

Impact-driven scholar, reflective practitioner, or pracademic? Conceptualizing hybrid roles to bridge the research-practice gap in HRM

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ABSTRACT

Bridging the gap between theoretical concepts relating to human resource management (HRM) and practical application of research insights is essential for creating important, relevant, and therefore high impact management theories about work and organizations. Pracademics, who actively participate in both research and practice activities, cross boundaries between domains, so play a critical role in bringing theories into practice. However, the role of pracademics is conceptually underdeveloped and ambiguous, limiting our understanding of how actors engage in bridging the research-practice divide. We propose a continuum of research-practice roles, recognizing that hybrid roles are often fluid in nature. We explain how hybrid professionals hold different identities; as impact-driven scholars, reflective practitioners, or pracademics. These roles have implications for individuals' activities, identity work, career, and collaboration. Drawing on three contemporary challenges in HRM, we illustrate how hybrid professionals can align HRM theory and practice and help close the research-practice gap. As well as theoretical and managerial implications, we also highlight implications of the continuum of roles for policy makers and funders.

1. Introduction

A key function of business and management scholarship is to develop theory and evidence-based insights to improve decision-making and outcomes for organizational stakeholders (Barends & Rousseau, 2018). Successful research-practice integration can both enhance the practical relevance of research and advance research knowledge (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). Yet, the field of management, and specifically human resource management (HRM), has been criticized for its ineffective integration of practice and practical issues into research (Timming & Macneil, 2023) and a lack of innovative approaches to bring these two domains together. Bansal et al. (2012) suggest that “most of what management researchers do utterly fails to resonate with management practice” (p. 73) and, based on a review of 4000 articles on HRM published between 2010 and 2019, Aguinis et al. (2022) found that only 1.5 % contained actionable policy recommendations. Despite repeated calls for better knowledge exchange to close this research-practice gap by introducing different approaches to teaching (Deadrick & Gibson, 2009; Johnson & Ellis, 2023), more action-based research

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(Bleijenbergh et al., 2021), improved policy implications and societal impact (Aguinis et al., 2022; Ryazanova et al., 2024), research-practice partnerships (Vogel et al., 2021) and academic-based consulting (Bansal et al., 2012), the research-practice gap remains a problem (Banks et al., 2016).

One important consideration in the discussion on the research-practice gap is the role of hybrid professionals who engage in both scholarly and practical activities (Powell et al., 2018) and, thus, align theory and practice in their work (Hollweck & Doucet, 2020; Posner, 2009). These *pracademics* can be either scholars who are seeking to impact practice as part of their scholarly activities, or practitioners actively participating in research. In contrast to scholars and practitioners who encounter challenges while entering the other domain as part of their daily work, pracademics find themselves between these two worlds and enjoy increased flexibility in their transitions between research and practice (Bushouse et al., 2011; Hollweck et al., 2022; Posner, 2009).

Regardless of some recognition of the potentially role pracademics play in closing the research-practice gap (Johnson & Ellis, 2023; Murphy & Fulda, 2011; Mynott & Zimatore, 2022; Panda, 2014), there are two key problems in the existing body of literature. First, bridging the research-practice gap is a multifaceted challenge that requires hybrid professionals at the intersection of research and practice to draw from competencies that combine theoretical and practical evidence (Barends & Rousseau, 2018; Briner & Walshe, 2015; Dickfos, 2019; Hollweck et al., 2022). Available theoretical frameworks do not adequately capture the complexity of hybrid professionals, making it difficult to grasp their roles and identities, or even to identify hybrid professionals in the first place. While attention has been paid to management scholars taking on roles in practice (see, e.g., Mohrman et al., 2001; Tranfield & Starkey, 1998) and their importance for improving practice (“practice has mostly been influenced by a set of academics who choose to work in the middle of research and practice”; Lawler & Benson, 2022, p.2), there has been little discussion about practitioners who actively engage in academia and their role in research-practice collaborations (Gifford et al., 2023; Powell et al., 2018; Schön, 1983). This is important because practitioners who participate in scholarly pursuits enhance the practical application of theoretical knowledge (Kaufman, 2022; Lawler & Benson, 2022) and can overcome some of the challenges faced by scholars with competing demands (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006).

Second, while research in education, medicine, law, and public administration (Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023) recognizes the role of pracademics in bridging the research-practice gap, the connection between the two worlds in business and management, and especially in HRM, is “tenuous and disjointed” (Timming & Macneil, 2023, p.592). Bainbridge and Ng (2024) analyzed 825 articles published in *Human Resource Management* and *Human Resource Management Journal* (two of the highest impact empirical HRM journals) between 2010 and 2020 and only found five papers co-authored by practitioners, and only a single article authored by practitioners alone. This showcases a lack of collaboration and a potential lack of practice-oriented HRM theory that could help answer practice-based questions (Cooke et al., 2020; Negt & Haunschild, 2024). As highlighted by Gifford et al. (2023), evidence-based practice in HRM is still in its infancy, despite recommendations to increase the practical application of research (Gill, 2018; Lawler & Benson, 2022). Pracademics in HRM might therefore play an important role in translating theoretical knowledge to practical application and in developing scholarly avenues to solve practical problems. However, to do so, there is a need for more clarity about the roles and activities of hybrid professionals, to understand both the potential and the challenges.

In this paper, we explore how pracademics can contribute to a better integration and collaboration of research and practice in HRM. We draw on previous models of pracademics (Campbell et al., 2023; Dickinson, 2020; Eacott, 2022; Johnson & Ellis, 2023; Panda, 2014) to conceptualize three types of hybrid professionals along a continuum of roles (Fig. 1): *impact-driven scholars* (academics who actively contribute to practice), *reflective practitioners* (practitioners involved in research) and *pracademics* (individuals holding a hybrid cross-domain role). We conceptualize these as “ideal types” for illustration purposes while recognizing that the continuum implies that individuals can be more, or less, active in practice and/or research, so many individuals would not fit neatly into the types we describe. The continuum perspective allows us to explore how each of these three ideal types can contribute to bridging the research-practice divide, thereby creating new opportunities for individuals to engage in transformative activities that transcend the traditional boundaries of academia and practice. The research-practice continuum provides a clearer and more differentiated definition of pracademics and extends existing conceptualizations, that are limited by focusing only on individuals who predominantly sit in one domain (research or practice), and a lack of consideration about how different roles relate to one another. We utilize the continuum to provide a more complete explanation of how activities of hybrid professionals differ and change depending on their relative position. In doing so, this paper extends current debates in the HRM and research-practice gap literature in multiple ways.

