

Corporate index: bridging the academic–practitioner gap

Academic–
practitioner
gap

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Abstract

Purpose – The academic–practitioner gap has been a widely discussed and well-established issue. Despite numerous studies conducted in this area, empirical evidence reveals that the gap is widening and also emphasizes the exigency to bridge this gap. Hence, the purpose of this study is to propose an acceptable solution that will fill this lacuna.

Design/methodology/approach – The study adopts the qualitative research methodology and was based on the system theory (ST) and the institutional theory (IT). Interviews, based on a semi-structured questionnaire, were conducted, focusing on three categories, namely individuals with solely academic experience, individuals with both academic and industrial exposure and business leaders. The unit of analysis was the individual.

Findings – The study, which unearthed some rich and challenging evidence from the respondents, reveals that gaining industrial exposure and working on continuous professional development are vital for academics to narrow or even close this gap. In addition, serving as apex members at board level or in professional bodies, serving global organizations as lead consultants and working on research collaborations are other important dimensions for academics.

Practical implications – This study introduces an emerging model named the “Pentagon Model” and develops a corporate index (C-index) for academics to earn, similar to the h-index. The study also explains the operationalization of the C-index based on the proposed algorithm. Hence, it is envisaged that this study will change the landscape of the academic sphere in practical terms.

Originality/value – This study was carried out with the sole intention of bridging the gap between academics and practitioners. The proposed model and the index, which were developed by the author purely based on the outcome of this study, pave the way for many future research studies, not only to further improve the C-index but also to minimize disparities in transdisciplinary work between academics and practitioners.

Keywords Academic–practitioner gap, C-Index, Pentagon model, Institutional theory and system theory

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

Academics across the world publish their research not only to enhance their intellectual contribution but also for their career progression. However, during the last 2 decades or so, publications on various other disciplines have emerged (Helm, 2007; Vercic *et al.*, 2015) paying more attention to areas such as artificial intelligence, automation, industry related studies and sustainability (Christ *et al.*, 2018).

This has naturally led to the development of the h-index (Hirsch, 2005), for academics. The h-index can be defined as an author-level metric that measures both the impact of citations and the productivity of the publications, for scholars across the world (Bormann and Hans-Dieter, 2007). The index, which is a mathematical calculation, is based on the set of the scholar's most cited publications and the number of citations that they have received in other publications (Jones *et al.*, 2011). The index has more recently been applied not only to assess impact of a scholarly journal, but also as a key performance indicator (KPI) for university professors (Suzuki, 2014).

Despite the expansion of academic publications (Vercic *et al.*, 2015) in many dimensions and disciplines, the business world has emerged visibly, outperforming the academic realm in terms of competition, disruptive technologies, artificial intelligence, sustainability and



financial innovations such as fintech and the gap between academic research and practicing professionals' expectations is widening (Nejad, 2021).

Tapp (2004) citing Porter and McKibbin (1988), stated that business schools on many occasions complain that for academics and universities, quantity has become more important than quality, and, as a result, the academic community does not talk to practitioners, but are rather talking to themselves. While recommending a "hybrid life" for academics, Rana (2018), Sembel (2015), accentuated the importance of bridging the gap between academic theory and practice. Alpert and Phielers (2022) found a significant gap between the academic and practitioner in "branding" in the marketing domain. Tucker and Lowe (2014) stated that academics are from "Mars" and that practitioners are from "Venus". Frutos-Belizon *et al.* (2019) stated that the knowledge generated by academics in the field of management is often criticized because of its decreased relevance for professionals. Scholars such as Wilkerson (1999); Arnone (1999) from yester era as well as scholars from the contemporary world Vosburgh (2022); De Man *et al.* (2022) highlighted that academic research in the business management field is not readily related to practical management issues. Hence, it is evident that the gap between academics and practitioners has been a perennial issue.

Vercic *et al.* (2015) argued that with the evolving world, universities should have proper and possible congruence with all stakeholders including the business world. Benoit *et al.* (2019) emphasized the importance of collaboration at a higher level between academics and practitioners to leverage each other's resources and data knowledge. A continuous dialog between academics and practitioners is required (Kamel, 2019).

