**Lost in Translation: Helping Students Understand Scholarly Works**

ABSTRACT

Comprehending and applying the information contained in scholarly articles can be challenging for undergraduate and graduate students for a variety a reasons. To help students develop greater literacy relative to scholarly works, we developed an exercise where students work independently and collaboratively to extract information from journal articles and translate findings into understand evidence-based practice that can be applied in organizations. In our MOBTS session, we will explain the exercise and practice translating “Academicese” into English understandable by students and practitioners.

**Key Words:** management education, experiential learning, scholarly literacy

**Lost in Translation: Helping Students Understand Scholarly Works**

Assigning scholarly articles to undergraduate and graduate students or expecting students to complete writing assignments which draw on the research literature is common practice in the management classroom (Fujimoto et al., 2007). Unfortunately, comprehending and applying the information contained in scholarly articles can be challenging due to a lack of background information, the absence of illustrations, organizational structure, and unknown vocabulary (Bartunek, 2007). In anticipation of these challenges, some management educators decide to provide instruction on how to read scholarly articles. This exercise focuses on helping students understand the structure of scholarly articles and to decode the language commonly found in empirical and theoretical texts. In addition, the exercise emphasized the need to close the circle and apply empirical findings to management practice. Although designed to be used in undergraduate and graduate face-to-face classes, the exercise can be adapted to an on-line class or be given as an out-of-class assignment.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**

In today’s management classroom, a gap often exists between the educator’s expectations and students’ ability to read, evaluate, and apply content from scholarly articles. If management student are stymied in understanding scholarly articles, then it is less likely they will be successful in applying the information contained in the articles to course assignments. Furthermore, teaching students the skills needed to understand and appreciate research has the potential to help future generations of managers engage in evidence-based practice (Dawson & Burke, 2008). According to Burke & Rau (2010), “the ability to successfully integrate research and teaching is arguably the essence of what it means to excel as a university professor” (p. 134) and one of the keys to closing the research-practice gap.

To address the lack of scholarly literacy among undergraduate and graduate students, and support student learning, management educators may need to augment their discipline-specific teaching with instruction on how to read journal articles. One option is to refer students to readily available internet or library resources. For example, the University of Michigan has a three page guide, [How to Read (and Understand) a Social Science Journal Article](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/files/instructors/How_to_Read_a_Journal_Article.pdf) that details the “anatomy” of a journal article along with article reading strategies. Alternatively, instructors might chose to implement an exercise or activity to help student increase their understanding of scholarly articles. The characteristics of activities that have been found to be effective in supporting students in reading scholarly articles as cited by Fujimoto et al. (2007) include providing an explicit rationale for reading the journal article (e.g. Finlay & Faulkner 2010); providing students with a starting point for their reading (e.g. Rachal et al. 2007); providing relevance cues to direct their reading (e.g. McCrudden & Schraw 2010); and d) encouraging collaboration among learners (e.g. Finlay & Faulkner 2010). Each of these characteristics was incorporated into our exercise.

**Learning Objectives**

The specific learning objectives of this exercise are that students would be able to accomplish the following:

* Discuss the information contained in the different, inter-related parts of a journal article;
* Accurately extract information from a journal article;
* Accurately translate academic language; and
* Discuss how the findings or theory presented in the article might inform practice.

**Exercise Overview**

In class, we begin by providing students with the hyperlink to or a copy of the “Anatomy of a Journal Article” handout. Next students are instructed to utilize the university data base to locate an assigned article. After locating the article, students are asked to read the article and compose answers to the questions contained in the “Anatomy of a Journal Article” handout. Sample questions include the following: *What is this article about? What topic is the author studying? Why should we care about this problem/study? What were the findings?* Students then participate in a group discussion where they share their answers to the questions and come up with a group answer. Groups report their answers to the entire class and the instructor facilitates a discussion and clarifies information where appropriate. Next, each group is given statements from the article and asked to “translate” the statements. Student are told, “Imagine you have discovered some interesting and relevant information in a research article that could be applied at your place of work. How would you explain the information in a way that was both accurate and understandable to someone that had not read the article and was unfamiliar with the research literature? The following excerpt from a research article is an example of what would be given to the student groups:

*Our results provide support for an integrated trait-behavioral model of leadership effectiveness. In general, leader traits associated with task competence related to task-oriented leader behaviors, which improve performance-related leadership outcomes. In contrast, leaders’ interpersonal attributes were associated with relational-oriented behaviors, which improve affective criteria such as follower satisfaction with leader* (Derue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Huphrey, p. 37, 2011).

**Session Description**

For MOBTS, only the last step in the exercise will be facilitated – translating academic findings into accurate and understandable statements. After a brief introduction and overview of the exercise (5 – 10 minutes), participants will be divided into groups of 3-5 members. Each group will be given a series of statements taken from a scholarly article. Groups will be given 20 – 30 minutes to “translate” the statements into a statement that would be understandable to a student, practitioner or someone unfamiliar with academic jargon, and identify how the information could be applied to management practice. A large group discussion follows in which each group reports their interpretations and implications of the findings (20 minutes). The remaining time will be used for comments and suggestions (5 – 10 minutes).

**References**

Bartunek, J. M. (2007). Academic–practitioner collaboration need not require joint or relevant research: Toward a relational scholarship of integration. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50, 1323–1333.

Burke & Rau (2010). The Research-Teaching Gap in Management. *Academy of Management Learning and Education,* 9, 132-143.

Dawson, G., Burke L. A. (2008). Closing the research-teaching gap in human resource management. *Journal of Human Resource Education.* 2, 1-8*.*

DeRue, D. S., Nahrgang, J. D., Wellman, N., & Humphrey, S. E. (2011). Trait and behavioral theories of leadership: An integration and meta-analytic test of their relative validity.

*Personnel Psychology,* 64, 7-52.

Finlay, S & Faulkner, G (2010). 'Tête à tête: Reading groups and peer learning', *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 6, 32-45.

Fujimoto, Y., Hagel, P., Turner, P., Kattiyapornpong, U., & Zutshi, A. (2011). Helping university students to ‘read’ scholarly journal articles: the benefits of a structured and collaborative approach, *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 8(6), 1-14.

Hoskins, S. G., Stevens, L. M., & Nehm, R. H. (2007). Selective Use of the Primary Literature Transforms the Classroom Into a Virtual Laboratory. *Genetics*, 176, 1381–1389.

How to Read (and Understand) a Social Science Journal Article [PDF file] (n.d.) Available at <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/files/instructors/How_to_Read_a_Journal_Article.pdf>

McCrudden MT & Schraw G 2010, 'The Effects of Relevance Instructions and Verbal Ability on

Text Processing', *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 78, 96-117.

Rachal, KC, Daigle, S & Rachal, W. S. (2007). Learning Problems Reported by College Students: Are They Using Learning Strategies? *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 34, 191-199.