

---

# Educating Industrial–Organizational Psychologists for Science and Practice: A Canadian Perspective

---

R. BLAKE JELLEY

*University of Prince Edward Island*

SILVIA BONACCIO AND FRANÇOIS CHIOCCHIO

*University of Ottawa*

In this commentary, we offer a Canadian perspective on key recommendations raised by Byrne et al. (2014) and on related issues such as licensure, accreditation, and professional identity. It seems we are at an important crossroads for industrial–organizational (I–O) psychology. Indeed, the Byrne et al. article is one of several recent developments suggesting that there is growing interest in developing I–O psychology as a profession. For example, Briner and Rousseau (2011) issued a challenge to enhance the extent to which I–O practice is evidence based. Reynolds (2012) described efforts by SIOP to improve others' understanding of the practice of I–O psychology and, ultimately, remove unnecessary barriers to practice imposed by licensing requirements. Similarly, Jelley (2013) advocated for a more inclusive licensing framework. The 2010 American Psychological Association Model Licensure Act (APA MLA) is a promising starting point in that regard, particularly in terms of differentiating general applied psychologists from health service providers (Jelley, 2013; Reynolds, 2012). Byrne et al. correctly pointed out that the APA MLA serves only as advice for states, as well as

for Canadian provinces and territories. Likewise, the focal article authors noted that the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards (ASPPB) has a different MLA (ASPPB, 2010), “one that is less nuanced to the diversity of practices that constitute professional psychology” (Byrne et al., p. 12). Unfortunately, given that ASPPB is an association of regulators, one might expect the ASPPB MLA to be more influential among regulators than the APA MLA. Thankfully, the ASPPB seems receptive to the I–O perspective (Reynolds, 2012) and has recently established a joint task force to examine the licensure of consulting and I–O psychologists. SIOP, the Canadian Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (CSIOP), and the Society of Consulting Psychology will partner with ASPPB representatives on that task force.

## Professional Identity

Resolving the licensure debate is both important and pressing if we are to retain (or gain) our professional identity as psychologists. Indeed, in the absence of a viable option in psychology, I–O professionals may seek alternative professional credentials, such as the Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) or the Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) designations. Human resource management designations seem more accessible and relevant to the average I–O psychologist than is licensure in many North American jurisdictions. Moreover, jurisdictions may include language to the effect that

---

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to R. Blake Jelley.

E-mail: [bjelley@upeu.ca](mailto:bjelley@upeu.ca)

Address: School of Business, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PE, Canada C1A 4P3

Whereas all three authors are or have been on the Executive Committee of the Canadian Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, the ideas presented in the commentary are their own.

psychological licensure does not prevent members of other licensed, certified, or regulated professions “from rendering services consistent with their professional training and code of ethics, provided that they do not represent themselves to be psychologists” (e.g., APA, 2010, p. 10; see also ASPPB, 2010, p. 22). Therefore, alternative credentials may help I–O professionals justify practicing within their scope of competence and not run afoul of psychology regulators.

Although we do not have data on the current popularity of such options nor of trends over time, we have observed that three of the last five CSIOP chairs held or now hold the CHRP designation whereas none were or are licensed psychologists. In addition, I–O graduate programs may do a great job preparing our students to pursue alternative credentials. For example, the top scores on the Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations’ National Knowledge Exam in both the June and October 2012 administrations were earned by candidates with an I–O background. Alternative certifications may be interesting to practitioners and academics wishing to add to their credentials because they might, as Byrne et al. suggest in the context of postdoctoral positions and internships, “level the playing field” (p. 5) for professionals associated with smaller or less known organizations. At the same time, investing time and resources into endeavors that take us away from our psychology roots may further mask the contributions of I–O psychology and its graduates. It may be time to reexamine credentialing issues for I–O in light of what related professions are doing (Jelley, 2013). This can include examining licensure requirements; a voluntary certification for individuals; and accreditation of graduate programs, internships, and postdoctoral fellowships.

