, even when her supervisory team pushed her to focus primarily on theoretical advancements.

Emphasizing relationships is concerned with working to develop personal connections with research and practice stakeholders. For instance, the third author practiced reciprocity to avoid perpetuating and reproducing power imbalance in the research relationship. As she noted:

The principle of reciprocity is imperative while working with Indigenous communities because of the historically exploitative nature of research as a tool of colonial oppression. It recognizes that communities 'give' their knowledge for research purposes, and there is an obligation for the researcher to give back.

For the second author, developing personal connections with study participants was crucial. Her identity as a former practitioner in the field helped to facilitate these connections and to gain access to participant experiences. At the start of the interviews, she noticed the following:

I was surprised how much impact mentioning my previous experience as a sustainability coordinator had on some of the interviewees. Knowing that in the past I did a similar job to theirs opened up the conversation for some participants and made them more willing to share their experiences with sustainability reporting.

Disclosing her background helped to create a meaningful, two-way dialogue between the researcher and participants. Further, emphasizing relationships helped her to navigate the time lag between interviewing the participants, getting approval of the transcripts at a later stage, and even having key informants proofread and approve the final version of an academic paper written a number of years after the initial data collection.

Similarly, the first author found that building relationships with participants was significant. Before her study began, she met with the coalition Executive Director to develop collaborative research aims for the project. Then, she worked closely with participants to ensure that her emergent sensemaking was reflective of their experiences. This also offered her an opportunity to describe developing findings that were relevant to the practitioners in real time versus waiting until the study was completed. She noted that her engagement with the coalition from the beginning contributed to building trust with participants:

Actively working with the coalition was critical for developing trust and rapport, particularly since I was an outsider to the research context. In building their trust, I readily gained access to stakeholder groups and was able to observe a variety of meetings, which was invaluable for capturing different perspectives.

For the first and second authors, as outsiders to their research contexts, developing trust and building rapport with participants was significant to understand the collaborative efforts of stakeholders toward tackling sustainable development challenges. It also helped them stay connected with key informants of the studies, even after finalizing their PhD projects. For example, the second author maintained personal connections as she continued to engage in sustainability reporting at her school. The third author already had personal connections with her participants, and practicing reciprocity and respectful engagement helped her to balance between her roles as a researcher and community member. For all three researchers, facilitating ongoing and transparent communication with participants was significant for juggling the research-practice arenas.

Engaging in self-learning focuses on continual learning about the sustainable development challenge and field site, the study participants, and oneself throughout the research journey. For instance, the first author noted that actively listening to stakeholders allowed her to gain a more complete understanding of homelessness:

This PhD study was a product of my engagement with participants, other practitioners, and the scholarly research community. My interactions with academics and practitioners deepened my understanding. They also challenged some of my preconceived ideas, provided me with opportunities to improve my arguments, and offered thought-provoking questions, all of which served to deepen my discoveries.

Actively involving a variety of stakeholders made the process more complex as she was faced with different opinions that sometimes conflicted. Overall, though, working to understand others' viewpoints significantly strengthened her understanding of homelessness. The second author had a similar experience, in that the research provided her with continual learning opportunities on the study topic and the interactions among different stakeholders. In relation to the stakeholders involved in the reporting process, she noted:

During the interviews, I had to read between the lines and find out more about the internal politics of the university and the dynamics between some of the participants and departments.

This was particularly challenging for her, since sustainable development challenges are often complex topics, making the boundaries of such a study hard to define. While accepting a certain level of ambiguity, she learned to determine whether taking note of certain tensions among the respondents or departments was relevant for the way the reporting process in universities contributes to change for sustainability.

The third author faced an internal conflict between what she felt was typical for presenting findings in organizational research and what she felt was the 'right' way to show Indigenous insights into sustainable development:

I did not know how to, or whether I should make the emotion of the interviews visible as a finding. I couldn't ignore the overwhelming sadness and grief that I saw and heard in the interviews, so I made an ethical decision to honor that emergent space as valid knowledge.

This juncture posed a perceived risk where she feared that she had to compromise academic integrity for community integrity. Yet, contrary to this assumption, the experience of sadness and grief that unfolded in the research process reinforced the emerging theoretical insights. The discomfort facilitated an important lesson about how training is provided to emerging researchers prior to collecting data, and it revealed the nuances of researcher development to make the unseen realities of sustainable development challenges visible.

For all three researchers, actively seeking to learn allowed us to think about the sustainable development challenges from different angles and to develop both professionally and personally. Although actively listening to and incorporating feedback from multiple stakeholders created tensions due to diverse perspectives and the multi-faceted nature of sustainable development, this approach was crucial in helping us obtain a holistic perspective of the phenomena under investigation.

Practicing reflexivity is concerned with understanding and unsettling the ways in which we construct reality (Cunliffe, 2010). Consider the third author's field notes:

Managing uncertainty around relevance of research involved iterative discussion with supervisors, colleagues, and community members about useful tangents, seemingly unfamiliar terrain and generative doubt. In some ways, certainty was something to be wary of, and prompted me to go back to the data to constantly push the boundaries of what I thought I knew.

