Roles for Industrial/Organizational Psychologists: A Survey of New Zealand Managerial Personnel

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Strasser and Bateman (1984) have noted a gap between organizational views of the problems which industrial/organizational psychologists should study and the actual areas of I/O research reported in leading journals. The present study sought to extend their analysis by examining perceptions of (a) research issues and (b) practical contributions within organizations. Senior, middle and first-line managers reported that the most frequently encountered problems in their organization were leadership, interpersonal relations, communication and work demands. Of these, relations and communication were cited most often as problems which I/O psychologists could assist with. Ratings of areas selected from the I/O and human resource management literature suggested that respondents believed I/O psychologists' major research contributions could be in the areas of stress, communication and leadership, while stress, employee counselling and management development were viewed as primary areas of practical contribution. Implications of discrepancies between the "lay viewpoint" and self-images of professionals working in this field are discussed, along with the research-practice gap noted by previous investigators. Future directions for I/O psychology in New Zealand are explored.

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As has been noted by several authors (e.g. Dunnette, 1990; Landy, 1989; Muchinsky, 1990), I/O psychology is a discipline with two faces — one scientific (or empirical), the other practical (or applied). Since its development in the early part of this century, however, the discipline has struggled to integrate these two components into a unified framework. One suggested reason for this struggle is that there is frequently a communication gap between I/O psychologists who function as researchers, typically within universities, and those who operate as practitioners in the field. Whereas academic researchers have questioned the theoretical and empirical basis for techniques

and practices adopted by their practitioner colleagues, the latter have argued that the topics investigated by researchers are frequently unrelated to, or at least have low relevance for, the problems confronted by organizations and their employees.

Whatever the reasons for differences between theory and practice, for many years the discipline has recognized that a serious rift does exist and that efforts should be made to bridge the research-practice gap. Few studies have been conducted, however, to examine another observed discrepancy, namely the perceptions which non-psychologists (for example, managers within organizations) hold of I/O psychology versus the beliefs of I/O psychologists themselves about the potential contribution of their discipline. Although these two discrepancies reflect different concerns, they are clearly interrelated. Furthermore, almost all the research on these issues has been conducted in the United States. While it is likely that the roles filled by I/O psychologists are similar across countries, lack of information from other national contexts restricts our ability to make cross-national comparisons and to generalize from North American data.

In New Zealand, for example, there has been only one published study of the potential contributions of I/O psychologists. Over 20 years ago, Hines (1972) surveyed personnel managers in several countries (including New Zealand, Australia and the United States), to gauge their perceptions of the utility of the I/O profession. Whereas 60% of American personnel managers and around 44% of those in Australia considered it desirable to employ an I/O psychologist in their organization, only 7% of Hines' New Zealand respondents rated the employment of an I/O psychologist as a priority. Hines concluded that the profession of I/O psychology was not well established at that time.

Clearly much has changed in New Zealand since the early 1970's, and up-dated information on the perceived role(s) and utility of I/O professionals is necessary to assess areas of potential development within the discipline. The current study was designed in part to generate information on this issue, as well as to examine the generalizability of earlier studies conducted in the USA.

Previous research

Although several investigators have examined employers' judgments about the employability of I/O psychologists (e.g. Feinberg & Lefkowitz, 1962; Hines, 1972; Ronen, 1980; Thornton, 1969; Tiffin & Prevratil, 1956), few have explored the specific roles that an I/O psychologist might perform in an organization or the particular contributions that such a person could make to organizational life. Campbell, Daft and Hulin (1982) conducted a content analysis of five major empirical journals in the field to identify the types of problems which were most frequently investigated by I/O psychologists. They also solicited the beliefs of I/O academics and practitioners about what topics the discipline should be studying, and surveyed a small sample of human resource managers and administrators to assess the problems they considered to be important.

Comparisons between the perceptions of I/O psychologists and the concerns of organizational managers illustrated some differences, but overall a relatively high degree of similarity, suggesting that the areas which I/O psychologists considered salient were comparable to those reported as important by practising managers. However, a considerable gap was found between the major topics of published research and areas which both psychologists and managers wished to see more research conducted in.

Shortly after the Campbell et al. (1982) study, Strasser and Bateman (1984) conducted a survey of supervisory and non-supervisory staff in a large hospital in the United States. Strasser and Bateman asked their respondents to identify job-related problems which they believed I/O psychologists should be concerned with. These responses were then classified under ten headings, the most prominent of which were *relations* (listed by 22% of the sample as an important area for study), *leadership* (16%) and *communications* (16%). Comparison of these areas with those identified by Campbell et al. (1982) as predominant research topics illustrated a substantial gap between published research and issues considered by non-psychologists to be important.