First, with the continuum, we extend current theory by providing more clarity and a better differentiation of hybrid professionals. Overall, existing conceptualizations of individuals enacting both research and practice activities do not clearly account for the full range of roles contributing across both domains. In contrast to the existing dominant discussion about researchers engaging in practice (Campbell et al., 2023; Dickinson et al., 2022; Posner, 2009), we emphasize the unique contributions of different types of hybrid professionals. We illustrate the importance of distinguishing between three ideal types depending on whether they engage primarily in research, practice, or take on truly hybrid roles with an aim to create impact in both domains. This is not only important because of the lack of attention to pracademics and reflective practitioners in previous research (Powell et al., 2018), but because conflating these roles limits our ability to explain and overcome the challenges faced by individuals at different places on the research-practice continuum. By focusing on the different identities and activities that are related to various roles of hybrid professionals (Bushouse et al., 2011; Powell et al., 2018; Susskind, 2013; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006) we highlight the importance for theory and empirical research to consider reflective practitioners and pracademics more prominently, as their activities and contributions differ from those of impact-driven scholars.

Second, we contribute to current debates in the HRM literature by showing that the focus on integrating research into practice through better management and student teaching (Markoulli et al., 2017; Stirk, 2023), practical contributions (Bainbridge & Ng, 2024; Barends & Rousseau, 2018), and action research (Bleijenbergh et al., 2021; Lawler & Benson, 2022), will not be sufficient to close the

research-practice gap. We argue that HRM research and practice would benefit from integrating hybrid professionals into current and future collaborations to successfully solve practical problems and make research more relevant, with potentially higher impact for businesses and society. We illustrate the importance of the continuum perspective for these goals with three current practice-based discussions in HRM (return-to-office policies; generation management; generative artificial intelligence and algorithmic management). We show how the activities of different hybrid professionals address these issues in different ways, as the basis for more successful collaboration between theory and practice (which is needed; Dickinson et al., 2022; Diola et al., 2022).

Third, we utilize theory on identity work (Caza, Vough, & Puranik, 2018; Hollweck et al., 2022; Järventie-Thesleff & Tienari, 2016) to explore the challenges specific of these hybrid roles. A deeper understanding of identities, which allow dynamic responses to changing situations, is important because it addresses a potential barrier to bridging the gap between research and practice. We explain why pracademics must embrace a distinct identity (someone who sits at the crossroads of the two domains), but also shift between identities as a reflective practitioner and impact-driven scholar, depending on their audience and what they want to achieve. This is important because it highlights both challenges (shifting identities requires concerted work; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and opportunities (identity work can enhance performance in collaborative teams; Cheng et al., 2008) that may explain how the research-practice divide can be bridged by these actors.

Finally, responding to the criticism that management scholarship largely fails to address policy implications in research (Aguinis et al., 2022), we highlight how our continuum has implications for policy makers and funders, who are concerned with supporting research that addresses important practical issues. While there is a move toward funding research-practice partnerships (Margaras & Széchy, 2023), these partnerships face challenges of speaking different languages, incompatible or challenging career paths, dealing with conflicting demands, and timelines (Powell et al., 2018). Taking into account truly hybrid professionals (pracademics) in funded research collaborations provide an opportunity for more embedded research with the potential for greater practical impact.

In the sections that follow, we establish what we already know about pracademics, then introduce the research-practice continuum, defining the roles and activities these ideal types participate in, highlighting its implications for understanding the identities and identity work of impact-driven scholars, reflective practitioners, and pracademics, and theorizing their contributions to research-practice collaborations in HRM.

2. Pracademics

Pracademics have a role in translating complex theories into actionable strategies that directly contribute to tangible organizational improvements (Drnević et al., 2020), and developing complex theories to explain successful practical strategies. Recognized as boundary spanners, pracademics should be those “who have occupied significant positions as both academics and practitioners” (Posner, 2009, p. 16) and are able to transition from one domain to another (Dickinson et al., 2022). However, a pracademic in existing literature is often conceptualized as a scholarly role that reflects a paradigm shift toward collaborative problem-solving in academic communities, thereby aligning the role with the values and norms of the academic setting (Volpe & Chandler, 1999).

The roles held by pracademics have been illustrated in overlapping circles representing research and practice (Dickinson, 2020; Johnson & Ellis, 2023), or as four distinct quadrants to demonstrate low and high academic or practitioner orientation (Eacott, 2022; Panda, 2014), or positioning the pracademic as and insider and outsider within spaces of academia, policy, practice, and networks (Campbell et al., 2023). This has led to some discussion about different and distinct roles represented by a greater or lesser focus in each domain. Most conceptualizations position individuals engaging across research-practice as sitting in one dominant domain. For example, Macduff and Netting (2010) discussed the roles of “engaged scholars” (scholars who engage in practice) and “reflective professional practitioners” (practitioners who engage in research) to suggest that these hybrid professionals might form a collaborative team (a group of practitioners and scholars with distinct roles) to “draw from their joint strengths in building better capacity to collaborate” (p. 44). However, their focus was mainly on the importance of engaged scholars and their contribution to collaborations. Wilson (2019) followed a similar notion, arguing that “most pracademics belong to one of two pracademic subtypes, distinguishing them as those who are practitioners (pracs) or those who are academics (demics)” (p. 1). Therefore, while existing conceptualizations of pracademics highlight some forms of cross-domain roles, the implications of the distinction between these two hybrid roles and the importance of fully hybrid roles (i.e., individuals who are actively involved and create impact in both domains evenly) have been largely neglected. This results in a limited knowledge about the individual contributions of these different types, the activities they engage in, and the identity struggles which arise from hybrid roles (Dickinson et al., 2022; Fowler et al., 2023).

