A SPARC for Bridging the Research-Policy Gap

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Author note

We thank *Business Horizons* Editor Idie Kesner and three anonymous reviewers for their highly constructive feedback, which allowed us to substantially improve our manuscript.

In Press

Business Horizons

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ABSTRACT

A recently uncovered research-policy gap exists in management. Encouragingly, some journals have statements of aim or purpose that explicitly call for business practice implications in manuscript submissions (e.g., *Business Horizons*). However, these journals rarely call for policy implications, even though such implications may have a broader-reaching impact on business practice. Moreover, researchers lack concrete and actionable guidance for bridging the research-policy gap. We address this challenge by developing SPARC: A framework that helps management scholars design impactful research and derive policy implications. SPARC is an abbreviation for *societal challenge* (**S**), *pragmatism* (**P**), *action* (**A**), *result* (**R**), and *connections* (**C**). We describe each component and provide specific, sequential, and actionable steps. Moreover, to not just tell but to show its effectiveness and usefulness in enhancing research's impact on policymaking, we demonstrate how to apply SPARC for both research planning and dissemination. By narrowing the research-policy gap, SPARC provides researchers with actionable tools to become *policademics*, thereby improving the field of management's societal impact, relevance, and stature.

Keywords: evidence-based management, impact, societal challenges

INTRODUCTION

A key challenge facing management scholarship is the *research-policy gap*, which refers to a two-way communication problem between researchers and policymakers. Specifically, researchers rarely expound on the policy-related implications of their work. For example, Aguinis, Jensen, et al. (2022) conducted a critical review of the organizational behavior and human resource management (OBHRM) literature published between 2010 and 2019 (N = 4,026 articles). They found that only 61 articles (i.e., 1.5%) provided guidance on improving policy across the two domains. Similarly, Hughes and Dundon (2023) reported that just 441 articles (i.e., 3%) addressed policy in the Discussion and Conclusions sections of articles published in top management journals between 2010 and 2022. These results have been replicated in the tourism and hospitality management literature, although, after the COVID–19 pandemic, this research domain had great potential to make valuable contributions given the need for effective policies at the industry and national levels. Discouragingly, Aguinis, Kraus, et al. (2023) reviewed 12,269 articles published in 10 leading journals between 2012 and 2021 and uncovered that only 114 articles (i.e., 0.93%) included the why, how, and what of research-based policies.

Not all research will or should necessarily have policy implications (e.g., exploratory investigations). Nonetheless, management researchers are poised to impact policy profoundly (D’Aunno, 2005; Pfeffer, 2023). For example, we can examine an organization’s effectiveness in implementing policy and seek to understand any unintended consequences derived from policy choices. Importantly, we can draw conclusions from previous conceptual and empirical investigations to inform the construction of new policies (D’Aunno, 2005). There are numerous areas in which management researchers can contribute toward policy, including gender equality, work-family conflict, unemployment, fair and merit-based employee recruitment and selection strategies, equal opportunities, downsizing, employee wellbeing, corporate governance, and international trade, among many others (Eby & Facteau, 2022).

On the policymakers' side of the coin, and contributing to the research-policy gap, policies are often implemented without appropriate evidence, emphasizing that the research-policy gap is a two-way communication problem. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) advised against the application of travel bans during the COVID–19 pandemic owing to their substantial economic and social impact (WHO, 2020). Instead, they recommended targeted measures for travelers, including frequent testing, quarantine, and vaccination requirements. Nonetheless, several countries implemented strict border closures for international travelers without clear evidence that they were effective in controlling the spread of the virus. The global travel and tourism sector suffered losses of ~$4.5 trillion in 2020, as well as 62 million job losses as a result of COVID–19 restrictions (WTTC, 2021). Yet, business research spanning the areas of operations and supply chain management, organizational behavior (OB), and human resources (HR; e.g., wellbeing) could have potentially assisted in the policy development process.

Why is there such a shortage of policy implications in management research, and how can we, researchers, narrow the research-policy gap? First, we describe how to understand this gap from a demand and supply perspective. Then, we summarize some of the solutions proposed to date. We then introduce the SPARC framework and explain how it can be used to design impactful research and derive policy implications—and help those who are interested in becoming *policademics* (i.e., scholars who conduct research with direct implications for public policy and actively engage with policymakers in creating, disseminating, and applying their findings). Moreover, to not just tell but to show its effectiveness and usefulness in enhancing management research's impact on policymaking, we demonstrate SPARC with a practical illustration.

