Industrial and Organizational Psychology
PERSPECTIVES ON SCIENCE AND PRACTICE

Industrial–Organizational Psychologists in Business Schools: Considering the More Subtle Issue of *Fit*

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Is there really a problem here? Aguinis, Bradley, and Brodersen (2014) report a general negative perception among academics toward many industrial–organizational (I–O) psychologists' migration into business schools. The notion of "brain drain" seems to suggest some emerging problem or threat that requires resolution. We believe otherwise. As current faculty members who have experienced the *opportunity* to seek employment across a range of academic units—from business schools to labor studies programs to psychology departments—we suggest I–O psychologists' growing access to multiple academic venues and career paths only provides expanded opportunities for individuals and greater benefits to the science and practice of work psychology, more broadly.

The purpose of this commentary is to highlight the more subtle issue of *fit*. Just as a psychology department may not fit the personalities and career goals of some I–Os, a business school may not fit the personalities and career goals of others. Indeed, as I–O psychologists, is this not one of our primary concerns, placing people into jobs and organizations where they are happy and most effective? Why should we not want the same for our colleagues and ourselves? Just as important, does it not benefit I–O programs to attract those who truly feel "at home" in psychology? Consistent with attraction–selection–attrition (ASA) theory (Schneider, 1987), might greater career opportunities for I–O psychologists actually serve to filter out those who do not feel a sense of compatibility within a psychology department—perhaps improving the quality of advisor–advisee mentoring relationships and the general esprit d'corp among faculty members?

Aguinis et al. offer a very complete listing of rationales for positive and negative outcomes associated with choosing a business school over a psychology department. On the basis of our own experiences and discussions with others over the years, we expand on Aguinis et al.'s discussion by elaborating on several key "pushes" out of psychology and "pulls" into business (beyond financial issues). In so doing, it is not our intent to emphasize the strengths of business schools or the weaknesses of psychology departments. Such assessments are ultimately in the eye of the beholder and best left to individuals to judge for

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themselves. Rather, we hope our thoughts contribute to an honest discussion regarding whether psychology programs are really the best places for *all* I–Os to reside; whether business schools may offer a more proper context for *some* of us to conduct our work; and whether there are actually substantive concerns about these changes or whether they reflect an important and necessary evolution for the field of I–O.

Push Factors: Leaving Psychology

Grant Funding

Grants have become an important requirement for promotion in many psychology departments. In discussions with some of our colleagues in psychology, they emphasize their sense of thrill in pursuing grants through external sponsors. For these individuals, grants offer a feeling of excitement and a chance to apply their skills to real-world problems. However, many I–Os conduct their research without the need for external funding and show little interest in the grant process. In fact, many view the grant process—from application to execution to reporting—as an incredible drain on time and resources, not to mention inherently stressful when tenure and promotion are on the line. We have heard many individuals comment that the ambiguity associated with the publication process is enough! The inconsistency in performance criteria thus may make business schools more attractive to these folks. The fact is that those of us who want to engage in grant work can in either psychology or business, but the ways in which we are evaluated and the general enthusiasm for grant funding may be quite different across the two. Ultimately, the individual must decide in which environment they feel most comfortable.

Advising Doctoral Students

Doctoral programs are critical for most I–O psychology programs and many business schools. In positive situations (experienced by all three of us), strong mentoring relationships and life-long friendships can develop. Doctoral students can also serve an important role in facilitating a faculty member's research program, especially if the person's research requires management of an experimental laboratory and/or other significant logistical considerations.

However, considering the ratio of faculty members to doctoral students, faculty in I–O tend to have far more advisees. In addition, whereas doctoral students in business schools tend to be focused on academic careers, doctoral students in I–O can pursue a variety of nonacademic careers paths, such as consulting, corporate, or military. Combining these, I–O faculty tend to have more advisees with a wider range of career interests and motivations. Advising a greater number of doctoral students obviously requires considerable time and energy that can detract from one's own work. Time and energy spent advising students on theses and dissertations may also be partially lost when students are more applied in their career focus and uninterested in publishing their work or do not follow through with the publication process. These additional complexities inherent to advising in I–O programs may be situations that some wish to avoid.

Other less frequent but more disruptive issues can also surface with greater advising demands. As research suggests, advisor–advisee relationships can turn toxic and dysfunctional (Hobman, Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2009), especially when situational pressures drain both parties' mental resources and create tension over even minor conflicts—consistent with an ego depletion perspective (cf., Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998; DeWall, Baumeister, Stillman, & Gailliot, 2007). As the number of advisees grows, misperceptions and competition can develop among individuals if they compete for limited resources from their advisor, further contributing to less collegial work situations. I–O faculty members may also grow frustrated with students who are more applied in their career emphasis and less interested in publishing—creating

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added friction in advisor–advisee relationships. I–Os who experienced the stress of such situations in grad school may be less inclined to take a job in I–O for fear of reliving them again.

In summary, although advising has great potential rewards from a professional and personal standpoint, many I–Os may be deterred from all the additional responsibilities, complexities, and stressors that come with it in I–O programs. Thus, they may elect to move into a business school where advising demands are lighter or even absent. Again, this is a matter of personal choice and compatibility. However, in order to create more positive perceptions of advising, it seems important that I–O programs do their best to foster positive advising experiences for future I–Os—for example, by placing greater emphasis on matching advisors and advisees on personality or by enacting mechanisms that allow them to manage conflict more effectively.

