
Training Science–Practitioners: Broadening the Training of Industrial–Organizational Psychologists

BART L. WEATHINGTON

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

SHAWN M. BERGMAN AND JACQUELINE Z. BERGMAN

Appalachian State University

The suggestions of Byrne et al. (2014) need to be more broadly applied in order to help the field of industrial–organizational (I–O) psychology grow and move forward. Specifically, we believe that, although focusing on the education of doctoral students is an important and worthy endeavor, SIOP needs to make sure that discussions of graduate training also include master’s level education. In addition, we believe that education should be driven by the fact that I–O psychology is an applied discipline and is one that preaches the advances of the science–practitioner model. Thus, we need to broaden our training to educate all I–O students in both the science and practice of the field.

Don’t Neglect Master’s Level Education

The Byrne et al. article focuses exclusively on SIOP’s *Guidelines for Education and Training at the Doctoral Level in Industrial–Organizational Psychology* (SIOP, 1999). This focus is too narrow given that the content overlap is 76% (19/25) between SIOP’s

doctoral areas of competence and their *Guidelines for Education and Training at the Master’s Level in Industrial–Organizational Psychology* (SIOP, 1994). Given that there is this great of an overlap between doctoral and master’s education areas of competence, it seems prudent that any discussions regarding changes to I–O education should be broadened to include both the doctoral and master’s level.

Aside from the large overlap between the training competences, there is another, and possibly more important, reason to broaden any discussion of education in I–O psychology to master’s level education: individuals with master’s degrees in I–O psychology are the primary representatives of our field. Indeed, there are 136 master’s and 110 doctoral I–O psychology programs (Tett et al., 2012) with the average class size of master’s programs being about 12.3 students, compared with 4.6 for doctoral programs (Tett, Walser, Brown, Simonet, & Tonidandel, 2013). When those numbers are coupled with the percentage of master’s and doctoral students who work in applied settings (90.9% for master’s and 67.2% for doctoral), it is clear that there are more professionals with a master’s degree in I–O psychology that are practicing in the field than there are those with doctoral degrees.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Bart L. Weathington.
E-mail: Bart-Weathington@utc.edu

Address: Department of Psychology, The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Chattanooga, TN 37343

Teach Business Lingo to Future Academics and Practitioners Alike

We agree with Byrne's and colleagues' notion that I–O psychologists need to be able to “integrate scientific knowledge with the realities of business” (p. 3). I–O psychology is an applied field, and its main application is in the business arena, where the application of a scientific model of decision making can be extremely beneficial. As noted by Byrne and others, graduate programs in I–O psychology do a good job in creating technicians but seem to fail when it comes to training these technicians on how to communicate their expertise to business professionals and policy makers. This notion is supported by the findings of Tett et al. (2013), which indicate that consulting and business skill courses were offered an average 1.54 times in a 5-year period at both the master's and doctoral levels. This finding strongly suggests that changes in the way we prepare professionals for entry into an applied field need to occur.

We applaud Byrne's and colleagues' “out of the box” thinking regarding a certified, internship program, but believe that their suggestion to only require an internship for those whose aim is to work in an applied setting is too narrow in scope. We believe that all students, master's and doctoral, should be required to complete an internship during their time in graduate school in order to ensure that they have some practical, applied experience upon graduation.

This position is borne out of the fact that although there are a number of “pure academics” in the discipline, I–O psychology is, at heart, an applied science. We believe that even “pure academics” should understand how their research could be applied to the “real” business world. We also believe that requiring an internship would help the field of I–O psychology address two of its major weaknesses as seen by business and HR professionals: that I–O psychologists lack business/organizational understanding and are not taken seriously, in part, because they are “overly academic” (Rose,

McCune, Spencer, Rupprecht, & Drogan, 2013). We believe that if we are going to move the field of I–O psychology forward then the education of all I–O students, master's and doctoral, needs to include some type of applied business experience.

