

COMMENTARIES

Industrial–Organizational Psychology’s Chicken Little Syndrome

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Aguinis, Bradley, and Brodersen (2014) offer an assessment of the extent industrial–organizational (I–O) psychologists have moved to business schools and predictions for the future. We present additional quantitative data that speak to the extent such migration is occurring, examine other indices of influence, and report qualitative data concerning why individuals stay in psychology. We conclude with brief thoughts on the future of the field.

The Migration Issue

Predictions and analyses presented by Aguinis et al. are based on current affiliations of editorial board members of *Journal of Applied Psychology (JAP)* and *Personnel*

Psychology (PPsych). There are several reasons why these data do not tell the entire story. First, analyzing patterns based on current academic affiliation is problematic because it does not take into account where the degree was earned by the board member. Second, presenting historical trends in terms of percentages masks the fact that the total number of board members of these two journals has increased substantially across time. We elaborate on these issues below.

We obtained the raw data used by Aguinis et al.,¹ which included the name and current affiliation of each board member. First, we updated this data to include the most recently formed boards of *JAP* and *PPsych*. Next, we researched where each board member obtained his or her terminal academic degree (i.e., I–O psychology program or business school). This information was obtained through a variety of means including PsychINFO searches, ProQuest dissertation searches, *TIP* articles, and Google and Google Scholar searches that typically yielded current web

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1. We thank Herman Aguinis for providing this data.

pages, Wikipedia entries, obituaries, news articles, biographies, and publications. Searches were conducted using several keywords including board member names in combination with current or known affiliations, "psychology," "psychologist," "SIOP Fellow," and/or "SIOP." Often multiple sources of information were used to ensure the obtained information was correct. For example, information from a book chapter biography found in a Google search detailing degree date or institution may have been used to then confirm or narrow ProQuest dissertation search results. Because our focus was on academic migration, we did not include board members outside of university settings. We also excluded individuals who obtained degrees in disciplines such as industrial and labor relations. On the basis of this data we created three categories: (a) individuals who graduated from a psychology department and currently reside in a psychology department (psychology-psychology), (b) those who graduated from a business school and currently reside in a business school (business-business), and (c) those who graduated from a psychology department and are currently in a business school (psychology-business migrators).² We next plotted this data to examine trends across time (Figure 1). The dates on the x axis correspond with the appointment of a new editor-in-chief.

Journal of Applied Psychology

A substantial number of board members currently affiliated with business schools obtained their terminal degree from a business school. For example, with regard to the 2015 incoming editorial board, out of the 157 board members with a current business school affiliation 83 (53%) earned their graduate degree from a business school. With regard to the

2009 data, 60 out 121 (50%) obtained a business school graduate degree. Importantly, although the number of *JAP* board members who have migrated from psychology to business has grown, so too have the number of psychology-psychology and business-business board members.

Figure 1 shows that the total number of board members has grown considerably over the past several decades. In 1917 *JAP* had 3 action editors and 19 board members, in 1989 there were 3 action editors and 44 board members, in 2003 there were 7 action editors and 83 reviewers, in 2009 the numbers grew to 11 action editors and 192 board members, and finally the incoming board for 2015 includes 12 action editors and 223 board members. The increase in the appointment of individuals with business school affiliations coincides with an increase in the overall number of editorial board members. The total number of board members currently affiliated with psychology has not decreased; in fact it increased substantially through to 2011.

Personnel Psychology

As shown in Figure 1, the pattern for *PPsych* differs somewhat from that of *JAP*. After 2003 and through 2011, the number of board members affiliated with psychology remained steady while both groups associated with business schools (business-business and psychology-business migrators) increased. Interestingly, in 2014 the size of the editorial board (and board membership across all groups) decreased.³ Similar to *JAP*, we found that a substantial portion of current affiliates in business schools obtained their graduate degree in a business school. For example, in 2011 of the 70 *PPsych* board members affiliated with business schools, 32 (46%) originated in business schools.

Across time until 2014, the total number of *PPsych* board members has expanded but

2. There were also cases in which individuals had migrated from a business school to psychology. Because of the small number, we elected not to include these cases in our analyses.

3. We did not include neither the book review editor nor the book review advisory panel in our analysis of the 2014 board. This may account for the difference.