Another issue which has impeded a comprehensive account of the role of pracademics is the almost exclusive focus on industry-focused academics (Timming & Macneil, 2023). A widely used term in the literature is “engaged scholars” – individuals holding mainly academic roles, who also engage in management practice activities (see, e.g., Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006) – with discussion of their benefit to translate theory more effectively into practice (Campbell, 2022; Diola et al., 2022; Panda, 2014). Engaged scholars can use their practitioner experience to encourage students to develop their own theories through constructivist learning (Wilson, 2015), and their multi-domain experiences can facilitate industry-university collaborations and forge networks (Posner, 2009; Vogel et al., 2021). This strong focus on scholars that create impact beyond the academic domain means that individuals who are primarily based in practice, but engage in scholarly activities, have been largely neglected. The limited discussion about practitioners engaging in research (as opposed to researchers engaging in practice) has mainly focused on describing the challenges these individuals experience when transitioning from practice to academia (Campbell et al., 2023) or the value of bringing practitioner experience into classrooms (Stirk, 2023). However, existing conceptualizations do not adequately address the role of scholar-practitioners (rather than practitioner-scholars) who combine the two worlds from the opposite direction.

2.1. A continuum perspective of pracademics

Our continuum (Fig. 1) illustrates two domains of activity: research and practice. Here, “research” refers to activities involved in knowledge generation, such as collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, developing theory, and evaluating a body of evidence; activities usually enacted by individuals in academic institutions (e.g., doctoral student, postdoctoral researcher, professor, or lecturer). By “practice”, and for the purposes of this paper specifically human resource (HR) practice, we refer to the activities involved in the management of people in or around organizations or work settings, relating to individuals (e.g., ensuring workplace health and wellbeing), organizations (e.g., productivity and performance), or society (e.g., decent work for all and sustainable economic growth). These activities are engaged in by individuals holding practice-based roles (e.g., HR assistant, learning & development manager, Chief HR officer, line manager, business owner, independent HR consultant). We propose that individuals maintain a sense of belonging or a “homebase” along the research-practice continuum. Factors such as employment situation (e.g. proportional contract in business, self-employment, or university), area of expertise, amount of time spent in each domain, and key contributions to research and/or practice can serve as indicators on where individuals feel more at home (internal) or how their affiliation is categorized and viewed by others (external) along the continuum. To illustrate the span of roles along the continuum, we use ideal types of each hybrid professional, recognizing that individuals may fit more or less into each type.

Impact-driven scholars are academics who spend time engaging in practice-based activities with the specific goal to create impact on policy and/or practice for individuals, organizations, or society. We use the term “impact” instead of “engaged” (which has been used by other scholars, e.g., Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006) to denote the active contribution of scientific research to create change in the realm of practice. This could include policy or procedural developments that affect practice as an outcome of research, and thus go beyond simply interacting with organizations to collect data to achieve research goals. Impact-driven scholars participate in problem-driven research that aims to solve practical issues, which requires a higher awareness of issues of greatest concern to organizational leaders and management practitioners (Bushouse et al., 2011). Impact is therefore a reciprocal process involving both researchers and practitioners, and a collective endeavor (Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Gassanova & Kozhakhmet, 2024). Impact-driven scholars may, for example, engage in consulting work to support organizations to develop new strategies, policies, or practices based on the knowledge they generate through their academic research (Jewell et al., 2022; Ryazanova et al., 2024); or may engage in action research which focuses on developing interventions to enact change in work, organizations, and beyond (Susskind, 2013). For example, a research professor employed by a university who conducts field research, meets regularly with a group of HR professionals to generate and discuss research ideas, and who works with organizations to develop interventions based on research insights would be considered an impact-driven scholar (Lawler & Benson, 2022). This is therefore distinct from scholars whose research is embedded in practical problems or who collect data from organizations to generate new knowledge (which is true for most HRM scholars), but whose outputs focus on a scholarly audience, with passive dissemination to practitioners (e.g., news articles).

Reflective practitioners work primarily in a practice role and utilize research generated by others to inform their practice. This aligns with discussions about evidence-based HRM, which “is about making decisions through the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of four sources of information: practitioner expertise and judgment, evidence from the local context, a critical evaluation of the best available research evidence, and the perspectives of those people who might be affected by the decision” (Briner et al., 2009, p. 19). An HR consultant, working predominantly with organizations to help solve people management challenges, who regularly utilizes academic research to inform their practice (Gifford et al., 2023), and gives (guest-) lectures for students at a university to share their insights, would be considered a reflective practitioner. This can be distinguished from practitioners who absorb insights based on

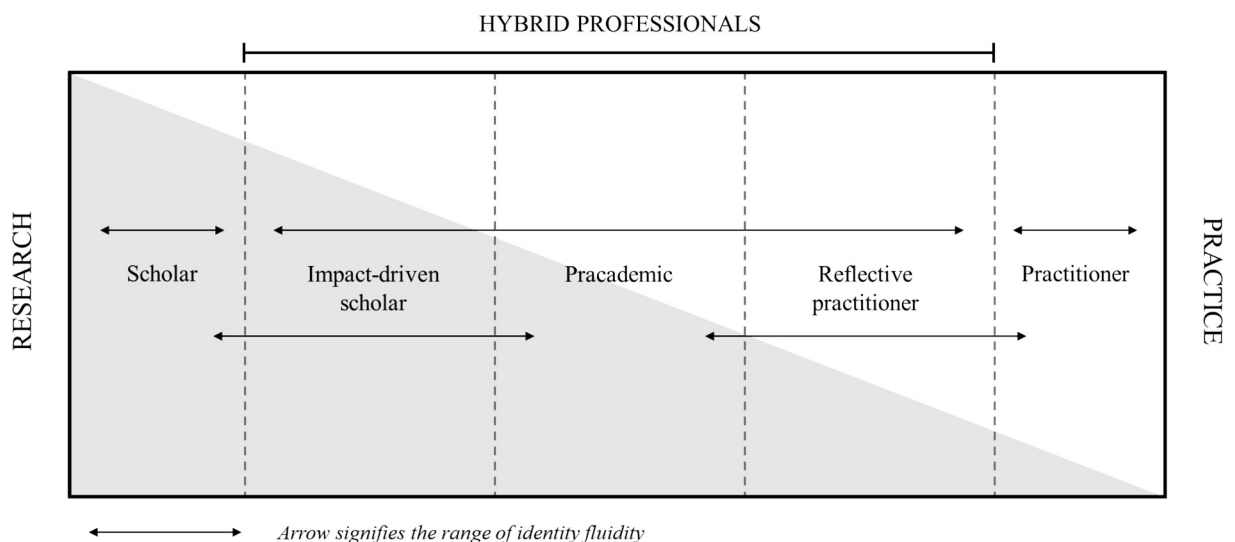


Fig. 1. Hybrid professionals along the research-practice continuum.

research (e.g., in publications such as *Harvard Business Review* or *People Management Magazine*) but do so passively (e.g., they do not integrate this into their practice) and non-critically (e.g., apply “best practices” without considering the context).

