

Despite decades of work and thousands of meticulous studies published, academic management research is simply not being used to any significant degree by business leaders when making strategic decisions. Instead, other decision inputs are at the forefront, including benchmarking studies, cases, past experience, anecdotes, hunches, and opinions, much of which can hardly be called “evidence”.

Why would a practitioner *not* choose to use our scholarship in strategic decision-making? One reason may be that most “research published in academic journals is written primarily for other academics” (Terpstra & Rozell, 1998, p. 23). The intricate statistical methods and often unnecessary and overly complex language make it hard for practitioners to digest. In addition, it appears in visually unattractive journals that are costly, difficult to access, unknown, and not credible to managers. Understandably, practitioners prefer readily available information that does not suffer from such drawbacks, and they seek knowledge from high-profile non-academic authors in trade journals or books (Rousseau, 2006). Practitioners simply do not have the time to fully understand the “products” of academic scholarship, nor do they have adequate training. Moreover, were practitioners to rely heavily on management research in making key decisions that ultimately failed, they could suffer reputational effects by drawing upon a source of information that is not credible to their peers.

This raises the question: Why have scholars not actively engaged in creating work that is desired and welcomed by practitioners? One answer is that management PhDs, by and large, are not trained to write for a practitioner audience. Why should they be? Their first jobs out of their doctoral programs will not be determined by the practical relevance of their scholarship, nor will their annual performance reviews. In addition, tenure and

promotion decisions are simply not made based on the candidates' impact on the practice of management at the vast majority of business schools in the U.S. There is simply little incentive for scholars to do work that is immediately and clearly valuable to practitioners. In fact, writing for practitioner-oriented journals involves a great deal of risk, given the difficulty of placing such work in journals widely considered top-tier publications by strategy scholars.

Even though practitioner-friendly research is not particularly promoted in academic culture, scholars have recognized the need for a conversation about the scholarship-practice gap. The majority of work addressing this gap has focused on the ways to make management research more useful to practitioners (Dunnette, 1990; Nowicki & Rosse, 2002; Starkey & Madan, 2001; Van De Ven & Johnson, 2006). This stream of literature suggests that scholars should focus on useful research questions and data collection (Dunnette, 1990), write practitioner-friendly versions of their academic manuscripts (Nowicki & Rosse, 2002), and engage in close collaboration with business leaders to find the nuances of complex issues leaders face (Starkey & Madan, 2001; Van De Ven & Johnson, 2006). We view these as worthwhile endeavors. In addition to these approaches, we recommend that educators attempt to bring the practitioners to the research. Specifically, we propose finding ways to transform practitioners from non-trusting and indifferent outsiders to engaged and active beneficiaries of academic research. That is not to say that strategy research should not become much more practically relevant. It most certainly should. After all, in strategic management, as in many other fields, the scientist-practitioner gap “carries with it real life implications – for individuals' lives, for the discipline, and for society at large” (Cautin, 2011, p. 198).

Society has every right to expect us, as business scholars, to do something beyond having a conversation among ourselves. Given the notion that the closure of research-practice gap can be approached from more than one direction, we challenge strategy scholars to use their influence in the classroom to strengthen the bridge between scholarship and practice.

In the pages that follow, we first discuss matters related to strategic decision-making, and we make conceptual case for using strategy research in the MBA classroom. We also present a novel pedagogical approach that provides MBA students with an opportunity to develop the skills necessary to extract value from management research and offers faculty a tool to coach students on this task.

### **Managerial Rationality and Strategic Decision-Making**

The most important strategic decisions reflect managers' choices to commit valuable resources, set important precedents, direct significant firm-level actions (Mintzberg, Raisinghani, & Theoret, 1976), as well as shape their firms' general direction and influence organizational performance (Dean & Sharfman, 1996). The strategic decision-making process in particular has been found to be a function of numerous factors, including the managers' prior knowledge and experiences (Barr, Stimpert, & Huff, 1992; Kiesler & Sproull, 1982; Walsh, 1995), the organizational context (Kaplan, 2008; Ocasio, 1997), environmental factors (Nadkarni & Barr, 2008), as well as the managers' intuition and a presence of political behaviors (Dane & Pratt, 2007; Elbanna & Child, 2007). Given the complex nature of strategic decision-making, it is understandable why the literature suggests diverse explanations about the links between the inputs to the strategic

decision-making process and its effectiveness (Baum & Wally, 2003; Hough & White, 2003; Khatri & Ng, 2000).

