

Launch editorial

Martin Reynolds



A WARM WELCOME from me as Dean of Ashcroft International Business School (AIBS) to this first edition of our practice-based research journal *Interconnections*. I would first of all like to thank all those who have been involved in making this happen and, particularly Dr Bronwen Rees, who has taken on the challenging task of being Editor of this first edition. I would also like to thank all those who have written papers for this volume. We have made a good start.

Many might ask, do we need another journal in the crowded space of academic publications in the field of business and management? The answer we hold to this question should be clear from the articles that have been written by all the contributors to this first edition of *Interconnections*. We believe there is a gap in the market for a journal that provides a focus for critical debate on international management practice.

In establishing *Interconnections*, Ashcroft International Business School is deliberately targeting readership groups whose interests straddle the theory/practice boundary of the inter-disciplinary field of international management practice. This field of investigation is core to the academic excellence model underpinning the courses and research at Ashcroft International Business School.

As an economist I am drawn to make parallels with the long-standing debates and divide within my discipline created by the comparison of the sophisticated models of neoclassical theory and the economic realities of consumer and firm behaviour. We do not simply see practice-based research as being about researchers drawing out implications of their research for practice, or business people talking to academics, though these are important aspects.

We see a deeper issue – there is a need to address the mind-set or worldview that has caused us to ask such fundamental questions in the first place. In essence we see the need to examine our research

methods, our ways of thinking and understanding about the business world – and to understand how we have created a significant gap between the theory and practice of management. It is intended that *Interconnections* will create a space and learning opportunity for contributing to this on-going debate, helping us understand the state we are in and consciously and collaboratively allowing academics and practitioners to work together at addressing the problems. This is an exciting challenge and we hope *Interconnections* will make a contribution.

Interconnections is a journal that also serves the needs of Ashcroft International Business School. Our strategy and vision is focused upon developing a leading practice-based, international business school. We seek in establishing *Interconnections* to develop a forum for debate where we can open up the issues that are driving our particular approach to business and management education. We are committed to communicating with both academic and business communities about our practice-based research programme at AIBS – a programme that has been co-designed with business. As such *Interconnections* provides AIBS faculty and business with a communication and dissemination channel for their work.

Interconnections is part of our strategy of putting into practice our approach to university-business partnership. An important contribution of a university business school is to develop new insights and knowledge that will help improve management practice. Importantly, we believe that there is considerable scope for developing new insight and knowledge from understanding the practice of management. This is not to undermine the importance of exciting new academic theories. We emphasise the balance and blending of theory and practice.

Each year colleagues in AIBS focus their research and scholarly activity on themes that have been shaped through dialogue with business and other organisations and agencies. In some instances we will be working closely with organisations so that we can align our research endeavours with the specific organisational learning needs and strategy of the business. For several years our researchers have been working in such a way in areas such as leadership, emotional intelligence, and cross-cultural dialogue, underpinned by theories and practices from economics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, psychotherapy and critical theory, to name but a few.

We seek to differentiate *Interconnections* as a journal by the focus of its content, the balance of its contributors from academe and practice and the practical relevance of the findings reported in the journal. The journal will also serve to draw attention to new and difficult issues and challenges, making these accessible and in a format that both informs new research and management practice. We will be developing a journal that will develop new ways of integrating theory and practice and not just setting up debate and research questions in a familiar and preconceived way. This is an exciting agenda and gives a role for *Interconnections* to help create new forms of dialogue and exchange between academic researchers and business practitioners – avoiding the too common problem of many academic journals adopting a language and style of debate that is often perceived as being imposed by academics and typically bearing little resemblance to business and management realities.

In this first edition of *Interconnections* we explore the theory/practice divide from a number of different angles. In the first section, ‘From the ivory tower’, researchers from Ashcroft International Business School present their work and offer ideas on how business and the business community might work at breaking down the divide between theory and practice. In the opening paper Bronwen Rees explores the technological nature of our modern world and its impact on people and mindsets. She argues that the theory/practice divide is the logical result of the emphasis on reason which began with Descartes. Katalin Illes goes on to discuss the thorny issue of trust in a globalised workplace, and what this means for management education. Jon Smith and John Rayment discuss the growing calls for spirituality in the workplace arguing this is a symptom of the abstracted nature of our workplaces. Finally, Bronwen Rees interviews John Wilson on the nature of our current research paradigms and how a radical transformation of this could help create a more ‘embodied’ form of research where our experience is related to our theories.

In the second section, ‘From the field’, researchers and practitioners from outside AIBS take up the mantle. Chris Brewster, world-wide leader in human resource management and industrial relations looks back over whether any of our management theories have really changed over a period of 30 years or so. Just like Katalin Illes, he concludes that ‘trust’ is a very important issue in the globalising world. Mark Goodridge, Chief Executive of ER Consultants,

one of our oldest niche consultancies, reflects on whether and how management theory helps in his work with blue chip companies. David Arkell, a senior manager in a large public sector company shows how his doctoral research work on 'emotions' has helped him create successful European team working. Greg O'Shea explores issues of power and wealth in organisations and how critical management theories and chaos theories provide a framework for meaningful and deepening engagement with organisational practitioners.

The Research and Practice Forum details the outcomes of an experiment in cross-cultural dialogue that attempted to break the theory/practice divide through its ways of dialoguing, providing a forum for researchers from across the globe to dig deeper into their conditioned assumptions. Finally, we offer some tools that business practitioners may wish to consider using from our research base.

We hope that you enjoy this first issue of *Interconnections*. We are on a learning curve with our first edition and we welcome contributions and thoughts as to how the journal might better position itself and also improve its content and its presentation. We also welcome you to make your own contributions to the debates we hope have been started in this first edition.

Our next issue will be themed around the area of sustainability and will be launched at the 10th international conference of Heterodox Economics to be held at Anglia Ruskin University, July 4–7 2008. Once again we welcome thoughts and ideas about themes and offers of contributions. For contact details please see the end of the journal.

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From the ivory tower

Bronwen Rees begins with a suggestion that we are reaching a **crisis** in the Western worldview where abstract thinking has lost touch with nature. Katalin Illes suggests some practical ways in which we may develop **trust** through **student learning**, and through practice in the workplace. John Wilson takes a fundamental look at the **role of the researcher**, arguing that we have a responsibility as researchers to explore our own motivations and need to embed this in our research. Finally, Jon Smith and John Rayment explore the pressing call for **spirituality in the workplace**; too much emphasis on abstraction has denied our souls the possibility of expression.