Although the role of intuition in research is not a widely-discussed factor, as a device of reflexivity, it plays a significant role in moving out of inevitable phases of stasis.

Throughout the research process, the first author attempted to be as reflexive as possible about how her own presence and viewpoints shaped the study. This included reflecting upon familiar and surprising elements, and what she wanted to learn more about in her participant observation field notes. Consider the following field note excerpt:

When the topic of prevention came up, [the Executive Director] mentioned that they were still waiting to obtain a youth report from [a local foundation]. What I found very interesting was that [the Executive Director] mentioned the idea of starting a social enterprise for youth, which had come up as a topic at the round table last year. As most of what I have seen in the partnership has seemed to have a nonprofit lens as it relates to funding, this was a pleasant surprise and one I want to investigate further.

The second author had a similar experience:

Certain interview questions I raised pushed my participants to reflect on the sustainability reporting process and illuminate areas of improvement. For example, the university used stakeholder engagement processes within its sustainability strategy development, yet in the sustainability reporting process it was lacking. A participant thanked me for connecting these two processes, because they had never done it before.

This example, amongst others, caused the second author to reflect on her role in the research process. She became aware that she was implicitly providing feedback on the reporting process to the participants, addressing issues that, in turn, caused them to reflect upon their internal process of sustainability reporting.

All three researchers tried to be continually aware of how their own presence, viewpoints, and previous experiences affected their sensemaking of sustainable development challenges. It is important to be cognizant of how we, as researchers, may affect the involved stakeholders and their view on the topic under study (and vice versa).

Framing the emerging results focuses on highlighting results in a meaningful way given the stakeholder group. For example, the first author provided research participants with a summary of the results and associated recommendations, which was much closer-to-the-ground to enhance its utility for this stakeholder group. By comparison, the journal articles she crafted were written at a higher level of abstraction to make a scholarly contribution.

In another instance, the third author noted the challenge of framing her results for a global network of scholars that emerged from a distinctly local worldview. Bringing her research into existing scholarly conversations involved a great deal of definitional work to translate concepts from unique languages and histories to provide broader management implications. She also noted the importance of being mindful of framing the research findings and implications for the local Indigenous communities in a way that avoids esoteric language and is directly applicable to their economic and political contexts.

The second author found it difficult to frame her results in a meaningful way for all stakeholders involved, even within one community:

My doctoral supervisory team was an interdisciplinary group of scholars with various backgrounds, i.e. chemical engineering and environmental management, educational philosophy, economics and ethics, and business and sustainability. During the study, I came to realize that it was important to discuss the meaning of terminology used in the project: even often used expressions, such as ‘integrating sustainability’, had different meanings for the involved scholars.

While the scholarly community may be perceived as homogenous in contrast to the practitioner community, both entail diversity. Sustainable development does not stay within the limits of one discipline, and thus studying it ideally involves academics of different disciplines (Winn and Pogutz, 2013; Laasch *et al.*, 2020). This helped the second author to understand how concepts are perceived differently within particular disciplines and to communicate in ways that resonates with different researchers.

Discussion

Engaged scholarship reflects research that is as relevant to the world of practice as it is to the advancement of scholarly knowledge (Van de Ven, 2007; Shani and Coghlan, 2014; Bansal *et al.*, 2018). Yet, guidance on how to apply engaged scholarship is needed to help management scholars take full advantage of its benefits (Hunt, 2008; Adelman and Spivack, 2009; Bansal *et al.*, 2012). Avenier and Parmentier Cajariba (2012) partially respond to this call by describing a dialogically engaged scholarship model to develop knowledge valuable for academia and practice. While Avenier and Parmentier Cajariba (2012) focus on the research design phase, our study offers a more complete picture of practicing engaged scholarship. We contribute to the literature by providing a holistic process model based on empirical findings, detailing the day-to-day experiences of becoming engaged management researchers through our combined learning journey as junior scholars. Moreover, we highlight the use of engaged scholarship to tackle sustainable development related phenomena, thereby acknowledging the significance of bringing context into our research (Lee, 2018; McLaren and Durepos, 2019).

Detailing the experiences of the individual management researcher

In line with Empson’s (2013) study, and contrary to Schumacher’s (2018) focus on the group level, we shed

light on our experiences as *individuals* navigating research-practice tensions. However, instead of focusing on researcher identity work (Empson, 2013), we provide a comprehensive framework of day-to-day engaged scholarship detailing key factors, which, together, shape how research-practice tensions are experienced and managed.

First, we illuminate three factors that affect how researchers experience research-practice tensions when taking up engaged scholarship (see Table 1), advancing Van de Ven's (2007) primarily conceptual discussion. For example, in regard to *previous experience*, the second author's previous experience as a university sustainability coordinator, or the third author's membership of the Indigenous community under study, affected how they each viewed the research-practice divide.