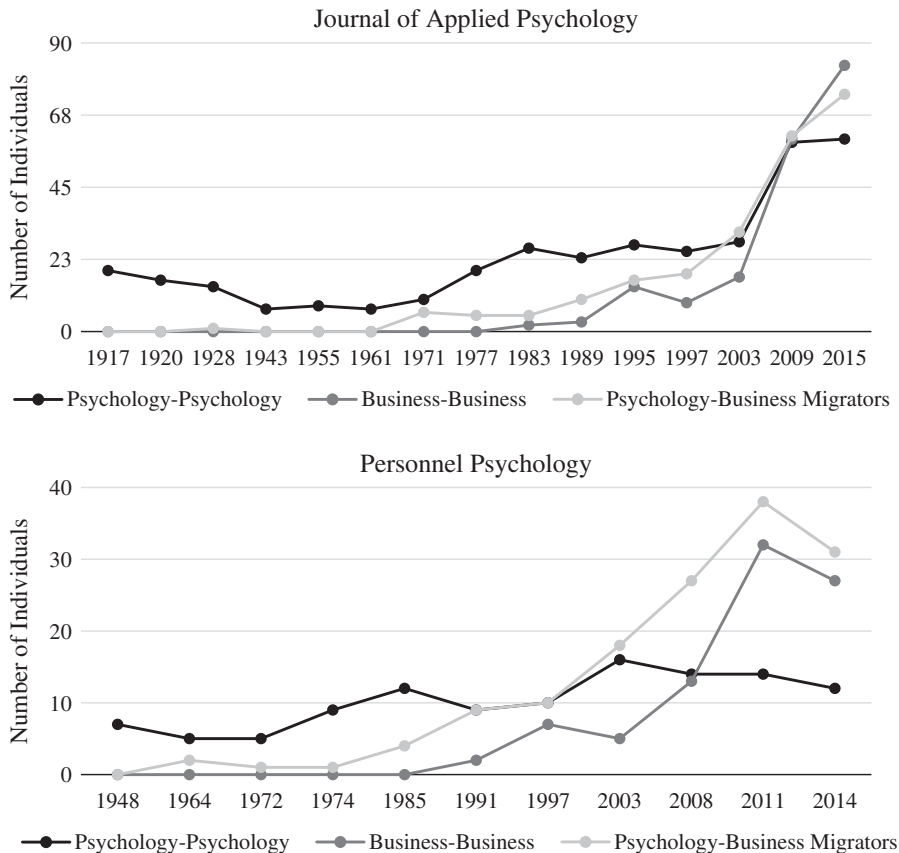


Figure 1. Raw numbers of editorial board members of *Journal of Applied Psychology* (top panel) and *Personnel Psychology* (bottom panel) who graduated from psychology and are currently in psychology (psychology-psychology), who graduated from a business school and are currently in a business school (business-business), and who graduated from psychology and are currently in a business school (psychology-business migrators).

not to the same extent as *JAP*. In 1964 there was a single action editor and 23 board members, in 2003 there were 2 action editors and 47 board members, in 2008 there were 3 action editors and 66 board members, and in 2011 the numbers grew to 5 action editors and 91 board members.

Summary and Implications

Roughly half of the individuals associated with business schools that serve as board members of *JAP* and *PPsych* originated in business schools. Moreover, although there is a shift in the relative percentage of board membership made up of those currently

affiliated with psychology versus those currently affiliated with business, there has been no pattern of decline with regard to the total number psychology board members.

With these findings as a backdrop, we pose several alternative views to that of “brain drain” with regard to the pattern of board composition across time. One is that demand has exceeded supply. Although the number of programs offering PhD and PsyD degrees in I–O psychology has increased across time, there is a finite pool of faculty from which to draw. Moreover, the fact that so many individuals with business school degrees are becoming board members suggests that the increase is not merely a

function of those with “sufficient scholarly stature” migrating to business schools, thus reducing the pool of those within psychology who possess a “sufficiently scholarly stature.” Rather, the demand is such that there is need to immigrate those with business degrees onto the boards of traditionally I–O journals. If the demand–supply explanation is valid, it suggests that we need to grow the number I–O psychology programs and the faculty associated with those programs in order keep pace with the demand.

