The Relevance and Role of Interdisciplinarity in Asia Pacific Studies and Publications ©

Introduction
There is a growing cacophony from clarion calls for greater ‘interdisciplinarity’ (ID) in academic thought, research and publications. This is from a variety of sources, both institutional (some universities, funding bodies) as well as professional (some academics). This is an easy call to make, but implementation and practice are certainly not so. Yet, such ideas are not new and this mantra is occurring while some disciplines seem to be moving in the opposite direction, ie building ever more exclusive, impervious and higher barriers in more hermetically sealed ‘silos’ in the name of ‘quality’, ‘rigour’ or ‘scientific enquiry’.

This overview of ID covers several aspects. This includes: why calls for ID are popular, what ID means and definitions, where we might be with ID, publishing ID work as this is *primes inter pares* to the likelihood of substantive developments, which links to issues in ID. Finally, the relevance and role of ID for Asia Pacific studies and publications broadly and more narrowly are covered.

Why Is The Call For ID So Popular?
Some commentators (eg Klein, 1990; 1996; Rhoten and Parker, 2004) are highly committed to ID for several reasons. One is that phenomena can only be seen in partial ways dependent on which disciplinary lens, with its boundaries, is used. This is shown in the example in Table 1. This partiality and bias situation is exacerbated as increasingly complex problems cannot be dealt with by mono-disciplinary approaches. Indeed, there are “…a common set of questions that would require a willingness to transcend the usual disciplinary boundaries if answers were to be forthcoming” (Miiller and Page, 2007:xvii). Indeed, even within the area of work and society “…different disciplines can illuminate discussions in valuable and unexpected ways…” (Grugulis et al, 2012:8). Another example is industrial relations, with very different views of the same events and issues, ie strikes, which can be seen from unitarist, pluralist or radical perspectives, each with its own distinctive causes, theories, dynamics, consequences, etc.
ID can be seen within some other debates. For example, ID is within calls for papers to be more less narrow and connected more to wider social science (eg Edwards, 2011; Khapova and Arthur, 2011) or part of the mission of some journals, such as Work, Employment and Society, calling for articles from geography, history, social anthropology, etc (Grugulis et al, 2012). Yet, to what extent these articles are actually ID rather than from ‘outside’ disciplines, is a moot point. For example, Chudzikowski and Maryhofer (2011) cover the role of ‘grand theory’, developing a broad framework of ‘five touchstones’: context; structure and agency; boundaries; dynamics; methods. Such perspectives may be reflecting or rediscovering the halcyon days of social science in the 20th century. Some examples will be noted next.

From the 1920s there was Von Bertalanffy, a biologist whose organismic conception of biology was known as ‘open systems theory’, which came to pervade many disciplines. Veblen (1919) was one of the first to apply evolutionary ideas to economics and developed ideas of ‘path dependency’ and ‘cumulative causation’. Wiener was the father of cybernetics, an interdisciplinary new science born after 1945, which created connections between science and social science by developing a non-causalistic and ecological view of systems. Cybernetic ideas were widely developed and used in management and the broader sociological context. Then there was Parsons (1951), who interpreted social systems with structural-functionalism, with Dunlop (1958) an example. Weber wrote on the ethos of Protestantism and the rise of capitalism (1958); sociology of religion (1964); and world history and general theory of the rationalisation of Western society (1968).

More recently, traces of ID can also be seen within the following. Weick from the 1980s used systems theory with music and literature, poetry and the arts. Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) emerged (Cilliers, 1998; Axelrod and Cohen, 2009; Holland, 2006) and was applied, both narrowly and specifically, such as to careers (Jones and Corner, 2012) and more broadly, such as to combine ideas from economics, political science, biology, physics and computer science (Miller and Page, 2007) or in relation to social capital and methods (Rowley and Redding, 2011; 2012).

What is ID?

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Problems with ID stem from it being a classic elastic and ‘motherhood and apple pie’ concept. ID also has a pejorative nature and is tied into binary choices/opposites which it is part of, such as exclusive versus inclusive; uncooperative versus cooperative; narrow versus broad; simple versus complex; inward versus outward; etc. Thus, how can anyone be against ID? Surely it is a ‘good thing’? Of course, it depends on exactly what ID is and means to people.