From an antithetical and argumentative perspective, Shirbagi and Gholami (2020) found that academics use their sabbatical leave for reasons such as lifestyle changes, reducing burnout and improving academic output. Carraher *et al.* (2014) found that, universities should consider the effective usage of sabbatical leave for alternative career options as a wider human resource (HR) policy. Faculty members view that engaging in educational activities is more important than collaborating with industry (Vaaland and Ishengoma, 2016). Transformation of business schools to provide solutions to the real world are failing. Naturally this widens the gap between theory and practice (Galan, 2018). The danger is that the relevance of academic research is becoming extremely low for business practitioners, and the gap between academic research and practitioners' knowledge is widening (Perea and Brady, 2017; Brown and Oplatka, 2005; Dyllick, 2013; Vaaland and Ishengoma, 2016).

Aligning with the above arguments, Tsui (2021) stated that academics, instead of explicitly considering their contribution to business and the society as their fundamental objective, have concentrated on publishing in highly ranked journals. Several surveys and bibliometric studies (Amjad *et al.*, 2017; Daud and Muhammad, 2014) have been conducted to rank authors in academic social networks. However, no study with a pragmatic approach has been carried out to overcome the widening gap. Even the studies carried out recently in Netherlands, USA, Sweden and Finland (Urquia-Grande and Eztebenaz, 2020; Vosburgh, 2022; Sanburg *et al.*, 2022) highlight that there is a significant lacuna with no pragmatic approach to bridge this gap. Therefore, this study focuses on the following questions:

- (1) What are the reasons for the academic–practitioner gap?
- (2) How can the academic–practitioner gap be bridged?
- (3) What are the suitable and acceptable solutions to close this gap?

Literature review

An academic is defined as a person who teaches and conducts research in higher education institutes or universities (Grover, 2020). Contrary to academics, a practitioner is a person who

practices a profession, occupation or runs a business (Jones and Daniel, 2019). Alpert and Piehler (2022); Banks *et al.* (2016), have defined as the academic–practitioner gap as the theory–practice gap. The gap between academic research and practitioners is the disconnect and the incongruence between research and the real-world expectations (Benoit *et al.*, 2019). Empirical evidence define another category called “pracademics” who have the exposure towards the academic affairs as well as the industry exposure. Posner (2009) defined pracademics as those who have significant experience in both academic and the business world and can move between them with ease.

Utilization of sabbatical leave

Shirbagi and Gholami (2020) while defining sabbatical leave as an extended time away from university work that is officially granted to a professor for varying purposes, such as personal reasons, professional and academic growth, learning new skills, or recuperation, highlighted that the overall experience of sabbatical leave is to “improve the academic standards of the university”. With the emergence of technology, along with globalization (Tang and Carr-Chellman, 2016; Iravania, 2011), academics have to upskill their knowledge to remain academically qualified to meet their accreditation standards. Baruch (2004) stated that companies such as Microsoft and General Mills are using sabbatical leave similar to academics for their C-level executives as a part of their HR strategy. Iravania (2011) found that academics use sabbatical leave for five reasons namely to write books, meet psychological needs such as reducing stress, to enhance new teaching techniques, improving income generation and personal motivation. However, the literature does not highlight any finding to confirm that academics utilize their sabbatical leave to gain business knowledge, hands on industry exposure in organizations. Shirbagi and Gholami (2020), Wong (2014) stated that most of the faculty members use sabbatical leave to publish their research to meet their KPIs, improvement of individual academic competences for career advancement.

Congruence with the evolving world

The changes in the evolving world are inevitable. Universities should align with the ever-evolving business world. Based on a study conducted on European Business Schools, Sionneau *et al.* (2014) recommended that business schools should lead, organize, change and manage the coherent “Globally Responsible Humanism”. Arnone (1999) stated that universities should run as businesses and strategically align with the corporate world, catering to their corporate demands and business research. A study conducted in Sri Lanka, (Abayadeera and Watty, 2014) found an expectation-performance gap in generic skills in accounting education for graduate accountants and how the university professors hesitate to meet the market needs due to low confidence, deficiencies in practical exposure and high expectations from the market. Bui and Porter (2010) also found similar sentiments. Vaaland and Ishengoma (2016) observed that the faculty members are more pessimistic about university–industry linkages with foreign firms in terms of training and educational related activities. Kamel (2019) stated that Business Schools should become invaluable platforms with linkages between academia, business and industry. Making suggestions for universities and business schools, Dyllick (2013) stated that it is a significant challenge for academics to make fundamental changes for their teaching, research and management. However, closer scrutiny of literature reveals that despite several studies and recommendations by scholars such as Porter and McKibbin (1988), Lawler and Benson (2020), Kamel (2019), Tucker and Lowe (2014), universities have not changed their goals and KPIs to be aligned with the changing world. Despite the growing exigency for the universities to be a “provider of solutions”, to the world, Kairuz *et al.* (2015), Vosburg (2022) stated still the academic values

