Integration, Interconnectedness and Influence: Towards a Global Agenda for Impactful Service Research

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Thank you to all of you for being here today. By your mere presence, I am truly convinced that our timing in organising this event is right. We threw this event open for participation based on a simple brief - that we continue to grow service research and to ensure it impacts upon practice and future research. That we hope to initiate the first ever global alliance between service researchers and industry, in a federated alliance, as well as develop an agenda for global collaborations. It sounds grand, and it sounds like a PR narrative. But let me tell you. We are serious. Because it has never been done before. There is no model for this out there, and yet if we get it right, it could potentially revolutionise how we do things at universities, at consultancies and in industry. And if we get it wrong, things will be exactly the same as it is today. How's that for risk.

My good friend Professor Ray Fisk has a good term for my attempt today. He calls it lunacy. In fact, in his email to me, he called me a lunatic twice. I take no offence of course as I am quite sure he means it only in the most endearing way. The fact that he is here today and has agreed to chair the afternoon session means he's not far off the lunacy tree either. How's that for a strategy to get your detractors on your side.

But I jest. Ray is not a detractor. Ray is here today because he genuinely believes in the cause. He has been a service research champion for decades (sorry if I'm giving your age away here Ray) and he was here 3 years ago for the IfM/IBM white paper discussion. And he's back again to continue that journey. Although from what I hear, that journey also includes continuing his intimate relationship with our Cambridge pubs.

And we have many here today who believe in this journey as well. Our featured speakers, many of whom we know and refer to in our work, and all of you, who have signed up to this lunatic cause. Our speakers will all give you their opinion on the three major themes set out right at the beginning of the day and you will all have a chance to contribute towards the agenda for the day after they have spoken.

Let me now set some ground rules for today's meeting.
First, we will not go into the definition of service. While I think such a debate is important, I ask that it does not happen today, as I wish it not to paralyse our cause – which is to find issues in common that would unite us to make a difference in the world. Besides, if have not yet found a definition for democracy or sustainability, this is testimony that we do not need to agree on a definition to progress the research.

Second, this meeting is not my cause. The fact that you are all here today is a testimony that this call has resonated with all of you. So it's your cause as well. For today to be successful, we must endeavour to achieve a collective agenda. So I would very much appreciate it if you could willingly interact and contribute to today's session as we endeavour to get everyone's views. We will be listening to featured speakers first, after which the AIM Service Fellows would have a panel discussion, chaired by the AIM Deputy Director and Director of Cambridge Service Alliance, Professor Andy Neely. Following on, there will be an interactive session where you will all be broken up into groups to give your suggestions and feedback on the major themes. These would be collated and we will then have a townhall session which would then lead to a vote on priorities. The details will be explained to you at each stage of the session.

So, as the first speaker, let me start the ball rolling and present my views on the matter.

1. INTEGRATION

A doyen of service research and an old friend of mine whom many of you also know, Professor Evert Gummeson, who unfortunately cannot be with us today, said it succinctly in an email:

'There is an urgent need to address the big issues of a society built on complex but incoherent and fragmented service systems. Many do not work well (health care) or are the objects of fraud and corruption (financial sector), and research has not had much effect on them except on certain details.'

I agree. The academic community is millions strong. We devote a great part of our lives studying, researching, analyzing, examining. We could do better. We should do better. Evert continues:

‚The most dangerous disease in science is complacency through the preoccupation with "approved" research techniques over relevance, premature generalization, and the promotion of conventional and mythical models and concepts through classrooms and textbooks. There is urgent need to advance service theory beyond fragmented midrange theory in the direction of theory which is addressing complexity issues by EITHER being both better rooted in the "real reality" and/OR offering more abstract and general "grand" theory.'

The issue I believe Evert is trying to raise is that practice has fragmented to industries and sectors with very few ways of transferring knowledge between them. Many academics, who are tasked to provide abstractions for knowledge transfer, have given up and have joined practice to be industry and sector driven. We now have journals in transportation, healthcare, tourism and if one were to read these journals and all its jargon, one would find that they are so embedded within their **industry community** that it almost feels like there can be no transfer of knowledge between them at all. It's not their fault – they just want to learn and advance knowledge for their industry. Conversely, we look towards more theoretical literature and perhaps seeking better abstractions from practice, we may look upon business, manufacturing, engineering journals. In those, it is clear that we are embedded just as deeply within our **disciplinary community**. If you read **these** journals, you can almost feel that no industry exists. So the dilemma is the gap between contexts (practice/sector) and better abstractions i.e. the theories.

So wide is the gap that this has created a chasm between practice and academia. And despite help from good consultants – some of whom are genuinely good bridges between the two – not enough is being done.

There are two types of integration needed here – between practice and research, and between research domains. But perhaps one could assist the other. Problems in practice don't recognise disciplines or theories – Ray was saying the same to me last week – so there is motivation for academics to engage in problems so that problems could better inform theories and problems could be solved by the application of theories. So working with practice is not merely consultancy; it also gives back to theory. But here's the problem. It doesn't give back to the same theoretical domain. Quite often, academics are not very good at recognising theories in use within contexts. They know their own theories, but the theories that exist within a context is not their theories ALONE, it's an intermingling of many different theories within a context. So what does the academic do. Take the research OUT of the context and only construct the research design so that the question lies within

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that academic's domain and then go back to the company and ask if they could collect the data as separate from the real context. Not an ideal solution.

