Industrial and Organizational Psychology (2025), **18**, 195–200
doi:10.1017/iop.2025.13

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

COMMENTARY

Bridging the academic–practice gap through big team science initiatives

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Engaged scholarship provides a valuable opportunity for academics and practitioners to collaborate and bridge the academic–practitioner (A–P) gap (Voss et al., 2025). To address the limitations of engaged scholarship, we propose scholars should explore alternative collaborative approaches, such as big team science initiatives (BTSIs). BTSIs are expansive, coordinated efforts that bring together multiple researchers, institutions, and often funding agencies to tackle scientific problems or research questions (Hall et al., 2018; Kreamer et al., 2024). These initiatives are defined by their ambitious objectives, extensive collaboration, and shared resources, expertise, and data. BTSIs aim to advance scientific understanding, address practical challenges, and achieve breakthroughs beyond the reach of smaller scale projects (see Forscher et al., 2023). Although BTSIs are uncommon in industrial and organizational (I-O) psychology, numerous scientific fields have advanced their research through BTSIs (see, for example, ManyLabs; Klein et al., 2018).

First, and importantly, we argue that various research teams can address the A–P gap, including academic-only teams. Although we agree with Voss et al., that collaborating with practitioners through engaged scholarship is one way to close the A–P gap, we acknowledge that it is not the only solution. In fact, we contend that relying on academic–practitioner partnerships to close the A–P gap absolves academics from their role in producing research with meaningful practical implications. Furthermore, we argue that although relevance may be one component of useful research that practitioners can influence, factors such as generalizability and credibility also contribute to research's usefulness—two things that BTSIs, especially academic BTSIs, can directly address. Although research-trained practitioners can contribute to these aspects, academics can address generalizability and credibility regardless of practitioner collaboration. Thus, academics cannot rely upon the partnerships forged through engaged scholarship to close the A–P gap. Instead, they must use the tools and structures that are readily available to them.

That said, BTSIs can (and do) encourage valuable collaborations between academics and practitioners. In fact, we are not the first to make this suggestion: for example, Castille and colleagues (2022) introduced their concept of "ManyOrgs," a large-scale collaborative initiative linking academics and practitioners to address I-O science questions. Although BTSIs generally consist of academic partnerships, BTSIs can be "created and managed by individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds and levels of training" (Baumgartner et al., 2023, p. 2), and other fields have utilized BTSIs across academic *and* industry settings (e.g., Voelkel et al., 2024). These initiatives involve practitioners as essential partners, ensuring research is scientifically rigorous and practically relevant. Practitioners also gain significant benefits from engaging in BTSIs, including greater access to research, shared resources, and expertise, while influencing agendas to ensure practical, real-world outcomes.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2025.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Overall, BTSIs can play an important role in closing the A–P gap because they (a) help to address issues such as generalizability and credibility that threaten the usefulness of research, (b) address several limitations of engaged scholarship, and (c) though not necessary, can reduce the barriers to academic–practitioner partnerships in research. Below, we focus on three key challenges of engaged scholarship presented by Voss et al. and discuss how BTSIs can help address these challenges: (a) lack of training and incentives, (b) obstacles to scientific integrity, and (c) limited generalizability of findings. See Table 1 for a summary of these obstacles and the value of BTSIs in addressing the A–P gap.

Challenge 1: Lack of training and incentives

Voss et al. highlight the limited resources and training available to academic researchers pursuing engaged scholarship. A major challenge in forming applied partnerships is initiating the process—generating leads for collaborative projects, establishing trusted relationships with organizations, and creating stakeholder buy-in. This involves networking to identify key stakeholders who can approve projects and aligning collaborative research with the organization's strategic plan. However, most I-O programs lack formal training focused on developing these skills, limiting I-O researchers' attempts to secure leads and form partnerships within organizations. Additionally, although A–P projects typically don't require more time than traditional research, concerns about potential career impacts and distractions from perceived critical tasks can deter participation (Banks et al., 2016). In light of this, many junior faculty prioritize what they see as "safe" for publishing in top-tier journals and stick to widely accepted methods such as survey and experimental designs, often relying on samples from undergraduate students or crowdsourced participants.