This suggestion does not mean that all professors need give up their academic focus to become consultants for hire. However, for the betterment of the field of I–O psychology and to enhance the training of future I–O applied and academic professionals, we believe that all programs should require an applied internship of some type. This would give students experience in how things work in the business world, help them to better understand business lingo, and provide them with an accurate frame of reference for their future course work and research.

Finally, we agree with Byrne et al.'s assessment that training in employment law should be required. However, we disagree with their assessment that it “may be a topic important only to those entering specific practice positions and, therefore, could be moved to being covered as part of a certified internship” (p. 6). Again, focusing on the fact that I–O psychology is an applied field, we believe that all students should have some training in the legal environment in which businesses operate. We agree that great partnerships can be formed between business and universities that can mutually benefit the business, the university, and the student. However, leaving the formal training of a topic as technical as employment law up to an internship puts a lot of faith in the idea that a for-profit company will forgo its main objective, to make money, and become an educational institution.

Requiring an applied internship and providing more formal training in employment law will better equip I–O professionals to more effectively communicate with business decision makers by helping future students understand the legal and business realities in which businesses operate. In addition, such training would go a long way to helping I–O psychologists overcome

their general lack business/organizational understanding.

Help Get I–O Psychology a Seat at the Table

Many practitioners and academics in I–O psychology have lamented the often poor visibility of our field and the fact that we do not have a seat at the executive table (Rotolo, 2009). To address this issue from an academic standpoint, we need to make sure that our research is accessible and will be both seen and used in the real world. From a practice standpoint, we need more chief HR or people officers coming from the ranks of I–O. This, in particular, would serve I–O psychology well, as such high-level executives would not only increase the visibility of our field but would also allow the field to have the impact on business that we all know it can have. Although it is of concern that some I–O psychologists seem to disconnect from the field as they move up the corporate ranks, we believe that this may occur with much less frequency as the visibility and reputation of our field grows.

Many reasons have been given for poor visibility of I–O psychology. One contention is that this occurs partially because we often think of and present ourselves only as human resources specialists. This portrayal, however, compounds our lack of visibility because human resources as a field suffers from a visibility problem of its own (Hammond, 2005). I–O psychology and the training of I–O psychologists at all levels need to move beyond human resources. We must broaden our view of I–O psychology to consider the interdisciplinary nature and implications of what we do. Being trained as scientific-practitioners is a core function of I–O psychology and we do it well. However, tactical considerations do not preclude a consideration of the larger organizational picture and looking to make contributions in organizational areas beyond human resources.

Indeed, I–O psychology has a great deal to contribute at all levels of the organization; but if we do not communicate

this effectively or understand the business and legal realities in which organizations operate then we will be stuck as niche players in the strategic operations of organizations. Thus, practitioners and academics alike need to be able to speak the “lingo” and discuss business in a manner to which corporate executives will be receptive. Yet, training in I–O psychology is different from the training received in business schools (Gasser, Butler, Waddilove, & Tan, 2004; Gasser, Walsh, & Butler, 2008). Doctoral and master’s level I–O psychologists must be familiar enough with basic ideas and terminology in law, finance, accounting, marketing, and economics to contribute to both strategic and tactical business decisions. We do not have to be experts in all of these areas, and we are not advocating for a duplication of MBA curriculum, but we must be conversant and have a base understanding of these areas. Once we are speaking the same language and have a common foundation, perhaps we can then more easily earn our seat at the executive table.

Finally, after students graduate from I–O psychology programs, the field needs a concerted effort to keep corporate I–O psychologists, many with master’s degrees, engaged in our discipline and involved in SIOP. This would go a long way toward enhancing our visibility, securing meaningful internship experiences with trained I–O psychologists, and creating a dialog between academics and practitioners regarding the current happenings in the workplace. Together, these efforts and changes to graduate training in I–O should be implemented with the goal of helping all students, masters and doctoral, gain exposure and experience in areas that would propel them, and the field of I–O psychology, forward.

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