are defined based on citations and the publications and no visible transformation in universities are taking place.

Faculty-practitioner collaboration

[Walker et al. \(2008\)](#) accentuated the importance of collaborating research between faculty and practitioners taking examples from North America, Australia and Europe. [Chen et al. \(2013\)](#) made similar sentiments to enhance the effectiveness of academic research through greater collaboration between the faculty and the practitioners. Quantifying the widening gap between academic research and audit practice, [Ratzinger-Sakel et al. \(2015\)](#) found that concerns of audit practice is missing in audit related research under “audit practice domain” and suggested more research collaborations between academics and practitioners to overcome these issues. Due to the widening gap, [Sionneau et al. \(2014\)](#) emphasized the importance of universities conducting research together with the business world. Based on research conducted by scholars such as [Bansal et al. \(2012\)](#), [Straub and Ang \(2011\)](#), [Peng and Dess \(2010\)](#), [Seidel and Watson \(2014\)](#), [Wynn and Williams \(2019\)](#) recommended collaborations with five Vs namely value, velocity, voice, visibility and verifiability for academic research with practitioners.

Industry exposure of academics

Brand managers see no relevance to their real life work as academics use only theories ([Alpert and Piehler, 2022](#)). [Sanburg et al. \(2022\)](#) stated that academic research is often criticized due to reduced relevance and lack of pragmatism by the practitioners. [Powel et al. \(2018\)](#) while highlighting the importance of academics in universities, stated academics having industry exposure and becoming more familiar with the field of practice, can foster and facilitate the academics understanding of the two worlds. [Tucker and Lowe \(2014\)](#) argued due to lack of industry exposure of the academics, practitioners and the academics are in two worlds. [Lawler and Benson \(2020\)](#) conducting a comprehensive study for the widening gap based on empirical studies conducted by scholars such as [Rousseau \(2007\)](#), [Tushman and O'Reilly \(2007\)](#), [König et al. \(2011\)](#), [Tenhiälä et al. \(2014\)](#) stated that academics research should create value for organizations, skill development of the professors to understand the practical challenges, write a proposal to business organizations, quoting a price for research, developing a scholar-practitioner model for applied research and emphasized the importance of practical experience in companies.

This study is underpinned by the institutional theory (IT) and the system theory (ST). IT introduced by [Meyer and Rowan \(1977\)](#), explains as to how institutions cease to resemble each other to provide a more integrated and regular society. [DiMaggio and Powell \(1983\)](#) argued that institutions should survive, conform and align with the reality in the environment. [Scott \(2008\)](#) stated “institutional inertia” is a major “stickiness” or resistance to change with the environment. ST introduced by [Bertalanffy \(1969\)](#) stressed the importance of interdisciplinary work. [Straussfogel and Schilling \(2009\)](#) stated that ST can be a platform to evaluate characteristics of intellectual streams extended to multidisciplinary work, relations and studies between abstract organizations with independent substance. [Walby \(2007\)](#) argued that ST, should facilitate multiple social relations moving beyond one domain without restricting to one institutional domain. Hence the IT focuses as to how universities should change, conform and align with the needs of the environment to survive and the ST entails how the academics should move beyond their domain to understand the needs of the practitioners. These two theories provide the rationale to complement each other for this study and deploying them in tandem provides a unique approach in capitalizing on the strengths of the two theories ([Hoque et al., 2013](#)).

Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative research methodology, which can explore the meaning, people ascribe to their experiences and views. It relies on rich, verbal descriptions gained through in-depth interviews (Silverman, 2000; Sivabalachandran and Gooneratne, 2022). This methodological approach has become a suitable option for the current study as it helps to unearth the reasons for the gap, real life experiences, complexities, challenging areas and the suggestions in bridging the gap between the academics and the practitioners. Accordingly, the in-depth interviews were conducted from a sample made up of three categories, namely, the academics (university Vice Chancellors and Professors), pracademics and practitioners (with only industrial experience). These respondents were selected using the purposive judgmental sampling method and the unit of analysis is the individual. The questions which were of semi-structured basis, were formed based on empirical studies carried out by Shirbagi and Gholami (2020), Alpert and Piehler (2022), Vaaland and Ishengoma (2016) and Frutos-Belizon *et al.* (2019). With the given nature of the study, some of the questions were marginally adjusted based on the theoretical normative perspective to explore and gain more views based on their experiences. The normative perspective under the qualitative approach has been useful in generating powerful descriptions that does not contradict the “is-ought fallacy” (Gold *et al.*, 2011). The description of the selected sample is given in Table 1 below.

Data collection

Adequate space was provided for further questions based on the answers given by the candidates, especially those targeting the “what” and “how” factors. The business leaders who were selected for the interviews had sound knowledge of the university system and were qualified with research at Masters or Ph.D. level. The data collection instrument was an “episodic interview” which followed the protocol used to stimulate research narratives. During the interviews, the interviewees were frequently asked to narrate or quote suggestions or voice their opinion based on real life experiences with utmost assurance of confidentiality. Each interview lasted for approximately 35–40 min, except for 4 interviews, which went up to about 50 min.

Upon interviewing 5 respondents initially, two areas were emphasized by them. Firstly, the purpose of moderating and mediating variables in research and whether they create any impact on the business world; secondly, the extent to which academics possess business exposure, that will serve to bridge the gap. Accordingly, these two questions were added to the semi-structured questionnaire for the remaining candidates and the interviews were completed at the “saturation point”. Hennink *et al.* (2019) described the saturation point as a parameter for judging; when to cease sampling in qualitative studies when no additional data being found.

Findings

All interviewees, except for one, confirmed without any hesitation that there is a definite gap between academic research and practitioners. More than 90% of interviewees, including the university professors, affirmed this fact, using terminology such as a “*significant gap*”, “*visible gap*” and “*definitely there is a gap*”. The exceptional interviewee [M1] stated that “*a gap does not exist if the research begins with an industry problem. This is where research should start with an industry problem and then relate it to literature and the theoretical gaps [. . .]*” (M1).

RQ1. What are the reasons for the academic–practitioner gap?

The interviewees had many reasons spanning several dimensions to explain the gap. When asked about the reasons for this widening gap, the following reasons were prominent among those offered:

Code	Position	Academic	Pracademic	Practitioner	Total experience	University exposure	Industry exposure
M1	Adjunct professor (Ph.D.)		✓		45 years	30 years	15 years as General Manager
M2	University professor (Ph.D.)		✓		33 years	19 years	14 years at 02 MNCs
M3	Faculty member (Ph.D.)		✓		21 years	08 years	13 years in the corporate sector
M4	Faculty member (Ph.D.)		✓		24 years	10 years	14 years as General Manager
M5	Faculty member (Ph.D.)		✓		45 years	28 years	17 years as General Manager
M6	Senior faculty member (Ph.D.)	✓			20 years	20 years	Nil
M7	Faculty member (Masters)			✓	31 years	02 years (Visiting)	29 years as CEO/Board level
M8	Vice chancellor (Ph.D.)	✓			30 years	30 years	Nil
M9	Professor and former vice chancellor (Ph.D.)	✓			35 years	35 years	Few assignments at global level
M10	Professor ((Ph.D.)	✓			28 years	28 years	Nil
M11	Professor (Ph.D.)	✓			24 years	24 years	Nil
M12	Dean/ Professor (Ph.D.)	✓			35 years	35 years	Nil
M13	Non-exe director (Ph.D.)			✓	31 years	05 years (Visiting)	31 years
M14	Market research expert (Ph.D.)			✓	39 years	04 years (Visiting)	35 years
M15	Chairman/ Managing director (Masters)			✓	28 years	Nil	28 years

Table 1.
Description of the sample selected for the study

(continued)

Code	Position	Academic	Pracademic	Practitioner	Total experience	University exposure	Industry exposure	Academic–practitioner gap
M16	Former secretary to the President of Sri Lanka (Masters)			✓	40 years	05 years (Visiting)	35 years in the Public sector	
M17	Group managing director (EMBA)			✓	20 years	Nil	20 years	
M18	Senior vice president bank (EMBA)			✓	26 years	Nil	26 years	
M19	Chief financial controller (Masters)			✓	32 years	04 years (Visiting)	32 years	

Source(s): Author’s work based on sample

Table 1.

