A Revision to Manuscript Submission Guidelines: New Implications for Practice

From time to time, the editors of the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* find it worthwhile to revise the guidelines issued to authors regarding the focus and content for articles in the Journal. After considerable discussion, the editors have endorsed the recommendation made by Jean Bartunek, Special Associate Editor for Linking Scholarship to Practice, that articles published in JABS include a separate "Implications for practice" section that specifies both what the implications are and to whom they are directed. We explain the rationale for this decision and the new guidelines for the Implications for Practice section in the following statement. Jean Bartunek's primary responsibility will be at the end of the submission process, working with the editors and authors of accepted papers to make sure that implications for practice follow the new guidelines.

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Editor

GUIDELINES FOR "IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE" IN JABS

In this short document we introduce new guidelines for the "Implications for practice" section of articles submitted to the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* beginning in 2013. These new guidelines take into account the fact that the target audiences for JABS include not only behavioral scientists studying the processes of social and organizational change, but also change practitioners, clients of human resources professionals, and policymakers. The aims and audiences of the Journal are clearly outlined on the JABS website,

http://www.sagepub.com/journalsProdDesc.nav?prodId=Journal200967#tabview=title.

Rationale for the new guidelines

Sections entitled "Implications for practice" in academic articles are not always implications for practice. Articles in scholarly journals are typically reviewed by academics, and whether they actually speak to practitioners is often not really considered important (Kieser & Leiner, 2009).

Bartunek and Rynes (2010) analyzed implications for practice sections in five top tier management journals, and found that such implications only appeared in about half of the articles. Further, a practitioner who reviewed them considered that less than 10% of them were actually helpful for his practice. This might not be of concern in academic journals that are not expected to influence practitioner audiences, but it is certainly of concern for a journal like JABS that is intended to be a scholarly journal that also speaks to practitioner audiences.

At the 2011 Academy of Management meeting Warner Burke chaired a Professional Development Workshop in which some skilled management and consulting practitioners, Jennifer Kurkoski and Kathryn Dekas, both of whom work within "people analytics" at Google, and Dick Axelrod, a well-known organizational consultant, chose articles from JABS whose implications for practice they considered effective for practice. They described the characteristics that were particularly helpful for practice, and then participants in the session worked together to construct a draft of what implications for practice should include. The draft was then refined, and resulted in the "prescriptions" here, which are indeed based on the recommendations of practitioners.

Guidelines for "Implications for practice" Sections in JABS

Implications for practice sections should conform to the following guidelines.

1. *The abstract of the article must include at least one sentence about specific implications for practice.* This is not simply a statement that the article includes implications for practice, but an illustration of at least one such implication.

2. *Each article should include a clearly delineated section titled "Implications for Practice".* This includes a bold heading that introduces the section so it is easily found. If there are no direct implications for practice because the article introduces a new research method or conceptual framework, it is still important for the author(s) to reflect on how practice, including the practice of research, could eventually be affected by the application of the method or framework.

3. *Each implications for practice section should include descriptions of a) problematic issue(s) being addressed, b) the specific audience(s) to which implications are addressed, c) a small number of recommendations about what the audience should/could/should not do based on the research findings, d) an expected outcome of carrying out recommendation(s), and e) some specific illustrations of what carrying out the recommendations might look like, perhaps in narrative form.*

4. *The readability level of the implications for practice should be suitable for practitioners, straightforward and clear. It is preferable that descriptions be relatively short and focused.*

Illustrating the Guidelines: What should implications for practice look like "in practice"

As we indicated above, prescriptions are much clearer when they are accompanied by examples. Thus, we reviewed implications for practice in the articles published in JABS in 2011 and 2012 to search for exemplars of the types of implications for practice we are recommending. None of the articles included all of the components we list here, although a few of them (e.g.

Foldy, 2012; Berneth, Walker, Walter & Hirschfeld, 2011; &, Grant & Marshak, 2011) listed many of these. Rather than try to present one particular paper as an exemplar, we will draw some "best practice" examples from many of the papers published in the last two years.

One statement about specific implications for practice in the abstract

Many papers published in JABS and other journals include a line in the abstract something like this: "The article concludes with implications for practice", or "Implications for practice are discussed". However, the articles do not say anything at all to lead a reader to see what kind of practice is being discussed. Thus, JABS is now requiring that articles include a specific statement about implications for practice in the abstracts of the papers.

Two articles provide illustrations of such statements. McDermott and Keating (2012, p. 62) included the following statement in their abstract: "The findings suggest that organizations should focus on developing their social contexts to augment service improvement." Meyer (2012, p. 194) states in her abstract that "To successfully bring radical reforms to the Parliament, political leaders therefore need to manage influence from multiple stakeholders and overcome non-decision making". Both of these statements suggest the types of action the articles are going to be exploring and recommending.

