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Turbocharging Practical Implications in Management Studies

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This is the second editorial commentary in a three-part series that addresses introductions, implications, and interestingness. The first, focusing on the introduction design, is about what the beginning of a paper should look like. The second, focusing on practice implications, is about what the end of a paper should look like. The third discusses how to develop and fit attention-grabbing ideas into the academic conversation in the literature. We hope this editorial series provides inspiration and ideas about publishing papers that people want to engage with.

Keywords: *open science; transparency in research practices; research methods; research design; content analysis*

Management researchers characteristically list and justify implications for practice (*practical implications* hereafter) in the discussion section of research articles. A practical implication refers to a statement, conclusion, or recommendation that researchers themselves draw from a scientific study for a nonacademic audience to consider, adopt, or act upon in thoughts, behaviors, works, or lives. What distinguishes a practical implication from an academic one

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is that the former is communicated to a nonacademic audience even as both might draw upon the same ideas and findings.

Management researchers have long debated the significance and utility of having a practical implications section in research articles. Although that debate will undoubtedly continue, the reality is that this section can be one of the more challenging yet valuable things a researcher can do to bring the entire article to a new level of insight and impact. Of course, not all studies can or need to strive for practical implications—for example, some studies offer academic implications alone by developing theoretical constructs or solving methodological problems. However, for those that do, effective crafting is crucial for influencing practitioner attention.[1] Indeed, studies find that practical implications in most studies go unnoticed most of the time, due in part to issues surrounding framing (e.g., Bartunek & Rynes, 2010; Joullié & Gould, 2021; Pearce & Huang, 2012; Shapiro, Kirkman, & Courtney, 2007).

In this editorial, we discuss a *user-centered framework* for crafting practical implication statements. The framework builds on three elements: (a) *Identifying a Target Audience* (i.e., specific practitioners who could directly use or benefit from knowing a practical implication), (b) *Specifying the Mode of Utilization* (i.e., the specific use of a practical implication, in the form of direct application, knowledge gain, or support for ongoing practices), and (c) *Characterizing the Type of Progress* (i.e., the potential impact in the form of promoting an advantage or mitigating a disadvantage by using a practical implication).

This framing is meant to simplify a multifaceted issue and recognize the necessity of doing so in the limited journal space of a discussion section. By organizing the development of practical implications around three intuitive elements, the framework can provide the focus necessary for offering practical implications "in easy-to-digest, easy-to-comprehend, and easy-to-find" statements for practice communities (Jaworski, 2011: 214). The degree to which a practical implication is presented in a clear, simple, straightforward way just like an executive summary should also enhance its adoption among general audiences interested in using management research, such as educators, consultants, journalists, and professional communities. Thus, even though few practitioners might regularly read management studies, this framework may help to increase the likelihood of practical implications being "picked up" by practitioner-oriented media and outlets such as the *Conversation*, *AOM Insights*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Researchers or intermediaries interested in promoting management research among practice communities may find such statements compelling to share via social media.

Moreover, it is a basic framework that can be applied to diverse research topics, regardless of the type of manuscript or targeted practitioner. No matter how carefully conducted, a single study in our field often is not conclusive due to aleatory (chance) and epistemic (knowledge) uncertainty. That uncertainty is a more fundamental, pervasive, and decisive factor complicating our understanding of practical implications than commonly recognized. To us, it underscores the need for greater attention to the potential role that common frameworks may play in facilitating linkages and integration among the field's related implication statements. The use of common frameworks can help link practical implications drawn from individual studies and aid in more systematic utilization by practitioners, consultants, practitioner-oriented outlets, and educators. Common frameworks can also aid in developing more coherent and cumulative assessments on the nature and outcomes of practical implications offered in the field's published studies. That, in turn, could have long-term consequences for opening up the field's enduring "incestuous, closed-loop" that Hambrick (1994: 13) so eloquently described. We thus encourage the broad spectrum of researchers to consider building from the current framework to offer practical implications and illustrate that utility by undertaking an assessment using a sample of published implication statements.

A Framework

The discussion section is where researchers integrate a study's theory and results with other relevant theories, domain knowledge, and evidence sources to discuss the study's implications, strengths/weaknesses, and conclusions. Kearney (2017: 289) uses the analogy of a journey to describe its significance: "If science is a long and winding road, and research is how we move forward on that road, then the Discussion section should show the reader on a roadmap (or GPS system) how far we have moved after the present study, if we have moved at all." In the management field, that progress is partly manifested in practical implications, which signify the specific ways in which a study may catalyze advances and applications in nonacademic settings.

Simultaneously, the management field currently lacks both a standardized practice and a rich understanding of how individual researchers frame practical implications. Because developing practical implications from a single study are ultimately an open-ended exercise, different approaches may be possible to communicate the content and presentation of each practical implication statement. The former involves the specific utility an implication statement offers (content—what is said), and the latter involves presenting that utility (presentation—how it is said). Our framework suggests three core elements for crafting implication statements sensitive to the practitioner's perspective.[2] The notion of perspective-taking broadly refers to recognizing knowledge, values, meanings, assumptions, and beliefs from a different community (Mohrman, Gibson, & Mohrman, 2001: 359).[3] We posit that when an implication statement incorporates the elements of an audience, utilization mode, and potential progress concurrently (i.e., content) and sequentially (i.e., presentation), it should become more user-centered and thus more likely to resonate with practitioners.