[. . .] universities and the industry do not go hand-in-hand, most of the academics do not have a relationship with the industry and their research is based purely on their academic knowledge and to enhance their h-index and citations [. . .] (M9, M1, M2, M16).

“[. . .] academics do not see the reality and the competition on the ground [. . .]” (M16), quoting a unique example based on his wealth of experience, stated that “the Technical Colleges engaged in vocational training have gone very far using the latest methods and technology, but the instructors lack such practical and real life exposure in using such latest machines” (M16).

“Academics are more theoretically bent, and they lack practical exposure” (M2). “Definitely academics lack practical exposure, most of them haven’t even worked in the industry at all. So they have no knowledge about the competition business leaders face. (M01, M5, M4, M3 and M8).

However, one university professor stated that the reason for this gap is only a “*perception*” (M10) and “[. . .] *publications are not read by the practitioners and such publications do not get properly communicated to the industry [. . .]. Also they talk a lot about the existing gap but very few help us*” (M11).

Another university professor (M12) stated that “*how we disseminate knowledge is through academic journals and practitioners are of the view that our research carries only theory and it cannot be applied in practice [. . .]*”

Gap exists when academics seek only academic enrichment without giving due consideration to practical application. Academics look only for more publications. They should have real life exposure [. . .] (M14, M2, M8, M13, M14, M15, M17)

Practitioners stated “[. . .] *corporate sector never gives research to academics as they do not have real life exposure. Better to give that research to a consultant [. . .]*” (M13, M15, M17, M18 and M19)

Sometimes academics use concepts such as moderating or mediating variable in their research, they are just numbers and no use at all for the corporate world (M13, M17, M19)

It is suicidal to show raw research with terminology such as moderating or mediating effect to the corporate world. Research outcomes should be translated to an understandable language for practitioners (M16)

[. . .] Academics are generally not bothered about deadlines. The business world has strict deadlines. For instance, we have to forward the financials and the annual reports to the stock exchange within a period of three months. But if you send an article to an A or A* journal, it will take about 3 years to publish. By that time, the business world will end one strategic plan cycle. [. . .] (M13, M14)

Based on the above quotes, the following **Table 2** can be developed for coding and for thematic analysis.

The opinion and views expressed by the interviewees confirm that the industry exposure for academics is important.

RQ2. How can the academic–practitioner gap be bridged?

Interviewees, including university professors, made many suggestions to improve the gap between academics and practitioners.

[. . .] both parties should conduct more collaborative research where the industry can provide the research problem and work together (M10, M11, M12, M19, M16, M2).

Most university professors suggested signing memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with professional bodies to strengthen the linkages and to obtain the required industry exposure. “More MOUs and agreements have to be signed with the industry for joint work. For instance, a professor in HR can get involved in human resource (HR) activities for a period of 02 years. A professor in finance can sign an MOU with the Institute of Chartered Accountants or an Audit firm to work there as a consultant for 02 years (M7, M10, M11, M12 and M13).

Practitioners need business solutions or to try to overcome a real-world business problem, not go for the rigor of the research. Hence academic research must be aligned with practical needs [. . .] (M14, M15, M16 and M19).

One way to overcome this issue is to translate research reports for the corporate world to understand. Even the moderating or mediating outcomes should be translated into an understandable language. Otherwise it is of no use (M1, M2).