BTSIs can address training limitations and concerns about the value of engaged scholarship in several ways. First, BTSIs can pool resources such as training and expertise across individuals, institutions, and organizations. For example, if one I-O graduate program offers training on identifying key stakeholders for collaborations, that knowledge can be leveraged within the larger collaborative effort. As team size increases, so does the likelihood that some team members will possess the necessary skills to secure leads, identify stakeholders, and network effectively. BTSIs can also foster informal peer learning/mentoring, enabling less experienced team members to learn from an "expert" networker on the team.

Second, BTSIs can incentivize researchers by using team collaboration to shorten project timelines. Each team member brings unique skills and knowledge, allowing tasks to be divided based on expertise, which can accelerate the research process. For instance, different researchers can focus on data collection, analysis, and managing stakeholder communications. This division of labor allows tasks that would typically be sequential (e.g., designing two different studies) to be completed simultaneously. Additionally, large teams (e.g., 10 or more collaborators) are more likely to generate research that is high impact in terms of reach and citation count (Wu et al., 2019). Accelerating the research process and the promise of higher impact could encourage junior faculty to participate in BTSIs, helping them meet their tenure and promotion requirements more efficiently.

Challenge 2: Obstacles to scientific integrity

Voss et al. acknowledge the challenge of balancing scientific integrity with organizational and strategic demands, as competing interests can affect academics and practitioners. For example, the goals and priorities of organizational leaders can significantly influence the design and direction of research. As a result, the study's design might be tailored to meet specific business objectives rather than adhering to rigorous scientific standards. Similarly, academic researchers may face

https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2025.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2025.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1. Challenges, Big Team Science Initiative (BTSI) Solutions, and Value in Bridging the Academic–Practitioner Gap

Challenge of engaged scholarship	How BTSIs address challenge	Additional value added to addressing A–P Gap
Challenge 1: Lack of training and incentives		
– Graduate programs often neglect teaching skills helpful for finding and securing buy-in for collaborative research, such as networking with key stakeholders and aligning projects with organizational goals. – Incentive structures within academia can discourage scholars from pursuing engaged scholarship.	– Providing opportunities to learn collaboration skills and how to secure buy-in through observation and peer mentoring across multiple research teams. – Potential for increased research efficiency by sharing the workload among researchers – Potential for higher impact research.	– The connections built in A–P collaborations help to introduce both academics and practitioners to new ideas that help close the A–P gap. – When BTSIs converge with A–P partnerships, larger cross-disciplinary networks are formed, thus diffusion of ideas can happen on a larger scale, having a stronger impact on reducing the A–P gap.
Challenge 2: Obstacles to scientific integrity		
Difficulty balancing scientific integrity with the necessary compromises to meet organizational goals. – Researchers often value transparency and data sharing (e.g., the open science movement), whereas practitioners may prioritize protecting sensitive information due to confidentiality or competitive advantage.	– Research design decisions that relate to scientific integrity are outlined in collaboration agreements – No single organization and/or institution has undue influence on research design decisions – Organizational anonymity in BTSIs reduces the incentive for organizations to protect data – BTSIs have many researchers who provide oversight	Flaws in academic research could contribute to the A–P gap. To the extent that BTSIs strengthen scientific integrity and increase the credibility of academic research, they should reduce the A–P gap. – OSPs and transparency are hallmarks of BTSIs; therefore, scientific integrity is typically prioritized.
Challenge 3: limited generalizability of findings		
– Conducting research within a single organization can limit generalizability as the research question may be tailored to its unique context and challenges within that organization. – Limited diversity reduces the applicability of results to other settings, making findings highly specialized and less transferable.	– Studies involve multiple institutions or research sites to increase the diversity of participants, research settings, and methods. – Sharing of resources, data, and expertise to ensure findings are based on a wide range of evidence. – Encouraging cross-disciplinary collaboration, considering diverse perspectives and methodologies. – Investigating large-scale problems that extend beyond single organizations	– A contributing factor to the A–P gap could be the context-dependence of academic research. BTSIs use of more diverse samples that result in higher generalizability – Ability to conduct research across multiple sites may also include multiple countries and industries, increasing the generalizability of research as well as exploring I-O theories in diverse research settings; this is especially relevant for academic-only BTSI teams.

pressure to produce favorable results to secure ongoing funding or future collaboration opportunities. These competing interests could limit the credibility of research findings and threaten scientific integrity if not addressed.