Identifying a Target Audience

The target audience includes potential readers of articles and end-users of practical implications who may come across practical implications through intermediary sources such as traditional and social media outlets—this dimension signals to whom practical implications may be relevant. If an implication statement does not identify the right audience, it is likely ineffectual. Specifying the audience is also essential because it allows researchers to reflect on the context of the challenge to advance a practical implication. Thus, to the extent that scholars can frame the problem and its noted significance or relevance for a specific audience, its impact will likely increase.

Frequently, management researchers indicate the target audience of practical implications using generic terms such as "organizations," "firms," "companies," "high-tech settings," "managers," "leaders," etc. However, these are somewhat vague and all-encompassing audiences. For example, firms or managers do not constitute a homogeneous group of actors having the exact needs or wants (Joullié & Gould, 2021). For a practical implication to get any traction, it needs to identify someone who may directly use or benefit from knowing it (e.g., "implications for entrepreneurs raising funding from VCs"; Bacon-Gerasymenko &

Eggers, 2019: 1683). Even when the audience is evident and specialized, an implication statement will be more compelling when its audience is named. For example, instead of targeting general organizations, Bapuji, Hora, Saeed, and Turner (2019: 2157) specifically explained how their findings could be helpful to "firms in the hotel industry, as well as for large chain organizations more generally."

That said, identifying the right audience for a given implication statement is often complicated by at least three factors. First, target audiences can differ in various ways across studies in the management field, and different audiences may have distinct needs and priorities that affect how they engage with research findings. Second, it is often challenging to determine who has the most pressing and immediate need *vis-à-vis* a research finding. And third, it is usually not a straightforward process to move from a study's specific feature to an actor's specific situation.

Considering these challenges, scholars could identify and try to connect their findings to different audiences. For example, in considering the divergent needs of different audiences, Martin, Wiseman, and Gomez-Mejia (2019: 721) developed implications for specific audiences, including "regulators, policymakers, boards of directors, and shareholders [regarding] the importance of considering an additional cost associated with granting of CEO equity." Researchers could also focus on the problem an audience has to address. For instance, Bapuji et al. (2019: 2157) explicitly discussed how research insights based on the hotel industry "may prove particularly salient for interface routines in large chain organizations, whose success largely depends on their ability to replicate routinized behavior across their organizational units." Finally, researchers could choose to articulate practical implications in a specific setting (e.g., the unintended consequence of transparent organizational design in a manufacturing plant; Bernstein, 2012) or use an anecdote about well-known executives (e.g., Robert Johnson II, former chairman of Johnson & Johnson, providing constructive feedback to James Burke after a failed business decision to innovate; Gong, Cheung, Wang, & Huang, 2012).

Specifying the Mode of Utilization

Practical implications in a management study could deal with a diverse range of circumstances and uses. The purpose of specifying the mode of utilization is to provide the target audience with guidance regarding promising use possibilities. There is a risk of simply restating a research finding as a practical implication statement without a utilization mode. Or the researcher might think that the utilization dimension is obvious and thus does not bother specifying it beyond the relationship implied in a study—for example, "we tested and found that there is a negative relationship between a CEO's over-confidence and company performance; therefore, companies should exercise extreme caution in selecting over-confident CEOs."

Instead, by specifying the utilization mode, the researcher can communicate the possible and advantageous ways of using a practical implication as they understand it—when and where to apply a research finding. It entails showing the degree to which a finding has clear and direct applicability to a target audience's needs and is appropriate to their context, without going into implementation details. After all, it is reasonable to expect that the targeted practitioner is better positioned to determine the actual steps of implementation. Moreover, the discussion section's limited space is not conducive to elaborating upon the implementation details and actions.

Instead of cataloging all possible specific utilization modes, we join others in suggesting that three broad modes could be relevant to most management studies: instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic (e.g., Amara, Ouimet, & Landry, 2004; Pelz, 1978). To Beyer (1997), *instrumental use* concerns the direct, specific application of research findings. For example, managers who need to deliver negative news to employees are encouraged to "actively take the recipients' perspective and to imagine how the bad news can affect the employees' lives" (Patient & Skarlicki, 2010: 573). *Conceptual use* refers to applying research findings in the form of knowledge accumulation. For instance, policymakers need to "understand how outsourcing and automation activities affect the supervisor biases" (Briscoe & Joshi, 2017: 1437). *Symbolic use* involves using research findings to substantiate and legitimize predetermined positions. For example, Hekman, Johnson, Foo, & Yang (2017: 790) used their counterintuitive results to legitimize a recommendation that organizational leaders might consider changing a long-standing policy that "diversity offices are run by ethnic minorities and women."

Although management researchers tend to focus on conceptual uses, we encourage consideration of all three possible modes. Of course, this does not mean that all studies will have the potential for all three types simultaneously. Moreover, how researchers envision a particular mode could differ from how a target audience member ends up using it. Astley and Zammuto (1992: 453) observed that managers adapt concepts and terms from management research and imbue new meanings into them in their organizational contexts, and thus "academic concepts do not, in this case, furnish new knowledge; they furnish intelligibility for what is already known."

Characterizing the Type of Progress

This refers to identifying potential benefits or avoiding possible detriments from one or more utilization modes mentioned above. It helps researchers recognize and communicate that not all implications are equal in their importance or potential impact. Unfortunately, many researchers seem to have a vague understanding of what kind of progress or potential impacts their findings might yield for their audience members. In far too many implication statements, this dimension is ignored.

