

# Editorial: Advice for management researchers on discussing the implications of an article

Writing the Discussion section of an academic article is a challenge for most scholars, especially beginners. Upon reaching this research stage, authors often run out of steam, facing the Discussion as an obligation rather than a chance of strengthening their contribution and relevance (Geletkanycz and Tepper, 2012). Consequently, it looks more like a summary of the results than a forum in which authors address the “so what?” question and explain in-depth the implications of their manuscript – how it advances knowledge and practice related to a theme.

We call the authors’ attention to the difference between the presentation of the results – a section in which they describe what the data show – and the discussion of the results and their implications – which encompasses a deep and reflective text that enlightens the effects/utility of the research for theory and practice. In contrast to the *Results* section, *Discussion* “explains why the results are meaningful in relation to previous, related work and the research question that was explored [...] it deals with the *claims* that might be made, especially *new knowledge claims*” (Swales and Feak, 2012, pp. 309, 365).

Every top-tier journal requires a discussion of the implications, which can be presented within several sections, such as the *Discussion of the results*, *Discussion*, *Implications*, *Conclusion/Final remarks* and so on. The term used is just a detail of journals’ or authors’ style. Most important is to be aware that any complete discussion is constituted of several elements (e.g. theoretical/practical implications, study limitations and future research) and that the discussion of the implications is indispensable (Geletkanycz and Tepper, 2012). In this sense, research implication is a necessary condition for a fruitful discussion. Building a discussion without thinking about how the results may generate implications for different domains can be counterproductive. However, in our experience as associate editors of the *RAUSP Management Journal*, we have noticed that authors have difficulty showing how the research implications articulate with the study’s results and research domain.

This editorial offers suggestions to help authors build a more critical and reflective discussion of implications. Our focus is on theoretical, practical and social implications, mandatory for manuscripts submitted to *RAUSP Management Journal*. First, we define these types of implications. Then, three articles published in *RAUSP Management Journal* are presented as examples of insightful discussions. We finish by offering bits of advice for building substantial discussions and delivering guiding questions that can help authors to gauge whether the crucial elements of the discussion have been covered.

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## Types of implications

The word 'implications' implies that researchers can forecast future usefulness, or that a reader can relate in some capacity to the usefulness of the research to their particular context" (Garcia, 2017, p. 2).

The most expected contribution from an academic work is the theoretical one. Given its importance, some authors share valuable explanations on what it consists of (Corley and Gioia, 2011; Whetten, 1989) and how to build a discussion that elucidates contributions to theory (Geletkanycz and Tepper, 2012). Theoretical implications reflect the consequences, the effects of the research for literature. When discussing theoretical implications, authors should *clarify how their findings affect the knowledge about a phenomenon*, either by adding new variables that improve its explanation, refining conceptual rigour or revealing a new perspective that changes our understanding of it.

The practical implication, on the other hand, "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" (Simsek, Li, and Huang, 2021, p. 1). As editors, we expect authors *to demonstrate how their research can be used by multiple stakeholders* (such as managers, policymakers, regulators and others) to improve or add value to practices (e.g. process and policy) and to mitigate problems as well (e.g. conflict flaws, unethical behaviours). In other words, a practical implication consists of guiding practitioners on how research findings can be implemented and their potential benefits (Simsek, Li, and Huang (2021) for a detailed framework on how to build practical implications).

Academia has raised the flag of research that generates positive impact for society (see *RAUSP Management Journal's* editorial series on research impact [Sandes-Guimarães and Hourneaux Junior, 2020; Hourneaux Junior and Sandes-Guimarães, 2020; Sandes-Guimarães and Hourneaux Junior, 2021]), but many authors are still confused about how to position the social implications into this discussion. Research impact can be understood "as some kind of contribution, influence, value, change, effect or benefit that scientific research brings to society in its most diverse spheres (economic, social, health, public policies, etc.), directly or indirectly" (Sandes-Guimarães and Hourneaux Junior, 2020, p. 284). In this sense, social implication entails a kind of forethought about research impact; it derives from theoretical and practical implications. Discussing social implications requires authors *to acknowledge the underlying social aspects of the research that may impact society in its various domains*. By doing so, they can identify who may benefit from their research, including non-readers and those who do not have access to it.

## Examples of insightful discussions

We chose three manuscripts published in the *RAUSP Management Journal* to illustrate insightful discussions of theoretical, practical and social implications.

In "Social entrepreneurship and social change: a practice-based study in non-governmental organisations," Cavalcanti (2021) examines how practices of social entrepreneurship (SE) lead to social change. Drawing on practice theory, the author refines the understanding of SE by proposing an original definition that comprises political aspects of SE (that had not been embraced in previous definitions). The author shows how SE gives rise to social change and explains that it is context-dependent; in doing so, she posits that the way SE leads to social change – and the notion of social change as well – may vary depending on contextual factors (such as organisational structures, stakeholders' interests and moral authority). In addition, she offers an analytical framework of five propositions to guide future studies on the theme. This example shows that applying a framework not used in previous research enables to enlarge the understanding of a concept and offer

propositions that can guide new studies, considering the variations that may occur from the context investigated.