We can see a range of different prefixes to disciplinarity: mono-, cross-, inter-, multi- and trans-. Yet, these are very different concepts in practice, as shown in Figure 1. If works transcend fields by creating hitherto unused approaches it might be trans-disciplinary while “Interdisciplinary research integrates concepts, tools and/or information from two or more established fields” (Pautasso and Pautasso, 2010: 227). Yet, this integration is radically different if cognate disciplines, ie are near neighbours or more distant or even far apart. Then there is the issue of the ‘type’, the ‘degree’ and the ‘depth’ of integration in ID. This links to ideas of not only ‘borrowing’ from other disciplines, but actual ‘blending’ (Oswick et al, 2011), albeit only within organisational theory.

Figure 1

Where IS ID Now?
Given these ‘nudges’ from various sources, just where is ID now? For Khapova and Arthur (2011) there was: little knowledge sharing between disciplines; selectiveness of disciplines (which links to perceptions of ‘normal’ methods of enquiry which are self-reinforcing because data is then difficult to compare, which encourages even more specialization); and selective collaborations. For Jacobs and Frickel (2009). ID had grown, but Pautasso and Pautasso (2010) note its limits because of factors such as disparate reviewer preferences and feedback making such work professionally risky. This is because, as Mallard, Lamont and Guetzkow (2009) note, of the disciplinary-specific ways of producing theory and methods, which are key to peer evaluation, which for Klein (2006) requires new models.

An initial point is that there is disciplinary variability in ID. For example, in the social sciences it is economics that is most often held up as the least ID and most inward looking. Economists’ scepticism of others is evident in low citation of other social science research
(Pieters and Baumgartner, 2002) making it ‘...the most insular...’ (Jacobs and Frickel, 2009:49). Some other fields seem less narrow, such as industrial relations, with ID during its emergence, with roots in a range of disciplines, such as sociology, politics, economics, history, psychology, etc. We could make a tentative case that this is also the case for Asia Pacific studies with a similar evolution from academically disparate roots. Another way to judge ID levels is to look at the disciplinary background of faculty and how many are from ‘outside’ its mainstream. This non-traditional background of faculty is increasingly rare, partly for reasons we look at next.

A critical factor on ID levels the increasingly important issue of where ID would actually be published? This opens up a Pandora’s box of issues.

Where To Publish ID?

An initial question is why would academics submit papers to journals seen as non-traditional to their disciplines risking unsympathetic peers and institutions as well as editors, evaluation and readerships? Perhaps ID journals would be a better home to address some of the issues? However, editors and publishers mean quiet a range of things when they call a journal ID. Jacobs and Henderson (2012) produce a useful typology of six types of ID (and percentages of new journals in them). First, ‘disciplinary plus’ (13.5%), which focused on a particular discipline but were willing to accept papers from related fields to the extent they shed light on their core issues. Second, ‘specialized interdisciplinary’ (48.1%), which took papers from a broad range of disciplines to answer focused sets of questions. Third, ‘social-cultural comprehensive’ (17.3%), a broader type journal, covering the entire terrain of social and cultural phenomenon. Fourth, ‘academic universal’ (5.5%), an even broader type journal, sets out its terrain as not only the social sciences but also the sciences and humanities as well. Fifth, ‘problem solving’ (11.3%), with journals which focus on particular public issues or social problems, bringing together research that addresses diverse aspects of a given issue. Sixth, ‘theoretical interdisciplinary’ (1.5%), journals which focus on a particular theory or approach.

Also, it is natural for academics to send their best papers to the highest ranked journals because these offer the best prospects for visibility of research (Ibid.) and peer and
organisational recognition, respect and reward. So, new ID journals would have difficult launches and growth given how to obtain high quality submissions and become recognized as important outlets for scholarly communications from the outset.

Furthermore, ID work may be judged more harshly. Key criteria in evaluating mono-discipline papers include: novelty/originality, flow, accuracy/precision, consistency, clarity, inspiring further research, of broad interest, appropriateness and understandable (Pautasso and Pautasso, 2010). ID papers not only need to meet those standards, but also to address further specific issues of: is the paper really ID; balance between fields and use of new vocabulary (Ibid.). These are additional high hurdles for ID papers to jump to qualify for publication. Evidence of this is that even a journal established as broad-based, Work, Employment and Society, confirmed that submissions from even just outside the sociological diaspora “…are still few in number and they are also more likely to be rejected...” (Grugulis et al, 2012:5), let alone from further afield.