Understanding the Research-Policy Gap: Demand and Supply

There are many potential reasons why a research-policy gap exists. In some cases, manuscripts addressing policy implications might be submitted to journals, but they are ultimately rejected. It is also possible that policy-related content may be diluted through the peer review process. These situations suggest insufficient demand for such work (Harley & Fleming, 2021). Encouragingly, mission statements from journals such as *California Management Review, Harvard Business Review*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, and *Journal of Business Venturing Insights* indicate that some are becoming more receptive to policy implications in manuscript submissions. Likewise, Doh et al., (2023) encouraged researchers to consider societal impact through various methods, such as influencing policy, when preparing submissions to the *Journal of International Business Studies*. The Responsible Research in Management Award (RRMA), sponsored by the Academy of Management Fellows, provides an example of a recent initiative that seeks to recognize work that informs policy (RRMA, 2025). Similarly, accrediting bodies such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) highlight the critical role of business schools' societal impact (AACSB, 2023; Aguinis, 2024).

In addition to the demand perspective, it is equally possible that scholars do not submit manuscripts with policy implications to management journals, either because they are of no interest to them or because they believe reviewers will appraise such content negatively. Hence, there is an insufficient supply of such work (Harley & Fleming, 2021). Unfortunately, journal rankings have ensured that only a select few publications are considered part of the "top league" (Aguinis, Cummings, et al., 2020). Academics have a firm grasp of the metrics that will be used to judge their career success. We have unwittingly created a system that incentivizes scholars to publish work within established research domains (Harley & Fleming, 2021). Accordingly, there is an unhealthy focus on incremental knowledge gain and formulaic approaches to research (Eby & Facteau, 2022). Critically, this comes at the expense of attempts to address society's challenges (Hughes & Dundon, 2023). Related to the supply explanation, it is also possible that scholars want their work to create societal impact but lack the requisite knowledge and skills to increase the policy-relevance of manuscript submissions (Kassirer et al., 2023; Suddaby et al., 2023). It is well-documented that business doctoral programs rarely include formal policy training (Aguinis, Jensen, et al., 2022)—a problem which is exacerbated by the tendency of such programs to focus almost exclusively on publishing in so-called "top-tier" journals (Harley & Fleming, 2021). Accordingly, the next generation of researchers appears ill-equipped to sufficiently articulate what research-based policy should look like (Aguinis, Jensen, et al., 2022; D'Aunno, 2005).

Some Proposed Solutions to Date

Although the research-policy gap is less well-known, it is not that dissimilar from the more widely discussed research-practice gap (Shapiro et al., 2007), which can be considered as the result of two separate and distinct translation problems. First, research that is lost *before translation* is considered socially irrelevant or unimportant, whereas research that is lost *in translation* is considered challenging to locate or understand. Shapiro et al. (2007) emphasized the need for innovative solutions to address such translation problems if research produced by management scholars is to be considered socially relevant and the same can be said for the research-policy gap.

There is a growing consensus that management researchers rarely ask questions that can inform policy (Eby & Facteau, 2022). Thus, scholars have suggested a range of recommendations for how policy can be front-loaded into the research process to help reduce management work being lost before translation (Shapiro et al., 2007). For example, Aguinis, Jensen, et al. (2022) proposed a dual theory-policy research agenda that included designing empirical studies with possible policy goals in mind. Similarly, Kassirer et al. (2023) offered a problem-driven roadmap for producing socially impactful and policy-relevant management research. These researchers urged others to consider the social problem they should be working on before considering how to study it best.

Hughes and Dundon (2023) proposed a dual-purpose schema for policymakers and management researchers based on four key components. The first component (i.e., society) entails policymakers and researchers collaborating to identify relevant research projects that could yield societal impact, such as those concerning generative AI technologies or green climate actions. The second component (i.e., actors) involves policymakers engaging with researchers and stakeholders to ascertain their unique perspectives of the associated challenge. It was suggested that researchers might also consider the power, agency, and interests between stakeholder groups in global economic systems. Finally, the third and fourth components (i.e., processes and policy, respectively) encourage policymakers and researchers to examine tensions between processes of change and policy enactment issues to establish relevant interventions. For example, many organizations amend their corporate vision in response to societal changes but fail to evaluate the impact of new policies adequately (Hughes & Dundon, 2023).