We suggest two foundational progress types—prevention-focused and gain-focused. Prevention- or loss-focused progress signifies that a research insight may be used to mitigate or address a critical issue for a target audience. For example, because managers delivering negative news "can experience fear and dread and anticipate being judged poorly by the news recipient," Patient and Skarlicki (2010: 573) offered suggestions to managers to alleviate these concerns. By contrast, gain-oriented progress focuses on communicating new value creation. For instance, Green, Dalal, Swigart, Bleiberg, Wallace, and Hargrove (2019) proposed that examining personality consistency in addition to personality trait levels can enable organizations to maximize person-job fit in employee selection. Researchers can also highlight gain creation by presenting innovative interventions, promoting new understanding, and providing opportunities for a new dialogue. Alternatively, they can offer needed management guidelines, clarify existing ambiguities, and reconcile conflicting recommended practices to mitigate pain or loss.

Characterizing the type of progress helps explain why the specific uses of a practical implication (i.e., conceptual, instrumental, or symbolic) could help a target audience. Thus, it is critical to specify (and quantify, if possible) the nature of loss prevented, or gain expected, regardless of the utilization mode. Absent a progress statement, a practical implication assertion will likely remain too broad. Joullié and Gould (2021: 12) offer an interesting example of the statement that "organizations can improve the quality of current employees by providing comprehensive training and development activities" (Delaney & Huselid, 1996: 951). As Joullié and Gould observe, this statement implies a universe of two possible outcome options with no substantive predictions concerning either. All incoming evidence bearing on the statement will be compatible with it—either comprehensive training will, or will not, improve employee quality. Characterizing the expected progress's specific nature, either a loss-prevention or gain-creation, can help alleviate such ambiguity. For instance, instead of relying on a generic statement, Liao, Lee, Johnson, and Lin (2021: 24) detail how organizations can achieve gains by providing "training efforts that introduce ideas, examples, and positive consequences of perspective-taking and expose employees to empathic role models." As another example, Briscoe and Joshi (2017) discussed the problem of gender inequality in male-dominated firms by quantifying the potential loss: "at that time, only 15% of equity partners were female. However, in 2014, the goal failed, reaching only 16.8%."

Using the Framework

Our discussion so far clarified each dimension of the framework. We supplement that discussion with a summary in Table 1, including some illustrative statements aligned with the corresponding framing. To help the reader remember the framework, we point out that the implied logic is foundationally aligned with the universal conception of "job" in the theory of jobs-to-be-done—defined as "shorthand for what an individual really seeks to accomplish in a given circumstance" (Christensen, Hall, Dillon, & Duncan, 2016: 48). As with this framework, the concept of a job has three elements: user, engagement circumstance, and accomplishment. That analogy goes deep. The framework's implied logic is that when practical implication statements are aligned with a relevant "job," practitioners will more likely notice them. Moreover, much like progress in a job requires a careful analysis and understanding of a user's context, practical implications demand a careful understanding of the targeted practitioner's "job," which should ultimately be the focus of a given implication statement.

This section complements the framework's development with some suggestions for interested researchers. The first suggestion is to become familiar with the target audience's perspective. There are a few options for doing so, such as perusing practitioner-oriented newspapers and magazines, attending relevant conferences and trade shows, or talking to actual practitioners. This does not need to occur on an ongoing basis. It can be something researchers do every so often to stay up to date with the targeted practitioner's specialized language or jargon. For example, a friendly reviewer noted that a practitioner told them that no managers use the word "firm"; instead, they say "company"! When feasible, the researcher might ask a practitioner to read the study's practical implications section before an accepted version (such as during the conditional acceptance stage) is submitted for publication.

The second is to develop practical implications as a team, drawing from diverse perspectives. Practical implications can benefit from input from individuals with complementary research skills, such as theory building, research design and statistics, and integrative literature reviews. A team approach will also help ensure a fuller consideration when implications target multiple audiences. During this process, it can also be beneficial to get practitioners

Table 1

A Summary of the Framework for Practical Implications

Element	Description	Dimensions	Salient Questions	Illustrative (Published Studies) Examples
Identifying a target audience	A given practice statement is relevant to a target audience with a problem.	• Type (e.g., policy makers, community leaders, entrepreneurs, managers) • Positions • Organizations • Industries • Institutions • Environments • Underlying problems (e.g., problems faced by individuals, teams, organizations, societies) • Consultants • Media outlets • Educators	• Who might benefit from knowing these implications? • Does the implication generalize to all audience members? • Who might be impacted by the audience members adopting the implication? • How to target specific audience members? • Who is in the best position to use research to address a problem? • What is the problem and why the practical implication is relevant?	• Our study has practical implications for entrepreneurs raising funding from VCs (Bacon-Gerasymenko & Eggers, 2019) • Our study offers several managerial implications for firms in the hotel industry, as well as for large chain organizations more generally (Bapuji, Hora, Saeed, & Turner, 2019) • 75% of U.S. hotels have a towel reuse program, guests often fail to participate in them (Bapuji et al., 2019)
Specifying the mode of utilization	A given practice statement is appropriate to a specific circumstance and can be used in a specific way	• Conceptual • Instrumental • Symbolic	• Under what circumstances will the practical implication be used? • Where might research be used? • How might research be implemented? • What is the appropriate context? • What is the appropriate use?	• Managers hiring temporary workers should consider the cost of losing them (conceptual) (De Stefano, Bonet, & Camuffo, 2019) • Managers could create more opportunities (such as organizing an "international day" event) for employees of different cultures to exchange ideas (instrumental) (Chua, 2018) • Organizations should consider extending beyond the 12 weeks mandated by the Family Medical Leave Act for women (symbolic) (Gabriel, Volpone, MacGowan, Butts, & Moran, 2019)
Characterizing the type of progress	A given practice statement is meaningful and effective when used in a specific circumstance.	• Promote gain • Prevent loss	• What are the potential benefits? • What are the potential solutions? • What changes might follow? • How to achieve greater returns? • What is the downstream impact? • How much one should invest (resource, time, effort) and how much return should one expect?	• Mistreating the most talented employees is a threat to the future and the well-being of the organization. . . . To combat this issue, there are a few things organizations can consider (prevent loss) (Khan, Moss, Quratulain, & Hameed, 2018) • Women's business ownership is important for societal growth . . . to stimulate more entrepreneurial activity among women, we need to both provide the environment and tools they need while accommodating and possibly even including women's in-groups in these efforts (promote gain) (Bullough, Renko, & Abdelzaher, 2017)

