I. Background

The purpose of this article is to summarize my presentation for the 2023 Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) Distinguished Professional Contributions Award. I begin with a few introductory remarks on my background and the award, followed by suggestions for making discoveries in applied work. I also provide examples of how I identified improvements to practice through my own applied work. Finally, I end with a few recommendations.

The science-practice model is not science versus practice, and it certainly is not academic versus applied. Rather, those in academic settings should try to consult, and those in applied settings should try to conduct research and publish. There are many benefits to practice, teaching, and science; each contributes to the others, and all three are necessary to be a stable platform.

Although I am a professor in a business school, and I write a lot of articles, I am not a pure “academic.” I started my career with 8 years in industry, 4 years each at Weyerhaeuser Company and IBM (1978–1986). I have been at Purdue since 1986 but actively consulting since 1987. I have conducted about 1,500 projects in 200 organizations, consulting and writing articles on a wide range of I-O topics, including but not limited to selection, validation, job analysis, career development and training, and recently artificial intelligence.

The Professional Contributions Award, as I understand it, is for contributing to the improvement of practice, regardless of your main employment setting. Although I am primarily located in an academic setting on a daily basis, I understand that I got the award for how my research influenced practice. I learned those improvements in practice through my applied work in consulting.

I exemplify a new personality trait: Need for sharing knowledge. When I began practicing, I was in awe of how much we did not know (or, instead, how much was not documented in the literature). I had this intrinsic need to want to tell other people what I learned. I tried to publish and present papers, and had some modest success. I soon became obsessed with looking for insights in each applied project and sharing them with others in the profession. Most of my publications and presentations have been things I discovered or created in practice. This has become my modus operandi.

Some Secrets to Publishing From Applied Projects

First, organizations are willing to use stronger research methods if the project is important to them and the researcher explains the value of research rigor. Research quality should be more important in applied work anyway, given it will affect peoples’ lives. Second, put together teams of researchers to publish the data. This award and presentation is a salute to my teams of coauthors. I really owe it to them.

Third, asking for permission to use the data for publication is usually unnecessary and often backfires. Organizations that benefit from the science have an obligation to give back. Fourth, be inspired by solving the problem as opposed to pursuing a narrow theoretical interest. Be agnostic as to topic, finding, or theory. Fifth, do not worry about what is trendy; publish what you are working on. The importance of the topic is justified by the fact that an organization is sponsoring the project. Sixth, be willing to look into other literature and new areas; take on projects outside your domain (within reason of course). We have generalizable research skills. Being new to an area will often lead to key insights because you are not encumbered by the received doctrine (i.e., currently accepted interpretation of a phenomenon within a field).

The remainder of this commentary is devoted to examples of how I tried to improve practice through discovery in applied projects. I divide the examples into three broad topic areas below.

Structured Interviewing

I have conducted about 150 projects, and I shared the findings in about 25 articles (and an equal number of SIOP presentations). Here are some examples of the applied question or observation, followed by the citations of the primary publications.

1. How can we change the hiring practices to treat all candidates equally after a race discrimination lawsuit? Let’s ask everybody the same questions and evaluate the answers in a more objective way. See Campion et al. (1988).

2. Are situational and past behavior interview questions equally valid? Let’s include both and compare them in the next consulting project to see. See Campion et al. (1994).

3. Structuring the interview is clearly the way to go. Somebody needs to summarize all the ways to do so to improve practice. See Campion et al. (1997).

4. If structured interviews are presumed to be fairer and more defensible, let’s see if judges even notice. Bring in a couple of attorneys who are I-Os as coauthors to ensure we interpret the court cases correctly. See Gollub-Williamson et al. (1997).

5. If structured interviews are presumed to be fairer, do they show any demographic similarity effects? See McCarthy et al. (2010).

6. We know candidates fake in interviews, but how and how much? This was a dissertation inspired by practice. Aside from helping understand how faking occurs, another implication is that the accepted practice of probing makes it worse, especially for situational questions. See Levashina and Campion (2007).

7. How can we reduce rating errors among interviewers (leniency, severity, and central tendency)? What if we give them feedback on their past ratings? See Hartwell et al. (2016).

8. Good literature reviews are very helpful to practice by summarizing what is currently known. See Levashina et al. (2014) and Posthuma et al. (2002).

Job Analysis and Work Design

I have conducted about 200 projects, and I shared the findings in about 25 articles (and an equal number of SIOP presentations).

1. How can I do a dissertation that combines my PhD training program in I-O, human factors, and industrial engineering? Many if not most problems in organization are interdisciplinary, and this can lead to key insights. See Campion and Thayer (1985) and Campion (1988).

2. Who actually knew that the practice of job redesign requires meaningful trade-offs, and they can be clearly predicted in advance and maybe even reduced with an interdisciplinary perspective? This started as a SIOP poster paper that was read by some I-Os in a company that led to years of discoveries and consulting projects. See Campion and McClelland (1991) and Campion and McClelland (1993).

3. This “teams” trend is cranking up. We need to get out ahead of it. How can we design teams so they are more likely to be effective? A progressive client might be willing to do decent studies to find out. See Campion et al. (1995) and Campion et al. (1996).

4. Can I use opportunities to redesign jobs and teams to further our understanding of improve practice? I found field quasi-experiments are often possible if you look for them. See Morgeson and Campion (2002) and Morgeson et al. (2006).