Researchers also have suggested strategies to help overcome the problem that management research is often challenging to locate or understand (i.e., it is often lost in translation; Shapiro et al., 2007). For example, the final component of Kassirer et al.'s (2023) effective management research roadmap entails effectively disseminating research findings. It was suggested that coordinating with academics and communicating with change-makers (e.g., policymakers and funding organizations) are vital.

USING THE SPARC FRAMEWORK TO BRIDGE THE RESEARCH-POLICY GAP

The recommendations in the previous section help management scholars think about engaging with those outside academia. However, an apparent limitation of the extant literature remains that academics lack specific and actionable tools to achieve this lofty goal (Aguinis, Jensen, et al., 2022; Eby & Facteau, 2022; Rogelberg et al., 2022).

The PICO framework is one of the most well-known and frequently cited research-related processes in clinical research (Richardson et al., 1995; Robinson et al., 2011). This framework originated from epidemiology but has become a fundamental tool in evidence-based practices, policies, and systematic reviews (Luijendijk, 2021). PICO stands for **P**opulation (or problem/patient), **I**ntervention, **C**omparison (or control), and **O**utcome. The framework allows researchers to consider the most salient points of a clinical question, facilitating a systematic search strategy (Kloda et al., 2020). PICO has been deemed the most appropriate method of question formulation when conducting quantitative systematic literature reviews and has been endorsed by the Cochrane Collaboration (McKenzie et al., 2019). Additional frameworks have been developed to assist with qualitative and mixed-methods research such as SPIDER, which refers to **S**ample, **P**henomenon of **I**nterest, **D**esign, **E**valuation, and **R**esearch type (Cooke et al., 2012).

Taking PICO and SPIDER as points of departure, we developed a framework to help management scholars identify potentially impactful areas for investigation, conduct research in these areas, and derive structured policy implications from the results. Specifically, we examined the scant management literature that included implications for policy to extract common themes that could contribute to a mnemonic framework. The SPARC framework is included in Figure 1 as a preview of the discussion that follows. SPARC is an abbreviation for *societal challenge* (**S**), *pragmatism* (**P**), *action* (**A**), *result* (**R**), and *connections* (**C**). Given its underlying logical flow, the framework is designed to be followed in a sequential manner.[1]

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

As shown in Figure 1, SPARC is divided into two main phases. The research planning phase (top) is designed to help researchers conduct more socially and policy-relevant research (i.e., addressing research that is often lost before translation). The research dissemination phase (bottom) aims to increase the visibility of policy implications in research, thereby addressing research that is often lost in translation.

Research Planning

Societal Challenge (S). The first step in the SPARC framework entails identifying research programs that could impact policy relating to a societal challenge (Hughes & Dundon, 2023). Herein, we define a societal challenge as a "specific critical barrier(s) that, if removed, would help solve an important societal problem with a high likelihood of global impact through widespread implementation" (George et al., 2016, p. 1881). Examples of societal challenges include environmental sustainability, technological advancements (e.g., generative AI), ethical innovation, public health and well-being, global crises and resilience, sustainable business models, responsible leadership practices, and social equity and inclusion.

Pragmatism (P). Researchers have a finite supply of time and resources. Pragmatically, we

[1] Early career researchers are likely to benefit from implementing this sequence explicitly. However, a caveat is that more experienced researchers (i.e., those who have already conducted research with clear policy implications) might not have to follow all the steps in a rigid way.

encourage management scholars to consider directing their research efforts toward societal challenges for which progress is likely. It can be helpful for researchers to consider domain expertise in this regard. Hence, there is a need to reflect on why management researchers, in particular, are well-poised to work toward solving a particular societal challenge. For example, Kassirer et al. (2023) explained that management researchers are well-positioned to investigate societal problems in which institutions and organizations play a pivotal role (e.g., enhancing corporate social responsibility; Rupp et al., 2024).