“Academics must develop their skills periodically in the industry. This will help them to become aligned with the evolving world. If possible, they must get into Boards as Non-Executive Directors or work with global organizations such as IMF, World Bank, and UN.” This will give them global business exposure. However, to get selected for such assignments, academics must possess real life exposure, which is a challenge”. (M16, M8, M9 and M13)

Academics should utilize their first and the second sabbatical leave periods in their career to work in industry in their given spheres. For instance, finance lecturers in accounts departments, HR lecturers

Quotations	Concept	Sub-theme	Theme
As per above quotes	Lack of practical exposure	No practical experience	Poor industrial exposure
	No ground reality	Not in touch with reality	
	Research conducted purely for academic purposes without due consideration for practice		
	No business exposure		

Source(s): Author’s work based on interviews and data collection

Table 2.
Analysis for question No 01

in HR Divisions can work at a corporate company, utilizing their first two sabbatical leave periods before they become professors. This has to be made compulsory as taking sabbatical leave for publications will further widen this gap. Publications should fall under normal academic work [...] (M3, M5, M6, M13, M14, M15, M16 and M8)

The above interviewees stated that working and gaining real life exposure in industry is more suitable during the very first and the second sabbatical leave tenure of two years each, because a young academic becoming a professor and then working in industry might create ego issues and hesitance.

One way to overcome this gap is to work jointly with industry and more importantly, to work on “research grants [...]” (M1, M13, M15).

My participation in skills and knowledge development at McKenzie, MIT and Coursera has given me immense skills and knowledge at the global level. The knowledge, the richness and the networking you gain from such programmes, cannot be measured in monetary terms. I think all academics should participate and all universities must sponsor them at least once in a life time to such programmes [...] (M14)

Almost all interviewees were of the opinion that holding positions as Non-Executives or in global organizations such as IMF, UN will help academics to understand industrial problems and bridge the academic–practitioner gap. However, some interviewees, based on their corporate exposure, *stated that academics should have at least the minimum competences about industry to be invited to Boards* (M13, M8, M2, M14, M16, M17 and M18). The rationale provided for this is that academics should be able to question the top management on practical aspects during Board meetings.

When questioned about the global exposure of academics, it was revealed that the majority of academics in this sample (M8, M9) have worked on at least one global project which is related to academic work only. Hence, there was no real exposure to industry.

The interviewees who possessed industry exposure, also confirmed this point. Further, most of the business leaders in the sample selected for this study (most of them possess doctoral degrees), stated in a subtle but disappointed manner based on their experience with academics, that *“however much business leaders work towards collaborations, linkages and attempt to carry out market and management research, academics hesitate to move away from their “shell,” where they focus mainly on theory, terminology, depth, rigor and taking undue time to complete a research study. By the time we receive the report, we cannot understand the jargons, another market problem has cropped up, the earlier research has become obsolete and hardly any practical solutions are given in the report. Hence, academics have to change and be flexible. We are willing to fund them and discuss issues [...]”* (M13, M14, M15 and M17).

The above [Table 3](#) thematic analysis based on the opinion and views stated by the interviewees affirm that academics utilize their sabbatical leave for academic purposes and not for professional development or to gain industrial exposure.

In addition, all academics clearly stated that their universities have not re-designed their goals and KPIs for decades, either to be congruent with the business world or to reduce the academic–practitioner gap. Academics attached to universities as senior professors and Vice Chancellors clearly stated that they have never made such changes (M8, M9, M11, M12 and M13). The business leaders with doctorates even stated that *“they (academics) are not even bothered to make changes as that will challenge their ego or expose their tunnel vision”* (M13, M14, M15 and M17).

[...] academics work in some kind of a shell. Sometimes they do not even think of those aspects as such dramatic changes will make them small or severely expose their weaknesses (M2, M13, M14). Hence this proves that universities do not take effective and actionable steps to bridge this gap as well as to be congruent with the evolving world.

Quotations	Concept	Sub-theme	Theme
As per above quotes	Sabbatical leave must be used to gain real life exposure Upgrading skills is mandatory Working at the corporate level Consultancy for global organizations will help to bridge this gap Must have more MOUs and Agreements with the business world	Effective utilization of sabbatical leave Training and development Corporate positions Global involvements More industrial linkages	Corporate Sabbatical Professional skills development Apex positions International consultancy Research collaborations/Grants

