

I/O Psychology Research Conducted in Nonacademic Settings and Reasons for Nonpublication

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The mission of this Scientific Affairs subcommittee was to find answers to two questions: (1) What research is being conducted in nonacademic settings? and (2) Why isn't more being published from nonacademic settings?

To gain information on these issues, we decided to conduct telephone interviews with a randomly selected sample of 50 I/O psychologists with nonacademic affiliations. We asked 10 open-ended questions on four topics, then content analyzed the answers.

Background

Question 1: What is the nature of your current position? Approximately 28% were employed in business firms, 38% in private consulting, 14% in government, and 20% in other classifications (e.g., nonprofit research institutions, health care settings, retired). This distribution approximates the findings of Howard (May 1986 TIP).

Question 2: What is your educational history? About 86% had a Ph.D. or Ed.D., and 46% said I/O was their major degree area. This compares with Howard's findings of 85% and 50%, respectively.

What Research is Being Done

Three questions were asked on this topic, but they were all analyzed together. *Question 3:* What research are you involved in now? *Question 4:* What about past research involvement? *Question 5:* What other I/O research is going on in your organization? Table 1 contains the top 10 categories of answers.

TABLE 1

Category	% of Respondents
Testing, selection, and validation	54%
Performance appraisal	22%
Opinions, attitudes, culture, and values	20%
Assessment and assessment centers	18%
Training and development	16%
Job analysis and classification	14%
Executive development and selection	12%
Pay	10%
Career development, promotion, and turnover	10%
Employee assistance and family issues	10%
Organization analysis and diagnosis	8%

Clearly the top category of research was testing, selection, and validation. The rest of the list reads like a table of contents from an I/O textbook: performance appraisal, attitudes, assessment centers, training, job analysis, etc. Other topics not listed in Table 1, but mentioned more than once, included productivity, organization development, organization structure and strategy, personality, program evaluation, ethics, and stress.

It is also noteworthy that 30% said they were involved in no research (by any definition) at the present time, and a few said they had not conducted any research since their dissertation. Furthermore, 16% specifically mentioned that they administered or managed research, but did not personally conduct any at the present time. A number also noted that they did not like to call what they did research because it was better described as program development.

Why Not More Publishing

Two questions were asked. *Question 6:* Why isn't more publishing going on? *Question 7:* What other explanations might there be? Participants were invited to comment on both their personal reasons and other reasons in general. Table 2 contains the top eight categories of reasons.

TABLE 2

Why Not More Publishing	
Category	% of Respondents
Lack of time or resources	64%
No reward or money	46%
Not important part of nonacademic's job	44%
Publication process itself	42%
Proprietary or confidential nature of data	38%
Organizations do not support basic research	18%
There are other outlets for applied research	14%
Disenchantment with published literature	10%

Not surprisingly, lack of time and no reward were the two most common reasons. Closely related, publishing was not viewed as an important part of a nonacademic's job. From a values perspective, it was simply not a priority. Many felt the publication process itself discouraged applied research because it sometimes lacked the control and rigor necessary to make it into the journals. Editors preferred more micro, academically oriented research. A few of the respondents even mentioned negative experiences with the publication process and "picky" reviewers. The proprietary or confidential nature of the data reflected litigation concerns, potential bad publicity, or not wanting to give away the competitive advantage that research affords.

Other frequently mentioned reasons included the short term perspective of organizations not supporting basic research, other outlets for disseminating their research such as conventions and professional journals, and a basic disenchantment with what is published as being too esoteric and of little value to practitioners.

Paraphrasing some of the specific comments is illustrative of these concerns. After mentioning time as a main reason for not publishing, one respondent noted that he would not do it even if he had the time. He would do more marketing. Another respondent noted that companies don't even require or support documentation internally in terms of technical reports. So why would they encourage publishing? Another said, "It's a pain in the neck" to negotiate and acquire the controls needed to conduct rigorous, publishable research. There are social influences as well. One respondent said that executives disapprove if you are too academic; thus, you don't publish in order to preserve acceptance. Another said that a norm often develops within an organization not to publish; therefore, newcomers give up the idea quickly. Finally, one respondent suggested our study asked the wrong question. We should be asking, "Why isn't less publishing being done, since much of it is not very practical or relevant."

What Might Encourage More Publishing

Question 8: What might encourage more publishing from nonacademic settings (both you personally and in general)? Six categories of answers emerged (Table 3).