Another possibility is that board membership reflects, in part, the affiliation of the editor-in-chief. With regard to *PPsych*, starting with the 1991 appointment, all chief editors have had current affiliations with a business school with the exception of Ann Marie Ryan who began her term in 2003. Incidentally, 2003 coincides with the peak number of board members affiliated with psychology (see Figure 1). Since 2011 all of the associate editors of *PPsych* have also had business school affiliations. For the first time in the history of *JAP*, the incoming editor-in-chief is affiliated with a business school. Interestingly, Figure 1 shows that for the first time there is no increase in the number of board members affiliated with psychology at *JAP*, while there were increases in both types of business school affiliations. Such a pattern is reflective of the classic attraction–selection–attrition paradigm as Editors both attract and select like individuals to serve on the board (Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). Perhaps the real issue of concern is not brain drain but the impact that the immigration of the managerial sciences is having on the research published in I–O psychology journals (Highhouse, 2014).

Scientific Influence

The conclusions and predictions made by Aguinis et al. with regard to scientific influence are based on the composition of the editorial boards of two journals and the authors that publish in the same two journals. We contend this is a narrow

and deficient way in which to view I–O science influence. To that end, we looked at two additional indicators of influence that represent more aggregate contributions: SIOP Distinguished Scientific Contributions Award (DSCA) winners and SIOP Fellows.

Based on the same set of three categories previously described, we plotted the affiliation of individuals who have received SIOP’s most prestigious award for contributions to science (Figure 2a) and those elected to Fellow status (Figure 2b). We identified their affiliation at the time the award was given.

The DSCA was first given in 1983, and there have been a total of 37 recipients (in some years two awards were given). We plotted the data by decade. As illustrated in Figure 2a, all 37 received their graduate degrees in psychology. A total of 16 of 37 (43%) were affiliated with a business school at the time of receiving the award. From 1983 to 1990 63% of recipients were in a psychology department. From 1991 to 2013, the percentage of recipients from psychology was 50%. Regardless of what setting individuals chose to affiliate with, training grounded in psychology was the foundation for those judged to have made extraordinary contributions to I–O science. Of the 258 academic Fellows, 120 (46%) had psychology affiliations, 96 (38%) began in psychology and are currently in business, and 42 (16%) earned their degree in business. Here again, we find that the vast majority of individuals accorded Fellow status received their training within a psychology department.

Summary and Implications

Data based on lifetime scientific achievement designations show that although *some* of the most scientifically influential members of the field affiliate with business, the pattern is not one that suggests that the center of scientific influence has shifted to business schools. Importantly, our analysis further demonstrates that the foundation for scientific influence remains within psychology; the scientific training received by the