Cappellozza, Moraes, Perez, and Simões (2022), in their article “Antecedent factors of violation of information security rules,” show that employees’ moral disengagement and perceived penalty predict the intention to violate organisational information security policies. Given the findings, the authors propose some practical implications. One of them is to improve organisational communication “with training actions that simulate daily work routines and situations that offer opportunities for violating organizational policies, so that professionals can have a real sense of the susceptibility of failures to data protection and mitigate individual tendencies that may favor unwanted behavior” (p. 96). In presenting this suggestion, the authors demonstrate how organisations can use their study to mitigate internal factors that may foster risk inherent to information (e.g. cyber-attacks and fraud).

In their article “Dropout and retention of undergraduate students in management: a study at a Brazilian Federal University,” Costa, Bispo, and Pereira (2018) explore the antecedents of dropout and retention of undergraduate business students from Brazilian public universities. Based on the findings, the authors propose recommendations focusing on economic-financial and pedagogical dimensions, which, in turn, have social implications. For example, they suggest transparency regarding the disclosure of the amount invested per student so that the academic community and the society become aware of financial and social losses that dropout causes to the government and, consequently, to society. Furthermore, from the pedagogical point of view, the authors propose actions for levelling the playing field for all students to improve their performance in quantitative content subjects; consequently, the dropout due to course failure may decrease. Therefore, the authors’ recommendations imply benefits in the education domain, by improving students’ quantitative analytical skills and reducing their chances of dropping out; and in the economic domain, as the government can better forecast and plan resource allocation per course, which leads to more efficient use of public resources.

### **Advice for building substantial discussions**

When writing the discussion, authors should keep in mind some essential elements of their research: the research question, their theoretical positioning, the data under investigation and the article’s intended audience. In addition, it is the time to explain how the study adds to extant literature, specify how scholars and practitioners can use the findings and elucidate how it may impact society. Retaking these elements allows authors to build critical reflections that emphasise the study’s relevance and engage readers. At the same time, looking at the study as a whole prevents authors from succumbing to the common pitfalls of rehashing results, meandering and overreaching (Geletkanycz and Tepper, 2012). We now offer bits of advice to help authors build insightful discussions and suggest guiding questions to assess whether essential elements of the discussion have been covered.

#### *Theoretical implications*

The authors should critically explain how their study promotes a deeper comprehension of the research problem under investigation; offer alternative explanations for unexpected or counterintuitive results; and point out whether the knowledge generated is limited to particular contexts. The following questions may help you craft the theoretical implications of your manuscript:

- Is the novelty explicit? Have I stated in detail how my research fills a theoretical gap?
- Have I presented possible explanations for the research problem investigated logically and reflexively?

- Have I articulated the findings with literature and shown how my research advances knowledge on the topic? Do the results support, complement or contrast with extant literature?
- Have I demonstrated why the insights raised by my research are relevant?
- Have I set limits for generalising the theoretical implications?
- Have I explained how the study's findings could be used in future studies?

Take note: Do not suggest implications out of the research domain – pay attention to the theoretical positioning of your manuscript and the specific aspects of the investigated problem; only offer implications supported by your data.

### *Practical implications*

The authors should clearly demonstrate how the practical implications can be operationalised and implemented; specify who may be interested in the study; and indicate benefits from using the practical implications. Consider the following questions:

- Given the study's results, what can organisations do differently?
- Have I explained how practitioners may apply the study's findings (e.g. through training, process review, change in sales promotion)?
- Have I specified a target audience for the implications of my study?
- Have I indicated what progress practitioners can have by using the practical implications (minimize losses or boost gains)?

Take note: Do not suggest practical implications to generic audiences (Simsek, Li, and Huang, 2021), such as *This research has implications for managers*; on the contrary, try to be as specific as possible, for example: *This research has implications for human resource managers of organisations that are going through M&A and need to deal with process integration*.

### *Social implications*

The authors should show the potential benefits of applying the study's findings; explain how benefits may impact society (in its various domains, such as economic, health, social); and present who may benefit from applying the study's findings. Below, we present guiding questions related to social implications:

- Have I specified precisely which domain(s) of society the study may impact?
- Have I explained how the study may positively impact society?
- Have I explicitly presented who might be the beneficiaries of the social implications?

Take note: *Social implication* is not synonymous with *public policy implications*. Therefore, when proposing social implications, authors should demonstrate in which domains of society the research may generate impacts, which may or may not comprise public policies (as in the following example):

In a study on Logistics, the authors present a five-step model to implement a reverse logistics system in non-durable consumer goods companies. A possible social implication is related to the environmental domain: reducing waste production and inappropriate disposal can decrease soil contamination and pollution.

### Final remarks

Publishing should not be the ultimate goal of scientific work in management. Increasingly, scholars have been encouraged to conduct research that impacts different domains. Discussing research implications deeply and reflectively is crucial to highlight its potential impacts, as other researchers and practitioners may clearly visualise the study's relevance and usefulness. We hope this editorial helps authors build a critical and substantial discussion of the implications of their future works.

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