To address these challenges, BTSIs incorporate certain practices to increase the scientific integrity of research projects. Broadly, the social sciences have led to the large-scale adoption of open science practices (OSPs) such as preregistering hypotheses and methods and sharing data and materials (Castille et al., 2022) to bolster scientific integrity. However, there are barriers to adopting OSPs when attempting to partake in engaged scholarship (e.g., organizations' hesitation to share data or withholding the reporting of certain analyses for proprietary reasons). These limitations often stem from the difficulty of maintaining anonymity when organizational members of engaged scholarship teams serve as coauthors. Lemoine (2023) suggested that researchers could address such concerns by assuring anonymity when negotiating access to field data. However, as researchers move from negotiating field data access to conducting engaged research, these anonymity assurances may create obstacles to implementing OSPs. BTSIs can address this limitation in several ways.

First, several examples of BTSIs such as the Psych Science Accelerator (Moshontz et al., 2018) and the Advancement of Replication Initiative in Management (ARIM) demonstrate how BTSIs typically operate with a collaboration agreement. These agreements establish guidelines for sharing data and materials upfront, enabling stakeholders to clarify what they are willing to share before research begins and helping researchers identify the best ways to transparently share their findings. Furthermore, because BTSIs collect data from many sources, they are not reliant on a single organization positioned to drive how OSPs are embraced. Because data come from multiple sources, assurances of anonymity are strengthened, thus organizations have less incentive to push back against OSPs.

Additionally, there are a variety of OSPs that can be adopted in addition to data or analysis sharing; for example, in BTSIs, many scientists actively observe processes and provide feedback on their implementation. This collective involvement increases oversight: identifying issues early, ensuring greater accountability, and maintaining the integrity of the research process. By strengthening the credibility of science through the structured use of OSPs, BTSIs may also help to reduce the A–P gap as credible science should be more relevant to practice and research application (Kreamer et al., 2024).

Challenge 3: Llimited generalizability of findings

Voss et al. note the tension during engaged scholarship regarding whether the priority should be generating scientific knowledge or identifying solutions to organizational problems. As academics and practitioners work together, research questions are bound to become more customized to the organization's specific challenges, potentially limiting the generalizability of the question/s being investigated. Moreover, to reduce the burden on employees participating in research, organizational partners may request that some items within validated scales be reworded or removed from a survey, which makes comparison with prior research (or replication) more challenging. Furthermore, simply focusing on a specific context may limit the generalizability of findings.

BTSIs help mitigate concerns about the generalizability of findings in several notable ways where engaged scholarship is unable to do so. Primarily, BTSIs address research questions in a variety of settings and using many tools. BTSIs can tackle large-scale projects that impact many organizations, conducting research across various settings rather than limiting themselves to a single study within one specific organization. By uniting researchers from various disciplines and institutions, BTSIs can explore the same research questions using multiple methodologies. This approach allows for comprehensive testing and validation of findings in different contexts, increasing their relevance and applicability. BTSIs can also

https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2025.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

facilitate diversity, as their large team size lends itself to diverse teams (which can include academics and practitioners). For example, ARIM has collaborators in more than 20 universities across three continents. One of ARIM's projects currently has 35 collaborators and has collected more than a dozen samples, including undergraduate students, graduate students, working professionals, and crowdsourced samples (i.e., CloudResearch, Prolific). The project has utilized multiple variations of a research design to understand how contextual variations influence our understanding of previously established relationships. Such an approach would be impossible without a big team and it addresses generalizability in a way that a single partnership cannot.

Concluding remarks

We agree with Voss et al. that engaged scholarship offers unique value to I-O psychologists, having the potential to advance our science's development, practicality, and credibility. However, rather than treating A–P partnerships as the "gold standard," we argue that engaged scholarship should be "one quiver in the quill" for I-O psychologists. We acknowledge various limitations with engaged scholarship—for example, lack of training and incentives, obstacles to scientific integrity, limited generalizability of findings—and argue that BTSIs can help address these limitations, thereby serving as another quiver in that same quill.

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Cite this article: Kreamer, L., Obenauer, W. G., & Cobb, H. R. (2025). Bridging the academic–practice gap through big team science initiatives. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* **18**, 195–200. https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2025.13

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