Yet more recently, Binning, Brockwell, Williams and Baker (1991) also conducted a content analysis of major empirical journals to explore the research-practice gap. While the results of the two earlier studies indicated that I/O research may lack relevance to organizations and practitioners, Binning and his colleagues wondered whether changing research patterns may have reduced the previously reported discrepancy. From their study Binning et al. concluded that the gap may not be as wide as previously thought, but there are still areas of significant deviation and practitioner needs are not being met optimally.

Aims of the present study

Against the backdrop of information provided by the above studies, the present research sought to assess the perceptions which managerial personnel in New Zealand organizations hold of the potential contributions of I/O psychologists. In addition to gathering information of particular relevance to the New Zealand context, this study extended the scope of earlier investigations, by focusing on both research and practical contributions of I/O psychologists. A possible limitation of earlier research was its restriction to the relevance of published research. Although empirical research may be a central element of the work of many I/O psychologists, especially those in academic settings, it is likely that a

more direct contribution to organizational functioning comes from the applied activities carried out by I/O practitioners.

To explore the implications of managerial perceptions of the profession for the development and application of I/O psychology in New Zealand, the present study focused on four primary questions:

1. What problems do managers perceive as occurring in their organization?
2. What problems do managers believe I/O psychologists might contribute to, in terms of both empirical investigation and practical assistance?
3. How do managers at different levels within organizations differ in their perceptions of (a) problems, and (b) contributions?
4. How do managers who have been exposed to the work of I/O psychologists differ from those who have had no prior contact with the I/O profession?

The principal aims of this study were (a) to explore the problems identified by managers as occurring in organizations, and (b) to assess their perceptions of the potential contributions which I/O psychologists might make to the resolution of these problems. In addition, following arguments proposed by Strasser and Bateman (1984), we examined differences between levels of management in their perceptions of both problem areas and the possible role of the I/O profession. Strasser and Bateman suggested that researchers and practitioners have typically focused predominantly on the interests of organizational executives and senior-level managers, and shown little recognition of the needs and preferences of lower-level personnel. While their survey uncovered no substantial differences between supervisors and non-supervisors in their perceptions of research contributions, whether or not personnel at various levels differ in terms of their beliefs about the practical contributions of I/O psychologists has not been investigated previously.

Finally, the extent to which organizational personnel have experienced contact with an I/O psychologist may have a bearing on their perceptions of the role of the profession. Hines (1972) noted that, at the time of his survey, New Zealanders had little experience of I/O psychologists, who were "often confused with the psychiatrist" (p. 129). Similarly, Muchinsky (1990) observed that many people believe that all psychologists are clinical psychologists who help individuals with behavioural and emotional problems in their everyday lives. We anticipated that managers who had had some professional contact with an I/O psychologist would have developed a more accurate perception of the functions of the profession and would rate its potential contribution more highly than would individuals with no previous contact.

Method

Sample

Fifteen organizations in the Waikato region, ranging in size from 70 to 900 employees, participated in the study. Organizations were selected from the Hamilton section of the New Zealand Business Who's Who and the Government Department's section of the Waikato, King Country and Thames Valley Telephone Directory. The organizations which were sampled operated in a variety of industries, including manufacturing, retail, service, finance, agricultural research and property development. Questionnaires were distributed to 214 managerial personnel within these organizations; completed questionnaires were received from 116 respondents (92 male, 22 female, 2 unknown), a return rate of 54%.

A breakdown by management level revealed that 25% of respondents were executives or senior managers, 39% were middle managers and the remaining 36% occupied first-level managerial or supervisory positions. The average age was 38 years (SD = 9.0), average tenure in their current position was 3.5 years (SD = 4.3), and mean length of time in the organization was 10. 8 years (SD = 8.5). Overall, the sample was relatively highly educated, with 49% having completed tertiary qualifications (including university and technical institute qualifications). Given the nature of the sample, this profile is not surprising. Hines (1972), for example, reported that 28% of his sample of managers had obtained a university degree.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire was constructed to examine (a) problems reported as being experienced in the work environment, and (b) beliefs about the potential utilization of I/O psychologists, in terms of research and practical contributions. Questions on these issues were modelled on Strasser and Bateman's (1984) assessment of personnel beliefs about the role of I/O psychologists, expanded to include practical as well as research contributions. The questionnaire was divided into four sections, which are described below.

Problems encountered at work. To obtain perceptions of common problems encountered in the workplace, open-ended questions were designed to

probe difficulties experienced in "doing their job" "dealing with people" and "working for the organization". Respondents were encouraged to identify as many problems as they could in each of these areas. However, where the same problem was mentioned more than once, to avoid duplication it was coded once only.