Implications for practice sections include a description of the issue the implications are meant to address

It is not uncommon in academic articles to see some prescription for practice based on the findings, but the prescription is unconnected to any specific issue it is supposed to address, or problem it is supposed to remedy. For implications for practice to be useful, however, it is important that they address clearly identified issues.

Several recent articles in JABS include very good descriptions of a "problem" or issue of concern that can be addressed by the recommended practice. For example, Chreim & Tafaghod (2012, p. 28) state that "It is important for acquiring managers charged with facilitating the integration to understand that acquired managers are newcomers who may face radical changes and contradictory frames that pose major demands on their sensemaking abilities." Oreg, Vakola and Armenakis (2011, p. 517) comment that "change recipients are naturally concerned with the personal impact that the change will have on them. If perceived risks/costs outweigh benefits, change recipients will understandably tend to resist change. This may seem obvious, but findings demonstrate that managers are often oblivious to how change recipients will respond to the change and do not give enough thought to change recipients' perspectives." Taylor and Bright (2011, p. 452) state that their "article highlights the need for change agents to pay close attention to how their actions may be fostering defensiveness and drive self-focus tendencies on those affected by the change"

These discussions of problematic issues may help to link the implications into issues practitioners already recognize in their work. At the very least, they focus change agents' attention on practice concerns to which their work may contribute.

Implications for practice sections describe the specific audience to whom implications are addressed

Sometimes it is difficult to determine to whom implications are addressed. But for implications for practice to be helpful, it is important that they identify the specific audience for their specific implications.

There are many good examples in the recent *JABS* articles of specific audiences to whom recommendations re directed. Several of the articles (e.g. Dewulf & Bouwen, 2012; Daskalaki,

2012; Grant & Marshak 2012; and Michael, Neubert &, Michael, 2012) address their recommendations to change agents. Some implications are directed towards managers with specific responsibilities, including Chreim and Tafaghod (2012, p. 28) who address them to, "managers of acquiring and acquired firms", Bernerth, Walker, Walter & Hirschfeld (2011, p. 351), who address them to direct supervisors, and Langley et al., (2012, p. 161), who address them to, "Managers of change".

Implications for practice sections include a small number of recommendations for practice

Each implications for practice section should include a small number of recommendations for what the specified audience should/could/should not do based on the findings of the study. A smaller number of focused implications is better than a wide and diffuse number of implications.

There are several recent examples of such recommendations. For example, in response to an identified issue in their paper that "managers need to recognize that organizational change—especially change that is perceived as negative—can result in an unintended, and often unacknowledged, risk: a buildup of latent errors in operations" Goodman and Ramanujam (2012, p. 429) recommended that managers "must consider ways to enhance organizational attention and memory during and after the implementation of major change (e.g., arranging for operations to be audited during this period, ensuring that error management activities are not suspended during this period). Moreover, managers should consider using the measurement of latent errors as an additional method to assess the effectiveness of change."   In response to their identified concern that "that identity struggles are overlooked in mergers as well as many forms of organizational change. " Langley et al. (2012, p. 161) stated, among other recommendations, that "Our first recommendation is for managers of change to become aware of identity work

patterns in their own organizational context, and use this knowledge to bring groups together by acknowledging difference while establishing important sameness."

Sharma and Kearins (2011, p. 195) discussed how problems experienced in collaboration for sustainability, such as "organizational differences on sustainability, resource and time constraints on the part of organizations and individuals, and complexities inherent in sustainable development as a holistic philosophy" may lead organizational representatives to "compromise on fairly easy or abstract solutions for organizational good rather than serve the wider remit of sustainable development." In response, among other implications, they recommended that "conveners of the collaboration should clearly demarcate time, at the beginning of the process, to discuss and develop a shared understanding of sustainable development. They should raise and find answers to the following issues: (a) what members individually understand by sustainable development, (b) whether and in what manner their organization gives different priority to the three pillars of sustainability, (c) what then should their collective understanding of sustainable development be, and (d) how they should integrate across the three pillars of sustainability."

All of these recommendations focus on specific actions particular practitioners might take. They thus suggest some ways of learning from research findings in order to improve practice.

Implications for practice sections include descriptions of expected outcomes of carrying out the recommendations.

Sometimes in implications for practice sections recommendations are explained well, but little is said about any specific outcomes, or aims to be accomplished, by carrying out the recommended activities.. This is not particularly helpful, however. Describing a specific

expected outcome gives much more clarity about the expected impacts of carrying out the recommended practice than leaving the outcome unspecified does.

