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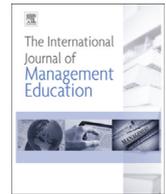
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Some features of organizational behavior knowledge and the resulting issues in teaching organizational behavior



Badrinarayan Shankar Pawar

National Institute of Bank Management, NIBM Post Office, Kondhwe Khurd, Pune 411048, India

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ABSTRACT

The existing literature indicates that management research, of which organizational behavior (OB) is a part, has declined in usefulness and relevance for teaching. As a reflection of this, the research-teaching gap also has been noted in the literature. Possibly as a consequence of this, concerns have been expressed about inadequate transmission of OB knowledge body through OB teaching and about the impaired legitimacy of behavioral coursework in the business education. These concerns in the existing literature suggest a need for examining the nature of OB knowledge body and for exploring the issues it may create for OB teaching. The present paper addresses this research requirement. It first points out the need to examine OB knowledge features and the resulting issues in OB teaching. It then explains why the nature of OB knowledge is likely to affect OB teaching and create issues in OB teaching. It then describes some limiting features of the specific elements—concepts, theories, and empirical findings—in OB knowledge body. In light of the limiting features of the OB knowledge discussed, it then explores some of the resulting issues in OB teaching. Finally, it outlines directions for future research and practice.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Why do we need to examine the nature of OB knowledge and resulting issues in OB teaching?

Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan (2007) reviewed five decades of research in the Academy of Management Journal and noted that the theory building and theory testing components in research have increased over the period of five decades. However, examining the published research in the Academy of Management Journal (and also in Administrative Science Quarterly) over a similar period, Pearce and Huang (2012) concluded that the research has become increasingly less actionable and hence less useful for teaching. Thus, ironically management research's increasing sophistication is not positively associated with its usefulness for teaching.

The existing literature has acknowledged this limitation of management research by noting that it is not useful to those who are “outside ivory towers” (Pearce & Huang, 2012, p. 260), it is a part of “closed, incestuous loop” where only academicians become producer and consumers of their own work (Hambrick, 1994, p. 13), and it is “esoteric and irrelevant” (Burke & Rau, 2010, p. 133). Thus, it is not surprising that the literature (e.g., Burke and Rau, 2010) points out the existence of research-teaching gap.

E-mail address: badrinarayan_pawar@yahoo.com.

The above discussion suggests the necessity and importance of bridging the gap between research and teaching. While the above observations and views about the reduced relevance of research-generated knowledge for teaching apply to management field in general, they are also applicable to organizational behavior (OB) because OB is a part of the management field. Therefore, the process of bridging the teaching-research gap in OB will require focusing on the nature of research-generated knowledge available specifically in OB and the issues for OB teaching that result from the OB knowledge features. Clear understanding of the nature of research-generated OB knowledge and the resulting teaching issues will help future research to explore the ways to address the OB teaching issues and facilitate greater use of research-generated OB knowledge in OB teaching. The present paper adopts such a focus. This focus and the place of the present paper in addressing the OB research-teaching gap is depicted in Fig. 1.

Adopting the above focus within the framework depicted in Fig. 1, this paper makes three distinct and original contributions. First, to the author's best knowledge, no paper in the existing literature has provided a unified and comprehensive description of the limiting features of all three OB content aspects namely; concepts, theories, and empirical findings in OB. Second, this paper identifies the OB teaching issues emerging from these limiting features of OB knowledge described. Third, as one of the ways of knowledge advancement is characterized by the metaphor of "gradually adding light to a darkened room" (Weick, 1989, p. 518), the first effort, which this paper does, cannot be expected to completely address all aspects of the issue under consideration. The pioneering effort made in this paper brings, for the first time, to the light the relevant issues in a unified manner and future research will be needed to throw further light on these issues. To facilitate such future advancements, this paper points out future research directions and practice implications that may direct the systematic exploration and devising of the solutions to address the issues pointed out in this paper. These three contributions of this paper form a part of a larger framework depicted in Fig. 1.

This paper's focus is bounded at three levels. First, it focuses specifically on OB and not on the entire management field which, as noted by Peng and Dess (2010, p. 282), includes many other areas. Second, it focuses on examining only the limiting features of OB knowledge and not all features. As concepts, theories, and empirical findings are the main elements of OB knowledge/contents (e.g., Cummings, 1978), the limiting features of OB knowledge are identified by focusing on these three content elements of OB. Third, it focuses on the issues an OB teacher may face while teaching OB because of the limiting features of OB knowledge. It is relevant and necessary to examine these aspects specifically for OB in light of the serious situation in OB pointed out by the conclusion of Rynes, Trank, Lawson, and Ilies (2003, p. 277) that "unfortunately, both our result and others' (e.g., EBI, 1997) suggest that we have failed to legitimate the knowledge base of behavioral management to two of our most important constituencies, recruiters and students." Thus, this serious situation in OB along with the earlier described decreased usefulness of research-generated management knowledge in teaching and research-teaching gap in management all point out a need to examine the limiting features of OB knowledge and the resulting issues in OB teaching.

The limiting features of OB knowledge outlined in this paper may not be unique to the OB field. However, OB field deals with the phenomena—behavior in organizations—which are affected by multiple situational factors which themselves are evolving. This makes the field of both complex and dynamic as Cummings (1978, p. 97) noted, "... realities in organizations change so rapidly that our descriptions (ways of thinking, constructs and technologies) do not keep pace with the rate of change in the objects of our study." Thus, the limiting features of OB knowledge can have significant implications for OB teaching as reflected in some of the assessments from the literature outlined above and as elaborated in the subsequent parts of this paper.

1.2. *Why the nature of OB knowledge is likely to affect OB teaching?*

"Learning involves a modification or increase in knowledge" (Burke & Rau, 2010, p. 133). By implication, teaching can be viewed as a teacher's dissemination of knowledge to modify or enhance students' knowledge. Consistent with this, Keys and Wolfe (1988, p. 205) define management education as "the acquisition of a broad range of conceptual knowledge and skills in formal classroom situations in degree-granting institutions." Similarly, Trank and Rynes (2003, p.199) note, "Developing a scientific body of knowledge and using it as the main resource for instruction were the goals of those who sought professional status for business schools 4 decades ago." More recently, Brown, Rynes, Charlier, and Hosmanek (2013) noted that while knowledge/content and reflection/experience are two aspects of OB teaching, the knowledge/content part is dominant in the contemporary OB teaching.

These multiple views of learning, management education, instruction, and specifically of OB teaching indicate that the subject matter content/knowledge is an important ingredient in teaching. It follows that the nature of OB knowledge/content is likely to affect OB teaching. This, however, raises a relevant question: What is the content or knowledge element in OB?

