
Industrial–Organizational Psychology Research: The Setting Is Academic

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Aguinis, Bradley, and Brodersen (2014) explore the extent and consequences of a migration that may not even exist. We challenge their core premise that the practice of industrial–organizational (I–O) psychology in business schools signifies a migration away from psychology departments. Rather, we believe their data point to a more important gap than the one between psychology departments and business schools. Specifically, the evidence presented warns of a divide between academics and practitioners, and that should be the focus of the discussion. A debate about the setting of I–O research is academic, but one about the growing gulf between researchers and practitioners within the field is exigent.

We start with a review of the evidence. In study 1, the authors attempt to explore

the migration by examining (a) the affiliation of editorial board members and authors of two top I–O journals, (b) SIOP membership/conference attendance and the number of programs offering doctoral degrees in I–O psychology, and (c) compensation data of I–O psychologists across contexts. Only the first category attempts to address whether the migration is occurring. Yet on the basis of the data from these sources, the authors conclude that the field of I–O psychology is expanding and that “I–O psychologists are moving to business schools” (Aguinis et al., 2014, p. 289, italics in original), with the further implication that it is the most gifted scholars who are leaving.

The data presented may provide evidence that the field is expanding and that there are compensation differences between psychology departments and business schools. However, we argue that there is no evidence to support the primary premise that we are witnessing an exodus of I–O psychologists from psychology departments, nor that it relates primarily to the

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field's top scholars. The word "migration" implies a movement from one location to another. The information on the affiliation of editorial board members and authors of two top I–O journals indicates where these individuals are now. However, we are given no data on where they started. The results from study 1 show that research in I–O psychology is being conducted in business schools *also*. Although that may be a story of expansion, it is not necessarily a story of movement. To show a migration, one would have to find that the successful scholars who write and edit for the two top journals received the majority of their training in I–O psychology departments but now work primarily in a business school. That is not shown. It is quite likely that at least some of these scholars who work in business schools were trained exclusively in business schools through organizational behavior or human resource management programs. This would mean there is no movement from one place to another and hence no migration. The evidence we are shown simply tells the story of a field undergoing expansion.

There may be a general growth in the number of researchers with a business school affiliation due to the fact that students who have been trained in business schools become researchers affiliated almost exclusively with business schools because business school trained scholars are rarely hired by I–O psychology departments. Furthermore, I–O psychology programs are no longer the sole training ground for researchers interested in and capable of producing literature that is appropriate for the *Journal of Applied Psychology (JAP)* and *Personnel Psychology (PPsych)*. An alternative explanation for the preponderance of business school scholars at high levels of these I–O journals is that the overall quality of the training and research being conducted in business schools has reached the point where it matches the rigor of that in psychology departments. In addition, it may be that business school trained scholars are filling a research void that those trained in I–O psychology programs are not and

that this distinctive contribution translates into business school affiliated authorship and editorial influence. The bottom line is that it is no longer a valid assumption that authors and editors in these journals were trained exclusively in I–O psychology programs. Because business school-trained researchers retain that affiliation, this shift in training backgrounds has implications for overall researcher affiliation patterns within the field. Specifically, it means that we should expect to see growth in the proportion of business school affiliations, which is consistent with what the authors found.

Furthermore, because we are given only author and editor affiliation *percentages* with no indication of whether the underlying whole is changing over time (i.e., size of the editorial boards or overall volume of authors), it may be that the increase in the proportion of business school affiliated researchers is due to the acknowledged overall growth of the field, as opposed to an absolute drop in the number of researchers affiliated with psychology departments that we would expect from a broader migration.

To investigate this possible explanation, we examined one volume from each decade of both of the targeted journals since their inception to determine how the absolute numbers of editorial board members, articles, and authors have changed over time. We found that the size of the total editorial boards (defined as the editor(s), any associate editors, and the editorial board members or contributing editors) of both journals has grown substantially, as shown in Figure 1. The total editorial board of *PPsych* went from 21 in 1948 to 81 in 2014, an increase of almost four fold. The total editorial board of *JAP* has changed from 22 in 1917 to 236 for the 2015 incoming board, an increase of over 10 fold. Given that overall board size has grown significantly, it is not surprising that many of the new editorial positions are being filled by business school affiliated board members, as Aguinis et al. show. Hence, we suggest that the shift in proportional affiliation that the authors show