Although many of these studies resulted in contradictory findings (Rajagopalan, Rasheed, Datta, & Spreitzer, 1997), one of the explanatory variables – rationality – has continuously been found to be positively associated with strategic decision-making effectiveness (Dean & Sharfman, 1996; Elbanna & Child, 2007; Janis, 1989; Miller & Cardinal, 1994; Schwenk & Shrader, 1993). “Rationality is the reason for doing something and to judge a behavior as reasonable is to be able to say that the behavior is understandable within a given frame of reference” (Butler, 2002, p. 226).

Given that the effectiveness of strategic decision-making is a function of one’s rationality, it is logical to suggest that decision-making effectiveness will rise with an increase in rationality. Thus, if we, as business school faculty, wish to improve our students’ ability to make effective strategic decisions, we should focus on enhancing our students’ rationality in the learning process. How do we do that? In an organizational context, individuals’ rationality increases with the introduction of a devil’s advocate, outside experts, and cognitive conflict (Janis, 1982; Schweiger, Sandberg, & Ragan, 1986). In the classroom setting, we propose that teaching MBA students to rely upon evidence-based management is one way to elevate students’ rationality by “using more information and creating more diverse viewpoints” (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992, p. 21).

The central idea behind the use of evidence-based management for organizational decisions is founded on a synthesis of critical thinking, the best available evidence, and the ability to avoid one’s personal biases and experiences (Rousseau, 2006). In other words, rationality is rooted in robust evidence. To maximize decision-making rationality,

managers must integrate the best available findings, their expertise, and customers' preferences to produce the optimal outcome (Sackett, Straus, Richardson, Rosenberg, & Haynes, 2000).

The evidence-based management literature has emphasized the importance of exceptional quality cues in organizational decision-making. However, managers often pay relatively little attention to the *quality* of the evidence they use. The result may be poor decisions based on unfounded beliefs, fads, and ideas popularized by management gurus (Barends et al., 2014), who many times base their advice upon weak evidence. Over time, managers begin to rely more and more on untested theories about cause-effect relationships – especially if those theories seem to have validity from time to time.

### **Making the Case to (Future) Practitioners**

Besides enhanced rationality, there are other motivations for the future practitioners now in our classrooms to become familiar with high-quality management research. First, practitioners should lean on academic findings because such an approach is recognized by experts to be effective. The Center for Evidence-Based Management (CEBMA) - a non-profit organization founded by an international group of management scholars and practitioners - places the results of scientific research among the most important inputs to managerial decision making. Barends and colleagues (2014) note that empirical research results are one of the main key considerations for decision-makers. Specifically, to make an effective judgment, managers should take into account the organizational context, their professional experience, information from internal and external stakeholders, and

the findings from published scientific research. Scientific research includes academic research in management and relevant research outside the management discipline.

Second, practitioners should use academic research because some of it, though clearly not *all* of it, is relevant to what may be their most critical challenges: managing the strategic decision-making process and enhancing motivation. Yes, we are aware that “the gulf between the science and practice of management is widening” (Van De Ven, 2002, p. 178), but still “we are plenty relevant” (Walsh, 2011, p. 215). For decades, academic research has supplied those practitioners who searched for it with insightful and meaningful answers. What has not been provided to the practitioners, in most MBA programs, is the opportunity to develop the skills required for accessing and interpreting the results of managerial research.

Dierdorff & Rubin (2006) found two competencies (the strategic decision-making process and managing innovation) to be significantly more important to managers than all other behavioral competencies. Sadly, these authors later found a major misalignment between the skill sets needed by managers and the ones supplied by MBA programs Rubin & Dierdorff (2009).

Third, practitioners should employ academic research because it is a unique source of important management-related scientific findings not available elsewhere and may, therefore, yield a competitive advantage. Some might suggest that practitioner-oriented periodicals serve just fine as a source of reader-friendly versions of quality academic research. Indeed, the management-focused popular media might be a well-regarded source. However, those publications often lack scientific grounding. The scientific basis for *Harvard Business Review* articles is “rather weak” (Schulz & Nicolai

2015, p. 43). Another investigation of three widely recognized practitioner outlets - *Human Resource Management*, *HR Magazine*, and *Harvard Business Review* – showed that these publications rarely discuss scientific results (Rynes, Giluk, & Brown, 2007).