### **Reflections on the Byrne et al. Recommendations**

Perhaps the most important point Byrne et al. made is that a committee be created. Whereas we agree that more structured internships may be desirable to improve

preparation for evidence-based professional practice (O’Neill & Jelley, 2012), we suggest that the scope and membership base of that committee or task force be broader. Rather than focusing immediately on setting standards for and then certifying (or accrediting) internship and postdoctoral programs, the committee’s first order of business should focus on an overall review of how I–O psychologists are educated and trained for science and professional practice, and associated structures (e.g., accreditation & legislation). SIOP-certified (or in the case of Canada CSIOP-certified) internships and postdoctoral positions could be further examined as part of that overall review and future planning.

In addition to ensuring that the task force is composed of members representing varied professional perspectives (academics, practitioners, applied researchers), it may also be important to broaden its membership to include international representation. With the SIOP membership becoming more diverse, international I–O programs gaining traction, increasing cross-national collaborations between scholars, and I–O consulting firms expanding operations around the world, now may be the time to consider developing I–O as a profession globally, not only in North America. A global I–O perspective begins with a thorough discussion of education standards. International I–O associations would likely welcome the opportunity to be involved in such endeavors. Perhaps this is a job for the new Alliance for Organizational Psychology (AOP). The task forces’ recommendations could provide an international framework from which jurisdictions could adopt standards while attending to any local issues at stake (e.g., official language(s), licensing requirements).

The Byrne et al. recommendation to certify internship and postdoc positions based on *organizations’ position statements* would need to be considered for adequacy. Would such a review be sufficient to earn a “seal of approval?” CSIOP has encouraged graduate programs listed on its web site to describe and self-assess against the

*SIOG Guidelines (Guidelines for Education and Training at the Doctoral Level in Industrial–Organizational Psychology*, SIOG, 1999) and make that information available to prospective students. Whereas this is far from being an accreditation program, it is nevertheless an inexpensive way to foster alignment. CSIOG does not offer a seal of approval. Byrne et al. acknowledged the tension between guidelines that offer programs considerable flexibility and more stringent standards. The tricky issue of whether I–O programs should ensure that graduates qualify for licensure and the related question of formal program accreditation is important to consider because accreditation remains a stumbling block for North American I–O psychology. Seeking accreditation was described as a “quixotic quest to meet the mercurial and nebulous demands of APA” for other psychology disciplines (Byrne et al., p. 12). In Canada, a comment about the lack of I–O programs accredited by the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) was met with an invitation to the I–O community to consider “how CPA accreditation activities might evolve further to include industrial organizational psychology” (see editor’s note in O’Neill & Jelley, 2012, p. 17). The CPA CEO pointed out that CPA accreditation, which began with clinical psychology, has expanded to also include counseling, school, and neuropsychology in response to needs of those professional communities. Whether there is interest among Canadian I–O programs to pursue this option and if any costs involved can be justified in terms of benefits for education and training is yet to be determined.

The appropriate level of standardization and body to accredit graduate programs, internships, or postdocs needs to be considered. It is not clear whether SIOG would accredit programs outside the United States. APA accreditation of Canadian programs will sunset in 2015 and a new APA–CPA mutual recognition agreement is now in place ([www.cpa.ca/accreditation](http://www.cpa.ca/accreditation)). Foreign accreditation can be a sensitive issue. A similar mutual recognition agreement could

exist between SIOG and CSIOG, but CSIOG has a small membership base and relies exclusively on volunteers (i.e., no staff support). It does not seem viable for smaller I–O societies to take on certification or accreditation responsibilities, although the Canadian I–O community could explore CPA accreditation. This is a reason why AOP should be actively involved given that many other countries cannot bank on economies of scale in tackling licensure policies and infrastructure.