Pracademics are fully hybrid roles represented by (near) equal emphasis on activities in research and in practice. Individuals can be considered pracademics if they consistently and actively bridge the two realms, generating knowledge that can be actively used in both (Medik, 2021; Posner, 2009). They have a significant stake in both domains and switch between research and practice depending on the situation to such an extent that they may be seen as an equal colleague in both worlds (Dickinson et al., 2022). A pracademic might be working part-time as an HR business partner and part-time as a researcher at a university and have a high awareness and self-reflection of their roles in both domains. This hybrid professional would engage in academic research in collaboration with academic colleagues on topics relevant to practice and use the insights generated to inform policy and practice in organizations and beyond.

As Lawler and Benson (2022) point out, the realms of research and practice are interconnected and permeable. Therefore, the research-practice roles along the continuum can be considered not only as distinct but also in relation to each other. In the earlier examples, our impact-driven scholar regularly speaks to the reflective practitioner to both generate and share ideas across the two domains so that research informs practice and practice informs research, and a pracademic is involved in both, engaging in research collaboration with the impact-driven scholar and solving organizational problems with the reflective practitioner. The continuum also recognizes that individuals can move between research-practice roles as part of career transitions (Posner, 2009; Wilson et al., 2014), so the focus of time, energy, and knowledge of individuals in each domain may change over time. Practitioners who transitioned to academia report that they maintain professional values from their past practical experience, even when they fully commit to academic careers (Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023). This indicates that, although scholars and practitioners can traverse the full length of the continuum when making career transitions, they might increasingly self-identify or be identified by others as impact-driven scholars or reflective practitioners (i.e., as holding a specific hybrid role).

2.2. Activities along the research-practice continuum

Prior dichotomous models of research-practice roles (scholar-practitioner or practitioner-scholar) have fostered a notion of disparity between the two domains rather than conceptualizing the hybridity of roles engaged simultaneously in research and practice. To illustrate why the full range of hybrid roles implied by our continuum is important, we draw from previous discussions on activities of pracademics (Diola et al., 2022; Hollweck et al., 2022; Medik, 2021; Susskind, 2013) to highlight how these roles differ in five areas of activity: translation, brokerage, knowledge production, dissemination, and education (Table 1). These activities represent the span of actions required to bridge the research-practice gap from identifying problems (translation), creating research partnerships to address these problems (brokerage), producing new insights (knowledge production), and sharing these insights (dissemination and education). We utilize specific, current, examples of practical HRM challenges (Table 2) to illustrate the activities that individuals in hybrid roles engage in.

Translation refers to a linear “generate-transmit-adopt” process (Powell et al., 2018, p. 64) from ideas to action. Here, the main activity of impact-driven scholars is to translate practical problems (that they may not have experienced themselves) into questions

Table 1
Activities of impact-driven scholars, pracademics, and reflective practitioners.

Activity	Impact-driven scholar	Pracademic	Reflective practitioner
Translation	Translate practical problems into researchable questions	Translate organizational and management theories and research into practical strategies and practical problems into researchable questions. Translating between domains by interpreting and transferring language, norms, and artifacts	Translate organizational and management theories and research into practical strategies
Brokerage	Bringing practice/practitioners into the research domain to create opportunities for interaction (e.g., inviting practitioners to join research projects)	Creating interaction between research/ers and practice/practitioners. Being a member of research <i>and</i> practice networks to broker (e.g. knowledge) between domains	Bringing research/researchers into the practice domain to create opportunities for interaction (e.g., inviting scholars to consult on practical problems)
Knowledge production	Using domain- or context-specific practical knowledge to produce generalizable theoretical knowledge	Generating new knowledge through interaction between domain-specific, practice-based, and generalizable research knowledge	Using generalizable research knowledge to produce domain- or context-specific practical knowledge
Education	Supporting students (at all stages) to embed theoretical knowledge in practical examples (e.g., through case studies, guest lectures) and/or sharing research insights with practitioner audiences (e.g., through company visits)	Developing evidence-based curricula for a practice audience; using cross-domain knowledge to develop needs and continuously iterate education programs	Educating practitioner colleagues based on research evidence (e.g., through corporate training) and/or sharing practical insights with students (at all stages)
Dissemination	Give attention to practical and policy implications in research outputs; share research insights in practitioner-focused outlets	Sharing research insights with practitioner-researcher audiences; coauthoring research publications with a focus on practical issues	Sharing case studies to highlight practical relevance of research outputs; contributing to research publications as an expert reviewer

Table 2

Activities of impact-driven scholars, pracademics, and reflective practitioners in response to specific HRM-related issues.

	Impact-driven scholars	Pracademics	Reflective Practitioners
Return-to-office policies Make decisions about how and when employees should work on- or off-site; a question that was made more salient in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share research insights with organizations and support them in making decisions informed by these - Collect data from organizations on working practices; within and between organizations, with sensitivity to contextual, organizational, and individual factors to create new knowledge to inform practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gain access to pre-publication research insights through conferences and publications - Work in partnership with scholars and colleagues to generate new knowledge on the application of return-to-work policies - Generate strong practical and policy recommendations by reflecting on the macroturbulence caused by the pandemic tickled down to HR challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make fast business decisions in response to macro-changes using existing data and research-based insights available through practitioner outlets - Facilitate data collection (e.g., employee surveys) to gain additional insight into the employees' experiences of return-to-work policies
Generation management Navigate the challenge of managing generational differences in the workforce; a challenge that is high on the list of concerns among practitioners, consultants, and the media, but downplayed by scholars due to other factors which may explain observed generational differences."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coach practitioners to understand the issues with generational differences, based on research insights about conflating factors (e.g., life stage, age, perceptual issues) - Build a network of practitioners for the purpose of data collection to generate new knowledge about the experience of generational differences in organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Translate between differing perspectives on generational differences to align practical concerns to scientific evidence on age at work - Assemble a team to engage in research to address questions related to generational management - Develop solutions to practical problems based on scientific evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop an understanding of the research-based issues with generational differences at work - Develop interventions based on scientific evidence available in practitioner outlets - Work with scholar partners to engage in action-based research to test the effectiveness of interventions
Generative AI (GenAI) and Algorithmic Management React to internal and external pressure to response to the rapid rise of GenAI in HRM decisions and processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrate AI tools into research questions and design as the basis of field-based research on AI decisions and processes - Work with practitioner partners to understand more about how AI tools are applied and experienced in organizational contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support the exchange of knowledge (in mixed scholar and practitioner groups) about the risks and opportunities of AI whilst using the applications in HRM activities - Educate HR practitioners and scholars on the ethical, technical and social implications of AI and algorithmic management in work and organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflectively utilize GenAI advancements (e.g., chatbots, professional assistants, and business intelligence tools); spending time considering the goals of the application of these tools - Work with scholar partners to design research to examine the impact of utilizing GenAI tools in HRM processes