Action (A). Having identified a societal challenge that is suitable for management research assistance, scholars must consider the actions they can take to address the problem. This can be likened to McCarthy and Bogers's (2023) "investigating" element of their process model for social-media-enabled academic openness. Typically, this involves designing the study, selecting participants, and addressing other operational issues, such as determining the location where the study will be conducted. This component in the SPARC framework also entails a period of critical reflection, using cognitively taxing system II thinking (Evans, 2014; Von Nordenflycht, 2023). In other words, researchers must critically consider their unique methodological and theoretical strengths. This should enable researchers to develop an approach likely to yield the greatest societal impact. For example, researchers can seek to answer questions such as: Would the societal challenge benefit from exploratory or confirmatory/disconfirmation research? What is the theoretical underpinning of the study (e.g., inductive, deductive, theory elaboration)? In which methods and data analysis do I have expertise that could help address the societal challenge?

Result (R). The fourth step in the SPARC framework involves anticipating the research results. Specifically, researchers should consider how the findings of a study might be used to improve organizations and society at large (i.e., by adopting a design-science approach; Simon, 1969). However, we acknowledge that research conducted in politically charged contexts can have unintended consequences. For example, “backfire” occurs when well-intended initiatives result in unintended negative outcomes, such as discrimination and prejudice, as is in the case of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI; Burnett & Aguinis, 2024). We recommend that researchers consider both the positive and negative implications of their work, as well as the broader political context, during this step in the planning phase to anticipate whether policymakers are likely to use the research results. It is noteworthy that policymakers’ positions can change quickly and this is also likely to influence the extent to which research findings are implemented.

To facilitate this step in implementing the SPARC framework, we rely on the recommendation by Aguinis, Jensen, et al. (2022) to conduct thought experiments (i.e., judgments about what would happen if an imagined scenario were real; Kornberger & Mantere, 2020). In a thought experiment, we envision the completion of a research study, allowing us to visualize how the results could subsequently be applied to policymaking. Thought experiments are appropriate when there is a need to confirm or disconfirm theory, and Aguinis et al. (2023) provided an example of how this approach can be applied to the study of allyship (i.e., when members of advantaged groups engage in committed action to improve the treatment of members from disadvantaged groups). Likewise, when the research aims to develop theory, it can be helpful to use diagramming as a technique to facilitate theoretical thinking, as opposed to descriptive thinking (Von Nordenflycht, 2023).

Connections (C). The fifth step in SPARC’s research planning phase entails collaborating with those responsible for integrating policy recommendations. This step aligns with the concept of engaged scholarship (Van de Ven, 2007), which encourages researchers and practitioners/policymakers to examine complex social phenomena by collaborating across the various stages of the research lifecycle, such as formulating problems and designing research. Academics’ and practitioners’ awareness of each others’ roles might be enhanced by fostering collaborations that capitalize on different perspectives and creating buy-in to collaborations via mutual value creation (Aguinis, Audretsch, et al., 2022). Likewise, academics and policymakers can collaborate to identify research projects that inform policy on societal challenges (Hughes & Dundon, 2023).

Working collaboratively with policymakers and other stakeholders (i.e., beneficiaries of the policies to be implemented) will often shape the research planning process (Dwivedi et al., 2024). For example, given greater access to a particular sample of interest, the research question might become more focused. Likewise, the research design may change with the increased availability of resources among researchers and policymakers, such as transitioning from cross-sectional to longitudinal study designs. In alignment with engaged scholarship (Van de Ven, 2007), SPARC’s planning phase is iterative, and hence in Figure 1, there is a feedback loop that joins Connections (**C**), back to the Societal Challenge (**S**). This allows for a further period of critical reflection across each of the SPARC steps while accounting for the input of policymakers and stakeholders.

Research Dissemination

Having described how the SPARC framework can assist management scholars in planning and designing impactful research, we now explain how the framework can also be used to derive policy implications for inclusion in manuscript submissions. These guidelines and tools are much needed, given that management researchers receive little training in communicating scientific findings to lay audiences—especially policymakers (Eby & Facteau, 2022). We explain each step in the process and draw upon various illustrative examples from the extant management literature. Again, Figure 1 provides a visual representation and summary of the components discussed next.