Note. Illustrative Statements (modified based on implication statements from Van Iddekinge, Lanivich, Roth, & Junco, 2016):
1. Our study has practical implications for organizations and recruiters who consider using Social Media (SM) information for selection (*identifying a target audience*).
2. Research has shown that an increasing number of organizations are using information from social media platforms such as Facebook.com to screen job applicants . . . however, there is little evidence to support the use of this practice (*specifying the mode of utilizationt*).
3. Our findings cast serious doubts concerning the appropriateness of considering applicants' SM information (Facebook ratings in the current study) during the selection process. We strongly encourage organizations to refrain from using SM (e.g., Facebook) and other Internet information (e.g., Google searches) until methods for collecting and evaluating such information are shown to be reliable and valid (*characterizing the type of progress*).
4. Based on the results of an SHRM-The Society for Human Resource Management (2011) survey, most organizations do not have a policy regarding the use of Internet information. As a result, we recommend that organizations develop clear policies concerning the use of SM and other Internet information. It may be important for HR staff to educate managers and employees about the potential problems with using SM information (*characterizing the type of progress*).

involved. For example, practitioners may be included in the team that writes the practical implications, or researchers can at least get feedback from practitioners, such as MBA/Executive students. Even though this may be easier said than done for those scholars who lack practitioner networks with work experience or an opportunity to teach at MBA and Executive levels, reaching out to nonacademic colleagues may still prove helpful in the process.

Third, it is often not enough to develop practical implications from an accurate and objective understanding of a single study's results. Researchers should integrate the study's insights and results with the current understanding, evidence, and domain knowledge. This is not unlike what researchers do with academic implications: When discussing them, authors tend to draw on prior literature to examine the novelty and relevance of their results. Similarly, reviewing relevant meta-analytic evidence, systematic review results, and integrative reviews could provide the context to interpret specific implications—for example, comparing the focal study's effect sizes with those of prior research can help researchers better characterize the type of progress as a result of a specific utilization mode (e.g., "our study indicates that when managers do X, the effectiveness of Y will be 50% higher than typically reported").

Fourth, when framing implications, researchers could consider grouping and sequencing them. It may be that not all conclusions should be generalized to guide practice. For example, some practical implications describe rare events or phenomena with low base rates of occurrence. Practical implications that address high prevalence situations are likely more valuable and might be prioritized. Thus, even before identifying a target audience, it would make sense to narrow down the most meaningful findings for the most promising practical implications. Authors can then consider how to group and sequence practice implications. For example, practice implications could be grouped based on target audiences (e.g., organizational leaders, policymakers). Another potential sequencing strategy involves the immediacy of the progress expected. Addressing an existing pain point could strike the audience as being more critical than proposing a future gain. An alternative sequencing possibility involves the strength of each implication—for example, listing substantial implications first (based on the effect size, generalizability, and causal inference), then those that the focal study can support moderately, and finally, the more speculative ones (if any).

Fifth, all studies have strengths, weaknesses, and boundary conditions. Broadly stated, a particular implication for deductive studies, for example, is likely more substantial when it is derived from a large number of supportive studies, larger effect sizes, rigorous research designs, larger sample sizes, reliable and valid constructs, and fewer human biases (Ioannidis, 2005; Rafoth, Semich, & Fuller, 2015). However, it is also the case that both over- and underreaching are problematic. Authors should know the limitations of their study well and thus need to resist the temptation to extend practical implications beyond those limitations. Doing so may be completely legitimate sometimes because there is a crucial role in integrating new findings with old ones to present cumulative understanding. However, it can also step into ethical grey areas if the authors' study does not support and directly speak to such recommendations.

Finally, researchers may consider hedge against inherent uncertainty due to the varying nature of evidence strength and chance. Although the term "hedge" means different things to different people and disciplines, we use it in the context of researchers' level of certainty and commitment to a given practical implication's veracity. For example, consistent with the ideas in Hyland (2005), researchers could hedge various aspects of practical implications, such as (a) strength, (b) likelihood, and (c) commitment. We do not have a straightforward formula as to how researchers could match hedges to different practical implications. Instead, our point is that researchers should consider using hedges deliberately. This also implies that researchers may wish to think twice about overly deterministic phrasing such as “must,” “have to,” “necessary,” or “imperative” when stating practical implications.