Table 3.
Analysis for research question 02

Source(s): Author's work based on interviews and data collection

Discussion

This study uncovered many startling revelations, though some are challenging when viewed from the academic perspective. This study revealed the exigency to gain industrial exposure for academics and the utmost necessity to re-design the goals of universities to incorporate such KPIs for academics in order to bridge the gap. The outcome confirms the studies conducted by [Verčič et al. \(2015\)](#), [Vosburg \(2022\)](#). Almost all interviewees agreed that having real life exposure will help to bridge the academic–practitioner gap and stated that academics should be “pushed” to utilize their first two sabbatical leave terms to gain industrial exposure. Hence “*corporate sabbatical*” is the first theme emanating from this study. This confirms [Carraher et al. \(2014\)](#), [Shirbagi and Gholami \(2020\)](#) findings that academics should consider alternative career options for their sabbatical. Secondly, interviewees suggested that academics update their knowledge with the evolving trends in the business world. Based on their views, the second theme generated from this study is “Continuous Professional Development” for academics. One quoted example was that “*Finance professors should have their knowledge updated on International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). Without gaining skills, on such developments, how can they teach graduates or postgraduates?*” (M14). [Wong \(2014\)](#) stated that advanced professional competences are necessary for quality teaching. One interviewee stated that, similar to companies sending their employees for training under their training budgets, universities should also send their faculty members for training to update their knowledge on evolving areas within their teaching spheres. Thirdly, the interviewees stated that working at apex positions in organizations, or as the chairman or the president of a professional institution such as the Institute of Chartered Accountants or the Chamber of Commerce, or becoming a board member of a listed company for a period of at least two years, while serving in the university, will help academics to experience the challenges in the business world. “*Becoming a board member in a listed company will also teach them about corporate governance and sustainability, as listed companies have to meet compliances. Such evolving areas are important for academics who lecture only on HR, organizational behavior and marketing, to expand their horizons*” (M13, M14, M16 and M19). Hence, the third theme which stems from this study is to hold Apex Positions, where these academics will be in touch with industry. The interviewees were of the opinion that serving in international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), International Monetary Fund (IMF), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank (WB) as a lead consultant or working on research grants from industry under a competitive selection process or conducting collaborative research with industry would help to bridge the gap. Hence, the fourth and the fifth themes stemming from the study are “international consultancies” and “research collaborations/grants”. This affirms the findings from studies carried out by and [Tucker and Lowe \(2014\)](#) and [De Man et al. \(2022\)](#).

Based on these themes, the following **Pentagon Model** has been developed as an emerging model based on the study outcome. The importance of the dimensions of this model flows clock-wise.

Formation and the operationalization of the corporate-index (C-index)

Based on the thematic analysis, and the Pentagon Model (Figure 1), majority of interviewees clearly stated that using first two sabbatical leave periods in their academic career comprising two years per term to work in the industry is one key solution. The first two sabbatical periods are more appropriate as the academics. Secondly, continuous professional development is necessary, where academics can enroll for short courses at Harvard Business School, MIT periodically to enhance their professional development skills where universities can sponsor such programmes with an annual plan for academics. These two themes which are mandatory, emerged based on the study outcomes.

The third theme is holding apex positions in the business world for instance as Non-Executive or Independent Directors, or as the president of a professional organization for a minimum period of two years, where academics will have the opportunity to associate with many business leaders. The fourth and the fifth themes are based on serving as a lead consultant for a global organization and working on research grants or collaborative research with the business world. Hence, it is suggested that having one of these three dimensions is adequate, given their lower emphasis by the respondents, compared to the above mentioned, first two mandatory dimensions.

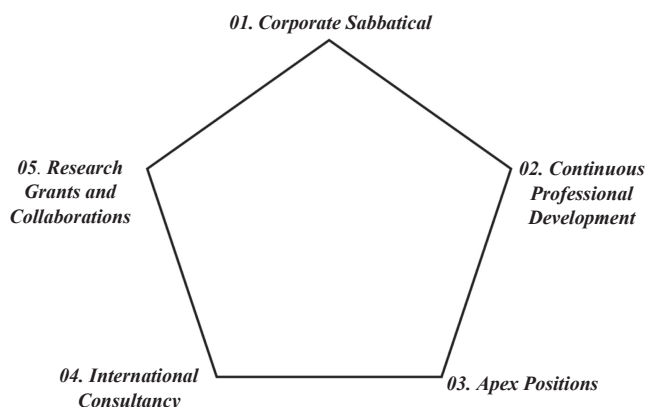
Based on the above, the following Table 4, is developed as a synopsis to calculate the C-index of one.