So for an academic to work in context, s/he needs to know more theories – from outside their own domain area. And there is a need to understand how theories come together, and how they themselves are in need of adaptation, refinement and change when interacting with other theories. That's quite a challenge – something I learnt 2 years ago on the S4T project where as a marketing person, I had to sit and listen to subsystems modelling in engineering. My training was in mathematical economics and social psychology. I was in a very different world.

What I learnt was exactly what I have just described. I just didn't know enough theories, and I didn't know how to bring together our theories to see how they generated different phenomenon. I can honestly say that over the 2 years on the project, I spent more time studying other theories, just so that I could connect them and say something useful to practice and write something useful for theory. I am fortunate to have gone 'native' for more than 10 years in practice and 12 years in academia, and that background has aided me in this challenge.

Notice I did not say disciplines. I said theories. And this is deliberate. I have learnt that focusing on inter-disciplinarity reinforces standard disciplinary boundaries and upholds such regimes rather than break them down. To be truly interdisciplinary, one must believe the disciplines themselves are not sacred cows – that the very nature of the discipline within which the researcher sits could be questioned. That the assumptions that surround our disciplines can and should be questioned. So instead of being inter-disciplinary, I propose being inter-theoretical. And I believe an academic and a practitioner working together can achieve great things; if the knowledge from inter-theoretical approaches can be applied to solve problems and the contextual inter-theoretical solution can give give insights to the theories, we can serve both masters. And all at once, integration between practice and research can dovetail into integration between research domains. We must do much much more of this – particularly with the world becoming more and more interconnected. So let me discuss interconnectedness next.

2. INTERCONNECTEDNESS

I am an avid facebooker, as those of you who are my facebook friends will know. I facebook socially and use twitter and linkedin for professional reasons. Our world is more tightly bound than ever envisaged – allowing one person to engage in multiple communities, multiple work, and multiple play, almost concurrently. Yes, after this speech, I will make my move on scrabble with my sister in Brooklyn.

We now see a convergence, not just of technologies, but of people and organisations. Interconnectedness is spawning new business models, new pricing strategies – it's even spawning new words – mashups, cloud. It is allowing people to work from home, integrating different resources across space and time, serving others differently. It is changing the nature of organisations, challenging the way it is traditionally organised in departments such as HR, marketing, operations. This service world of interconnectedness is at the doorstep of academia and we are ignoring it. We pretend it doesn't exist. Why? Because academics are already uncomfortable in multi-theoretical contexts – the whole interconnectedness just makes it all the harder.

Meanwhile, a world of individual thoughts, behaviours, words, speeches are starting to be stored in enduring digital forms. We will not discuss privacy issues here but suffice to say that *volunteered information* itself is growing in leaps and bounds. It has been said that we are swamped with data. Last week I was at the IBM Start Summit at Clarence House on the Analytics day. For those who

weren't completely bored by my tweets, one thing was clear. The digital economy is generating petabytes of data. That's a lot of zeros. Where we are, what we do, how we interact - there is just a lot of data out there. Oracle, IBM, Microsoft and SAP between them have spent more than $15 billion buying software firms specialising in data management and analytics. The irony? Academic researchers and graduate students/PhD students are still trying to get new data. You can argue, we set different research questions from what data is currently being generated. I can accept that 10 years ago but if today we can gather real location, behavioural and volunteered personal data, we can investigate what is real, rather than what is projected or perceived…. The fact that the academic community is not as well engaged in an interconnected data-driven world is to me a manifestation of a deep divide. We must narrow this chasm.

Where data used to be collected and analysed only by the academic community, it is no longer so. Practitioners have come into the act and this is a good thing. It means more people have to learn the sensemaking that comes from information. But it also means that as academics, we must bring our theories closer to practice. Whether our behaviour stems from technology adoption, or planned behaviour, or whether we live out day-to-day to actualise or to reinforce our identities, there is a theory. The academic community cannot go about pretending that the data out there has nothing to do with them.

For practitioners, I must emphasize the role of theory in analytics, which is often not mentioned. Just as those of us who work on data and intelligence know, the conversion of data to information and from information to knowledge is value laden. It is dependent on who is converting the data, and for what purpose; it is dependent on where the data comes from, and how it was collected and finally it is dependent on how it is intepreted, reported and used. So there is a distinction between mining, analytics and predictions. If there is a true need for sensemaking and meaning in the information, then there is a need for theory mining as well as data mining.

I believe as academics and practitioners, we have a challenge to understand and research into this complex interconnected world, and not reduce it to bits that we know and within the domain of our comfort zone and thinking that these bits could work in isolation from other bits. This has to change. Both in practice and in academia.

So on to my final point.

3. INFLUENCE
In many conferences around the world, we hear it being said again and again. We can only impact on our community – be it France, US, Germany, Finland, Singapore, Japan or wherever… we do not have enough influence to impact on, or have a global agenda. Today, I hope to put to rest that excuse, and would love to have some ideas on how to do this. I believe we can have a global influence, a global impact if we can get our act together and address the issues I have highlighted. If we knew what we **could not do** alone, but **could do** together, this would be a start. And there are many e.g. LEXICON – if we could come together to define what we mean across theories and disciplines, we could progress the knowledge. If we open our minds and use our intellect on where we connected theoretically and practically, we could be much more effective. METHODOLOGIES – if we could share data, instruments, measures, constructs, we could advance the way we made sense of this world. And sensemaking is essential for each culture, each country to progress their own agenda.

I believe the time is now and we have the right platform to drive this forward. How should we do this? I have my thoughts and I'm sure you all have yours, and I hope today's session will bring them

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together for an agenda that will be action-oriented and will have a global impact. Thank you for listening.

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