1.3. *What are the elements of OB knowledge?*

For identifying the limiting features of OB knowledge, it is necessary to consider what the key elements of OB knowledge are. Cummings (1978, pp. 93–95) characterized the OB field using three dimensions namely; a) a way of thinking, b) a collection of concepts, models, and facts, and c) a system of tools and technologies. Of the last two elements—a collection of concepts, models, and facts and a system of tools and technologies—OB tools and technologies are applied in nature and are likely to be derived from OB concepts, models, and facts (empirical findings). Thus, the collection of concepts, models, and facts can be regarded as the core content element of OB.

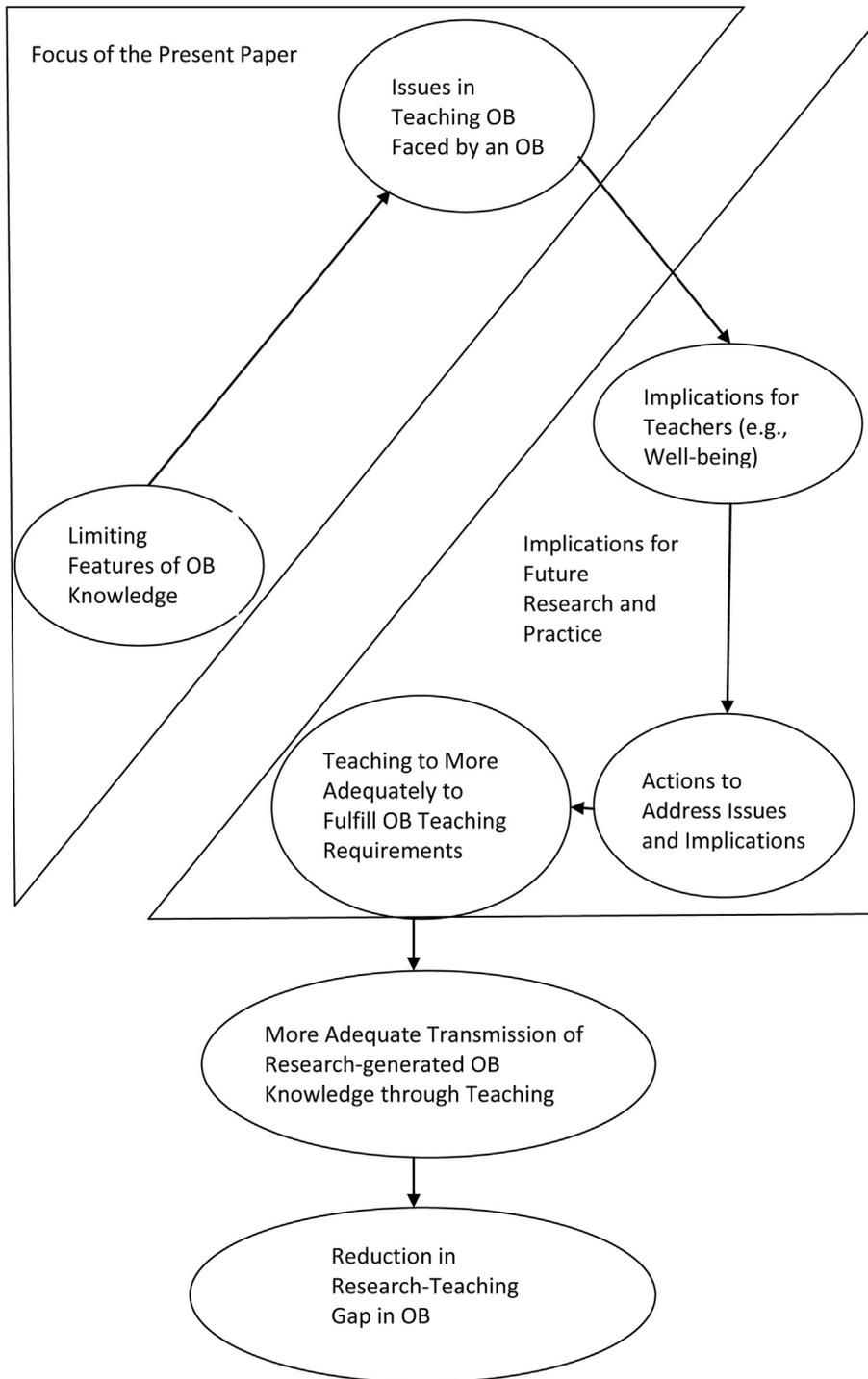


Fig. 1. This Paper's focus and its implications for future research and practice.

In light of the earlier outlined centrality of the OB knowledge in OB teaching process (Section 1.2) and the above noted core position of the collection of OB concepts, theories, and empirical findings in the OB knowledge or content, it follows that the limiting features of concepts, theories, and empirical findings in OB are likely to give rise to issues in OB teaching. These two aspects –the limiting features of OB knowledge and the resulting issues in OB teaching-are the focus of this paper.

Thus, I first focus on the limiting features of individual OB content elements –concepts, theories, and empirical findings- and then I outline the overall limitation of the extent and quality of OB knowledge base. Subsequently, I discuss the issues OB

teachers may face in teaching the body of OB knowledge having these limiting features. Finally, I conclude by outlining some of the research and practice implications. Table 1 provides an overview of the limiting features of OB knowledge and the resulting issues in OB teaching outlined in the subsequent part of this paper. Identification and elaboration of these limiting features of OB knowledge and the resulting OB teaching issues constitutes the main focus of this paper.

2. Limitations associated with the knowledge in OB

2.1. Limiting features of OB knowledge

As outlined above, based on Cummings' (1978) characterization of the OB field, concepts, theories (models), and empirical findings (facts) can be viewed as the main elements in OB knowledge contents. Each of these three content elements of OB knowledge has certain limiting features as listed in Table 1 and outlined below.

2.1.1. Content element one of OB knowledge: OB concepts

2.1.1.1. *Multiple definitions of a single concept.* In OB, multiple definitions exist for a single concept. Consider some examples outlined below. Bennis (1959, p. 260) noted, "Always, it seems, the concept of leadership eludes us or turns up in another form to taunt us again with its slipperiness and complexity. So we have invented an endless proliferation of terms to deal with it: leadership, power, status, authority, rank, prestige, influence, control, manipulation, domination, and so forth, and still the concept is not sufficiently defined." Similarly, Luthans (2005, p. 547) observed, "Unfortunately, almost everyone who studies or writes about leadership defines it differently." Another example of multiple concept definitions comes from the concept of motivation where Luthans (2005, p. 229) noted, "Today, virtually all people –practitioners and scholars- have their own definitions of motivation." The concept of power provides yet another example where "almost every author who writes about power defines it differently" (Luthans, 2005, p. 412). As another example, consider the concept of organizational politics where "there is a lack of uniformity in the ways in which different writers define organizational and workplace politics" (Gandz & Murray, 1980, p. 237). All above examples indicate that multiple definitions exist for a single OB concept.