that can be empirically tested and to translate research insights into generalizable practical recommendations (Hollweck et al., 2022; Moxley, 2024). For example, responding to generational differences is high on the agenda for practitioners, yet these differences are often dismissed by scholars as they are more likely explained by age or life stage than generation (Costanza et al., 2023; Parry & Urwin, 2021; Rudolph et al., 2021). Impact-driven scholars can help translate research insights from multiple areas to help practitioners better understand what lies beneath generational issues. Reflective practitioners, on the other hand, translate research insights generated by others into actions for context-specific practical problems that they (or their clients in the case of consultants) are faced with. They may, for example, translate research insights about hybrid working (e.g., Hughes & Donnelly, 2024; McPhail et al., 2024) to inform decisions and communication about return-to-work policies, which have been of great concern to organizations since the COVID-19 pandemic. Pracademics have a two-way translation role, such that they must speak both “jargons” (Lawler & Benson, 2022) to translate practical problems into research questions and research results into specific practical actions. They therefore translate between the two domains, helping scholars and practitioners not only understand each other’s languages, but also interpret and transfer norms and artifacts across domains. In these circumstances, pracademics who understand business strategy and context sensitivity can contribute to enhancing the impact of research by suggesting appropriate research designs to help HRM research to address complex realities (Markoulli et al., 2017). For example, in response to generational issues, pracademics might work with organizations to develop training interventions to improve inter-generational communication while engaging in field experiments to develop new knowledge about the effectiveness of such tools (see the intervention published by; Burmeister et al., 2021).

Brokerage means to create networks by enabling the exchange of knowledge between research and practice (Campbell, 2022). As impact-driven scholars are positioned within academia, they broker relationships by inviting practitioners into their home domain, to interact with research projects, or hold guest lectures. For example, the evolution of AI and algorithmic management is rapid and poses challenges for both scholars (e.g., updating teaching content and formats and making use of AI to support research processes) and practitioners (e.g., evaluating AI-enabled HRM practices to monitor their effectiveness and risks). Yet, many scholars lag businesses that have already implemented AI and algorithmic management in their daily practices (Charlwood & Guenole, 2022). Impact-driven scholars can broker interactions with practitioners who are making more active use of GenAI to inform research ideas and methods. Reflective practitioners likewise invite scholars to consult on practical problems by sharing research insights on a specific problem (e.g., implementing a return-to-office policy; Jewell et al., 2022). They can also broker relationships with scholars to design research to examine the impact of new practices on employees’ experiences at work. Pracademics’ brokerage activity involves creating

connections across domains. This means not only brokering their own relationships in each domain, but also acting as a broker connecting individuals between their two distinct networks of scholars and practitioners. The brokerage role of pracademics is therefore distinct from impact-driven scholars and reflective practitioners, as pracademics are able to create connections between the weak ties in their networks (e.g., between scholars and practitioners who are only connected through the pracademic), which has benefits for knowledge creation and dissemination (Barker Scott & Manning, 2024; Tümen, 2017). Impact-driven scholars and reflective practitioners predominantly make use of their own strong network ties, as they are less connected in each distinct domain.

Knowledge production is a core research activity that refers to the generation of new knowledge to address research problems. In this activity, impact-driven scholars differ from non-impact-driven scholars by using practical knowledge to inform research design, as the basis of generating new theoretical knowledge, and actively advise on the design of practices based on the theoretical knowledge that they generate (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). For example, while scholars and practitioners generally differ on their perspective about the importance of generational differences, research by Brant and Castro (2019) highlighted that generational differences signal feelings of entitlement which may have implications for management, thereby providing new knowledge about the reason for this practical concern. Reflective practitioners generate knowledge about their context that can be used as evidence about specific problems or issues (e.g., by formulating problems based on their professional experience; Briner & Walshe, 2015) and may generate new knowledge about the practical problem by reflecting on research insights. For example, using research insights about the challenges of hybrid working to design employee surveys which create new practical knowledge about specific opportunities and challenges of more flexible working arrangements. Pracademics create knowledge through the bi-directional interaction between domains. For example, “by bringing new and different knowledge, experiences, and expertise from practice and from scholarship and by connecting and integrating theory and practice in different ways.” (Campbell, 2022, p. 101). A pracademic generates knowledge by, for example, allowing triangulation and cross-verification of findings due to their hybrid, cross-disciplinary activities (Bansal et al., 2012). For example, using theory about technology use and motivation to develop new knowledge about the application of Generative AI in HR processes by reflecting on the experience of implementing them in practice (Aleksic et al., 2024).

Dissemination refers to the activities involved in sharing research knowledge. Time horizons of academics and practitioners regarding publications differ as high-quality research typically requires significantly more time than organizations generally allocate to addressing issues of concern (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014). Scholars who are less actively focused on impact predominantly disseminate research insights through academic conferences and publications, mainly targeted at other researchers. Impact-driven scholars give more attention to managerial or practical implications (which are often underdeveloped in research papers; Aguinis et al., 2020), and share their research insights through practitioner-focused outlets such as blog posts (e.g., how to strategically navigate the disruption of GenAI; Hudson & Morgan, 2024), public speaking, videos or podcasts (e.g., about better hybrid working; Neeley, 2023), practitioner-oriented outlets (e.g., *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *HR Director Magazine*; Ryazanova et al., 2024), or share recommendations for interventions on social media. The goal of these dissemination activities is to create active engagement with research outputs as the basis for action in practice. Reflective practitioners’ dissemination activities focus on sharing practice-based insights with researchers. This may include attending focus groups or collaborative discussions on the invitation of scholars (as in the entrepreneurship processes explored by Bansal et al., 2012) or sharing best-fit case studies that may help inform research ideas or theory development. The dissemination activities of pracademics must involve sharing insights that integrate the two domains. For example, presenting research based on scholar-practitioner research partnerships at conferences targeted at both communities (e.g., in the UK the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development’s Applied Research Conference; impact-driven sessions at the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology conference in the US), or coauthoring with mixed scholars/practitioner teams in either research-focused (e.g., Rousseau & Barends, 2011 on becoming an evidence-based practitioner in *Human Resource Management Journal*), or practitioner-focused publications (e.g., King, Denyer, & Parry, 2018 on organizational culture in *Harvard Business Review*).