The popular business media not only lacks a reliance on science, it suffers from another downfall: the delayed introduction of information. Conducting and publishing managerial research takes a considerable amount of time, often years. Furthermore, the translation of academic research into practitioner-friendly language, and the publication of such work in practitioner-oriented journals, adds even more time before managers can access the findings and use them in their decision making.

Despite decades of management research, the bridge integrating scholarship and practice is still weak, and scholars remain concerned that key business decisions are being made without full knowledge of what science shows to actually work. We argue that practitioners can greatly benefit from learning how to understand and interpret management academic literature - specifically, how to recognize the most relevant topics and extract the essence of the research findings for further consideration in strategic decision-making.

We are confident that many practitioners, including those sitting in MBA classrooms, will be interested in academic management research as a source of information when making strategic decisions. The challenge as we see it is in applying a pedagogical approach that enhances the practitioners' appreciation for the advantages of using this research for strategic decision-making, and helps them develop skills in identifying and translating this research.

### **Toward a Pedagogical Approach**

Rousseau stated, “...decision quality is a direct function of available facts, creating a demand for reliable and valid information when making managerial and organizational decisions” (2006, p. 206). Training future managers to discriminate among information sources based on the validity of findings will help them discover high quality evidence. In other words, we argue that one of the valuable contributions of evidence-based management is to provide a means for a manager to question – or deny – parts of their assumption bases (Davis, 1971), which is a critical tenet of effective decision-making. How can we teach future strategic decision-makers to separate fads and opinions from high quality findings? Moreover, how can we provide them an opportunity in their MBA programs to develop the skills required to access and interpret management research - the source of superior quality evidence?

This is clearly a shortcoming of current curricular approaches found in most MBA programs. In an interview for *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, Russell Ackoff indicated that, among other things, business education gives students a “ticket of admission to get a job where they could learn something about management” (Detrick 2002, p. 56). Indeed, Indra Nooyi, CEO of PepsiCo, mirrors this opinion and states, “We have these kids who don't know anything about business in great detail. They come out [of business school] saying they've got an MBA and they've got an education but not knowledge” (*The Economist*, November 2016). Business schools’ faculty are able, however, to provide more value than that. One of the ways we can do so is by training MBA students to make strategic decisions with superior quality evidence that is at least partly grounded in results found in our field’s leading academic studies.



Of course, not all management research will be useful to practitioners. Shapiro, Kirkman, and Courtney (2007) noted that some management research is “lost *before* translation”, where researchers are addressing problems that are not helpful or interesting to managers. As mentioned earlier, we are unlikely to solve this problem in the short run due to the structural foundation (academic culture and hiring/promotion policies, e.g.) of our discipline. However, we can salvage “lost *in* translation” studies, where potentially relevant knowledge is not presented in a way that managers can use (Shapiro et al., 2007). Thus, we suggest the focus of such MBA training should be on the “lost *in* translation” studies. Said differently, management professors should train MBA students to both identify and interpret studies containing actionable findings.

How can students locate actionable research studies? Pearce and Huang (2012) classified articles as actionable if the answer was ‘yes’ to all three of the following questions:

1. Are the research findings more than purely descriptive accounts of uncontrollable circumstances?
2. Can a causal conclusion be made?
3. Does the causal conclusion translate into a practical action that can be taken?

We recommend that faculty teaching MBA courses adopt these elements of Pearce and Huang’s definition of actionable research to assist MBA students in learning to identify, understand, and use actionable management research to make key management decisions.

Using management research in the classroom is by no means a novel idea. Christine Quinn Trank created a course called “evidence-based practice” (Trank, 2014). Lockwood Keats, and Dess (1989) and Dess and Markoczy (2008) proposed an assignment where

MBA students were challenged with providing critiques of academic articles. We build upon this idea and provide a more structured approach with the three following components.

First, *motivation* - we must encourage students to face their biases and assumptions and learn to look at scientific evidence. Second, *skill development* - we must teach students how to locate articles that may be actionable for managers and extract knowledge from them. Third, *structure* - we must give students clear guidance and a structure for the process. In the following paragraphs, we provide details about each of these three components.