2.1.1.2. *Vagueness in the definitions of concepts.* The above examples refer to specific individual concepts and refer to the multiplicity of definitions. However, the definitions themselves may have another inadequacy of being vague and this inadequacy may apply to a considerable part of the overall OB field as noted in Greenberg (2003). In the preface to his edited book "Organizational Behavior: The State of the Science", Greenberg (2003, p. xv) stated, "I asked Professor Locke to comment on the state of the field of OB as a whole as reflected by contributions to this book. His essay, which concludes this volume, connects various individual contributions by acknowledging a common limitation of our work –vagueness in the definitions we use. With characteristic candor and insight, Locke provides a service to the field of OB by challenging us all to be more precise in our conceptualizations" (emphasis added).

Such vagueness in concept definitions is likely to have adverse implications for the quality of OB knowledge. Thus, while providing his overall "Commentary" on the various chapters outlining the state of the science in OB, Locke (2003, pp. 415–6) noted, "I begin this chapter with a discussion of definitions, which is the main theme of my comments, because I believe that a major factor retarding progress in our field –and almost every intellectual field today-has been the use of sloppy, careless, or subjective definitions. Every chapter in this book suffers, to a lesser or greater degree, from this problem ... poor definitions ...

Table 1

Features of OB knowledge and the resulting OB teaching issues.

OB knowledge content element	Features of the OB content element	Resulting issues in OB teaching
Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple definitions • Vagueness in definitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vagueness in the OB reality view provided by OB concepts
Theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple theories • Conflicting theories • Limited validity and usefulness of theories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incoherent view of the OB reality through multiple and conflicting theories
Empirical Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings scattered in a large number of individual papers • Presence of conflicting findings • Findings get revised or qualified • Methodological limitations are associated with findings • Low strength of association captured in findings • A finding represents a tiny fragment of the OB reality • Limitations in integrating individual findings • Difficulty in arriving at generalizations from empirical findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequately unified view of the OB reality from empirical findings scattered in individual studies • Doubts about the OB reality view provided by individual empirical findings with methodological limitations • Inadequate confidence in the OB reality view developed from empirical findings with low levels of support • Lack of a direct experience through empirical findings • Inadequate clarity from empirical findings • Inadequacy of OB textbooks as an aid for integrating empirical findings

undermine progress. This is because instead of fulfilling their proper function –the promotion of cognitive clarity– they sow cognitive confusion.”

The above discussion suggests that the concept element of OB knowledge is characterized by limitations such as multiplicity and vagueness of definitions. As concepts are a means for comprehending the reality (e.g., [Locke, 2003](#)), these limitations of concepts are likely to impair clear understanding of the various OB phenomena.

2.1.2. Content element two of OB knowledge: OB theories

2.1.2.1. Multiple theories of a phenomenon. There tend to be multiple theories in an OB topic. For example, there are multiple theories of motivation such as goal-setting theory, equity theory, and expectancy theory. As another example, consider leadership theories. [Bennis \(1959, p. 260\)](#) noted, “As we survey the path leadership theory has taken, we spot the wreckage of ‘trait theory,’ the ‘great man’ theory, the ‘situationist critique,’ leadership styles, functional leadership, and finally leaderless leadership; to say nothing of bureaucratic leadership, charismatic leadership, democratic-autocratic–laissez-faire leadership, group-centered leadership, reality-centered leadership, leadership by objectives, and so on.” The above examples focus on two OB topics but they reflect the pattern observed in many OB topics.

2.1.2.2. Multiple conflicting theories. The presence of multiple theories in a topic creates the potential for conflicts between various theories. For example, in the context of motivation theories, and while focusing on VIE or expectancy theory, [Pinder \(1977, pp. 387–8\)](#) noted, “Another problem with VIE theory is that it differs with other theories on certain significant issues”, pointed out a few differences of it from operant theory and equity theory, and expressed one of its limitations as “critical contradictions with other ‘established’ bodies of theory.”

2.1.2.3. Limited validity and usefulness of theories. Furthermore, many theories may have inadequate empirical support or validity. For example, [Miner \(1984\)](#) assessed validity and usefulness of the theories in organizational science. His assessment indicated that out of 32 theories covered, only 11 (or about one third) had high validity which was assessed in terms of the extent of empirical research carried out and found to be supporting the theory. [Miner's \(2003\)](#) more recent assessment of 73 OB theories also indicated that only 25 of 73 (or about one third) theories had high level of validity. Furthermore, [Miner's \(2003\)](#) assessment also indicated that only 10 out of 73 theories had high level of usefulness assessed in terms of the extent of viable applications generated by a theory which were found, on the basis of research, to produce intended results.

The above discussion suggests that OB knowledge is characterized by the existence of multiple theories. Furthermore, conflicts between theories and limitations of validity and usefulness of theories also characterize the theory element of the OB knowledge.

2.1.3. Content element three of OB knowledge: empirical findings

2.1.3.1. Findings scattered in a large number of individual papers. Pieces of empirical findings within an OB topic tend to be generated in individual empirical studies and collectively there tend to be a large number of studies within an OB topic. For example, on the topic of work attitudes, [Locke \(1969, p. 309\)](#) noted, “As of 1955, over 2000 articles had been published on this subject. The figure today may exceed 4000.” [Fisher \(2000, p. 185\)](#) noted a comparatively more recent estimate of over 5000 published articles and dissertations which included some examination of job satisfaction. This indicates that the empirical findings in an OB topic tend to be scattered in a large number of individual study papers.

2.1.3.2. Presence of conflicting findings. The largeness of volume of studies may create the potential for contradictory findings. Consider an example from the leadership topic where [Bennis \(1959, p. 260\)](#) noted, “The mountain of evidence which is available appears to be so contradictory ...” Contradictory findings may lead to a fragmented body of empirical findings. This is possibly reflected in a recent assessment of [Locke \(2000: xvi\)](#) who noted, “Over the past 30 years Organizational Behavior (OB) has become a very large field due to an explosion of findings and subsequent expansion of its subfields. It is regrettable that more progress has been made in fragmenting the field than in integrating it.” Thus, a large volume of empirical findings within an OB topic may contain conflicting findings.

2.1.3.3. Findings get revised or qualified. New findings in an OB topic area may qualify earlier findings. For instance, the positive association of procedural justice with organizational citizenship behaviors found in the earlier studies may get somewhat qualified through the findings of [Farh, Earley, and Lin \(1997\)](#) in the Chinese society that procedural justice has less positive association with organizational citizenship behaviors when traditionalism is high than when traditionalism is low. This example indicating that the previously universal generalizability of a finding subsequently became contextually-bounded generalizability suggests the instability of generalizability of findings. Similarly, [DeNisi and Kluger \(2000\)](#) pointed out that the findings on feedback effectiveness were incorrect in some of the previous reviews of the feedback studies. This example indicating that the findings previously taken as correct were subsequently found to be incorrect suggests the instability of validity of findings. Such possibility that the new findings qualify the earlier ones is reflected in [Rynes, Giluk, and Brown \(2007, p. 1002\)](#) who noted “the apparent instability of some of the major scientific HR findings.” Thus, knowing a set of OB findings on a topic may not guarantee that one knows something that has not been subsequently revised or qualified.