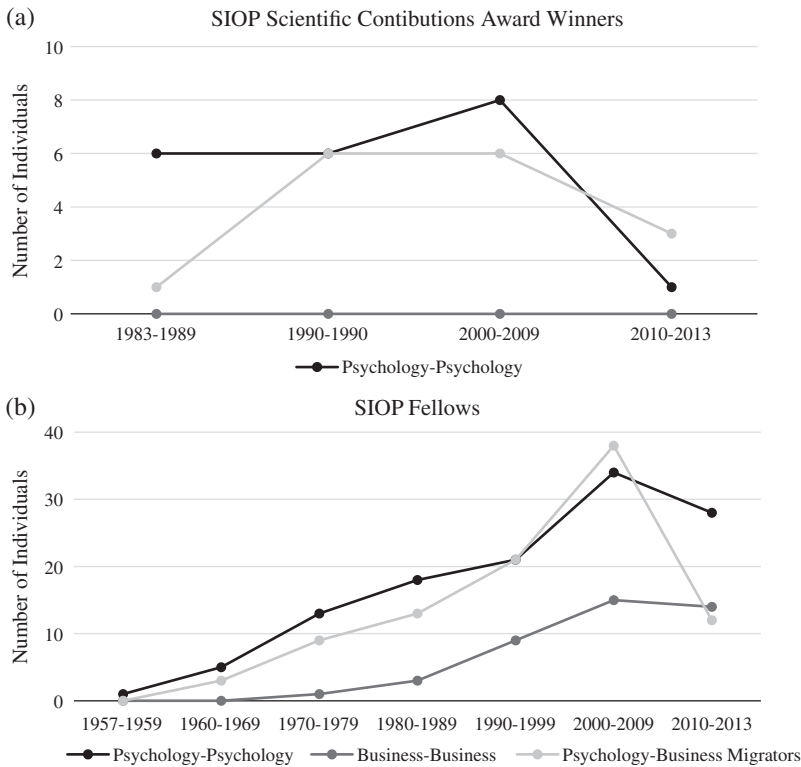


Figure 2. (a) SIOP Scientific Contributions Award winners by affiliation at time of graduation and at time of the award, respectively, (psychology-psychology), (business-business), and (psychology-business migrants). (b) Number of SIOP Fellows by affiliation at time of graduation and at time of the award, respectively, (psychology-psychology), (business-business), and (psychology-business migrants).

vast majority of DSCA recipients and Fellows was within a psychology department.

Why Stay in Psychology?

Aguinis et al. present data on reasons why I–O psychologists chose to move to business schools. To supplement that perspective, we were interested in reasons individuals stay in psychology. To that end, we targeted the 25 programs identified as having the most productive faculty in terms of publication in the top 10 I–O journals from 2003 to 2012 (Beiler, Zimmerman, Doerr, & Clark, 2014). We sent an online survey to a representative of each of these programs and asked these representatives to forward the survey to their I–O departmental colleagues. Responses

were anonymous. We received a total of 53 responses. Of these, 8 were assistant professors, 18 were associate professors, and 27 were full professors.

We posed the following open-ended question, “As you know, many I–O psychologists work in business schools. What are the reasons why you have chosen to work in a psychology department rather than a business school?” A sampling of responses appears in Table 1. Three themes emerged. The dominant theme centered on intellectual environment and values. Comments reflected factors that both drew them to psychology (e.g., research content focus) as well as factors that repelled them from business (e.g., reward systems that focus on the wrong thing). A second common theme involved teaching. Respondents were

Table 1. *Why Individuals Stay in Psychology*

Theme	Illustrative comments
Intellectual environment and values	<p>"I value intellectual atmosphere and freedom to focus on worker issues over salary"</p> <p>"I think there is more to scholarship than a list of 10 'A' journals."</p> <p>"I have known WAY too many scholars who have made enormous contributions in outlets that don't count in most b-schools ..."</p> <p>"The reward system in B-schools is focused on the wrong thing ... demonstrating pubs in specific journals vs the development of a programmatic and impactful research program."</p> <p>"Higher standards toward research quality."</p> <p>"I fit in better with the freaks in psychology rather than the narcissists (see Zelno et al. AMLE) in business."</p> <p>"Lack of appreciation for basic science in business schools."</p> <p>"I like playing with ideas and I am interested in people more so than organizations."</p> <p>"The focus on health and well-being of workers is more important to me than what has traditionally been the focus of outcomes relevant in business schools."</p> <p>"I have no interests in publishing in management journals (e.g., <i>AMJ</i>, <i>AMR</i>)."</p> <p>"Like being around colleagues from various psych areas: like culture. (Half the money, twice the fun! Ahem)"</p>
Teaching	<p>"Ability to work with more doctoral students."</p> <p>"More scholarly PhD students."</p> <p>"Not interested in putting on dog and pony shows for MBA students"</p> <p>"Students who care about people not profits."</p> <p>"I prefer to teach intro to psych and psychological theories rather than management theories when I need to teach introductory courses"</p> <p>"The quality of the graduate students and being involved in a I–O training program."</p> <p>"Teaching focuses on science not cookbook answers to management issues."</p>
Identity	<p>"I identify as a psychologist first."</p> <p>"I am a psychologist at heart."</p> <p>"I am a psychologist and resonate with that first and foremost."</p> <p>"... see myself as a psychologist; that is, I am in the psychological sciences and not managerial sciences."</p>

drawn toward teaching science and psychological principles and drawn away from teaching MBA students. The third theme centered on identity with respondents explicitly stating, "I am a psychologist."