### **Motivation**

A course that contains a module or an assignment about using evidence-based research should help students learn how to seek knowledge (Erez & Grant, 2014). In this paper, Adam Grant describes how he convinces students that academic findings offer useful insights to managers. Grant starts his first class with examples from medicine. He asks students to guess the correlation between taking pain relieving medications and actual pain reduction. Students are astonished when he reveals that it is only fourteen percent. Grant continues with similar examples that overturn students' biases and expose their underlying assumptions. He concludes with the introduction of some rigorous management research findings that show stronger associations than his examples from medicine. Students find this approach intriguing because it "...challenges (weakly held) assumptions..." (Erez & Grant, 2014, p. 109).

Similarly, Amir Erez engages students by demonstrating that their intuition does not always lead to appropriate decisions. He uses a case study where students inevitably

make a conclusion that he likens to NASA's 1986 decision to launch the space shuttle Challenger in extremely cold weather. Students learn that people tend to seek information that agrees with their previously held beliefs (i.e., people have confirmation biases), and that intuition lead to problematic outcomes.

Approaches similar to the ones we have just described play a critical role in students' motivation, and these can illustrate the relevance of academic research to one's career. Once students realize the results of management research can be relevant to their actual job requirements, their motivation to use these results increases (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000).

### **Skill Development**

Once students are motivated to engage with the results of academic research, they need to gain and practice the skills needed for this process. Since understanding and translating management research into actionable knowledge is a challenging task, we developed a multi-step approach (Figure 1) for management faculty to use in guiding students through the process of identifying actionable/relevant management research, and then translating it into useful information.

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Students begin by employing their university library's resources and searching leading academic management journals for relevant information on the topics of their choice. The subject of the search can be generated by the students' curiosity or assigned by a professor. Students can further narrow or expand the search results by changing the

time frame for the publication and/or the search terms (Step 1 in Figure 1). If students are not familiar with using the university library's databases, instructors can show them an example in class. To facilitate success with this exercise, we strongly suggest that faculty provide a list of leading management research journals that the professor believes to be appropriate for the subject matter at hand.

Students are then asked to skim through titles and abstracts to select only empirical studies that appear to be understandable and relevant (Steps 2-3). We encourage faculty to stress the significance of an appropriate sample – both its nature and its size (Step 4). For example, we recommend that students ignore studies where the data came from a sample of students rather than individuals or firms, and that faculty provide suggested minimums for sample sizes.

Finally, students are asked to review the discussion sections of the articles and find the summary of the articles' main findings (Step 5). Students should not choose an article if it uses constructs that are not under a manager's control. Currently employed MBA students, or those with work experience in an organization, are more likely to recognize when a variable is controllable by a manager, and we recommend that faculty discuss this important issue with the students in class or in the body of the assignment's instructions.

### **Structure - Assignment Instructions and Example**

The search guidance above lays the groundwork for the research translation where students can transform the findings from an academic management study into actionable insights for strategic decision makers. Professors should provide specific instructions for this assignment similar to those found in Table 1.

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We suggest that students provide a two-page summary so that they must significantly condense the insights found in their chosen studies. Appendix A offers an example that is a translation of a study by Erdogan, Bauer, Truxillo, and Mansfield (2012), and this or a similar example should be given to the students. We recommend that the two-page summary include a discussion of the data the study used, so that students are aware of the robust nature of this research. Students should also summarize the article’s conclusions (or the conclusions they wish to emphasize), which helps them see how the data analysis was used by the researchers to create relevant results. Students should reflect on the study by providing a brief overview section and a condensed list of the “key takeaways”.

The bulk of the assignment’s submission should discuss what the research shows and why the study’s results matter. Students should be encouraged to discuss ways the results can be used to make a difference in an organization’s strategic decision-making. Each of these tasks presents an opportunity for the critical evaluation of information, exposure to alternative ways of thinking, and practice with gleaning real-life business applications from the results of management research. The example assignment submission in Appendix A not only provides guidance for students, but it also sets expectations for their performance.

### **Improving Critical Thinking Skills – a Building Block of Rationality**

We believe that this approach will provide students with enhanced knowledge, a level of comfort with accessing this “new-to-them” source of high-quality information, better

strategic decision-making abilities, and improved critical thinking skills. Highlighting this additional benefit, Ireland believes that an academic study should enhance readers' critical thinking skills (Ireland, 2014, p. 265).