5. How can we combine everything we know to replace the Dictionary of Occupational Titles? The answer was the Occupational Information Network (O*NET). I was asked to join three of the eight research groups that were responding to the request for proposals put out by the U.S. Department of Labor to conduct the initial research. However, I had befriended many people in the DOL earlier in my career due to my applied work, and they asked if I would rather be on the team to pick the winner (and ultimately help supervise the development of O*NET). So, it was a question of “bird in hand versus bird in bush.” See Peterson et al. (2001).

6. Doesn’t anyone else realize that job analysis is susceptible to all the judgment errors known in psychology? Is that an elephant in the room? This started as a presentation at a DOL conference, which launched years of inquiry, mostly based on embedding research in applied job analysis data collections. See Morgeson and Campion (1997), Morgeson and Campion (2000), Morgeson et al. (2004), and Morgeson et al. (2016).

7. How can you convert the sometimes laborious due-diligence process called job analysis into an organization-changing development effort? Call it competency modeling. As a coauthor put it, this is the “Troyan horse” of job analysis. It is a way to sneak job analysis into discussions in the executive suite. Let’s get together a group of practitioners to share what they know with the profession. See Campion et al. (2011). In a related project, I used a change initiative at a government client to learn how competency models can drive strategy. See Campion et al. (2020).

8. Did you know that incumbents may tailor (craft) their jobs to meet their needs? This was not a discovery from practice, but it has implications for practice. I now include a job-crafting measure in every job analysis survey. See Peterson et al. (2001).

Personal Selection

I have conducted about 700 projects, and I shared the findings in over 40 articles (and an equal number of SIOP presentations). Here are some examples of the applied question or observation, followed by the citations of the primary publications.

1. How can we reduce rating errors among interviewers (leniency, severity, and central tendency)? What if we give them feedback on their past ratings? See Hartwell et al. (2016).

2. Candidate perceptions really matter. How can we improve them? Let’s try some manipulations, correlates, and improved measurement. All these projects used dataset from applied selection projects. See Bauer et al. (1998), Bauer et al. (2001), Truxillo et al. (2002), Schleicher et al. (2006), McCarthy et al. (2013), and McCarthy et al. (2017).

3. As teams become more common, we should figure out how to staff them. See Stevens and Campion (1994), Stevens and Campion (1999), Morgeson et al. (2005), and Mumford et al. (2008).

4. Personality testing is becoming a major trend, and everyone is forgetting they have very low validity. How could we objectively evaluate the evidence? Let’s ask a panel of former journal editors with experience judging research and no obvious ownership of that literature. See Morgeson et al. (2007a), and Morgeson et al. (2007b).

5. Situational judgment tests should be revitalized because they can measure some personality traits in a less faceable way and some mental abilities with smaller subgroup differences. There were also some bad ideas developing in the literature that needed to be avoided, such as reinventing them as written situational interviews or equating them with common sense. They have actually been around since the 1940s and can measure a
6. How do recruiters interpret application and resume information? This has practical value to both candidates and organizations but is virtually never examined in the research. See Brown and Campion (1994).

7. Can we create more qualified candidates by recruiting them earlier in life rather than have to compete for them when they are on the job market? This was a surprising discovery when analyzing recruiting source data for a client. See Campion et al. (2017).

8. Why fire perfectly adequate employees? Borrowing options theory from finance may help explain this practice in professional service firms. See Malos and Campion (1995), and Malos and Campion (2000).

9. Artificial intelligence may be the biggest influence on personnel selection since tests were developed. I was an early adopter, starting with work in 2012 and implementing a computer model for selection in 2014. I recognized the confluence of Big Data, advanced analytics, and opportunity (need) at a key client. This led to the first published article on the topic in a top I-O journal in 2016 and many studies since. See Campion et al. (2016), Campion and Campion (2020), Campion and Campion (in press), Campion and Campion (under review), and Campion et al. (under review).

10. Promotion and career development are neglected in I-O. Large companies think this is important, and their archival data can answer many questions. See Campion et al. (1994), Campion et al. (2021), and Campion et al. (in press).

11. Turnover management is very important to organizations but very difficult to manage because the reasons for turnover are so heterogeneous. What do I tell my clients? The literature focuses almost totally on the predictors, ignoring the criterion and process. See Campion (1991), Maertz et al. (2003), and Maertz and Campion (2004).

12. Unusual findings in staffing should be documented. They are not known and may be useful to others. See Campion et al. (1981), Campion and Mitchell (1986), Campion and Campion (1987), Posthuma et al. (2005), Posthuma and Campion (2008), Levashina and Campion (2009), Posthuma and Campion (2009), Campion et al. (2011), Jimenez-Arevalo et al. (2013), Campion et al. (2018), Posthuma et al. (2018), and Campion et al. (2019).

Some Concluding Recommendations

Help organizations and employees solve problems and be more effective using the SIOP fundamentals, and then share the insights with the profession. Realize the more you give, the more you get back. SIOP is mostly about methods and philosophies that require capable people and organizations to implement, not secret formulas. Sharing can improve both parties; it is not zero sum. Embrace the science–practice model; that is our “secret sauce.”

Appreciate the journey. This is science, not just technology. Focus on the enjoyment of problem solving and relish the discovery.

References


Campion, P., & Campion, M. A. (2013). The invited presentation could not be delivered at the recent SIOP conference in Boston due to a fire alarm.