Issues in ID

There are several further key issues that may impede ID’s development. For example, consensus and agreement on even the most basic matters within disciplines can be difficult. For instance, this ranges from even subjects and phenomenon of focus to ways of thinking and researching with the role and ‘correctness’ of inductive versus deductive reasoning and theorizing, hypothesis creation and testing, data types and collection methods, etc., all remain contested and debated. For example, within even the social sciences there is the Webbsian tradition of inductive generalization based upon empirical research (Webb and Webb, 1932) versus the Durkhiemian tradition of deductive conceptual schemes (Durkhiem, 1947; 1962). This tension is exacerbated across disciplines.

A key issue for ID is the need for institutions to be more logical and consistent. Institutions increasingly call for ID but then operate in ways that do not and not support it by inculcating and promoting a ‘publish or perish’ ethos. This culture is underpinned by simplistic metrics - the tyranny and self-fulfilling prophecy of naïve journal rankings as proxies for quality. (Rowley, 1999; Rowley and Warner, 2011). Lists are overly prescriptive, narrow, biased, partial and also naïve and lazy as top ranked journals publish poor quality while high quality
appears in lower ranked journals. Lists are ‘self-fulfilling’ with the established order perpetuated and increasingly difficult to overturn. In short, such inward looking can cut directly against ID.

One example is the Association of Business Schools (ABS) list increasingly used in the UK. The ABS (Harvey et al, 2010) mentions ID in just two places and then only in passing. First, when noting functions of the list, including assisting in deciding what to read and where to publish (p.2). Second, where ID is noted as within the remit of two of its Subject Groups: ‘General Management’ and ‘International Business and Area Studies’ (p.10). Yet, to what extent in reality would ID submissions even make it past initial desk review to being sent out and then to non-ID referees in the top ranked journals lists? There is no explicit group of ID journals on the list. It may be better to think in terms of the more sophisticated and nuanced six-fold typology outlined earlier (Jacobs and Henderson, 2012). Perhaps the de jure view on ID is that ABS administratively lump International Business and Area Studies together. This makes for a very mixed bunch of journals, ranging from Journal of International Business Studies to Journal of Common Market Studies, China Economic Review, Cross Cultural Management, etc. The ABS list Social Science group is even more disparate, including Journal of Economic Geography, Economic History Review, Sociology, Journal of Law and Economics, Technological Forecasting and Social Change, Industrial and Corporate Change, Feminist Economics, Theory Culture and Society, Political Studies, Capital and Class.

A further limiting issue for ID is that this myopia of metrics is cauterizing academic thought and developments as initiative and ‘blue skies’ research is stymied, even mono-disciplinary, let alone ID as it is seen as much more risky as outputs must find a quality ‘home’, defined de facto as a journal at the top of a list. This produces a ‘safety first’ ethos and approach in research and outlets. Also, it means the same few journals being targeted by more submissions with ‘push factors’ (eg increasing use of lists and expanding academe), which require journals to respond to the consequent tsunami of submissions. This can be by increasing output by publishing more issues (a route followed by, for example, International Journal of Human Resource Management, Human Relations, Journal of Management Studies and now more recently Work, Employment and Society) or ‘raising quality’, de facto by increasing rejection rates given the fixed output (a route seemingly followed by, for example,
British Journal of Management, Economy and Society, British Journal of Sociology, Capital and Class, etc). (Table 2) This latter strategy can be done by retreating into academic ghettos of ever narrower specialisation, focus and internal conversations. In this trek ID will be seen as increasingly anathema in a ‘dialogue of the deaf’.

Table 2

Relevance And Role Of ID For Asia Pacific Studies
The growth of interest in ID would seem, \textit{a priori}, a ‘good thing’ for broader, non-disciplinary based fields, such as Asia Pacific studies broadly and business and management within it more narrowly. This is because the area was commonly populated by researchers with varied interests and diverse disciplinary backgrounds, ranging from anthropology, geography, sociology, politics, economics, history, international business, employment studies, etc., from early on. This disparate way of looking at the field has continued. Indeed, there is the use of a plethora of Asia-related Research Centres of various ilk to capture this synergy and cross-disciplinary dynamism. Interestingly, there is evidence that Research Centres are more conducive for ID work, as well as being more common at the leading universities globally (Jacobs and Frickel, 2009).