2.1.3.4. Methodological limitations are associated with findings. Individual empirical studies examining one or more parts of an OB phenomenon may have their associated limitations such as small samples, convenience samples, low response rates, and inadequately validated measures. Consider some examples outlined below. Mitchell (1985, p. 201) noted that the data coming from his review of a sample of correlational studies in organizations “are rather unsettling. They suggest that the typical cross-sectional correlational study uses convenience sample with administered questionnaire. No response rate is reported, and no comparisons are made between respondents and nonrespondents. The literature on reliability and validity is often cited but the actual reliability and validity demonstrated is very weak. Alpha predominates as a measure of reliability, and construct validity is infrequently checked. Researchers do seem to be sensitive to the dangers of method variance, but the use of cross-validation or holdout samples is almost nonexistent.” As another example, some of the limitations with the measurement part of empirical studies of organizations have been reflected in Hinkin (1995, p. 967) who noted, “As Schwab (1980) points out, measures are often used before adequate data exist regarding their reliability and validity. Many researchers have drawn seemingly significant conclusions from the application of new measures, only to have subsequent studies contradict their findings (Cook et al., 1981).” One more example noted, “Much research on leadership and social power apparently took place before measurement quality was adequately investigated; one consequence of this state-of-affairs is that a substantial proportion of these large bodies of literature now appear uninterpretable or, at best, seriously compromised with respect to interpretability (Schriesheim, Powers, Scandura, Gardiner, & Lankau, 1993, p. 387).” Comparatively more recently, based on a comparison of some leadership motivation theories, Fry (2003, p. 716) noted, “This lack of specificity has resulted in a hodgepodge of empirical studies that, although reliable and valid, have diffused rather than focused theory building in this area.” Similarly, Fry, Vitucci, and Cedillo (2005, p. 857) expressed an assessment that “widely accepted and extensively researched theories of charismatic and transformational leadership ...” had “theoretical and measurement model mis-specification problems.” Thus, empirical findings in OB have several methodological limitations.

It may be noted that there are indications of greater rigor in top ranked journals as reflected in the increased extent of theory building and theory testing (e.g., Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007) found in the highly ranked *Academy of Management Journal* over the period and there have been advances in methods. However, such research in greater rigor (i.e., top ranked) journals and of recent times (i.e., using advanced methods) has come to be questioned (e.g., Pearce & Huang, 2012) in terms of its usefulness for teaching.

2.1.3.5. Low strength of associations captured in findings. The strength of associations between the variables under consideration is usually likely to be low in OB. For example, the average correlation between job satisfaction and performance, which is one of the extensively discussed associations in OB, is 0.3 (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). Such low correlations imply only occasionally occurring associations between the variables under consideration. Substantively, such findings indicate only a low level of definitiveness in the connections between the corresponding elements of the OB reality.

2.1.3.6. A finding represents a tiny fragment of the OB reality. Each empirical study typically examines only a small part of the multiple possible relationships existing among numerous elements of the overall organizational reality. This narrow focus in a single study, as though focusing on a small piece in a large puzzle, is consistent with Morgan's (1980) view that routine research is similar to puzzle-solving. Thus, the research findings from an individual empirical study seem to provide pieces of evidence that may constitute only tiny fragments of the overall OB reality. Each fragment has inadequacies coming from the limitations of the research process as discussed above and thus the fragments of individual empirical findings may represent a faint, distant, and approximated view of only a tiny part of the OB reality. One of the likely consequences of the puzzle-solving feature of routine research studies and the associated “faint, distant, and approximated view of only a tiny part of the OB reality” emerging from them can be possibly noted in a more recent observation of Burke and Rau (2010, p. 133) that management research is “esoteric and irrelevant.”

2.1.3.7. Limitations in integrating individual findings. While meta-analysis may help identify the average strength of a relationship by aggregating strengths of relationships across multiple studies, some limitations are associated with meta-analysis. Thus, Rynes, et al. (2007, p. 1001) noted, “although meta-analysis holds the promise of identifying ‘main’ or ‘average’ effects that can provide a basis for managerial action (Rousseau, 2006), concepts such as contingencies, configurations, complexity, ‘equifinality’, and trade-offs all raise questions about the extent to which ‘average’ findings can be usefully generalized.” Similarly, Rynes et al. (2007, p. 1003) noted another limitation of a meta-analysis as “Particular meta-analyses are often ‘islands in themselves.’ For example, competing meta-analyses are available that claim to show that (1) extrinsic rewards interfere with intrinsic motivation (e.g., Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1991) and that (2) on average, extrinsic rewards have beneficial effects, and the conditions under which extrinsic rewards interfere with intrinsic motivation are fairly rare in the workplace and easily avoided (e.g., Eisenberger & Cameron, 1996).” These assessments indicate that the extensively used technique of meta-analysis for synthesizing individual fragmentary empirical study findings has some limitations.

2.1.3.8. Difficulty in arriving at generalizations from individual empirical findings. Empirical findings are likely to be of significant use when they suggest some recurring regularities which potentially can take the form of principles or general laws. The need for developing principles from findings is reflected in a recent book by Locke (2000) which documents OB principles. That such comprehensive documentation of OB principles occurred in the year 2000 and it included a limited set of 29 principles possibly reflects the difficulty in arriving at principles or generalizations from OB empirical findings.

2.2. Limitations of the extent and quality of overall OB knowledge available

The above outlined limitations of the three individual OB knowledge content elements—concepts, theories, and empirical findings—are likely to have implications for the extent of overall knowledge available about the reality sought to be studied in OB. Various expressions in the literature indicate concerns about the limited extent and quality of knowledge available in OB. I outline below some such expressions from the existing literature.