Societal Challenge (S). Scholars should initially describe the societal problem they seek to address in their research. This description can be relatively broad (Kassirer et al., 2023). However, researchers need to provide sufficient contextual information to adequately describe the issue, including any existing policy shortcomings. To illustrate, in the context of mega-threats (i.e., negative DEI-related episodes that receive significant media attention), Leigh and Melwani (2019, p. 584) described that "organizations typically provide few guidelines for responding to external events" and that "managers may often overlook or ignore the influence of these events on their followers."

There is also a need to identify relevant parties impacted by the societal challenge and, consequently, the research. To that end, it can be helpful to think about relevant policy agents (i.e., those leading the effort to create and implement the policy, such as managers) and beneficiaries (e.g., organizations and employees; Aguinis, Jensen, et al., 2022). For example, Saridakis et al. (2022, p. 823) investigated the relationship between gender and promotion, stating that "the promotion rate for women is further reduced in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)."

Pragmatism (P). Pragmatists view all knowledge as provisional and believe it should be judged according to its usefulness in a given context (Bryant, 2009). The second step in the dissemination phase involves striving for pragmatism, by offering practical knowledge that can contribute to policy. Suddaby et al. (2023) described that while such knowledge may have immediate application, this is not always the case. Hence, the utility of knowledge should be based on the quality of insights it may generate in the future. For example, Waldman and Sparr (2023) emphasized the importance of integrative strategies in the context of DEI. The researchers suggested that "government legislation might grant tax incentives for companies to establish training and development programs that provide equity of opportunity for previously disadvantaged groups, rather than legislation designed to mandate equal outcomes" (p. 188).

Action (A). The third step involves stipulating actionable recommendations to policymakers that contribute toward solving the societal challenge (Dwivedi et al., 2024). It has been suggested that management scholars' implications for policy often lack specificity (Eby & Facteau, 2022). Therefore, it can be helpful to consider the associated barriers to the adoption, implementation, and sustainability of the proposed action (Birkland, 2019; Eby & Facteau, 2022). To illustrate, Woolley (2019) conducted a study regarding the gender, education, and occupational backgrounds of technology firm founders. The researcher suggested that policy could positively impact female entrepreneurs "…instead of encouraging more women to start high-technology firms, policymakers should identify the backgrounds, characteristics, and motivations of potential founders that are most aligned with technological success… It is imperative that policymakers encourage entrepreneurship for the right reasons…" (p. 283).

Result (R). The fourth step involves answering the question: How would organizations and society benefit from greater awareness, enhanced learning, and action concerning the problem? There are good, albeit relatively few, examples of researchers considering this aspect when deriving policy implications from management research. One of the few examples is Sherf et al. (2019, p. 490), who explained how "official job descriptions and performance evaluation criteria frequently omit acting justly as a key managerial responsibility and instead focus on technical aspects alone." Nevertheless, the researchers continued to describe the potential result of implementing additional policies: “Changing such elements can signal that acting justly is an effortful activity that requires time and attention and that such investments are strategically relevant for the organization” (Sherf et al., 2019, p. 490). Likewise, in their research concerning the association between attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and entrepreneurship, Antshel (2017, p. 258) suggested that “high school guidance counselors and ... college academic advisers will benefit from having knowledge about what supports work best for entrepreneurs with ADHD” following the implementation of “federal and state financing initiatives”.

Connections (C). Policy implications are likely more robust if derived from a corpus of replicable research rather than a single study (Aguinis, Jensen, et al., 2022; Eby & Facteau, 2022; Pfeffer, 2023). Policy development is a lengthy process that requires an evidence base to accumulate over a prolonged period. Research is vital in this process and can help change opinions among relevant changemakers. Accordingly, investigators need to consider how their work fits within a broader stream of research. Moreover, it can be helpful to think about possible connections to existing programs and structures within organizations or with existing legislation where relevant. Finally, implications for policy will be more impactful if researchers consider the broader cultural, legal, and economic context within which their research is oriented. Guo et al. (2020) provided an example of connecting their proposed action to the extant literature. In the global refugee crisis context, they suggested that “governments need to carefully review the impact of their immigration policies.” The researchers continued to explain that “Mulvey (2010) reported evidence of how the combination of the language framing of refugees (e.g., ‘bogus’ and ‘clandestine’) and social media (i.e., reports and news stories about refugees and asylum seekers) can contribute to a legitimacy deficiency of refugees.” Nonetheless, there is considerable scope for management researchers to enhance the connections between their recommendations and the extant literature/policy.