The importance of an international perspective on the education and training of I–O psychologists can be best illustrated by Byrne et al.’s recommendation to supplement a traditional doctoral education with mandatory postdoctoral fellowships. This perspective presupposes an abundance of postdoctoral positions across subfields of interest such that newly minted PhDs planning for an academic career can choose among several postdoctoral options to find the best fit given their research interests. Although this model may work in countries that have many doctoral programs, it may not be viable in countries where each area of interest is explored by only a handful of researchers at a time. Under this proposed model, many students would be left without viable postdoctoral options. Moreover, dwindling of federal granting budgets for the social sciences also contributes to the dearth of viable postdoctoral positions in Canada and other countries. It is also unclear how much demand exists for postdoctoral positions in I–O. If we build them, will students come?

From an institutional perspective, the proposition of mandatory postdoctoral fellowships and internships begs the question of whether our doctoral programs are meeting the expectations of academic and practitioner positions. If our doctoral programs are not meeting these requirements, then it behooves us to revise them to meet the current demands of the market. It is not uncommon for degrees to take longer to obtain as a field grows in complexity.

In summary, it is encouraging to see continued discussion about the

development of I–O as a profession and on the requirements for doctoral training. I–O psychologists have contributed to a recent special issue of *Human Resource Management Review* (2012, volume 22, issue 4) considering the value of HR certification (e.g., Lengnick-Hall & Aguinis, 2012) as well as to other professions' credentialing programs (e.g., Hakel, Koenig, & Elliott, 2008). It is encouraging to think that we might apply I–O expertise to critically examine the mechanisms by which to develop I–O as a profession. We should also reflect on the work of labor economists that challenges alleged benefits versus costs to the public of licensing compared to less restrictive certification (e.g., Kleiner, 2006). We believe that Canadian researchers and practitioners are committed to pushing the boundaries of our field and that a frank and open discussion on licensure, accreditation, professional identity, and the skills required by newly minted PhD graduates is of paramount importance if I–O psychology is to remain relevant and grow to meet future demands. Certified (accredited) internships and postdocs could be valuable for future I–O psychologists and their stakeholders but should not necessarily be the first order of business.

## References

- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Model act for state licensure of psychologists*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/about/policy/model-act-2010.pdf>
- Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards. (2010). *ASPPB model act for licensure and registration of psychologists*. Retrieved from [http://www.asppb.net/files/Final\\_Approved\\_MLRA\\_November\\_2010.pdf](http://www.asppb.net/files/Final_Approved_MLRA_November_2010.pdf)
- Briner, R. B., & Rousseau, D. M. (2011). Evidence-based I–O psychology: Not there yet. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*, 4, 3–22.
- Byrne, Z. S., Hayes, T. L., McPhail, S. M., Hakel, M. D., Cortina, J. M., & McHenry, J. J. (2014). Educating industrial–organizational psychologists for science and practice: Where do we go from here? *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*, 7(1), 2–14.
- Hakel, M. D., Koenig, J. A., & Elliott, S. W. (Eds.) (2008). *Assessing accomplished teaching: Advanced-level certification programs*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- Jelley, R. B. (2013). Advocating for a more inclusive licensing framework. *Psynopsis: Canada's Psychology Magazine*, 35(1), 12–18. Retrieved from <http://www.cpa.ca/Psynopsis/>
- Kleiner, M. M. (2006). *Licensing occupations: Ensuring quality or restricting competition?* Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.
- Lengnick-Hall, M. L., & Aguinis, H. (2012). What is the value of human resource certification? A multi-level framework for research. *Human Resource Management Review*, 22(4), 246–257.
- O'Neill, T. A., & Jelley, R. B. (2012). Toward evidence-based practice in organizations. *Psynopsis: Canada's Psychology Magazine*, 34(2), 16–17. Retrieved from <http://www.cpa.ca/Psynopsis/>
- Reynolds, D. (2012). A message from your president. *The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, 50(2), 7–9.
- SIOP. (1999). *Guidelines for education and training at the doctoral level in industrial-organizational psychology*. Retrieved from [http://siop.org/PhD\\_Guidelines98.aspx](http://siop.org/PhD_Guidelines98.aspx)