Several articles in JABS describe specific expected outcomes.   Michael et al. (2012, p. 403), for example, suggest that an interactive dialogical value formation process during change that responds to external conditions may have the effect of coalescing "patterns of employees' value commitments in response to the value preferences signaled in the change initiatives". Grant and Marshak (2011, p. 227) suggest that change agents "should pay attention to how prevailing narratives are reinforced in day-to-day conversation and dialogue throughout the organization (a problematic issue). They would then need to seek to intentionally introduce new narratives to alter those conversations, possibly by changing the types of questions asked (a recommendation for practice)…. " An impact of their attention to how prevailing narratives are reinforced is the possibility of "better understanding the power and political processes that may be shaping any given change effort and of then attempting to engage in directly influencing, co-opting, and altering those processes (an expected outcome)."

Implications for practice include specific illustrations of what carrying out the implications might look like.

It is one thing to give general advice for how to act. It is another thing to illustrate what this or some similar recommendation might look like or has looked like in practice. Including a narrative example of some type, or providing some other means of specifically guiding practice, is crucial to conveying effective implications for practice.

Foldy (2012), for example, in an article about negative spotlighting regarding race, compared practices that happened in two organizations. In her segment on implications for practice she noted that:

there are some hints in the article about what organizations can do differently (to reduce negative spotlighting). The comparison of WomenKind and Media Inc. highlighted two practices at WomenKind that might have led to a reduction of negative spotlighting incidents. First, it took an applicant's attitudes about race, gender, and social justice seriously in the hiring process. … Furthermore, WomenKind also made race discussable within the organization.

In another article, Vermaak (2012, p. 235) did not have a separate 'implications for practice' section, but a large part of his "findings" sections were implications for practice. The focus of his approach was on how "Instead of basing contracts on reassurance (facilitator directiveness), facilitators can go in the opposite direction. They can discuss with participants what issues matter enough to make the (participants') discomfort of unclear (consultant) help and an unfamiliar approach (in which participants d take considerable responsibility) worth enduring." Vermaak (p. 243) suggested to facilitators that:

A good rule of thumb seems to be to not intervene deeper than needed. The case example about the initiation paradox in Yemen is a good example of a gradual and careful progression to stronger interventions. In the beginning, we slowed down, for instance, by having them explore their own issues rather than assess our offer to help. Next, we validated doubts by openly discussing the three selection criteria and helped them reevaluate their ambitions by reframing tough issues as worthwhile. Still, half the group did not sign on, and we felt like we were somehow expected to convince them, but we feared that would only undermine sustainable commitment. So we prescribed that they should not take on L&D—a

counterparadox. Moreover, we suggested that they needed to put in more work to be eligible. This allowed them to step into the L&D project on their own terms.

Another possible type of a specific illustration might take the form of a diagnostic questionnaire that is embedded in an implications for practice section and that might be used by practitioners. For example Grant and Marshak (2011, p. 222) included an extensive Table 1 directed at both researchers and change agents with questions about multiple dimensions of discourse as an approach to organizational change, such as, for example, "How can we maintain a stance of reflexivity about our orientations and biases in order to stay open to possibilities and challenges? How do we incorporate into and modify our discourse about change to best respond to reactions and alternative discourses?" Questions like these can help practitioners follow a step by step approach.

Or, perhaps, a story might take a very different form. In his 2010 reflection for JABS about his "Odyssey" through organization development, Dale Zand (434-435) included an ancient Chinese story:

A servant, sent by his lord to deliver a message to the lord of a neighboring province, arrived at his destination and was ushered into the lord, who asked, "How is your master?"
The servant replied, "My master contemplates his faults. He finds they are many and they keep growing in number. Correcting them is endless."
The lord thought to himself, "This is a wise servant. He has taught me humility."

Stories such as this may not give directly practical advice, but they may stimulate creative thinking, and this may be of value in itself.

The readability level of the implications for practice should be straightforward and clear

The majority of the implications for practice sections in JABS for the past two years use specific words that are often not familiar to the public and overall, their reading levels make them almost impenetrable by practitioners.

Two recent implications for practice sections, one short and one very lengthy, do include implications for practice whose reading level is straightforward. Schwarz (2012, p. 370) in a paper that, ironically, is directed toward researchers who write about change, includes a paragraph on implications for "the way we research and publish in change" that is easily understandable. Foldy (2012) includes an extensive implications for practice section that includes several stories of what happened in the organizations studied. These papers make evident that it is possible to publish implications for practice that are readable by practitioners. This can be done primarily by reducing sentence length and by reducing the average number of syllables in the words used.

Conclusion

The editors of JABS are hopeful that the new guidelines put forth here will make JABS more useful to practitioners, and in so doing, increase the impact that our work has on our organizations and communities. In addition, even if the impact on practitioners is not great, we hope that that the impacts on the academics writing the articles may be worthwhile. It can help authors to clarify for themselves as well as others what their conceptualizing might mean to practice, and thereby enhance the importance of their efforts.

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