Education activities include teaching, training, and facilitating knowledge exchange in a school or university (Campbell et al., 2023), training and HR development processes in organizations, and informal education such as on-the-job learning. Impact-driven scholars use learning activities to foster an environment that encourages students within formal educational environment (e.g., school or university) to apply theoretical knowledge to practical problems by including practitioners through guest lectures, workshops, and practical cases (Johnson & Ellis, 2023). For example, encouraging students to critically discuss the experiences different generations in the workforce, with guest speakers who see this as major concern. Reflective practitioners bring academic knowledge to the workplace by educating staff, colleagues, and management on the application of models and theories to support practice and/or how to apply and interpret scientific methods (e.g., survey, interviews). For example, an HR manager delivering training to age diverse pairs based on research evidence about age diversity (Burmeister et al., 2021) rather than assumptions about generational differences is a reflective practitioner. This is particularly important because senior managers often lack exposure in their education and training to anything but the most basic concepts from HRM and related fields (Lawler & Benson, 2022), requiring further “on-the-job” learning and development. Pracademics provide education by, for example, working in partnership with both practitioner and researcher partners to develop a new curriculum for an executive HR program. As they are actively operating in both domains, pracademics can integrate knowledge from both domains in educational activities. For example, exponential technological growth in virtual collaboration in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a call for remote working models (Hesselbarth et al., 2024), and the task of bringing employees back to the physical office location and its consequences have been heavily influenced by the views of organizational leaders and their tendency toward groupthink (Gifford et al., 2023). Pracademics can educate others (e.g., through training, knowledge sharing, or discussion groups) about the operational and strategic pressures and research evidence on both the benefits and challenges of hybrid working. Pracademics can develop educational materials based on their own pedagogical skills and research knowledge and continuously evaluate and redesign education programs based on this cross-domain experience. They are therefore able to actively bring both research and practice knowledge into an educational environment (which may be in an educational

institution or in a business organization) rather than relying on others for one or another type of knowledge.

Overall, the alignment of these activity areas to each role illustrates how the allocation of time and other resources for each is distinct. The continuum structure of the roles implies that this allocation shifts as the balance of the activities is weighted differently between domains. This goes some way to explaining why it is often challenging for individuals attempting to bridge the research-practice divide. To overcome the challenge of this balance of resources requires the efforts of individuals and organizations (educational and business) to align resources to the desired roles. This balance of activities, which is effortful (as individuals choose or are incentivized to place different weight on research or practice across different activities), also implies that individuals are to some extent aware of their hybrid role.

2.3. Identity and identity work

Individual self-identities are closely intertwined with the professional roles and role expectations that individuals are confronted with in their daily work (Caza, Vough, & Puranik, 2018). As individuals operating across both research and practice domains are engaging with different communities, with different norms and expectations, “the pracademic identity is not only about navigating identities but about assuming dual or multiple identities simultaneously” (Hollweck et al., 2022, p. 13). Our continuum highlights that the nature of these multiple identities and the activity of “navigating” them are contingent on an individual’s perceived position along the continuum. This is because navigating multiple identities involves consistent identity work; “forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising” one’s understanding of self (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 626). Research on identity work associated with holding multiple roles has primarily focused on cultural roles (Caza, Vough, & Puranik, 2018), but can also be observed in professional roles. For example, dual careerists simultaneously segment and aggregate their different roles in order to manage their authenticity (Caza, Moss, & Vough, 2018). This identity work requires individuals to strategically identify and de-identify with their different work roles in response to feedback to help them remain effective in their work (Grimes, 2018). We argue that similar identity work is involved in researcher-practitioner roles, requiring the ability to adopt multiple identities to transition seamlessly between research and practice, and vice versa (Macduff & Netting, 2010; Powell et al., 2018), with important implications for research-practice collaboration.

As we have established, a dominant position in the researcher-practitioner continuum can mean identifying as a scholar, an impact-driven scholar, a pracademic, a reflective practitioner, and/or a practitioner. For individuals whose “home” is mainly in one domain, managing dual roles in attempts to bridge the research-practice divide could be costly, ineffective, and potentially harmful if the roles remain entirely separate (Haines & Saba, 2012). For pracademics who are involved more or less equally across domains, the constant interaction between scholar and practitioner identities can lead to unease, conflicting views, and a blurring of their identities (Mynott & Zimmatore, 2022). The challenges associated with holding these hybrid roles can be mitigated if individuals are able to also form a unifying identity (“I am an impact-driven scholar”). For example, research on bicultural identity indicates that when individuals successfully create a unifying cultural identity (e.g., Chinese-American instead of Chinese and American; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005), they experience less role conflict. This is particularly important for individuals in the middle of the continuum, as their “home” is in this dual role position. Acknowledging that pracademics possess a unified identity can provide both reassurance and affirmation as they navigate between research and practitioner settings (Campbell, 2022; Hollweck et al., 2022), satisfying their “desire to feel a sense of self, a way of associating, and a group and place within which they may belong” (Campbell et al., 2023, p. 71). This is of particular importance in relation to bridging the research-practice divide, as individuals with a unifying identity are more creative in tasks which draw knowledge from the different domains (Cheng et al., 2008). Individuals holding a distinct pracademic identity may therefore be more effective in activities that are about engaging in research and practice simultaneously. This principle can also be generalized to research-practice projects themselves: participants can frame the project as a ‘research-practice collaboration’, rather than a project which involves research and activities of practice. Sharma et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of this by showing that knowledge creation emerged from making the process of co-creating knowledge in research-practice collaborations salient and identifying the project as a research-practice endeavor.