Pull Factors: Going to Business Schools

Practice-Based Teaching

With respect to "pull" factors, many I–Os may simply desire a more practically focused and less theoretically driven teaching environment found in most business schools. Teaching in a business school may signal an enhanced opportunity to impact what actually happens within organizations—whether through undergraduate business courses, MBA classes, or executive education programs. These same opportunities are simply not available within most psychology departments, which may be frustrating for certain individuals. Some I–Os may also desire more case-based teaching methods typically found in business schools. Of course, it is possible to teach courses across academic units, offer executive education programs, and teach classes using case methods while residing in a psychology department, but it may require more effort. Several of our colleagues have also found jobs in graduate HR programs situated in psychology departments, which allow them to enjoy the best of both worlds. These individuals split their classroom time between teaching working professionals (using more practice-based teaching methods) and undergraduates (using more research-focused methods). Again, we see that the "psychology-or-business" decision is not an either/or issue but more a matter of choice and fit.

Business Environment

Similarly, some individuals may desire more of a business environment not present in psychology departments. I–O programs may create a feeling of cognitive dissonance in certain individuals who believe a business context is more aligned with their scholarly activities. This seems to be an uneasy tension that we have noticed in conversations with others. I–O has the peculiar identity of being focused on psychology *and* business, each of which have their unique stereotypes and associated characteristics. Certain I–Os may feel an identity crisis given their expertise concerns matters related to psychology at work, yet many psychology departments tend to be more liberal leaning and skeptical of business "folks" (as the focal article reports).

People seek to reduce cognitive dissonance either by changing their behaviors or their circumstances or through rationalization (Festinger, 1957). For I–Os who experience dissonance, yet are unable to rationalize the discrepancy, they might seek out business schools as a way of reducing perceived disconnects. The reverse may also be seen in business schools being viewed by members of the I–O community as perhaps overly concerned with bottom-line implications and less interested in the psychological underpinnings of organizational behavior. In this area, it seems that one must ask themselves with what restricted view they are most comfortable and in what academic department they might best be able to align their personal values and beliefs.

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Some Important Issues in Our View

Promoting an "I–O Identity"

Although we do not believe greater academic career opportunities should be viewed as an inherent problem or threat to the field, this is not to suggest that there are not issues in need of addressing. For example, as alluded in the focal article, I–O programs may not be instilling a sense of identity in grad students that they are a part of an I–O community. This may stem from a number of issues, such as a lack of courses focused on the history and traditions of I–O and its notable contributions to psychology, more broadly. We are also drifting more toward training I–O first and psychology second, which further weakens the image of being a psychologist. New I–Os may not view themselves as any different from their peers in business or as having any responsibility to represent the field in their careers, regardless of departmental affiliation.

Research suggests people make decisions based on rational cost–benefit analyses as well as more emotional, identity-related concerns (March, 1994). The latter reason is why rich liberals and poor conservatives often vote against their economic interests. Without instilling a strong "I–O identity" in grad students, I–O programs effectively make the decision to move out of psychology to more resource abundant business schools easier. That is, the identity piece is not present to override individuals' cost–benefit analyses. Cultivating a sense of identity in grad students, however, may make the "psychology-or-business" decision a bit more difficult or at least build greater commitment and responsibility to the I–O field. In reality, one can be an I–O psychologist regardless of their department. It is our duty to help solidify the identity that best suits our students while they are with us, and it is our choice how we want to see ourselves.

Avoiding Potential Stigmas

Finally, with I–O psychologists' increasing access to business schools, we have noticed a troubling stigma arising against individuals who select jobs in psychology. Given differences in salary and resources between business and psychology, the implication for many ill-informed individuals seems to be, "If you go to a psychology department, it is probably because you can't make it in a business school." Indeed, we have observed some business professors express the view that choosing psychology is equivalent to pigeonholing oneself as a "second class citizen."

On the other side are those in psychology who believe going into a business school is comparable to "treason" or "selling out." We know individuals who have experienced backlash from their advisors and others for taking jobs in business. Many in psychology also continue to note differences between basic and applied research and how going into a business school only typifies the "second class" nature of applied work. In addition to this being a false dichotomy, it should be our perspective that whether we approach science from a practical application or a theoretical question, both approaches must recognize the importance of doing both. As a very wise psychologist, Herschel Leibowitz, once noted, it is only a matter of where you start. If you find an application that works, you are doing something that has an important foundation and it is your job to uncover what you have discovered. Alternatively, if you have worked in a lab to isolate a unique phenomenon, it is your job to determine how to apply it or at least provide necessary information to allow others to do so. In the end, social stigmas related to psychology and business departments only serve to detract from the greater goal of what we are all here for: to understand and improve organizations and the lives of those who reside within them.

Concluding Thoughts

Ultimately, it is our position that being an I–O psychologist affords one the opportunity to study the world of work. Whether one does so within a psychology

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department, a business school, or elsewhere, it should be a matter of *personal choice*. We view the growing movement of I–Os into business schools not as a "brain drain" but rather as an enhanced opportunity for individuals to achieve greater fit in their careers and to impact the study of psychology at work.

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