Mitchell (1985, pp. 201–2) referred to the findings of an earlier survey of some members of Division 14 of American Psychological Association and noted that the respondents indicated considerable disagreement on a few issues. One such issue was about the extent to which we know about OB. One of the two opposing positions on this issue was “we have learned virtually nothing about organizational behavior” and Mitchell (1985, p. 201–2) noted that “numerous people took one side or the other on each point listed.” The discussion in Mitchell (1985, p. 201–2) suggests that the above mentioned position was taken by some survey respondents though some took an opposing position on the same issue. Another expression comes from Hinkin (1995, p. 967) who focused on the measurement aspect and noted, “Often scholars are left with the uncomfortable and somewhat embarrassing realization that results are inconclusive and that very little may actually be known about a particular topic.” Similarly, even as early as in 1959 and 1969, Bennis (1959, p. 260) and Locke (1969, p. 309) noted the inadequacy of knowledge available in the topics of leadership and job satisfaction respectively. Consistent with this, in one of the most recent OB research areas of workplace spirituality, Karakas (2010, p. 89) mentions having reviewed “about 140 articles on workplace spirituality”. Based on the review of about 140 articles, Karakas (2010, p. 100) noted, “There are still controversies around methodology, validity, rigor, and measurement of spirituality at workThe growing body of literature on spirituality at work has been criticized for being atheoretical and ungrounded (Fornaciari et al., 2003), as well as lacking rigor (Gibbons, 2000) and enough theory (Dent et al., 2005).”

While the above expressions refer to the extent of OB knowledge available, literature has expressed concerns also about the quality of OB knowledge. For example, Cummings (1978, p. 90) noted, “Our credibility with the managerial world is damaged when OB comes out in the executive programs as ‘a little of everything’, as ‘a combination of behavioral jargon and common sense’, or as ‘touchy–feely’ without content.” As another example, Prasad (1997, p. 213) recalled having received advice from teaching assistants that “Most students despised OB as being ‘fuzzy–wuzzy’ and a bit of a ‘blow-off’ course.” As yet another example, Pearce and Huang (2012, p. 248) noted, “The first author (Pearce, 2004) . . . had to rely on folk wisdom to teach experienced managers”.

The above noted views from the existing literature spanning over about 50 years (from year 1959–2012) and referring to the earliest OB research topics of job satisfaction and leadership and also to one of the most recent OB research topics of workplace spirituality have repeatedly expressed concerns about the limitations of the extent and quality of overall OB knowledge body. The earlier outlined limitations of the individual content elements—concepts, theories, and empirical findings—of OB knowledge and the resulting limitations of the extent and quality of overall OB knowledge pointed out in the preceding discussion are likely to give rise to certain issues in disseminating this OB knowledge body through OB teaching. I outline below some of such issues in OB teaching which are also summarized in Table 1.

3. Issues in teaching OB

The focus of the following discussion is on the professors of OB, referred to with the term “teacher–professor” or “teacher”, who possess a doctorate degree implying that they would have some training in and experience of doing research in OB. Further, the focus is on teaching OB at the undergraduate and MBA level.

In the earlier part of the paper, I drew upon the existing literature (e.g., Brown et al., 2013; Burke & Rau, 2010; Trank & Rynes, 2003) and pointed out that OB content/knowledge is a significant ingredient of OB teaching. Further, Burke and Rau (2010, pp. 133–4) suggest that management teaching involves transmitting knowledge that can guide implementation of interventions or actions in the real world organizations. Thus, in teaching OB one is required to provide to students a view of the OB reality that may guide them in understanding and responding to the reality of behavior in the real world organizations. This may require that the view provided in the classroom through OB teaching adequately describes the reality of organizational behavior and is coherent. However, the features of OB knowledge discussed in the preceding part may have limitations in providing such a valid and coherent view and may create some issues in transmitting the body of OB knowledge through teaching. I outline below and list in Table 1 some of such issues in OB teaching.

3.1. Issues emerging from the limitations of concepts and theories

3.1.1. Vagueness in the OB reality view provided by OB concepts

As pointed out earlier, there are multiple definitions for a single OB concept and the definitions have vagueness in them. The function of concepts is to provide cognitive clarity, but vagueness in concept definitions creates cognitive confusion (Locke, 2003). Thus, the vagueness of concept definitions can create difficulties for a researcher-teacher in developing clarity about the specific empirical aspects of the OB phenomena represented by OB concepts. As a result, a researcher-teacher will experience difficulties in providing cognitive clarity about OB phenomena to students through his/her OB teaching. The difficulty is likely to be compounded as the researcher-teacher may have to choose among multiple available definitions having varying degrees of vagueness. Being aware of the vital function of concepts in parsimoniously depicting the aspects of

the empirical world and also being aware of the vagueness and multiplicity of concept definitions and the resulting difficulties in OB teaching noted above, a researcher-teacher is likely to experience less than adequate comfort and confidence in using OB concepts in his/her teaching.

3.1.2. *Incoherent view of the OB reality through multiple and conflicting theories*

Another content element in OB knowledge body is OB theories. The function of theories is to provide a simplified representation of the empirical world, to parsimoniously organize the representation, and to communicate such representation (e.g., [Bacharach, 1989](#)). However, as pointed out earlier, OB theories have limitations. These include existence of several theories of a single phenomenon, contradictions among theories, conflicting predictions of different theories, and a lack of high level of validity and usefulness for many theories. Such limitations of OB theories are likely to create difficulties for a researcher-teacher in developing a clear, coherent, and definitive view of the empirical OB phenomena these theories seek to represent.

Consequently, s/he is also likely to experience difficulties in communicating, with the aid of OB theories, a clear, coherent, and definitive view of the OB reality to students. That such issues are likely to be faced by a researcher-teacher because of the limitations of OB theories seems plausible when one considers [Locke's \(2000\)](#) view that even textbooks' attempts to transmit learning through OB theories face difficulties. Specifically, [Locke \(2000, p. xvi\)](#) noted, "Textbooks, for example, typically list dozens of theories about each subtopic but do little to integrate the 'pieces' into an intelligible whole. The students who read these books (typically undergraduates) therefore come away from the course with a half-memorized jumble of disconnected and often contradictory ideas which are soon forgotten. MBAs who are assigned textbook readings no doubt wonder how they could possibly use such material to run a successful business." This negative OB learning experience for students is likely to be influenced by the limitations of OB theories that textbooks attempt to use in transmitting the OB knowledge.

3.2. *Issues emerging from the limitations of empirical findings*

3.2.1. *Inadequately unified view of the OB reality from empirical findings scattered in individual studies*

A researcher-teacher, by virtue of his/her research training, is likely to be aware of the difference between an empirical fact and a conjecture. As a result, s/he is unlikely to be inclined to use conjectures, either his/her own or derived from the concepts and theories in OB knowledge body, in his/her OB teaching. Thus, s/he would be inclined to draw upon the OB empirical findings in his/her OB teaching. Such reliance on using empirical findings is also consistent with the evidence-based management approach to teaching (e.g., [Erez & Grant, 2014](#)). However, in light of the large number of individual research studies in any particular topic area (e.g., about 5000 published articles and dissertations in some way related to job satisfaction noted in [Fisher \[2000, p. 185\]](#)), it may not be possible for a teacher to know every relevant finding on every topic. This difficulty magnifies when one considers that there are several topics within OB. A researcher-teacher's awareness of the infeasibility of accessing every empirical finding on an OB topic is likely to impair his/her confidence in his/her understanding of the OB topic because, as pointed out earlier, new findings could at times qualify or even contradict the earlier ones. Thus, a researcher-teacher, uncomfortable in conveying conjectures and consequently inclined to transmit empirical facts, may not be able to develop a comprehensive and coherent view of the OB reality based on his/her review of empirical findings scattered in a large number of individual studies in an OB topic area.