Critical thinking has been linked to the idea of rationality, and developing rationality is seen as one of the most important aims of education (Siegel, 1989). Celuch and Slama (2008) argue that the development of critical thinking skills is a necessary precondition for life-long learning. In an experimental setting, they concluded that students are more likely to become life-long learners if they have educational learning experiences that help develop thinking skills and show them how they can use these skills in their future jobs.

To evaluate how our approach may help MBA students enhance their critical thinking skills, we refer to the Steps for Better Thinking (SBT) Model (Lynch & Wolcott, 2001; Wolcott & Lynch, 2002; Wolcott, 2005). The SBT model is a developmental model for critical thinking skills and applies to college-age individuals.

The SBT Model is based on students' beliefs as to where knowledge comes from. The SBT Model has five levels of cognitive performance, called steps, from step zero through step four. The skills required for students to move from one step to the next are developed sequentially. This means, for example, that a student at step one is unable to consistently display the skills required for step three. A student at step zero believes that knowledge comes from experts (e.g., professors), and it is the student's job to memorize it. Students at step one recognize that even experts have opposing opinions and put little trust in information from others. When step one students read a scenario, they ignore any information that does not support their version of the 'truth', and cite the remaining evidence as proof they are right.

A step two student can analyze the pros and cons of alternatives but may experience difficulty making a decision. When a student can finally weigh the pros and cons of the alternatives, understand underlying assumptions, and make and defend a decision, he or she has progressed to step three. Students at step four can describe how their decisions might evolve as the environment or the underlying assumptions change.

At what thinking level are the MBA students in our classrooms, on average? Years of research using the SBT Model and the Reflective Judgment Model upon which it was based show that students complete their undergraduate educations at just under step one performance. Graduate students are, on average, approximately halfway between steps one and step two (King & Kitchener, 1994, p. 283)<sup>1</sup>. These findings might explain why “...practitioners sometimes are not simply biased against research, but rather inscribe their own experience into what they read...” (Trank, 2014, p. 383). These practitioners could be step one thinkers that align evidence to their existing ‘truth’.

Any MBA class is likely to include students with a range of critical thinking skills, but most are likely to be at least at step one. MBA students at all levels of thinking will benefit from completing the assignment, but in different ways. If there are any MBA students in the class who are at step zero, they will observe that many experts disagree as they skim through the research articles, which can help them progress to step one. Erez and Grant’s (2014) suggestion about “surprising” students with research conclusions that display their inherent biases and assumptions can help students progress to step two - when students realize that they are not the experts, and all points of view have some validity.

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<sup>1</sup> The thinking levels in the SBT and Reflective Judgement Models are numbered differently because the SBT Model covers only college age development.

To complete this assignment, students will have to weigh the merits of various research studies, and determine the pros and cons of summarizing a particular article. This provides practice with step two skills, but students also have to decide which article to use. The write-up is then the student's defense of that decision, which can help students practice step three skills. In an MBA class with a large percentage of students that seem to have advanced thinking skills, a professor could request that the write-up include a discussion about how the results might change if the environment or some of the underlying assumptions changed, which would help students practice step four skills.

## **Conclusion**

Here, we covered some of the ways managers make decisions, as well as some of the reasons for the research-practice gap. Most of the literature on this topic contains suggestions for changes scholars should make to their research to minimize this gap, and many note that these changes will be difficult to make. We believe that practitioners can benefit from learning how to interpret the results from academic literature to improve strategic decision-making, but acknowledge the difficulties of changing management scholarship. Therefore, we raised the question: How can we transform practitioners from non-trusting and indifferent outsiders to engaged and active beneficiaries of academic research?

We presented a novel pedagogical approach that can provide practice for MBA students in using academic research. Practitioners are more likely to use scientific evidence in strategic decision making if they recognize its value and have had practice extracting relevant information from this research. Most optimal decisions are likely to come from informed, rational, critical thinkers and life-long learners. Our pedagogical



idea assists students in their evolution to this type of decision-maker. This approach encourages practitioners to search academic publications for strategic decision-making inputs, and it provides business school faculty with a methodology for implementation in a classroom.