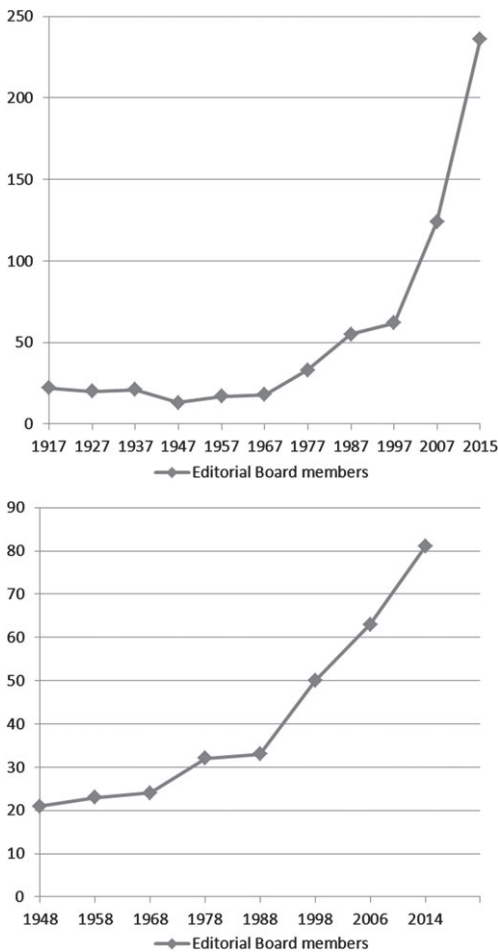


Figure 1. Total size of editorial board of *Journal of Applied Psychology* (1917–2015 incoming; top panel) and *Personnel Psychology* (1948–2014 current; bottom panel) including editor(s), associate editors, and editorial board or consulting editors from the first volume of each journal to the most current data available.

does not demonstrate migration but rather substantial expansion.

Using the same methodology, we also examined whether the number of articles changed over time. We found that since their inception both journals have roughly doubled the number of pages they print in a year. In the case of *PPsych*, the growth in printed pages has been associated with fewer but longer articles. It published 40

articles in 1948 and only 27 in 2013. In contrast, the growth in both the number and the size of printed pages at *JAP* has resulted in a growth in the number of articles as well, from 40 in 1917 to a height of 135 in 2007 and then a drop to 71 in 2013. Both journals also displayed a shift from a primarily sole or dual authorship model prevalent in the journals' earlier years toward the now common multiauthorship model by the late 1980s. Overall, we conclude that the number of authors in both of these journals has also increased over time much like the editorial boards. Thus, the data are consistent with an expansion story wherein business school affiliated authors constitute a large proportion of the growth.

For all of these reasons, we do not concur with the conclusion of Aguinis et al. that I–O psychologists—and in particular the best ones—are moving to business schools. Of course, we do not dispute that the expansion of the field to business schools affords I–O psychology department trained researchers that option if they so choose. We simply dispute that the evidence provided supports the migration conclusion.

Some of the confusion about the migration issue may come from the fact that the authors have not clearly defined what they mean by “I–O psychologist.” Is it someone who trained in I–O psychology, someone who practices I–O psychology, or someone who researches I–O psychology? According to the SIOP homepage, I–O psychology is “the scientific study of the workplace.”¹ If scientific research about the workplace is conducted in a business school, it is still I–O psychology by this definition. The primary conclusion we draw from the evidence presented in study 1 is that business schools and the researchers affiliated with them are now major players in the rapidly growing field² of I–O psychology.

1. Retrieved February 7, 2014, from <https://www.siop.org/>.

2. Retrieved February 16, 2014, from http://www.siop.org/article_view.aspx?article=1219#.UwEpGvldWHo.

Study 2 builds on the unsupported conclusions from study 1. The researchers emailed over 200 SIOP Fellows and presidents and asked them to respond to the issue of the migration of I–O psychologists to business schools. It is relevant that the researchers did not ask the respondents whether they thought there was a migration, nor did the researchers provide respondents with the data so they could draw their own conclusions. The authors simply stated there was a migration based on the fact that the majority of the board members with *JAP* and *PPsych* are now affiliated with business schools, and then asked for respondents' reactions. In short, the researchers asked respondents a loaded question that presumed the existence of the migration phenomenon.

Unfortunately, the analysis and reporting of the data from study 2 presents further concerns as to the validity of the authors' conclusions. First, the authors do not report the affiliation breakdown of the 171 respondents, so we cannot evaluate how representative the reported views of each affiliation group may be and whether or not the responses collected may be biased. It is possible that because SIOP Fellows and former presidents are highly accomplished SIOP members, they may be more likely to have an affiliation with a psychology department. Thus, the affiliation of those sampled may reflect an accepted but unsubstantiated view among those in I–O psychology departments that migration to business schools is occurring and that it is cause for concern.

