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## It Takes Two to Tango: The Management of Academic–Industry Partnerships Requires Multiple Perspectives

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Field-based research allows the domain of organizational research to remain true to its applied roots and conduct research on topics that are timely and relevant within actual organizations. However, anyone who has conducted field research knows that conducting such work is challenging and can be viewed as more of a *dance* between the scholar and the practitioner, requiring well-timed and coordinated moves. As Lapierre et al. (2018) allude to in the focal article, such projects can turn into a balancing act for researchers as they attempt to conduct publishable research with robust practices and designs while also appeasing the needs and expectations of organizational members and leaders.

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Lapierre et al. (2018) have provided numerous valuable insights in terms of how to manage this dance and, in so doing, have hit upon important points for researchers to consider. Yet, we found there to be several key considerations missing. Here, drawing on our own research experience in the field, we first elaborate on those points. We then suggest extensions in research on organizational partnerships in hopes of continuing this conversation.

**Consideration 1: A High-Level Title Is Not Necessary to Capture the Essential Nature of an Internal Champion**

We agree with Lapierre et al. (2018) that a champion is needed within the organization to not only develop initial enthusiasm for a proposed research collaboration but to also sustain this enthusiasm throughout the duration of such a project. Likewise, from much of our field-based research projects, such individuals are often at a high-level within the organization. However, we would like to point out that this assumption can at times be faulty, as we have also encountered experiences where the true *gatekeeper* within the organization resided much lower in the organization. For instance, the first author is currently involved in a research project involving service providers within the off-shore energy extraction industry. Although he and his research team made several attempts to obtain partnerships with entities in this industry by approaching C-level personnel, he did not actually obtain any traction within this industry until he made a connection with an individual who is at a middle-management level. This non-C-suite manager served as the access point to the industry.

Regarding the value of organizational champions, we echo the point made in the focal article noting the value of having multiple champions within an organization. We had a vivid example recently where one champion within an organization was unceremoniously fired and escorted out of the building by security. If this was the only champion that we had within the organization, our research project would have been in jeopardy. However, because we had multiple champions within that organization, we were able to maintain our research collaboration with that organization.

**Consideration 2: Financial Investment From the Organization Is Helpful, but Not a Requirement**

Lapierre et al. (2018) make the point that some organizations are “more likely to commit to an endeavor that they have already invested resources in” (p. 560). This is a sentiment that we were also told during the graduate programs where each of us attended, and we have certainly encountered situations where this is the case. However, we have also encountered situations where the organization was not in the financial position to be able to fund such a research project, and we were at stages in our research

careers where we could not turn down an opportunity to collect needed organizational data. As such, we had to explore other ways to keep the organizational partner engaged. For us, this has typically been framed within the idea of a win/win relationship with the key champion within the organization. Specifically, there have been instances where the organizational champions saw value in partnering with us on research articles, and this effectively kept them interested. In other situations, the champion was someone who needed a marquee initiative within the organization, so the internal champion found great value in advertising the project to internal audiences, leading to continued piqued interest in the endeavor. The point here is that although it may be ideal for the researcher to obtain monetary investment from the organization to support the research project for a variety of obvious reasons, this may not always be possible. As such, it is important to discuss additional motivations for industry partners; in the absence of financial investment from the organizational partner, there may still be reasons why the researcher would continue pursuing such a project.

### **Consideration 3: Other Entities Can Serve as a Liaison Between Academics and Organizations**

Much of what Lapierre et al. (2018) propose is built on the assumption that the academic is working directly with an organization. Although this may be the prominent approach, we would propose that there are other entrée points into organizations. For instance, some in our research team have had projects in healthcare that were not initially started between the researchers and the healthcare-providing entities. Instead, the researchers had relationships with a training organization that had been engaged by the healthcare facilities. The researchers were brought in to work on various projects with the training organization, which provided the opportunity to introduce data collection efforts that would benefit the training organization, the healthcare entity, and the research team as well. This point is raised to acknowledge that there are countless ways in which research projects can be developed, and those outlined by Lapierre and colleagues, although valuable, may not represent an all-inclusive list.

In sum, we feel that the perspective provided by Lapierre et al. (2018) is incredibly valuable, as it starts an important conversation and allows others to learn from leaders in the field. Still, it is limited by the fact that it appears to primarily be based upon the experiences of the six researchers involved with the focal article. These researchers are prolific, and therefore their voices carry much weight, but there is value in expanding beyond six voices. As such, we have a few recommendations that we believe could round out the story regarding field-based research.

### **Continuing the Conversation: Need for a More Complete Analysis**

As we alluded to in the sections above, although we agree with the vast majority of what the focal article outlines, there were also areas where our experiences differed from those articulated by the authors. This suggests the picture provided in the focal article is incomplete. In particular, we can see value in a systematic review and study of field-based research within the broader literature to better understand the academics' partnering experiences. Doing so would allow for a multitude of perspectives regarding the dance between academic and industry partners, and would address questions such as: How do researchers develop relationships with organizations? How long does it take to develop such relationships? Were the researchers proactive in developing the relationship, or did the opportunity just present itself? How did the researcher get the organization to agree to the research design? Did the organization push to reduce the data collection efforts, and how was this managed?

We see value in building upon the work of Lapierre and colleagues by conducting a comprehensive review of the organization management research initiated within field-based settings. Such work could include a survey of researchers who have conducted this research over the past few years, including obtaining qualitative data from such parties to better understand the true story of their involvement with organizational groups.

### **Continuing the Conversation: Perspective of the Organization**

The focal article provided by Lapierre et al. (2018) provides value in that it addresses the scholar side of the dance and, in so doing, provides insights to new and even more seasoned academics. However, leveraging the dance analogy a bit further, it takes two to tango! As such, the picture is not complete until we also consider the perspective of the organization, which is absent from the focal article. Accordingly, we see great value in future work that would not only systematically review field-based research from the academic side but also investigate the organizational partner's perspective.

We propose that shifting focus to the practitioner's experience and perception of such collaborations with academic partners could be highly informative. For instance, this approach could address questions, such as: What resonated most to the organization as the researchers were doing their sales pitch? What percentage of their involvement was intended to help the organization, to help themselves, and/or to help the researcher? What were the friction points that were encountered, and what was done (or could have been done) to address these items? What could have been done to provide more value at the end of the project?

Work in this direction should not only include assessments from the perspective of the top management teams within the organization but through

all strata of the organization that were involved in such projects. Likewise, we can also see value in assessing organizations who have yet to be involved in research collaborations to get their unaltered perspectives on how they could be sold to be involved in such projects.

### Conclusion

We enjoyed reading the recommendations of Lapierre et al. (2018) and believe this article will be a great benefit to many scholars. Still, we see this work as more of a start to a conversation than a complete picture. Additional work is needed to advance our understanding of the key elements to *both* sides of the dance that create successful field-based partnerships. We hope that the focal article, as well as the commentaries provided in response, kick start increasing attention to the topic of conducting high-quality, field-based research.

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