Finally, this classroom assignment may have another advantage for AACSB-accredited business schools. The preamble in the AACSB 2013 standards, which were updated in 2016, discusses the AACSB's new themes of engagement, innovation, and impact. About the theme of engagement, the preamble states:

“Effective business education and research can be achieved with different balances of academic and professional engagement. However, quality business education cannot be achieved when either academic or professional engagement is absent, or when they do not intersect in meaningful ways.” (<http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/standards/2013-business: 2>).

For maintenance of AACSB accreditation, then, schools need to demonstrate their ability to merge academics and practice. Training students to be managers who can use academic research is one way to show this engagement. There are many ways that schools should measure impact, but schools should “...make a difference in business and society ...” (<http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/standards/2013-business: 3>). Certainly, a pedagogy that can improve managerial decision-making will demonstrate impact.

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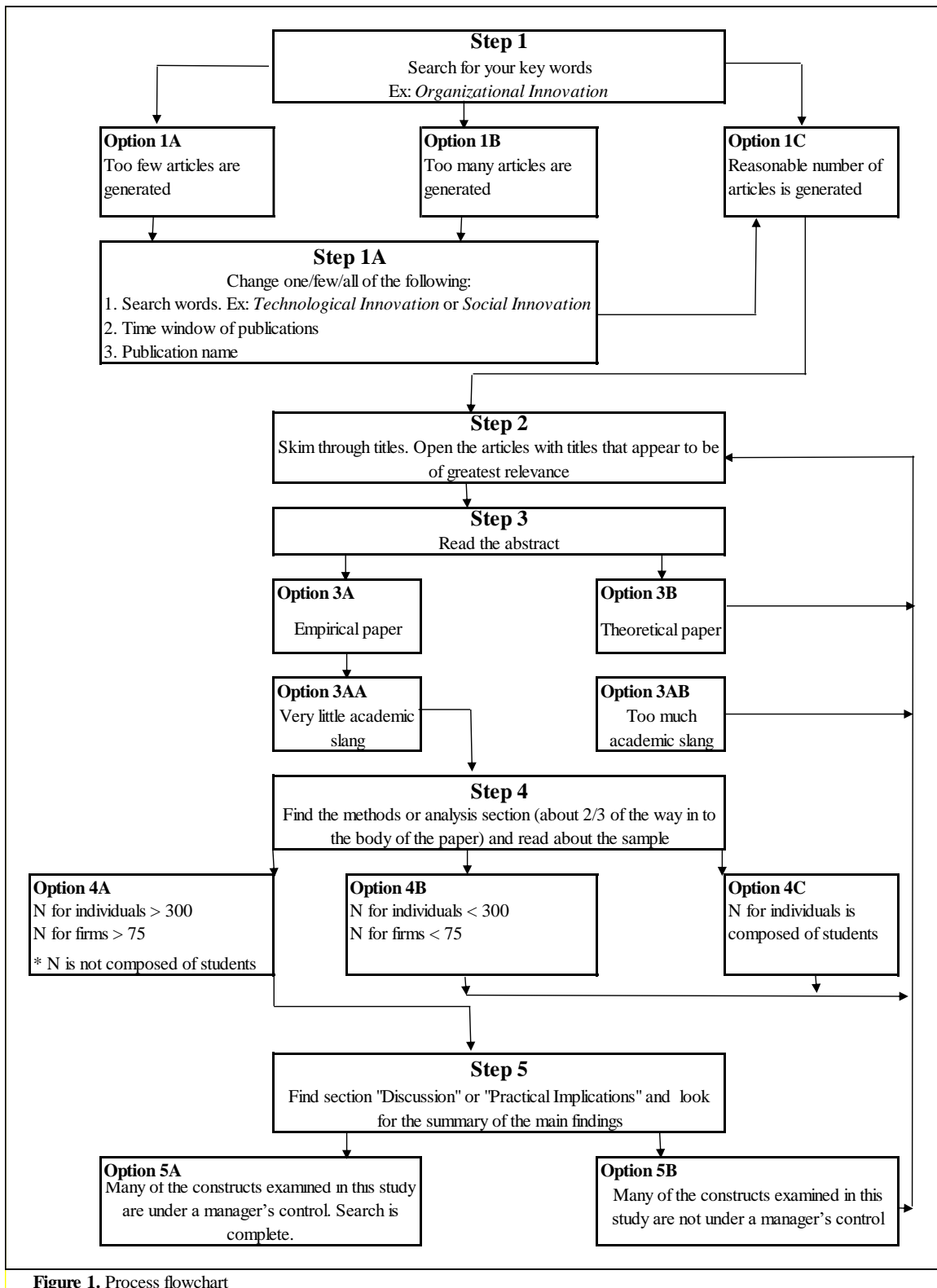