3.2.2. *Doubts about the OB reality view provided by individual empirical findings with methodological limitations*

As outlined earlier, findings from an individual research article have their associated limitations coming from the research process steps such as measurement and research design. A researcher-teacher, because of his/her training in and practice of OB research, is likely to be aware of these limitations and also of the resulting inadequacies of such findings in representing the reality of an OB phenomenon. This awareness is likely to create doubts for a researcher-teacher in using individual bits of OB empirical findings in OB teaching.

3.2.3. *Inadequate confidence in the ob reality view developed from empirical findings with low levels of support*

As discussed earlier, the level of empirical support for some of the relationships specified in OB is low. A researcher-teacher would know that such low correlations indicate only modest strength of association among the elements in the actual OB reality. Thus, a researcher-teacher would have inadequate confidence in such findings being reflective of the existence of relationships among the corresponding elements in the actual OB reality.

3.2.4. *Lack of a direct experience through empirical findings*

To a researcher-teacher, empirical findings may not provide a direct experience of the reality. Typical research in quantitative or positivistic approach, in which hypotheses are derived deductively from premises and tested through data collected on a select few variables through questionnaires, may keep the researcher-teacher from being exposed to the actual empirical reality of the OB phenomenon. A likely reflection of this is contained in [Lundberg's \(1976, p. 5\)](#) view about the then emerging trend in OB of valuing "methodological rigor and precision" over "phenomenological significance." In a somewhat similar vein, [Weick \(1989, p. 519, 524\)](#) noted that the link between concepts and their observables is likely to be loose. Concepts are the source of variables which are the observable counterparts of concept and variables get interlinked in the hypotheses (e.g., [Bacharach, 1989](#)). Thus, though a hypothesis specifies the relationship between variables, at a higher level of abstraction in a

theory it is linked to the relationship between concepts termed as a proposition (e.g., [Bacharach, 1989](#)). As the empirical findings are results of testing hypotheses which in turn are derived from the relationships between concepts (propositions), empirical findings reflect the actual reality filtered through the concepts. Thus, the looseness of concept-observable link (e.g., [Weick, 1989](#)) is likely to impair the actual reality content in the empirical findings. As a result, having a direct experience of an aspect of the actual OB reality would not be feasible based on the OB empirical findings. A researcher-teacher will be aware of this and thus may experience tentativeness in communicating in his/her teaching a clear and coherent view of the OB reality based on empirical findings.

3.2.5. *Inadequate clarity from empirical findings*

A researcher typically does his/her own research only in one or a few topic areas. This is exemplified in the work of several OB scholars. For example, Professor Gary Yukl (e.g., [Yukl, 1971, 2006](#)) has worked in the topic of leadership and related areas for about three decades. Thus, a researcher develops a deeper understanding in a few topic areas partly because of his/her exclusive focus on those areas and because of his/her close familiarity with the empirical findings in those few areas. However, for OB topic areas other than his/her own research topic area, s/he needs to develop an understanding on the basis of the empirical findings from other researchers' studies available in the literature. Thus, in these other topic areas, s/he is unlikely to have as deep understanding as possessed in his/her own topic areas of research. As a result, merely because of having developed greater clarity of understanding in his/her own area of research and having acquired the sensitivity to detect different gradations of clarity, a researcher-teacher is likely to realize that his/her understanding of other topics is less clear than his/her understanding of his/her research topic area. This realization could weaken his/her confidence in teaching OB contents in topic areas other than his/her own research topic areas. The likely implications of this inadequate clarity in topic areas other than one's topic area for a researcher-teacher or an academic professor become significant when certain distinct orientations of academic professors are noted. The orientations of academic professors are reflected in [Markides \(2007, p. 764\)](#) who notes, "Academics value a carefully crafted argument that builds upon the existing literature, is supported empirically through careful data collection and rigorous analysis, and adds incrementally to the body of knowledge." Similarly, [Lee \(2009, p. 196\)](#) notes that academic professors are "good at deliberative, thorough, and slow thought processes. We take years, for example, to develop ideas, to design and conduct studies to test these ideas, and to improve upon our original ideas based on our empirical findings, while trying to publish our research in prestigious journals." Academic professors' such orientation and their awareness of relatively inadequate clarity in topic areas other than their own research topic areas, emerging from the OB knowledge features outlined above, is likely to weaken their confidence in teaching OB contents in topic areas other than their own research topic areas.

3.2.6. *Inadequacy of OB textbooks as an aid for integrating empirical findings*

OB textbooks could be an aid for a researcher-teacher for developing an adequate understanding in topic areas other than his/her own research topic areas. Textbooks potentially can become such an aid because they could include, evaluate, and synthesize a large volume of empirical studies in each OB topic area. Textbooks, however, in practice have limitations in becoming such an aid as outlined below.

OB textbooks attempt to present a view of the reality associated with a topic by drawing upon several research studies available on the topic. However, the textbooks may not comprehensively cover all relevant empirical findings on each topic. Let us consider an example here of the self-esteem trait. In describing the personality trait of self-esteem, not all OB textbooks emphasize all the negative aspects of it. However, [Paloutzian, Emmons, and Keortge \(2003\)](#) note some empirical findings that indicate certain negative aspects of the self-esteem trait. In this specific example, a teacher's not being exposed to this set of findings because of their omission in an OB textbook and thus his/her not considering these in teaching the self-esteem trait may equip him/her with an inadequate view of the OB reality on this topic.

Furthermore, not all OB textbooks necessarily undertake a critical evaluation of research in every OB topic area before deciding what contents to include as OB knowledge. Let us consider an example of the "power bases" topic. [Podsakoff and Schriesheim's \(1985, p. 387\)](#) article that reviewed "power bases" began by noting that "undoubtedly, among the most popular and widely accepted conceptualizations of social power is the five-fold typology developed by French and Raven in 1959 ... a survey of the authors' bookshelves disclosed that it was included in every survey textbook in the areas of organizational behavior and social psychology!" [Podsakoff and Schriesheim \(1985, p. 409\)](#), however, concluded their review by paradoxically noting, "on the basis of this review, it might be argued that an adequate examination of the French and Raven (1959) conceptualization has yet to be conducted, and that much more research is badly needed in this domain. Although the French and Raven framework remains highly popular, the existing research does not support drawing confident conclusions about such things as relations between the five power bases and subordinate outcome variables." This example illustrates that textbooks may include contents whose empirical validity is in doubt in the available empirical research. The issue being addressed here becomes more serious when one notes that power bases is only one of the several aspects within the single OB topic of power and influence; and there are many such topics in OB. Consistent with the above illustration, [Rousseau \(2006, p. 263\)](#) and [Rynes et al. \(2007, p. 987\)](#) also have noted the limitations of textbooks in covering research findings.