Broader Advantages of Using the Current Framework

In offering a framework for practical implications, we also recognize that practical implications in most management studies are tentative due to aleatory and epistemic uncertainty. They require confirmatory evidence and examination in different settings and contexts. Thus, the problem of making implication statements matter more is also complicated by the fact that a single study’s implications alone are inherently constrained. In making this observation, we do not suggest that researchers refrain from drawing practical implications from a single study. After all, practitioners in a business context frequently operate without complete information (Gelade, 2006), and a single, well-executed study may provide actionable information. Instead, our point is that individual studies are not solely responsible for improving the real impact and outcomes of practical implications in the field. Like the rest of us, practitioners are unlikely to draw from a single study to inform and guide their work.

Under this condition, we thus wish to encourage management researchers to build from the current framework to offer practical implications for five additional reasons. First, doing so can help develop synergies, avoid redundancies, and integrate practical implications across studies in the field. Second, it can enable stronger links and comparisons across studies, thus facilitating more cumulative insights. Third, it may allow scholars to create case studies that reflect divergent perspectives from different studies. Beyond management education, these case studies can also serve as communication tools to promote managers’ interest in evidence-based management. Fourth, building on our framework can persuade a reader, such as a journal editor, thus increasing the likelihood of a favorable outcome during the journal review process. Finally, it can stimulate relevant research to investigate the nature and actual uses of practical implications.

An Illustration

To help illustrate some of our above points (precisely the last two), we conducted two assessments—a random sample of published articles and a sample of press releases from the Academy of Management (AOM) Insights. An essential mission of *AOM Insights* is to translate innovative research findings into a format that practitioners can adopt to improve the workplace. Therefore, reviewing and comparing statements from *AOM Insights* with different foci can allow us to gauge our framing structure. Specifically, we used it to examine a few questions: How does the framing perform relative to the implication statements appearing in the discussion section of published studies? Are there any implication statements that manifest the same or similar framing structure? If published studies do not display the framing, what are some differences? Is there a difference between published studies and practitioner-oriented *AOM Insights* and, if so, in what specific dimensions of this structure?

Table 2 provides a summary of both assessments. Clearly, they are exploratory. Our goal is not to provide confirming or disconfirming evidence but rather to demonstrate how the

Table 2
An Assessment of the Framework

Panel A: *JOM* and *AMJ* Results

Assessment Question	How does it hold relative to current practice in the discussion section of published studies?			Are there any published studies that manifest the same or similar framing structure? If published studies do not manifest the structure, what are some differences?			
Journal	Number of sampled articles	Discussion length (range)	Separate section (%)	Target audience (%)	The importance of the problem (%)	Specified utilization	Progress type
JOM	35	344 (134-729)	63	37	20	Instrumental 49% Conceptual 83% Symbolic 23%	Promote gain 63% Prevent loss 45%
AMJ	31	374 (59-870)	58	26	29	Instrumental 35% Conceptual 58% Symbolic 38%	Promote gain 41% Prevent loss 77%

Panel B. *JOM* and *AMJ* Exemplary Practical implications

Article	Identifying a target audience	Implication statement	Specifying the mode of utilization	Characterizing progress type
Briscoe and Joshi (2017, *AMJ*)	"Organizations that identify achieving gender equality as an overarching goal" (target audience) "Gender inequality is a particularly stubborn problem in settings such as corporate law firms, where nearly half of incoming associates are women, yet women represent less than 20% of partners" (clarify the importance of the problem)	"One feasible internal policy might be to identify those supervisors who show the lowest gender gap in subordinate worker evaluations—and reward them for this behavioral outcome" "Our research suggests that solutions may also lie outside organizations . . . client advocacy for gender equality is an important way to incentivize gender integration within professional service firms" "Focus on organizational policies that allow proximal peers to observe a supervisor's evaluation and reward decisions" "It will be important for researchers and policymakers alike to understand how outsourcing and automation activities affect the supervisor biases"	Instrumental, Symbolic, Symbolic, and Conceptual	Promote gains

(continued)

Panel B. (continued)

Article	Identifying a target audience	Implication statement	Specifying the mode of utilization	Characterizing progress type
Baer et al. (2018, *AMJ*)	"Our findings should be particularly salient for employees" (target audience) "Given the generally detrimental effects of unfairness talk, how can organizations address these issues?" (clarify the importance of the problem)	"By talking about unfairness they may be unknowingly exacerbating its already substantial ill effects. . .we suggest that employees should pay particular attention to whom they talk to about unfairness" "Our results indicate that a reframing response may be what is needed. Accordingly, employees could take an active role in addressing unfairness, explicitly asking coworkers to chime in with alternative perspectives." "Potential approaches include training supervisors to improve conflict management skills, enrolling employees in forgiveness interventions, providing reparations for the unfairness, and engaging in expressive writing about the unfairness"	Conceptual, Instrumental, and Instrumental	Prevent loss
Kim and Toh (2019, *AMJ*)	"Implications for leader self-awareness, leader selection, and performance management" (target audience) "Leaders of the potential cognitive and behavioral biases created by their former cultural experiences" (clarify the importance of the problem)	". . .should consider whether the cultures that the new group leaders bring fit well with the existing cultures or cultures that the management team thinks would be desirable for the organization" "Organizations need to recognize the potential tradeoff between the system stability produced by tight cultures versus the potential benefit of allowing constructive deviations brought by loose cultures" "This suggests the importance of matching tight–loose cultures to the groups' tasks and goals"	Conceptual, Conceptual, and Symbolic	Promote gains and Prevent loss
Bapuji et al. (2019, *JOM*)	"Firms in the hotel industry, as well as for large chain organizations more generally. . ." (target audience) "75% of U.S. hotels have a towel reuse program, guests often fail to participate in them (clarify the importance of the problem)"	"Our study shows that understanding-based redesign using more appropriate artifacts can be used in hotels to help influence guests' towel reuse behavior, and thus achieve considerable reduction in towel usage" "Our study shows how the artful use of familiar artifacts in routines can influence macro institutional logics and yield performance benefits, particularly for large chain organizations"	Symbolic and Conceptual	Promote gains