Figure 1. Process flowchart

**Table 1.** Assignment Instructions

Assignment task
1. Provide the full citation of the study you are reviewing.
2. Include an overview section with two to three sentences that in your opinion summarize the most important points in the study.
3. Write a section with three to five key points from the article. Also, clearly state (a) the purpose of the study, (b) the sample that was used, and (c) what the author/authors of the study have found.
4. Write a reflection how the findings of the study might benefit (or not) your job/company. Also, include your evaluation of the pros and cons of the research results to the specific business setting in which you work.
5. (optional) Describe how your use of the study's results might change if some underlying assumptions changed or if there was a change in the existing business environment.



## Appendix A

### *Completed Assignment Example*

#### **Citation:**

Erdogan, B., Bauer, T., Truxillo, D., & Mansfield, L. (2012). Whistle While You Work: A Review of the Life Satisfaction Literature. *Journal of Management*, 38(4), 1038-1083.

#### **Overview:**

The desire to enhance employee job performance and satisfaction is a hallmark of good leadership. This article addresses the components of employee life satisfaction, how those various components can be enhanced through effective leadership, and how life satisfaction can affect your employees' performance at work. By extension, this research has implications for strategic management and organizational performance.

#### **Key Points:**

- Employee life satisfaction drives individual performance and commitment to the organization and can have a significant influence on business results.
- Life satisfaction is multifaceted and includes the quality of work life, the quality of life outside work (including health), and feelings of self-esteem.
- Much of what happens at work affects life satisfaction beyond just the work life component.
- Effective leaders seek to improve their employees' overall life satisfaction by shaping their work life in ways that allow them to achieve balance and meaning in their lives. This will drive greater individual performance and commitment (and, by extension, company performance and mission execution).

#### **What the Research Shows and Why It Matters:**

Research by Erdogan and colleagues appearing in the *Journal of Management* is a fascinating “study of studies”, or what the researchers refer to as a meta-analysis, looking at almost 7,700 pieces of research dealing with employee satisfaction. They found that data strongly support the idea that satisfaction with *life* has tremendous spillover effects at *work*. Interestingly, the strongest correlation of all was between *career* satisfaction and life satisfaction. Career satisfaction refers to longer-term satisfaction with one's work experiences and one's optimism about career trajectory.

So, how can this help someone become a more effective, more strategic leader? It means that the most effective leaders will be those that focus on developing the “whole person” within their employees. Since life satisfaction affects individual performance at work, then improving life satisfaction for employees has to be of paramount importance for leaders. As a result, managers should:

- Ensure a good fit between employees and the roles that they play in organizations so that employees' interpersonal needs and desire for recognition are met (understanding that these needs/desires vary across individuals).
- Provide opportunities for challenge, growth, and personal meaning through the employee's relationship with the organization.

- Allow flexibility with roles and schedules so that individuals can balance the conflicting demands of life.
- Encourage employees to spend a portion of their time using their work-related skills helping others in their communities.

Leaders must be mindful of the factors driving employees to strengthen their psychological bond to the organization and achieve lasting meaning through their work.

Many leading companies are realizing this and are designing their jobs and cultures to maximize employee life satisfaction. And they're seeing outstanding results. Adobe Systems is among the leaders in this area, and their efforts at employee life satisfaction have led them to be listed on Fortune's "100 Best Companies to Work For" for over a decade. What makes them unique? They provide flexible work schedules, work-from-home opportunities, month-long sabbaticals, matching of employees' charitable contributions (up to \$5,000 per year per employee), adoption assistance services, dry cleaning pick-up, a wide variety of professional development opportunities, and tuition reimbursements. They have a unique culture, but their success isn't all about bringing a surfboard to work or having a bread machine in the office. It's about allowing people to be expressive and pursue their dreams.

In short, to achieve higher levels of employee and organizational performance, evidence from large-scale data analyses and company examples shows that leaders must focus on helping employees achieve higher levels of life satisfaction. The data show that life satisfaction is driven by multiple aspects of work, including work's ability to fulfill interpersonal, financial, and status needs; challenge the mind; and provide opportunities for a brighter future.