The above outlined issues in OB teaching and the earlier discussed limiting features of OB content elements from which these issues emerge are listed in [Table 1](#). In the next section, I outline the conclusions and research and practice implications evolving from the preceding discussion.

4. Conclusions

4.1. Constructive orientation of this paper

The existing literature has noted that usefulness of management research for teaching has decreased (Pearce & Huang, 2012), there is a gap between research and teaching (e.g., Burke & Rau, 2010), and the reduced research content in OB courses has impaired the access of business students and managers to OB research (Rousseau, 2006, p. 262). Thus, a relevant task is to identify the possible reasons for the research-teaching gap noted in these varied expressions from the existing literature. This paper's contribution comes from addressing this necessary task by examining one of the relatively unexplored aspects in OB teaching—the limitations of research-generated OB knowledge and the resulting issues in OB teaching.

In doing this task, if this paper reveals some inadequacies in OB knowledge base and the resulting certain troubling issues in OB teaching then it may be important to note, rather than ignore, such aspects in light of the somewhat serious situation in OB noted about a decade ago by Rynes et al. (2003, p. 277) as “a palpable lack of perceived legitimacy of behavioral coursework in management education” suggesting that “we have failed to legitimate the knowledge base of behavioral management to two of our most important constituencies, recruiters and students.” The problem indicated by Rynes et al. (2003, p. 277) is likely to be persisting as reflected in the review of management research by Pearce and Huang (2012) who noted that management research has decreased in its usefulness for both teaching and practice. Thus, though this paper points out inadequacies in the research-generated knowledge in OB and the resulting issues in OB teaching, it has a constructive orientation in indicating the need for addressing certain issues to ultimately more adequately fulfill the OB teaching requirement of transmitting OB knowledge through OB teaching. This focus of the present paper and the constructive link of it to improving OB teaching and reducing research-teaching gap in OB are outlined in Fig. 1.

Consistent with the above outlined constructive orientation of the paper, two aspects may be noted. First, because of the above constructive purpose, this paper deliberately focused on only the limiting features of OB knowledge so that the teaching issues emerging from them can be identified in this paper and addressed in the future research as depicted in the framework in Fig. 1. This focus on only the limiting features required by the paper's constructive purpose, however, does not imply that there are no positive features associated with the OB knowledge. Thus, the limiting features identified in the paper do not reflect the failure of the OB as a discipline. Second, this paper identifies the limiting features of OB knowledge and links them to the resulting OB teaching issues but does not at all suggest that these limiting features of OB knowledge come from the limitations of individual researchers. Indeed, it needs to be acknowledged that factors such as the challenges of doing research in social sciences of which OB is a part and the constraints in carrying out the research process are likely to give rise to the limiting features of OB knowledge. Reflecting an acknowledgment of such constraining factors, this paper has not attributed these limiting features to any factors and clearly bounded its focus within the framework in Fig. 1 in order to focus only on identifying the limiting features of OB knowledge so that the resulting teaching issues can be described and constructively addressed.

4.2. Implications for future research

The discussion in this paper suggests some directions for future research. First, not all topic areas within OB are likely to have similar levels of content limitations discussed in this paper. For example, content features such as the number of theories, conflicting assumptions of theories, and inconsistent predictions of theories are likely to vary across OB topics. Conducting research to assess the extent of content limitations in different specific OB topic areas is one direction for future research.

Second, within a particular topic area (e.g., work motivation), not all theories are likely to have similar levels of adequacy in terms of their providing contents for OB teaching. Thus, relative adequacy of various OB theories within each major OB topic can be assessed on multiple dimensions beyond the validity and usefulness dimensions for theory assessment included in Miner (1984, 2003). These additional theory assessment dimensions could include the extent of conflict of a theory's assumptions and predictions with other theories and goodness of a theory in terms of goodness attributes outlined by Bacharach (1989).

Third, the extent to which OB teachers actually experience the OB teaching issues outlined in this paper can be empirically examined in future research. Some teachers may experience such OB teaching issues more intensely than others and their experiences may change over the period of their careers. For example, Professor Victor Vroom, a renowned researcher who formulated the expectancy theory of motivation, has described how his strong research orientation and his awareness of the limitations of the expectancy theory had caused some adverse teaching experiences for him during some phase of his teaching. Specifically, Vroom (2007, p. 366) notes, “Perhaps I knew too much about the intricacies of Expectancy Theory—its warts and unresolved problems—to teach it effectively.” Vroom (2007, p. 367) further notes, “as a researcher I had acquired a spirit of caution in making statements about the world” Vroom (2007) also describes how he eventually overcame such difficulties. This example indicates that different OB teachers are likely to experience the OB teaching issues to differing levels and these experiences may change over the different periods of their teaching careers. Research to examine such different patterns of experiences emerging from the OB teaching issues and their dynamic pattern over a period in OB teachers' careers is another future research direction that emerges from this paper.

Fourth, if teachers actually experience the OB teaching issues outlined in this paper, then there are likely to be implications of those experiences for teachers such as reduced well-being. For example, Aldrich's (1997, p. 25) discussion in his essay "My Career as a Teacher" suggests that the failure in teaching could impair a teacher's well-being. Thus, a relevant direction for future research is to identify the implications of the teaching issues faced by OB teachers for their sense of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and well-being.

Fifth, future research also needs to extend this paper's work by identifying other features of research-generated OB knowledge that constitute additional limiting features of OB knowledge and other issues, beyond the issues outlined in this paper, in OB teaching emerging from such additionally identified limiting features. Sixth, future research also needs to empirically examine and document actions various teachers adopt to deal with these OB teaching issues and also specify effective actions for dealing with these issues.

Finally, while positivistic approach, usually termed as quantitative research, and interpretive approach, usually termed as qualitative research, are the two main approaches to organizational research (e.g., Lee, 1999), the quantitative approach to research is more prominent than the qualitative approach in OB. For example, Bansal and Corely (2011, p. 234) note that out of the total articles published in the *Academy of Management Journal* from year 2001–2010, "over 11% of articles were based exclusively on qualitative data" and mention that in the preceding period this figure was much lower. Thus, in light of the limiting features of OB knowledge and the resulting OB teaching issues described in this paper, a relevant direction for future research is to examine the extent to which the limiting features of OB knowledge come from the dominant positivistic approach to research.