(continued)

Panel B. (continued)

Article	Identifying a target audience	Implication statement	Specifying the mode of utilization	Characterizing progress type
Schmid, Pircher Verdorfer, and Peus (2019, *JOM*)	"Practitioners in the field of leader selection and training" (target audience) "Human resource professionals are increasingly considering undesirable qualities when evaluating the suitability of job candidates" (clarify the importance of the problem)	"We deem it a useful strategy to include indicators of exploitative leadership in structured interviews and, if possible, even in structured reference check procedures" "Taking exploitative leadership into consideration may be useful in training and development, for instance, by including indicators of exploitative leadership in "360-degree feedback"	Instrumental and Conceptual	Prevent loss
Hekman, Johnson, Foo, and Yang (2017, *AMJ*)	"Diversity-valuing behavior construct . . . may do more harm than good for non-White and female leaders" (clarify the importance of the problem)	"A fairer approach would be to simply measure and reward the degree to which people hire and promote individuals who are demographically dissimilar from themselves" "Ironically, our results suggest that, on balance, the glass ceiling may actually become stronger, rather than weaker, with each ethnic minority or woman leader hired" "Diversity offices are run by ethnic minorities and women, but our results imply that, for maximum legitimacy, organizational leaders might consider changing this"	Instrumental, Conceptual, and Symbolic	Promote gains, Prevent loss, and Prevent loss
Martin, Wiseman, and Gomez-Mejia (2019, *JOM*)	"Our study highlights to regulators, policy makers, boards of directors, and shareholders the importance of considering an additional cost associated with granting of CEO equity" (target audience and clarify the importance of the problem)	"For policy makers, we have provided evidence that the presence of a large institutional shareholder (an increasing empirical reality; Boyd & Solarino, 2016) can exacerbate the costs associated with CEO stock options, as reflected by the accuracy of financial reporting" "Our study also provides guidance for shareholders as to when they should be more vigilant regarding the use of earnings management and especially minority shareholders, when they are aware of the presence of institutional shareholders and CEO duality"	Symbolic and Conceptual	Prevent loss
Khan et al. (2018, *JOM*)	"Some supervisors appear to be strategic and calculating in their abuse of high-performing subordinates is particularly concerning" (clarify the importance of the problem)	"Organizations may consider the idea of screening supervisors for high SDO [social dominance orientation]" "To create cultures where social dominance is discouraged, organizations must design incentive systems that reward supervisors for developing high-performing employees. Instead of being threatened by high performers, high-SDO supervisors will be incentivized to protect, support, and promote top performers"	Instrumental	Prevent loss

Panel C. *AOM* Insights Results

Press release	Identifying a target audience	Implication statement	Specifying an Engagement	Characterizing progress type
Starting Over With a Verbally Abusive Boss (2018, *AOM Insights*)	"Employees can take steps on their own to stop a boss's verbal abuse and repair the relationship" (target audience) "A startling 27% of U.S. workers (65.6 million people) have suffered from some form of abusive behaviors from their leaders. . . . Verbally abused workers often quit their jobs" (clarify the importance of the problem)	"Followers can take these steps to 'break the abusive supervision spiral': • Learn skills that are valuable or even indispensable to your supervisor. • Improve your job performance so you can achieve goals that are important to your supervisor. • Encourage your coworkers to be united in front of your supervisor and emphasize how cohesive you and your coworkers are." "Business leaders and their followers need to be aware that power dynamics between them can serve as 'a barometer to forecast abusive supervision,' the authors wrote. The more significantly the power imbalance favors the supervisor, the higher the risk of such abuse."	Instrumental and Conceptual	Prevent loss
The Real Reasons Why Some Bosses Treat Employees Unfairly (2018, *AOM Insights*)	"Employees treated unfairly at work might think their bosses are poorly trained, ill-suited for supervision, or just plain mean" (clarify the importance of the problem)	"We might think about managers and supervisors as unfair, or think about them as being mean bosses, or incompetent, etcetera. But we need to think about why the workplace environment can create these types of behaviors. Instead of thinking, 'This is a bad manager because his or her employees are unhappy'" "Organizations can promote fairness by: • Giving managers more autonomy and flexibility over their own schedules. This could help a manager, for example, who needs to spend time with employees on a certain day, but a required, hours-long weekly meeting gets in the way. • Giving managers a role in writing their job descriptions and incorporating fairness behaviors into performance evaluations and reward systems."	Conceptual and Instrumental	Prevent loss and Promote gains

(continued)

Panel C. (continued)