APPLYING THE SPARC FRAMEWORK: AN ILLUSTRATION

How can the SPARC framework be used to guide the planning and dissemination phases of the research lifecycle aimed at influencing policymaking? In the following section, we offer an illustration of how this might work in the context of a societal challenge.

Research Planning

Dr. Alpha and Dr. Beta are professors of leadership and entrepreneurship interested in sustainability. They aspire to make a societal impact through their research and begin the process of planning a study.

Societal Challenge (S). Alpha and Beta are passionate about and advocate for business and environmental sustainability. They understand that climate change will impact everyone unless action is taken immediately (Nyberg & Wright, 2022). As a reduction of climate change would help solve a societal problem with global impact, Alpha and Beta are satisfied that it constitutes a suitable societal challenge to work on.

Pragmatism (P). Adopting a pragmatic approach to planning the research, Alpha and Beta strive to ensure that climate action represents a topic of scientific inquiry in which progress is likely. They examine various climate and sustainability policies currently in place in the United Kingdom, such as the Climate Change Act, Net Zero Strategy, and Powering Up Britain. Alpha and Beta acknowledge that organizations play a pivotal role in climate action. They also consider their domain expertise and conclude that they are well-poised to investigate the barriers to adopting organizational climate action.

Action (A). Alpha and Beta consider the specific actions that they can take through their research to help address climate change. Following a literature review, they determine that an organizational participatory approach with a sample of chief executive officers would be worthwhile. Alpha and Beta consider their unique methodological and theoretical strengths when designing their study. They have considerable expertise in qualitative research and agree that grounded theory offers an appropriate methodology. This is because it can be used to construct a substantive theory that holds practical utility for both researchers and policymakers.

Result (R). Alpha and Beta anticipate the results of the research and how a grounded theory into the barriers to adopting organizational climate action could be helpful. They can clearly see how identifying barriers could help policymakers devise more targeted solutions (e.g., policies, incentives, training programs) to enhance the likelihood of organizational climate action. Moreover, identifying such barriers could help inform policymakers about the extent to which their initiatives are realistic and achievable among businesses in the United Kingdom. Accordingly, the research could prompt policymakers to develop adaptable policies that can be adjusted over time, taking into account such barriers to action.

Alpha and Beta also anticipate a strong likelihood of a power dynamic during data collection, in which the participants (i.e., chief executive officers) may attempt to dominate the interviews. Accordingly, Alpha and Beta familiarize themselves with best-practice recommendations for conducting interviews with elite informants (see e.g., Solarino & Aguinis, 2021). Moreover, they diagram a provisional version of a grounded theory to help organize their ideas (Von Nordenflycht, 2023).

Connections (C). The researchers recognize the need to strengthen their connections with local practitioners and policymakers and commit to utilizing social media to support this effort (McCarthy & Bogers, 2023). They are pleasantly surprised when a notification informs them that a local climate change event is scheduled to take place next week. They attend the event and meet the local Climate Emergency Response Group, which has substantial connections to councils and businesses that have signed their local declaration to meet net-zero targets. Thereafter, Alpha and Beta meet with council representatives to explain their research ideas. The council is impressed and provide them with vital feedback to (a) focus on small businesses and (b) identify the barriers and facilitators to climate action in equal measure. The researchers use this opportunity to refine the proposed research question and associated methodology before inviting a range of chief executive officers to participate in the investigation.

Research Dissemination

Turning from research planning to research dissemination, we must acknowledge that scholarly journals expect a scientific writing style and terminology in manuscript submissions (Eby & Facteau, 2022). However, policy implications should be easily digestible for lay audiences. Alpha and Beta conclude their investigation upon theoretical saturation (i.e., the point at which new data collection fails to generate additional insights) following grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). When developing their manuscript, Alpha and Beta apply the SPARC framework as follows.