Our continuum assumes that identity work in the realm of research-practice collaborations must necessarily be dynamic in nature as individuals move between domains, engaging with actors in each (see also Dickinson et al., 2022). To effectively respond to this dynamism individuals in hybrid research-practice roles must adopt a “working self-concept” (an individual’s active representation of themselves in terms of traits, relationships, or group memberships; Markus & Wurf, 1987) that is suitable for the different roles they have to assume and situations they find themselves in. A dynamic working self-concept enables them to better respond to different demands that may require them to think and act more like a researcher, more like a practitioner, or in their boundary spanning role as a pracademic. This dynamism is necessary to overcome the risk of being an “outsider”, which can occur when individuals navigate the boundaries between research and practice, but are not yet quite “in” either domain (Hollweck et al., 2022). Research on role identity has highlighted that this outsider status occurs when individuals establish an expert identity in a given situation (Järventie-Thesleff & Tienari, 2016). In research-practice collaborations, expressing research or practical expertise risks one party seeing the other as an outsider, which may be a barrier to successfully co-creating knowledge, potentially highlighting some of the issues found in such collaborations (Guerci et al., 2023). The continuum highlights the distinct role that pracademics play in research-practice collaborations, beyond impact-driven scholars and reflective practitioners. Given that identity work is effortful and costly (Haines & Saba, 2012), individuals find it easier to switch between related roles (Arber, 2018). For pracademics sitting in the middle of the researcher-practitioner continuum, the identity work involved in moving between research and practice requires less mental effort than for those at either end of the continuum; whereby moving from research to practice or vice versa is metaphorically of a greater distance. This enables pracademics to switch between the different identities and move more fluidly between the adjacent roles.

To become aware of their own fluid identity, pracademics need not only to practice reflexivity (Arber, 2018), but also to engage in a relational process within the research team to make identities explicit. Sluss and Asforth (2007) highlight that identities form in relation to one another. These authors focus on subordinate-supervisor relational identity, but the same is true for the relational identity of researchers in relation to practitioners. For example, an impact-driven scholar may consider themselves an expert in algorithmic management when sitting at their desk in a university, but when they enter a gig work domain to engage with practitioners, they become an outsider. However, identity construction is an ongoing and complex process of self-positioning and self-understanding and being a pracademic involves an active interplay between the conceptualization of the self, the positioning of this within communities, and the actions that result from this engagement. In a research-practice collaboration, it is therefore necessary for the hybrid professionals involved to make clear not only their own identity but also their identity in relation to other members of the team and their expected role within this team. This serves to deepen connections and create a sense of belonging in research-practice collaboration, which is conducive to desirable outcomes, such as knowledge creation.

The nature of pracademics' identities is complex and multilayered, and like 'chameleons' they change color depending on their location and the context in which they interact. Pracademics can adjust their self-identity, and thus may remain hidden (Dickinson et al., 2022). Therefore, the identity of pracademics is informed by both internal work and externally informed roles and activities, which requires a fluid, reflexive process of identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Our discussion highlights the importance of recognizing distinct and hybrid identities and the fluidity of these that are shaped by ongoing interactions within and across traditional boundaries.

2.4. Theoretical implications

In this paper, we have argued that existing theory on the range of roles involved in research-practice activities has been insufficient. Previous debates have not fully considered the complexity and fluidity of the identities and activities associated with these cross-domain roles. In contrast to previous conceptualizations of pracademics, we argue that it is necessary to distinguish between impact-driven scholars, reflective practitioners, and pracademics in order to highlight their potential in bridging the research-practice gap in HRM. This conceptual paper contributes to the theoretical discussions in several ways.

First, with the research-practice continuum, we provide a more nuanced discussion on the identity fluidity of those operating within hybrid roles. This acknowledges that different types of roles navigate multiple identities and that these identities are not static but dynamic in nature. We point out that these are influenced by ongoing interactions across, within, and beyond traditional boundaries. By highlighting that pracademics – who sit in the middle of the continuum – would benefit from actively internalizing a hybrid identity, we offer insights on the importance of identity work for these individuals to both operate across domains and move between them (Hollweck et al., 2022). This fluidity is important for the cultural and social elements of identity construction that can empower individuals to craft their future selves and navigate complex landscapes of research, policy and practice (Strauss et al., 2012). We suggest that, by embracing the hybrid identity, pracademics are better able to prioritize tasks that focus specifically on crossing domains and connecting them rather than feeling torn between activities exclusively in research or practice. As a result, pracademics can bridge the rigour-relevance gap in management research (Hodgkinson & Rousseau, 2009; Johnson & Ellis, 2023) by ensuring that academic research is used in management practice. This approach enhances and increases the likelihood that practitioners will adopt the knowledge that research produces, the ways in which they can use it, and their perceptions of management research in general.

Second, the continuum perspective extends existing theory by enabling a better understanding of scholar-practitioners and their potential contributions in research-practice collaborations. Previous literature has focused almost exclusively on impact-driven (or "engaged") scholars or used impact-driven scholars and reflective practitioners as synonyms for pracademics, thus neglecting individuals not dominantly in scholar roles (Campbell et al., 2023; Dickinson et al., 2022; Posner, 2009). By focusing on the activities that are related to different forms of hybrid research-practice professionals (Bushouse et al., 2011; Powell et al., 2018; Susskind, 2013; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006), we highlight how the different roles (impact-driven scholars, pracademics, and reflective practitioners) can facilitate bridging the research-practice gap. It is important for both theoretical and empirical accounts of these activities to consider, particularly, the role pracademics and reflective practitioners more prominently, as their competencies and activities differ from those of scholars.

Third, we highlight some shortcomings of previous discussions in the HRM literature that explored the research-practice gap by showing the importance of considering the role of pracademics in this debate. We theorize how hybrid professionals might facilitate and alleviate some of the most pressing HRM issues that organizations face in the changing world of work (Bleijenbergh et al., 2021; Cooke et al., 2022) by simultaneously drawing on their scholarly and practical insights and expertise. The continuum not only classifies, but also clarifies the distinct contributions of the three ideal types of hybrid professionals, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of their potential contributions to bridging the research-practice gap in HRM.

2.5. Practical and policy contributions

In light of an increasing need for better integration of theory and practice into policy making (Aguinis et al., 2022), this paper offers several implications for policymakers, funders, universities, organizations, HR decision-makers, and pracademics themselves. These recommendations are important as they support pracademics in utilizing their fluid identity, whilst acknowledging that research-practice activities are collaborative and so require the engagement of other actors.