Based on the above, the following algorithms is proposed to earn a corporate index (C-index) of one to bridge the academic–practitioner gap.

$$C - index = \min(A, B) (C \vee D \vee E)$$

Source: Developed by the Author based on the research outcome.

Academics, upon completion of another around based on the above will obtain a C-index of two which means a sizable quantum of business exposure has been gained. Such academics will naturally gain advantage over other academics to get engaged in the business world with business competences.



Source(s): Developed by the author based on the research outcome

Figure 1.
Graphical illustration
of the Pentagon Model

Theoretical implications

The two key theoretical contributions of this study are the development of the Pentagon Model and the formulation of the C-index. These two contributions can serve as the foundation for future studies, as these contributions aim to fill a significant gap in literature and in practice to bridge the academic practitioner gap. There scholars from Netherlands and USA (De Man *et al.*, 2022) suggested more collaborative research and more structured interaction between the academics and the practitioners. However, the outcome of this study goes well beyond such outcomes to bridge the gap. From the theoretical perspective, this study proved that the ST can be used for transdisciplinary studies (Straussfogel and Shillings, 2009) in management arenas such as academic and business as well. This is an extension of the ST used (Howley and Chuang, 2011) for transdisciplinary studies for science and health. This study also proved beyond doubt that academics possess institutional inertia (Scott, 2008) and that universities should conform and align to environmental changes (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Having a more integrated and regular society as per the IT would bridge the gap between the academics and the practitioners.

Managerial implications

Vaaland and Ishengoma (2016) stated that no effective remedy has been introduced to bridge the academic–practitioner gap. Two scholars from Sweden and Finland (Sanburg *et al.*, 2022) suggested interactive and collaborative research to bridge the gap. However, the development of the Pentagon Model and the C-index would bridge this gap moving well beyond these suggestions though it may be challenging for academics as well as universities at the outset. The universities can now design their data bases similar to Google scholar and h-index to leverage the records for academics to obtain the C-index. Academics should avoid using concepts such as moderating or mediating variables (Wong, 2014; Perea and Brady, 2017), if they are of limited comprehensibility or little use to the business world. Thirdly, universities should redesign their goals, strategies and Performance Management Systems to encourage academics to use sabbatical leave to gain industrial exposure, update their skills and hold apex positions in the business world. This confirms Galan (2018) and Uriquia-Grande and Eztebenaz's (2020) findings. Academics should practice agility and realize that changing KPIs in congruence with the real world is inevitable, despite its being particularly challenging.

From the business leaders' perspective, academics utilizing their sabbatical leave can be accommodated in their respective organizations, creating a win-win situation. Organizations can sponsor more research collaborations and research grants for universities. These sponsorships should go beyond normal university linkages for internships (Wong, 2014; Perea and Brady, 2017) when dealing with the business world.

Work in the industry during a 02 years of sabbatical	Mandatory	A
Completing a Professional Skill Development Programme	Mandatory	B
One of these three options	Holding Apex Positions in organizations for 02 years	C
	Working as a lead Consultant for a Global organization	D
	Working on Research Grant/Collaboration with the Business world	E

Table 4.

Synopsis for algorithm **Source(s):** Author's work based on the research outcome

Future research and limitations

This study was conducted purely on an exploratory basis to bridge the academic–practitioner gap. Hence, taking this study as the basis, a number of future research studies can be carried out to further improve and expand the C-index and the Pentagon Model. One potential area is to ascertain whether the same dimensions exist in other countries in this geographical area, as this study was focused on the Sri Lankan context. Another area for future research is to improve upon the developed C-index in terms of the developed algorithms from a mathematical perspective. Thirdly, the possibility of developing a similar index for business leaders can also be explored, with a specific understanding of the academic background of business leaders. Fourthly, research can also be conducted to explore how best universities could redesign their educational goals and KPIs to accommodate the outcomes of the current study.

Conclusion

This study was conducted in an attempt to understand how the academic–practitioner gap can be bridged. The outcome of the study resulted in the development of the Pentagon Model incorporating the five main spheres which were identified as essential to bridging the academic–practitioner gap and the resulting C-index, which is the measurement index for the Model. Hence, based on the outcome of this study, it is the fervent assumption that academics will earn a higher C-index for greater corporate exposure in order to bridge the academic practitioner gap in time to dawn.

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