We also asked participants several questions concerning interest and interaction with business schools. A total of 33 respondents reported that they had been invited to apply for a position in a business school, 19 (58%) had not, and 1 did not respond. A total of 15 individuals (45%) had been

offered a position in a business school and turned it down. Those who had turned down business school positions were asked why they had turned the job down. The same themes emerged (e.g., "The psychology department environment is an intellectual's dream come true. It is a casual place where very serious scientists come to work."; "The money was tempting but in the end it was a poor fit for me intellectually."; "The potentially high demands from teaching MBAs."). Other factors came into

play such as location (e.g., “It would have been really, really cold. On the plus side, I could have lined my coat with one hundred dollar bills given the pay.”; “Cost of living was too high.”) and family considerations (e.g., “Wrong time to move my family.”; “Did not want to move to ensure career continuity for my husband.”).

Summary and Implications

There are advantages and disadvantages associated with both psychology and business school settings. Based on a variety of factors, individuals with an I–O psychology degree may feel that one environment provides a better fit than the other. Highly productive scholars are more likely to have options available to them, and some choose to migrate to a business school. However, there are also those who actively prefer to identify with a psychology department environment.

Conclusion

We reject the conclusion and prediction stated by Aguinis et al., “Thus, we predict that the vast majority of the most influential I–O psychology researchers will *continue* (emphasis added) to be affiliated with business schools.” We acknowledge that our analysis is limited to board membership while Aguinis et al. included publications as well as board membership. However, board members are likely drawn from the pool of journal authors, and thus we suspect the results would also indicate that a substantial percentage of scholars currently affiliated with business that publish in *JAP* and *PPsych* obtained their degree in a business school. Regardless, an analysis of publications and board membership of two journals does not enable conclusions to be drawn with regard to the number of individuals moving from psychology to business nor the extent that the most influential I–O psychologists are housed in business schools. The I–O sky is not falling. Admittedly, our additional analyses of DSCA recipients and Fellows are also

deficient for capturing I–O scientific influence. Influence is arguably best represented by identifying those in our field who have broken out of the closed system of I–O and have impacted the discipline of psychology or society at large in a meaningful way.

Nevertheless, the Aguinis et al. data as well as our own data raise issues important for the field to consider. We do not view the availability of multiple academic affiliations for individuals trained as I–O psychologists to play out their academic career as damaging to the field of I–O. Business schools will attract some individuals trained in I–O psychology while psychology will continue to appeal to others. As noted by one of our respondents, “People who move to b-schools are interested in studying different phenomena than those who remain in psychology.” Moreover, an assumption underlying Aguinis et al. is that individuals take jobs in business schools by choice rather than by necessity. Job choice is also dictated by market conditions, and in some cases there may be greater availability of business school positions than psychology positions.

Aguinis et al. argue that I–O psychology is marginalized in many top psychology departments, and that is one reason I–O psychologists might prefer working in business schools. We have no cause to disagree with this statement, but we caution those who flee psychology because they feel “marginalized.” A quick perusal of any ranking of top business schools will find that those schools also have very little traditional I–O presence.

Clearly, the best reason for choosing one setting over another is the fit between the intellectual environment of the setting and one’s own research interests. Although we take issue with the overall conclusions and predictions of Aguinis et al., we do not take issue with the common sense idea that some people trained in psychology departments will find that they have a greater interest in the managerial science environment and migrate accordingly. Rather than brain drain, this may reflect different strokes for different folks. We believe this simple fact

presents both an opportunity and a challenge for those who choose to remain within psychology. As we said, we agree that I–O has often found itself marginalized in comprehensive, traditional psychology departments, but we think that this is greatly our own fault as we have failed to make the case that a work psychology can be an important part of the science of psychology. Clinical psychology is not well respected in many departments either, and that is one reason why clinical programs are becoming “clinical science” programs with less focus on clinical practice and more on the science of disorders. This could be an opportunity for us as well, an opportunity is to reorient the field toward the science of work (Weiss & Rupp, 2011) and thus avoid “becoming a field that merely services organizational problems” (Highhouse & Zicker, 1997).

Then, instead of worrying about whether I–O psychology has migrated to business schools, we would have clearer emphases and accompanying training for different research issues best addressed by scholars in different settings. Instead of worrying about some fictitious “brain drain,” we would recognize that there are enough

brains, properly trained and stimulated, to produce top-level scholarship in each setting on each set of topics. Instead of trading one marginalized existence for another, we could start to make valued contributions in each domain.

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