First, policymakers concerned with research projects on HRM-related issues need to consider not only collaboration between different academic institutions to address practical issues but also more explicitly recognize a role for individuals operating across the

research-practice domains. Funders can do this by including requirements or incentives for research project applications to include hybrid professionals. Such requirements could include the necessity to bring reflective practitioners and pracademics as members of research teams to provide an expanded set of skills that may be lacking in most academic outputs and funding applications (Bainbridge & Ng, 2024; Powell et al., 2018).

Second, a key challenge in fostering pracademic careers lies in performance criteria at universities, which primarily focus on scholarly outputs. Although universities may attempt to encourage scholars to generate societally relevant knowledge, the main currency remains publishing in high-ranking academic journals and acquiring research funding (Campbell et al., 2023). Universities can strengthen their collaboration with industry by employing pracademics as important stakeholders. Pracademics can enhance the practical relevance of research by engaging in collaborative research projects, integrating practice-based case studies into university curricula, and promoting interdisciplinary collaboration (Johnson & Ellis, 2023). This requires universities to offer pracademic roles (e.g., Professor of Practice; external or part-time PhD programs) that recognize that pracademics function in two separate realms with distinct expectations, roles, and activities, and consequently necessitate more flexible administration (e.g., time, place, finance, and education) and require different skills and competencies (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014; Kougianou & Ridgway, 2022). These roles actively promote the dual profession of pracademics to enable them to perform their academic and practical activities more efficiently.

Relatedly, our continuum has implications for the career paths of individuals engaging in hybrid roles. It is currently likely that both scholars and practitioners attempt to bridge the gap between domains later in their careers (see, e.g. Obembe, 2023; Posner, 2009). This is for multiple reasons: the promotion and incentive structures in their “homebase” do not encourage hybrid roles; they have not yet developed their work identity and skills to cross-domains (as both require specialism built up over years); they are less likely to have a cross-domain network to enable them to hold a hybrid role; or they do not yet have the social capital or credibility needed to work across domains (Baruch, 2022; Fowler et al., 2023; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). This may be a missed opportunity. Practitioners early in their career have more recently left the educational system, so can build on momentum to operate across domains, if they have the right resources to do so. Early career scholars, likewise, are often at the cutting edge of research and methods developed through their doctoral studies, which could be invaluable in a hybrid role. The implication of this for organizations and individuals is that hybrid career paths should be recognized earlier as a credible option. This means aligning organizational practices such as investment in research skill development for early career reflective practitioners, or recognition of impact on practice in tenure and promotion decisions for early career scholars. It also means more active promotion and recognition of these career paths.

Finally, given the challenges of operating across domains (in terms of activities and identities), pracademics require specific support for these roles, for example, from a mentor from a similar background. According to Wilson et al. (2014) unpacking tacit knowledge with the guidance of an experienced mentor can help pracademics make their knowledge more explicit in the workplace. This is all the more important in HRM, as HR professionals are those who develop reward and performance management strategies as well as career planning, so can actively support pracademics to be effective in both areas. Pracademics themselves also need to attend to their own development of specific skills. For example, engaging in the actions and identity work needed to “move between the worlds”, to actively promote their role, recognizing their personal identities and the importance of the fluidity of their own position and the activities they spend time on (Panda, 2014; Posner, 2009; Powell et al., 2018).

3. Further research

Having provided a theoretical foundation for research-practice roles, future research is needed to explore our conceptualization to extend the theory. Here, we outline several suggestions on how specific issues raised here could be explored. Due to the lack of sufficient evidence about pracademics, their experiences, roles, identities, and contributions in research-practitioner collaborations, future research would particularly benefit from a qualitative approach.

First, using methods to capture rich experience (e.g., diaries), future research could explore the personal experiences, observations, thoughts, and feelings of pracademics as they engage in research-practice activities (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2023). This approach can help clarify the specific resources that pracademics need (and use) to excel in both domains, as well as the barriers to this. Diary studies using self-recorded video statements (Lau & Bratby, 2023) may be particularly valuable to capture thoughts in critical moments (e.g., as they act as a bridge across domains), including emotions through gestures and facial expressions instead of relying purely on retrospective reflection (Flanagan, 2023).

Second, longitudinal exploration of experiences of identity fluidity of pracademic experience in research-practice collaborations could help to explore the development and manifestation of identity over time. A longitudinal approach could be implemented using narrative methods, which would allow research to understand how people explain, experience, and justify their perceptions of identity (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020). An interview-based approach would allow researchers to delve deeper into the development of a pracademic identity, thereby expanding the scope of the current fragmented knowledge (Farquhar et al., 2020). Observation of collaborative teams could also focus on the relational components of research-practice activities, exploring how pracademics switch between their practitioner and scholarly roles in those settings and how these transitions are supported or hindered by other actors across time.

Third, future research might use a career lens (Posner, 2009; Wilson et al., 2014) to explore the processes that pracademics as they navigate their hybrid career. While the majority of existing papers on hybrid research-practice roles consider pracademics as individuals that transition from one area into the other (practice to academia, or vice versa), the career perspective would help researchers to explain career choices and dynamics of professionals who work in both realms simultaneously (pracademics). The career approach would also help to link the role of HRM policies and practices in supporting and shaping pracademic careers.

Finally, we have highlighted several factors which might operate as barriers to individuals engaging in hybrid roles (e.g., incentives, career structures, funding opportunities). Research on how these barriers operate at different levels (individual,

organizational, industry, society) and how individuals succeeding in hybrid roles overcome them is critical for theory, practice, and policy development.

4. Conclusion

In response to calls for novel approaches to bridge the gap between HRM research and practice, we argue that pracademics, who have remained largely invisible, play a crucial role in improving the integration of theoretical concepts and practical problems. In contrast to earlier approaches that focused on improving the collaboration between theory and practice through greater scholarly engagement in practice, we emphasize the need to promote the fluid identities of pracademics in this debate. We highlight the shortcomings of previous dichotomous conceptualizations of pracademics and introduced a research-practice continuum. We show how this conceptualization is not only more nuanced, but also provides a better understanding of the roles and activities of impact-driven scholars, reflective practitioners, and pracademics. We hope that our arguments spark more interest in studying hybrid professionals and the implications of their involvement as a driving force across boundaries between research and practice.

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