Societal Challenge (S). Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. Since the 1800s, human activities have been a primary cause of climate change, largely due to the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and gas (United Nations, 2025). Climate change has several consequences, including intense droughts, severe wildfires, flooding, and declining biodiversity. The United Kingdom has pledged to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. However, it has been estimated that only 38% of businesses in the United Kingdom are taking at least one action to reduce their emissions (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Accordingly, there is a need for the United Kingdom Government and independent bodies such as the Climate Change Committee (i.e., policy agents) to more fully understand small business owners (i.e., beneficiaries) barriers and facilitators toward adopting climate action. Similar pledges have been made by many other countries. For example, the European Union adopted its European Climate Law in 2021, making the commitment to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 legally binding for all member states.

Pragmatism (P). Following an iterative grounded theory methodology, Alpha and Beta propose a substantive theory that researchers and policymakers can use to identify the prominent barriers and facilitators facing small business owners in the context of adopting climate action. The core category of the theory is awareness and knowledge of current climate action practices, which serve as both a vital barrier and facilitator. Other prominent barriers include regulatory uncertainty and increased costs of implementing climate action. Contrastingly, government incentives and advances in technology are identified as prominent facilitators.

Action (A). There is a clear need for additional research to examine further the barriers and facilitators to organizational climate action among small businesses. However, Alpha and Beta recommend that the United Kingdom Government and independent bodies strive to develop appropriate educational materials addressing how small businesses can engage in climate action. Notably, such material should be easily digestible, and no previous knowledge of such practices and policies should be assumed, given that chief executive officers are often under severe time constraints. Alpha and Beta acknowledge that the United Kingdom has committed to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. However, they recommend that the government explore the feasibility of developing climate action policies tailored to small businesses in the United Kingdom. Such policies could be sector-specific, and local councils could provide additional support and guidance to enhance compliance.

Result (R). Alpha and Beta anticipate that the proposed action will lead to a greater adoption of organizational climate action in the United Kingdom. This is important, as organizations are increasingly being portrayed as key agents in responding to the climate crisis (Alam et al., 2022). Several benefits are associated with increased climate action. At the organization level, businesses would be eligible for tax incentives and see improvements in energy efficiency. At an international level, the United Kingdom, European Union members, and other countries are expected to experience economic growth through transitions to low-carbon economies. Moreover, future generations would greatly benefit from preserving biodiversity and climate-resilient nations.

Connections (C). The findings of Alpha and Beta's research largely support previous work that has demonstrated the importance of knowledge and awareness in adopting climate action (Herrmann & Guenther, 2017; Revell et al., 2010). Moreover, the recommendation to develop sector-specific policies to help small businesses in the United Kingdom transition to net-zero emissions is echoed in relevant policy publications (Robins et al., 2020). The proposed action aligns with the United Kingdom's and many other countries' commitments to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

DISCUSSION

There is a persistent research-policy gap in the field of management, which can be viewed as a two-way communication issue between researchers and policymakers. Researchers rarely receive formal policy-related training (Aguinis, Jensen, et al., 2022) or rewards for creating research-based policies, making it challenging to integrate policy into the research lifecycle. To that end, we developed SPARC, which consists of five practical and actionable steps: societal challenge (**S**), pragmatism (**P**), action (**A**), result (**R**), and connections (**C**).

SPARC is a dual-purpose framework, meaning that it can be employed to (a) plan and conduct potentially impactful investigations (Figure 1, top) and/or (b) derive structured policy implications for manuscript submissions (Figure 1, bottom).

When used to plan investigations, SPARC enhances the societal relevance of research, thereby addressing the problem that management literature is often *lost before translation* (i.e., socially irrelevant; Shapiro et al., 2007). When used to disseminate research findings, SPARC addresses the problem that management research is often *lost in translation* (i.e., challenging to locate/understand; Shapiro et al., 2007). The latter is noteworthy, given that most solutions to date are outcome-oriented (e.g., “derive policy implications from topical areas such as stress and well-being” Aguinis, Jensen, et al., 2022, p. 869) or assume a published piece of research as a starting point (e.g., “You published a paper on it [pressing societal problem] and even discuss policy implications! Now what?”; Kassirer et al., 2023, p. 15). Hence, we hope that the practical and actionable nature of the framework will appeal to researchers while raising the societal impact, usefulness, and stature of management research.