Press release	Identifying a target audience	Implication statement	Specifying an Engagement	Characterizing progress type
Government Can Pick Winning Entrepreneurial Investments (2020, *AOM Insights*)	"The federal government is one of the first sources from which U.S. entrepreneurs seek funding. But are government administrators good at picking the enterprises that are most likely to make the best use of those funds?" (identify target audience and clarify the importance of the question)	"This answers a fundamental question: Does the government have the capability to pick innovative commercial ventures? We find that the government does prioritize ventures that spur economic growth" "Emphasized four aspects of the grant review process that supports SBIR's capability to prioritize stronger ventures: • Hiring directors with experience in entrepreneurship or venture investing, and explicitly asking reviewers to evaluate commercial merit as depicted in applicants' commercial plans. • Using a due diligence process in which applicants receive feedback through multiple exchanges. This improves the quality of submissions and provides reviewers with more information. • Leveraging diversity of technical and commercial expertise on review committees, including dynamic attempts to recruit external advisors with specific expertise pertinent to a commercial plan. • Being flexible in rewarding ventures that appear to be exceptional."	Symbolic and Instrumental	Promote gains and Promote gains
Avoiding Problems When Founders Leave (2018, *AOM Insights*)	"Because founders invest so much of themselves into their ventures, it can cause problems when they leave—for the organizations and the entrepreneurs" (clarify the importance of the question) "What colleagues, venture capitalists, and other stakeholders can expect when founders exit" (target audience)	"It might be helpful for colleagues, venture capitalists, and other stakeholders to be aware of the type of founder they are dealing with. 'Anytime you're interacting with these founders in any way, it's important to know who you're getting in bed with, so to speak'" "Founders should 'do a self-diagnostic,' Rouse said, to help avoid such problems for themselves and their organizations"	Conceptual and Instrumental	Promote gains and Prevent loss
How Female Entrepreneurs Can Beat the VC Funding Bias (2018, *AOM Insights*)	"Firms owned by women account for nearly 40% of U.S. privately held companies, but attract only 2% of U.S. venture capital (VC) funding" (clarify the importance of the question)	"Female entrepreneurs are unlikely to realize that they are 'digging themselves into a hole' when they conscientiously and thoroughly answer the prevention questions with prevention responses" "When you're raising funds, you want your conversations to be about the aggressive, top-line growth forecast that you're looking to achieve, because that's going to align with the needs of a venture capitalist" "Discussing the potential for growth, the underlying growth characteristics of the market, the growing market demands, the favorable market characteristics, the demographics you're targeting for growth, and geographic expansion potential—those are the types of conversations that you need to be having"	Conceptual and Instrumental	Prevent loss and Promote gains

framework might be used to research practical implications offered in the field's published studies. As such, we caution against overinterpreting these exploratory findings.

Results from Published Studies

This assessment involved a random sample of about 10% of the total articles published at the *Journal of Management* (*JOM*) and *Academy of Management Journal* (*AMJ*) in the past 5 years (since 2016). We selected *JOM* and *AMJ* because they publish both macro- and micromanagement topics. We removed the review and theoretical articles. Of the remaining 351 articles published at *JOM* and 321 articles published at *AMJ* over the last 5 years, we reviewed 35 and 31 randomly sampled articles, respectively.

As with prior studies (Bartunek & Rynes, 2010; Joullié & Gould, 2021; Pearce & Huang, 2012), we observed a diverse pattern among published studies regarding implication statements. Some did not advance any practical implications, others merely reiterated the study's findings in one or two sentences, and still others offer unwarranted implications. Specifically, 82% of articles explicitly offered practical implications. More than half of the articles dedicated a separate section (e.g., Implications for Practice) to communicate them, while many other articles embed them in a general discussion section.

As a rough indicator of their importance, the number of words used to discuss practical implications varied considerably. For instance, the average length of practical implications in a study is 343 words for *JOM* articles, ranging between 134 and 729 words; the average is 374 for *AMJ* articles, ranging between 59 and 870 words. The correlation between normalized citations (i.e., divided by publication time) and the discussion length was near-zero ($r=-.09$ and $r=.07$ for *JOM* and *AMJ* articles, respectively). We also examined the Altmetric scores of the sample articles, an imprecise proxy for the impact of each research article on numerous nonacademic outlets, such as news outlets, blogs, and tweets. We found that the correlations between the discussion length and Altmetric score were −.19 for *JOM* and .47 for *AMJ*. Even though we cannot track the cause of that difference, the results suggest that the length of practical implications influences interests beyond the academic community alone.

Next, we coded the practical implication sections of the sampled articles to evaluate the extent and nature of their alignment with the framework. Most papers do not explicitly specify a target audience or clarify the significance of the problems to be solved. For example, only 37% of *JOM* and 26% of *AMJ* articles explicitly state the target audience, and even then, most use broad terms such as "organizations," "firms," "managers," and the like. Even fewer implications specify both the target audience and the type of progress for a salient engagement (see Table 2, Panel B).

We similarly examined practical implications based on the utilization mode identified, including instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic. Conceptual use is most frequently discussed (83% of *JOM* and 58% of *AMJ* studies). Instrumental and symbolic uses are less frequently discussed. We suspect it could be more challenging for researchers to discuss practical implications beyond conceptual use, which requires researchers to consider practitioners' contexts and specific jobs. Researchers typically use phrases such as "consider," "suggest," "be aware of," "demonstrate," "pay attention," and "indicate" to discuss conceptual implications. These words are often used to describe how practitioners conceptualize or reconceptualize a problem based on research findings (e.g., "managers should consider the influence of anchoring on their decisions," "our findings suggest it could be fruitful to promote gender equality"). When writing about instrumental uses, which emphasize the potential influences on practitioners' actions, researchers tend to use phrases such as "create," "provide," "encourage," "promote," "implement," and "train" (e.g., "managers should create a safety climate"). For symbolic use, the primary goal is to legitimatize a decision or a practice based on research findings. Thus, such implications are often associated with phrases like "highlight," "underscore," "justify," and "the importance of" (e.g., "our findings underscore the importance of diversity training").