Thus, this paper opens up several interrelated directions for future research to pursue. Such future research may address some of the components outlined in Fig. 1 and facilitate more adequate transmission of OB knowledge through OB teaching.

4.3. Implications for practice

As a practice implication, this paper may induce OB teachers to reflect about their own experiences of these issues in their OB teaching and about the features of OB knowledge that give rise to these issues. This reflection may help OB teachers to understand and manage their OB teaching experiences.

Another practice implication of this paper is that it may suggest a need for actions to devise and implement solutions that may improve the practice of OB teaching by addressing the issues associated with OB teaching. This could occur at various levels – institutional level or individual level of OB teachers—as outlined below.

First, guidelines could be developed to facilitate the delivery of OB contents based on the features of OB contents in specific topics or the features of the overall OB contents. For example, based on his assessment of the limitations of motivation theories, Pinder (1977) made some suggestions for teaching motivation theories. Such topic-specific teaching approach adoption by OB teachers could be one action for dealing with some of the OB teaching issues outlined in this paper. As another example, Miner (2003) evaluated 73 OB theories and based on the evaluation provided some suggestions for OB teaching. Along the lines of the suggestions for teaching of motivation theories in particular (Pinder, 1977) and OB theories in general (Miner, 2003) available in the literature, developing guidelines for actions to improve OB teaching by addressing the OB teaching issues outlined in this paper is another practice implication coming from this paper.

Second, though knowledge/content and reflection/experience are two elements of OB, the content element remains the main part of OB teaching (Brown et al., 2013). Thus, an OB teaching approach that emphasizes the content element is likely to be affected more by the limiting features of the OB knowledge and the OB teaching issues are likely to manifest more intensely in such an approach. Consider the example of the evidence-based management (EBM) approach. Based on a review of "more than 800 required management course syllabi from 333 programs" in the USA, Charlier, Brown, and Rynes (2011, p. 222) noted that "approximately 25% of core MBA management courses utilize EBM in some form" and that "Evidence-based management-consistent syllabi are most prevalent at the MBA level in organizational behavior." Some features of this EBM approach are reflected in Rousseau and McCarthy (2007, p. 85) who note that "The first principle in *evidence-based teaching* is to educate people in principles founded upon a convergent body of research...principles based on evidence are the basis for procedures that translate these principles into action" (emphasis added). Similarly, Erez and Grant (2014, p. 104) suggest that in this approach educators need to focus on teaching evidence-based management. These features of this teaching approach suggest that it is likely to require considerable reliance on the OB contents. Thus, this teaching approach is more likely to be affected by the limiting features of OB knowledge and by the resulting OB teaching issues than other OB teaching approaches that have less emphasis on the scientific evidence/content.

By implication, OB teaching approaches that have different levels of relative emphasis on knowledge/content and reflection/experience elements may be affected to a differing extent by the limiting features OB knowledge. Literature has noted the existence of various teaching approaches such as the above mentioned evidence-based management (EBM) approach (e.g., Rousseau, 2006), practical OB education (PROBE) approach (e.g., Shaw, Fisher, & Southey, 1999), experiential learning approach (e.g., Kayes, 2002), problem-based learning approach (e.g., Sherwood, 2004), and learning-centered teaching approach (e.g., Whetten, 2007). Such approaches could be viewed as having differing levels of relative emphasis on knowledge/content and reflection/experience elements. Thus, one implication for practice that this paper yields is to explore OB teaching approaches in which the relative emphasis on knowledge/content and reflection/experience elements is such that they can more effectively deal with the limiting features of OB knowledge and the resulting OB teaching issues. This practice implication would require explorations at the institutional level for devising teaching approaches, guidelines,

training, and faculty support frameworks. This practice implication would also require actions at the level of individual teachers for customizing and implementing such OB teaching approaches that may be devised at the institutional level.

Third, exploration of various institutional level administrative actions to address the OB teaching issues is another practice implication. For example, institutionally devising appropriate faculty recruitment and development systems to enable the faculty to deal with the limiting features of OB knowledge and the resulting teaching issues could be one possible action. Literature (e.g., Vermeulen, 2007) has provided some suggestions on how faculty members can do relevant research and bring their research into their classroom teaching. Such drawing upon one's own research-generated knowledge could be one way of at least partly dealing with the limiting features of OB knowledge and the resulting teaching issues. Systematic exploration and design of such actions from an institutional level is another practice implication brought out by this paper.

Fourth, as in the present period the relevance and usefulness of management research is being both questioned (e.g., Pearce & Huang, 2012) and defended (e.g., Peng & Dess, 2010) and the resulting debate is touching upon aspects such as the nature and role of research, teaching, and institutions, the OB teaching issues outlined in this paper are likely to acquire greater significance. Thus, an additional implication for practice is to explore institutional policies and structures to facilitate OB research that is more useful to OB teaching which itself may be influenced by factors such as likely information overload and the changing proportion of face-to-face teaching.

Thus, the practice implications emerging out of this paper focus on individual level in terms of OB teachers' reflection on their experience of these teaching issues in order to understand and manage their teaching experiences emerging from these issues. The practice implications also focus on the institutional level actions for exploring, devising, and encouraging teaching approaches that can effectively deal with the limiting features of OB knowledge and the resulting teaching issues and also for adopting various practices such as faculty development to facilitate their dealing with the OB teaching issues.

4.4. A way ahead: acknowledge OB knowledge limitations and address OB teaching issues rather than blame OB teachers

The above outlined future research directions and practice implications of reflection and actions among OB teachers are likely to be important in light of the research-teaching gap noted by scholars (e.g., Burke & Rau, 2010). Moreover, the research-teaching gap prevents students and managers from having adequate research-based knowledge inputs and thus leads to research-practice gap (e.g., Burke & Rau, 2010, p. 141). In this context, Rousseau (2006, p. 262) suggested that "Professors like me and the programs in which we teach must accept a large measure of blame ... Research evidence is not the central focus of study for undergraduate business students, MBAs, or executives in continuing education programs."

This paper acknowledges the serious situation of inadequate research knowledge transmission in teaching, implications of this for students (e.g., Burke & Rau, 2010; Rousseau, 2006), and the likely accountability of OB teachers in this. However, the discussion in this paper and the resulting research directions and practice implications suggest that rather than blaming the professors (the OB teachers) it may be appropriate to identify the specific limiting features of OB knowledge and the issues they create for OB teachers in OB teaching so that ways can be explored to address those issues for more adequate transmission of OB knowledge in teaching. Thus, this paper may, as reflected in Fig. 1, constructively shift away the focus from blaming OB teachers to acknowledging the limitations of research-generated OB knowledge and the resulting OB teaching issues (Table 1) and to helping teachers to cope with these issues. And in order to facilitate such constructive future research and practice efforts, this paper has provided several future research implications and practice implications.

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