We recognize that researchers’ ability to engage with SPARC partially depends on various contextual factors. Intrinsic motivation to conduct socially relevant research is important, but there is also a need for reward and compensation systems to acknowledge this explicitly (Aguinis & Gabriel, 2022). At a local level, university leaders have an important role in creating an environment that supports (not thwarts) research that has implications for policy. To that end, university leaders might encourage the use of personal impact development plans (Aguinis & Gabriel, 2022), of which SPARC could feature prominently. Specifically, such plans would include activities (e.g., shadowing researchers who have successfully influenced policy) and competencies that researchers need to acquire (e.g., being able to communicate research results in a compelling and jargon-free manner) to be able to plan and disseminate research with policy implications.

We believe that journals also have a responsibility to reward researchers who appropriately consider the policy implications of their work. Fortunately, the management domain is beginning to embark on this journey, evidenced by a swarth of revised journal mission statements that call for policy implications in manuscript submissions (Suddaby et al., 2023) and awards to recognize such work. Hence, the development of SPARC is particularly timely during this transitional period toward more socially aware and impactful management research.

Another contextual factor that bears consideration is that senior faculty members will likely have more fully developed networks of peers to draw upon when devising research programs. Hence, when it is infeasible to connect directly with policymakers (e.g., in the case of early-stage researchers, such as doctoral students), we recommend at least attempting to consider policymakers' perspectives when planning investigations. We also advocate thinking about societal impact early in one's career and leveraging social media is a good way for researchers to connect with external stakeholders (Aguinis et al., 2021; McCarthy & Bogers, 2023). It is also the case that additional contextual factors (e.g., cost, time) are likely to affect the extent to which policymakers can collaborate with researchers. Accordingly, we recommend that researchers familiarize themselves with the notion of collaborative policymaking to make this process as efficient as possible. For example, researchers might seek to clarify what "success" looks like when planning a collaboration, as well as clearly defining roles and ensuring adequate opportunities for face-to-face interaction to facilitate mutual trust (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Cairney & Toomey, 2024).

Policymakers can benefit from SPARC in several ways. For example, it is likely that researchers will increasingly seek opportunities to work collaboratively with policymakers. This means that policymakers' diverse perspectives will likely help shape the direction and focus of research investigations. Policymakers are also likely to benefit from the increased coverage of policy-related implications in journal articles, as this will help them quickly identify content relevant to their roles in making evidence-informed policy decisions.

We readily acknowledge that there are limitations associated with frameworks such as SPARC. For example, such frameworks might inadvertently constrain researchers into a prescriptive structure. Hence, we remind researchers of the need to be pragmatic when planning and disseminating complex research studies involving multiple stakeholders. Of course, we recognize that not all research will have, or should have, policy implications. For example, there is a role for exploratory research that does not require scholars to reference policy implications explicitly. Similarly, theories at an early stage of development are likely to be unsuitable for drawing firm policy implications (Aguinis, Jensen, et al., 2022). Results from a single study are unlikely to be sufficiently robust or trustworthy to create a policy that will affect thousands (or more) people in important ways. Nonetheless, we firmly believe that the percentage of articles in management referring to policy implications needs to improve if we are serious about making a societal impact (Pfeffer, 2023).

Finally, in addition to being used to help narrow the research-policy gap, a useful avenue for future research would be to use SPARC to critically examine the extant literature to identify which steps have, and have not, already been implemented by researchers. This process could facilitate an after-action review, which allows for a reflective examination of past performance, with a view to improving future outcomes—enhanced research-based policy implications (see e.g., Aguinis, Ramani, et al., 2020).

Concluding Remarks

There are growing concerns surrounding the research-policy gap in the management domain, as demonstrated by a shortage of policy implications in our journals. We hope the framework proposed herein will be the “spark” for researchers who aspire to become *policademics*—scholars who conduct research with direct implications for public policy and actively engages with policymakers in creating, disseminating, and applying their findings. Policademics bridge the gap between academia and governance by translating complex research into actionable insights, collaborating with decision-makers, and ensuring that scholarly work informs real-world policy decisions, ultimately leaving the world a little better than we found it.

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Figure 1

SPARC: How to plan management research and derive structured policy implications to bridge the research-policy gap