This ID is also reflected in the diverse submissions to some of the leading journals in the area. This includes Asia Pacific Business Review, with authors from a multiplicity of backgrounds and well beyond core business and management disciplines. It then becomes an issues for editors who need to seek out sympathetic reviewers.

Conclusion
To recall, “the benefits of disciplinary diversity are the ways that boundaries are challenged and observations sensitized” (Grugulis et al, 2012:7). For some people ID may be an example of going ‘back to the future’. Asia Pacific studies would seem to be a more fertile field for ID with its evolution. For others the trend is towards narrower and tighter disciplines. from the start. Indeed, some of its key journals receive papers from across the range of social sciences.

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There are institutional and professional ‘push factors’ for ID. Yet, simultaneously there are ‘pull factors’ away from this, as follows. First, institutional, with appointments, promotions and careers forged in the light of simple metrics and disciplinary assessment of ID. How do we cross the rubicon of ID work being published in either ID journals that need to be high ranked or in high ranked journals that take ID views? Second, professional, because there are many aspects of any issue than “…can lead to just as easily to the multiplication of academics units rather than their consolidation.” (Jacobs and Frickel, 2009:60). Mastering all cutting edge research and techniques across fields is beyond the reach of individuals, simply keeping up with the latest developments in one area is hard enough, “Consequently, scholarly life necessarily becomes divided into different fields of scholarship, with specialists focusing on different lines of inquiry” (Jacobs and Henderson, 2012:12). Along with the difficulty of trying to keep up with one’s own disciplinary developments in mass, commoditised education systems, the risk of being seen as a ‘jack of all grades, master of none’, still needs to be addressed. Explicit recognition, support and rewards for any polymaths in departments, faculties and universities would be a start.
Table 1: Varying Perspectives On One Phenomenon: The Example of Careers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspectives</th>
<th>Concerns &amp; Elements</th>
<th>Views &amp; Theories</th>
<th>Implications &amp; Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Sequence of work experiences as experienced by person</td>
<td>Vocational guidance Humanistic Proxen</td>
<td>Little knowledge sharing between disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Interpret social action Relationship between social structure &amp; individual agency Everyday actions reinforce &amp; reproduce social structures Strong &amp; weak ties</td>
<td>Chicago school Structuration Social networks Structural holes</td>
<td>Selective collaborations ‘Epistemic barriers’ (Jacobs &amp; Frickel, 2009) of incompatible styles of thought, research traditions, techniques &amp; languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Psychology</td>
<td>Relations between people &amp; groups Psychological People’s thoughts, feelings, &amp; behaviors influenced by actual, imagined or implied presence of others Sociological Context of larger social structures &amp; processes ie social roles, race, ethnicity, class, gender</td>
<td>Psychological Career enhancement Career construction Cognitions about oneself Relations with others Sociological Peer learning Employee’s organizational solidarity Multicultural career development Ethnic identification</td>
<td>Links to what is seen as ‘normal’ questions of interest &amp; methods of enquiry Self-reinforcing as data difficult to compare, encouraging even more specialisation Career paths Disciplinary orientation of journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Physical &amp; mental labor for production Human capital reflecting knowledge/skills that allow production Ability to bring resources together to produce better</td>
<td>Strategic human resource management Human capital Entrepreneurial &amp; social entrepreneurship careers</td>
<td>Funding applications &amp; evaluations Threat to disciplinary autonomy &amp; identity (faculty and journals) Narrow focus on journal ‘lists’ as proxy for quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed from Khapova and Arthur (2011).
Figure 1: Degrees of Integration in ID

Collaborativeness/Integration Level

Disciplinary Closeness
Table 2: Growth in Issues per Year in Various Journals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Founding issues/year</th>
<th>Changes</th>
<th>Date of change: Number of issues</th>
<th>Current</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Journal of Sociology</td>
<td>1950: 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Science Quarterly</td>
<td>1956: 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy &amp; Society</td>
<td>1972: 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academy of Management Review</td>
<td>1976: 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital &amp; Class</td>
<td>1977: 3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Journal of Management</td>
<td>1990: 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource Management Journal</td>
<td>1990: 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Journal of Industrial Relations</td>
<td>1963: 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1991: 4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Employment &amp; Society</td>
<td>1987: 4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2013: 6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Except 1959: 2
**Except 1975: 2
References