TABLE 3

What Might Encourage More Publishing	
Category	% of Respondents
Social support	32%
—Peer pressure	14%
—Consortium efforts	14%
—To be asked	4%
Changes in editorial policies	30%
Financial mechanisms to support publication	24%
Develop other outlet for applied research	16%
Increase employer support and recognition	10%
Get publications in front of management	8%

The first category can best be described as social support. Specifically, many respondents simply felt that more peer pressure would help, and that SIOP might take a role in this regard; others felt that more consortium efforts would help, and possibly these joint activities could be with academics; and a few felt all that was needed was to be asked by someone interested in publishing. Changes in editorial policies simply meant that journals should accept more applied research. Setting up some financial mechanism to support publication, such as grants or fellowships, might also help.

Recommendations to develop other outlets for applied research included the formation of a new journal that was less rigorous than *Journal of Applied Psychology* or *Personnel Psychology* but more research-oriented than *Personnel Journal* or *Personnel Administrator*. A couple of respondents also noted that there was no place to send intact technical reports now with the discontinuance of *Psychological Documents*. (Note: *Psychological Documents* has recently resumed operation under the ownership of Select Press. See the announcement elsewhere in this issue of *TIP*.) Suggestions to increase employer support for publication included the idea of sabbaticals at universities. Several respondents also suggested that getting our publications more in front of executive management would help, because it would then at least have advertising value.

Question 9: Do you think more joint academic-practitioner research would help? If so, what is the best way to encourage it? Responses were almost four to one in favor of this suggestion (78%). A number of potential problems were noted, however, including the possibility that the

research might need to be too academic, differences in priorities between academics and practitioners might make the arrangement unworkable, and support money may still be a problem.

With regard to how to encourage such activity, suggestions included convention sessions for this purpose, SIOP involvement, and graduate student interns as a means of facilitation.

Question 10: Have you seen the Linkup column in **TIP**? Do you think it might help encourage more joint research? (Note: Linkup is a new column intended to encourage collaborative research between I/O psychologists by advertising research interests and research sites. It has been featured several times in recent **TIP** issues including this one.) Results were 50/50 as to whether respondents had seen the column. However, of those responding, 83% felt it might help foster joint research.

Comments reflected some reservations that it might be hard to get the column off the ground, but that follow-up on success stories would be helpful. Although unrelated to this study, many respondents spontaneously offered positive comments on **TIP** itself.

Conclusions

The findings of this study must be viewed with great caution. With our sampling plan, the confidence intervals around our results are very large. (Note: The estimated confidence interval is plus or minus 14%.)

It is clear, however, that research is currently being conducted on a wide variety of topics in nonacademic settings. Whether more or less research is being conducted now than in the past cannot be addressed by this study.

In the planning of this study, a number of hypotheses were generated to explain why more research was not being published from nonacademic settings. They included changes in organizations, academe, editorial policies, and demographics. Some of these reasons were mentioned by respondents, while others were not.

Regarding changes in organizations, many mentioned the reluctance to publish information assets. This may be especially true with the heightened litigation of recent years over personnel selection. More pressure on R&D funding was also noted, and a full 30% said they were not conducting any research at the present time. There may also be more macro (e.g., organization development) research being conducted, but it is uncertain whether this is less publishable or not. It is also uncertain whether it is supplanting other types of research. Of perhaps more interest is the suggestion that we need to change the reward structure for psychologists in industry. We may be focusing our efforts on the wrong population. Maybe we should be trying to change the views of executive management

about the value of publishing, for they can do more to directly encourage it by how they reward psychologists in their organizations.

Little was mentioned regarding changes in academe. On the other hand, there may be changes in academe like more pressure to publish, but practitioners are too far removed to notice the changes.

Changes in editorial policies was mentioned by many of the respondents. It may be that as the field progresses, it takes a more rigorous study to get published. This could potentially reduce the number of publications on purely applied efforts. It may also be possible, as many respondents suggested, that we have grown too narrow, esoteric, and removed from practice in what we publish.

Changes in demographics were not frequently mentioned in this study. But, tangentially, a few respondents suggested that growth in the size of the field may result in lessening ties between practitioners and academe.

Although this study cannot clearly address why there is the drop in publications from nonacademic settings, it does offer some possible suggestions to reverse the trend. Most notably, the social or peer support to publish was mentioned by many. In terms of mechanisms, joint academic-practitioner efforts were viewed positively. Practitioners were very interested in working with knowledgeable academic colleagues. But because academics have more to gain, it is up to them to take the initiative to approach the practitioners with proposals and ideas. Furthermore, the role of SIOP to provide information and support in the form of such vehicles as the Linkup column or convention sessions was also recognized. In fact, many respondents voiced appreciation that SIOP cared about this topic and reached out to the members for their input through this study.

As a final thought, one of the respondents questioned whether we should be trying to encourage more publications at all. Rather, our focus should be on how to generate more *quality* in our publications.

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