Second, we identify strategies researchers utilize to navigate tensions faced (see Table 2). Three of the five strategies have parallels with tactics mentioned by Van de Ven (2007), namely, setting expectations with field participants, being reflexive, and building relationships of trust. Yet, rather than presenting them conceptually, we provide nuanced accounts of how we utilized these strategies in actuality. For instance, the first and third authors' regular interactions with field participants reminded them of the importance of normative research aims alongside theoretical goals.

Consistent with Cohen et al. (2009) and Peticca-Harris et al. (2016), we employ a collaborative auto-ethnographic approach to analyze our experiences as individual management researchers as direct sources of empirical data (see Lapadat, 2017). Even as our PhD projects were different in terms of the sustainability context and concepts studied, we demonstrate that our personal stories showed similarities in the tensions experienced and the strategies applied to navigate them. We anticipate that other researchers, particularly budding scholars, may find our framework useful when trying to overcome tensions faced in their own research.

Investigating sustainable development challenges

Similar to Bansal et al. (2012) and Tsui (2013), we view engaged scholarship as an approach that fits with the need for holistic research perspectives and practical solutions to effectively address sustainable development challenges. Our aim is to underscore the urgency for management scholars to investigate sustainable development related topics (Tsui, 2013; Bansal, 2019), and to motivate (budding) scholars to study this topic in collaboration with scholars from other disciplines, and practitioners from various fields (Winn and Pogutz, 2013; Craps, 2019; Laasch et al., 2020).

Three strategies stood out as being crucial for management scholars to study sustainable development

via engaged scholarship. First, as sustainable development research assumes a theoretical perspective and a normative outcome (Bansal, 2019), *remembering the purpose* of the research is an important strategy for engaged management researchers working on such topics. For example, by articulating the practical research aims up front, the first author was able to identify critical success factors to enable the coalition to end homelessness to improve their collaboration processes.

Second, while we reflected on our individual experiences, in reality, engaged scholarship takes place in interaction with stakeholders and thus requires *emphasizing relationships*. When investigating sustainable development challenges, diverse stakeholders are valuable, including multidisciplinary scholars and practitioners, so innovative solutions for the multi-faceted problems can be developed (Winn and Pogutz, 2013; Ferraro et al., 2015; Curseu and Schruijer, 2017). Achieving normative research goals, such as improving livelihoods for Indigenous communities, alongside meaningful theoretical contributions is impossible without the contextualized insights, knowledge, and engagement of important actors in the field (Christen and Schmidt, 2012; Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau, 2018; Craps, 2019). We found relationships with stakeholders to be crucial for fostering long-term connections (third author) and facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration (second author).

Third, when *framing the results*, we identified the difficulty of presenting them in a meaningful way for stakeholders. This is particularly important when studying sustainable development, as it requires close researcher-practitioner interactions (Winn and Pogutz, 2013; Curseu and Schruijer, 2017; Laasch et al., 2020). As stressed by Thomas and Ambrosini (2020), even when using engaged scholarship, researchers of different disciplines and practitioners remain embedded in their traditional concerns, while in practice, sustainable development challenges are rarely discipline-based. Therefore, adequately framing the results of our studies for each of the different actors involved is important for keeping all parties engaged and maintaining close relationships to address the sustainable development challenges.

Study limitations and future research

The experiences we discuss and the key factors and strategies that result may be experienced differently in other contexts. All three doctoral studies took place in Western Canada, employed inductive qualitative methods, and focused on sustainable development challenges. We encourage future empirical exploration of engaged scholarship in different contexts. Also, our engaged scholarship model emerged as a result of closely

examining our experiences and abstracting overarching themes. As such, it should not be viewed as an exhaustive list of factors and strategies. Rather, our intention is to share our experiences to provide a nuanced empirical example of how this process plays out in reality. We encourage management scholars to further empirically explore factors and associated strategies for navigating the research-practice divide via the use of other methods, and to tap into the rich experiences available on engaged sustainable development research in other disciplines and domains.

Conclusion

By developing and analyzing autoethnographic accounts of our PhD research experiences, we offer a nuanced understanding of how researchers navigate research-practice arenas simultaneously in investigating sustainable development. In doing so, we expand the work of Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) and Van de Ven (2007, 2011). Moreover, we answer the call of Hunt (2008), Adelman and Spivack (2009), and Bansal *et al.* (2012) to provide guidance on how to practice engaged scholarship to study sustainable development challenges (Bansal *et al.*, 2012; Tsui, 2013). Finally, we detail useful strategies for undertaking engaged sustainable development research, which benefits from increased research-practice interactions (Winn and Pogutz, 2013; Curseu and Schrujier, 2017; Laasch *et al.*, 2020). We hope this study offers insight, direction, and encouragement to other (budding) management researchers interested in making a positive difference to research and practice.

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