In terms of the progress types, most practical implication statements can be categorized as either promoting gains (e.g., increase productivity, performance, and creativity) or preventing loss (e.g., reduce abusive supervision, discrimination, unfair treatment). For promotive gains, researchers tend to use phrases like "create," "promote," and "support" to develop implication statements. In contrast, expressions such as "combat," "mitigate," "remedy," "prevent," and "alert" are typically associated with implication statements aiming to prevent loss. However, some studies simply rephrase research findings in layperson language such as "consider," "suggest," "be aware of," "demonstrate," "pay attention," and "indicate." We list those broad phrases to reiterate our earlier point that an implication statement would indeed be more assertive to the extent it indicates a type of specific progress and uses appropriate vocabulary to communicate it.

Finally, we offer a sample of exemplary practical implications in Table 2, Panel B. Though the sample of exemplary articles has strengths in several aspects, they rarely include all three elements of the framework. This suggests that future researchers can improve practical implication statements by considering the framing content and presentation.

Results from AOM Insights

To understand whether there is a difference between published studies and practitioner-oriented outlets, we again used the framework to examine a sample of *AOM Insights*, an online magazine for managers and business leaders published by AOM (Table 2, Panel C). *Insights* aims to translate the best academic research findings to practitioners and business leaders. In other words, each *Insights* statement is written with an explicit purpose of being helpful and actionable for practitioners, and articles are organized by topic. We selected papers based on original *AMJ* research from several common topics (e.g., leadership, motivation, diversity, and entrepreneurship).

Our general finding is that most *AOM Insights* articles can be organized based on the framework. They consider the target audience, clarify the underlying problems, and offer suggestions based on different uses toward specific progress. Consistent with our discussion of the importance of identifying a practitioner who would, directly and indirectly, benefit from a research insight, most *Insights* statements stress the significance of the management problem that the research aims to solve to engage an audience. A notable difference is that *Insights* frequently provides more specific implementation and execution ideas to solve problems, whereas research articles rarely get into such details of implementations. Although research articles are not in the best position to outline implementation plans, guiding principles may prove helpful.

In the above section, we assessed *AOM Insights* to provide a practitioner's perspective into our framing. This is an imprecise assessment in that the purposes of *Insights* differ from a practical implications section in some core ways. Moreover, this is a rather indirect assessment relative to primary information and insights from practitioners themselves.

Conclusion

Not all studies in the management field need to offer practical implications. Some studies can be of immense value and interest to academic communities alone. For those studies that provide practical implications, our experience—as editors, reviewers, and authors—has been that researchers tend to offer implications using prior studies as a template and/or incorporating specific suggestions during the review process. We acknowledge having followed a similar process in our published articles. There are certain advantages to such an open-ended approach. We do not wish to discourage researchers from innovative formulation and idiosyncratic communication of practical implications. Nor do studies need to list multiple practical implications—a compelling one is much better than several speculative or tangential ones.

Regardless of the number of practical implications offered, one salient consideration is their crafting. Academics (we included) easily fall into jargon or complex statements that make practical implications hard to digest. That said, we believe it is rarely due to a lack of genuine interest and effort from researchers when they offer uncompelling practical implications. How many of us would not want our research to be used by, and be in the service of, practitioners? Instead, the issue could be partly due to a lack of a guiding framework available to those researchers. Put simply, practical implications do not rise to the level of the study's potential because researchers lack a framework to move them forward.

It is thus a bit conspicuous that management researchers have not devoted more attention to the development of conceptual frameworks for practical implications. Research handbooks, doctoral courses on research methods, and editorial commentaries are replete with frameworks (and even checklists) to write a theoretical review, the methods section, the introduction, etc. But few frameworks exist for developing practical implications. Simultaneously, the limited journal space afforded by the discussion section of research articles constrains researchers' ability to develop a thorough explanation, placing a premium on crafting.

The user-centered framework suggests that a study's practical implications can be turbocharged when they identify a target audience with the most potential for use, specify a circumstance for use, and characterize progress resulting from that use. This is not to say that these elements are both necessary and sufficient to ensure immediate use. The decision to use or implement an implication involves various factors such as cost, feasibility, timeliness, alternatives, etc. (for a review, see Kieser, Nicolai, & Seidl, 2015). Instead, when these three elements concurrently frame a study's implications, practitioners or research intermediaries are more likely to notice them relative to those implications overlooking one or more elements.

In departing, what is also essential for researchers to know is that crafting practical implications can be practiced and improved. In developing the current framework, we also outlined several advantages of crafting practical implications using common frameworks. By examining implications using similar frameworks, the management field may start consolidating its collective contributions to the practice landscape and having a richer understanding of how much our collective scholarship has made a difference in the thoughts, behaviors, work, and/or lives of others.

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Notes

1. For the purpose of this editorial commentary, we use the notion of practitioners broadly, rather than limiting it to one type (e.g., managers in companies) or excluding other management research audiences such as educators, journalists, professional organizations, etc. This in part explains our preference for the verbiage of "practical implications" rather than "managerial implications" or "implications for managers."
2. Our perspective taking here is pragmatic, focusing an accurate, balanced, and holistic consideration of a study's results from a practitioner's perspective rather than a form of direct contact with a group of practitioners. That said, we incorporated feedback from a diverse group of researchers and from five practitioners in the process of developing the framework.
3. Some academics have never taken or needed to take such a perspective when conducting research—especially when their training also did not require internships or applied work. To help provide more concrete guidance, we offer several suggestions on how researchers might use this framework to develop implication statements for their studies.

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