Making Progress Toward Theoretical Progress in Management Research

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As in any scientific domain, theoretical progress in management research requires that we develop theories that provide clear propositions and use these propositions to derive hypotheses that are tested in empirical research. These steps toward theoretical progress are straightforward, and most management scholars learn to think in these terms as they pursue their programs of research. However, if we take a good hard look at management theories, we find that most of the propositions offered by these theories are imprecise, stating little more than the direction of the relationship between two constructs. Moreover, empirical studies that cite management theories rarely translate propositions from these theories into hypotheses that the studies intend to test. This state of affairs undermines theoretical progress in management research and constitutes cause for concern among management researchers. In this presentation, we will examine the aforementioned barriers to theoretical progress in management research and consider how these barriers can be overcome.