To investigate this possible sampling bias, we conducted a brief Internet search to explore the training and affiliation of these participants. Although time considerations precluded an investigation of the 146 SIOP Fellows, we were able to find information on all 25 of the SIOP presidents who participated in the original study. We found that all SIOP presidents had extensive psychology training, but only four (16%) had moved to an academic role that was affiliated solely with a business school. This suggests that the sample used by Aguinis

et al. may be overrepresenting the holdouts in psychology departments who, despite their exemplary scholarship, have resisted the lure of business schools and thus have a more negative view of the issue.

More importantly, however, the authors report that their first step in analyzing the responses in study 2 was to *a priori* "classify each of the comments based on the affiliation of the respondent" (Aguinis et al., 2014, p. 291). Thus, they presumed upfront that a respondent's current affiliation would constitute a meaningful categorization of the data. In other words, rather than having the categorization emerge through the data analysis process as is typically done in qualitative research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the authors imposed the importance of affiliation differences on the data. It is no wonder that they conclude that "individuals with a business school, psychology department, and practice affiliation hold different views regarding why the migration of I–O psychologists is occurring" (p. 291). Their method of data analysis did not allow for the emergence of alternate or more nuanced insights that could have shed new light on the core issue of migration.

In particular, we suggest that this analytical approach may have resulted in the importance of a researcher's training affiliation being overlooked in understanding how affiliation patterns are changing in the I–O field. For example, researchers affiliated with a business school and trained in a business school could have different perspectives from those affiliated with a business school but trained in a psychology department. After all, we might expect that people who are considered migrants could hold unique insight into this topic. Similarly, researchers currently affiliated with a psychology department who have declined offers from business schools may have perspectives that those who have not received such offers do not share. The point is that a researcher's current affiliation alone is not the only relevant criterion by which the data could have been meaningfully analyzed, and doing so *a priori* may have

misrepresented the differences in the views of the groups based on that sole criterion.

This concern is important because there are risks to drawing divisions within the field. We believe that examinations that reinforce an “us” and “them” mentality are dangerous because they further entrench each side in unnecessary silos. We argue that instead of raising an alarm over a possible migration, it would be more beneficial to the field of I–O psychology to view the phenomenon as a significant expansion of the field and its influence, which is clearly something to celebrate. If this perspective becomes the focus instead, the discussion can then center on how to build bridges between the diverse groups within the field rather than despair over the moats separating them. We suggest that scholars studying workplace phenomena in I–O psychology departments and business schools have much in common. Moreover, we feel the field of I–O psychology could be significantly strengthened if more time was spent on finding ways for people in I–O psychology departments and business schools to collaborate and to develop a stronger *shared identity*. Ideally, we could pool our expertise and resources to further the field together.

Finally, we propose that the more important divide that we see in the article by Aguinis et al. is the one between academia and practice. The data show that practitioners used to have a higher profile in the two focal journals but have now all but disappeared. Although the data do not tell us the reason behind the decline, the trend may indicate that these journals are less relevant to practitioners now than they were in the past. That is indeed cause for concern because the value of research stems in part from its ability to inform practice. As former practitioners ourselves, we expect that most practitioners care little about whether research originates in this department or that one. Practitioners just

want information that helps them better manage the workplace. We have to be sure that all of us in academia who study work stay connected to that core idea. By remaining focused on what is in the best interest of the field rather than the group to which we are affiliated, we can keep—and hopefully expand—the involvement of practitioners. Otherwise, such articles about academic partisanship risk making SIOOP and academia less relevant to practice.

In closing, we submit that a continued focus on the academic migration issue will only serve to separate organizational scholars who are doing similar work. Let us not be distracted by where the research is done. Instead of furthering the distance between business schools and psychology departments, we think it would be preferable to start more conversations on how to connect the two on multiple levels. We believe broad strategic discussions should be directed at strengthening the connections among academics of both stripes and, most urgently, the connections between academia and practice. By looking beyond our affiliation differences and becoming I–O psychologists without disciplinary borders, the field of I–O psychology will be better positioned to flourish even more and to respond to contemporary workplace challenges. Aguinis et al. have provided some important evidence that practitioners are slipping away. Therein lies the rub, for if we allow ourselves to become divorced from practice, we make ourselves irrelevant to everyone but each other.

References

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