Potential contributions of I/O psychologists. This section consisted of one open-ended question tapping respondents' beliefs about problem areas they felt I/O psychologists might contribute to (either through research or practical application), and two questions which required ratings of (a) research and (b) practical contributions of I/O psychologists in a range of specific areas. It was assumed that participants in this study would have some knowledge of psychology in general, but might be less familiar with the specific focus of I/O psychology. Before respondents were asked to list problem areas which they felt I/O psychologists might contribute to, I/O psychology was defined for them as "a specialty area of psychology concerned with human behaviour in work situations". The distinction between research and practice was also described briefly.

After they had completed the open-ended question on potential contributions, respondents rated (on a 5-point scale) *how relevant or useful* I/O psychology research and practice is to 25 selected areas, adapted from Barkway and Kirby (1983). These areas included job analysis, personnel selection, managerial development, training, performance evaluation, work motivation, job satisfaction, organization development, and a range of other issues considered to be representative of the functions performed by I/O psychologists, such as leadership, communication, organizational productivity and effectiveness, and job stress (see Table 2 for the complete list of items).

Contact with I/O psychology. Whether or not managers in our sample had any prior exposure to the work of I/O psychologists was assessed by asking if they had experienced any job-related contact with an I/O psychologist. From their responses to this question, respondents were categorized as 'contact' or 'no-contact'.

Demographic information. The final section of the questionnaire tapped respondents' age, gender, level of education, tenure (in their present job and the organization), and their managerial level.

Procedure

When the questionnaire had been designed, it was piloted on a small sample representing different levels of management, to ensure comprehensibility and clarity of questions. Telephone contact was then made with the personnel manager or human resource director of each organization. Questionnaires were sent for distribution by this person to managers within the organization. The contact

person was asked to randomly select respondents within each level of management. A stamped, addressed envelope was provided for participants to return their completed questionnaires confidentially to the researchers. Approximately three weeks after the first mail-out, a follow-up letter was sent to non-respondents to encourage their completion of the questionnaire.

Data coding

Responses to open-ended questions were coded independently by the two researchers, using as a framework the categories derived by Strasser and Bateman (1984), but creating new categories where appropriate. The first step entailed labelling of response categories for each question, followed by assignment of individual responses to these categories. Agreement between the two coders in their allocations was almost 100%. In rare instances where agreement could not be achieved, or when a response was ambiguous, the response was coded as "Other".

Categories were then combined into broader groupings. For example, selection, recruitment, training, and management development were all classified as *staffing*. A category (or grouping of categories) was retained if it contained >5 responses; otherwise it was included under "Other". The one exception to this was *job stress*, which actually contained < 5 responses, but was included for comparison with Strasser and Bateman's findings.

As mentioned above, the nine categories which Strasser and Bateman (1984) derived from the literature on I/O psychology provided a framework for coding responses in the current research. However, due to the wide range of responses given by participants to the open-ended questions in this study, an additional ten categories were created. A brief description of all 19 categories follows; definitions for the first nine come directly from Strasser and Bateman (1984).

1. *Relations:* problems focusing on interpersonal relationships, getting along effectively, working as a team, etc.
2. *Leadership:* problems focusing on supervisors or managers who are perceived as insensitive, uncaring, inequitable, etc.
3. *Motivation, commitment, loyalty and job involvement:* problems focusing on low motivation, low interest in the work, disloyalty to the organization, etc.
4. *Hard outcomes:* problems focusing on turn-over, absenteeism, productivity, quality of work, etc.
5. *Communications:* problems focusing on poor communication skills, obstructed communication networks, mis-communications, etc.
6. *Attitudes:* problems focusing on job dissatisfaction, low morale, negative attitudes about the workplace, etc.

Table 1. *Percentage of Respondents Identifying Specific Problem Areas*

Category	A	B	C	D
Relations	22	53	24	35
Communication	17	36	31	23
Stress	3	2	—	19
Staffing	19	9	6	18
Leadership	30	37	59	15
Change	17	10	19	13
Hard outcomes	11	9	6	11
Attitudes	5	13	2	11
Motivation	4	17	—	9
Work demands	46	16	7	9
Goals	13	5	8	8
Job design	10	2	4	8
Organizational structure	8	8	10	6
Resources	29	5	6	3
Rewards	2	9	13	3
Role tension	22	1	4	2
Policy	3	1	15	2
Awareness	1	14	1	—
Politics	3	4	6	—
Other	17	13	14	40
N	115	111	108	95

Notes:
A = Problems in doing the job; B = Problems dealing with others; C = Problems working for the organization; D = Problems I/O psychologists can assist with

7. *Staffing:* problems focusing on selection, recruitment, placement, training and development, etc.
8. *Job stress:* problems focusing on the employee's feelings of excessive job tension and stress.
9. *Organizational structure:* a more "macro" orientation, including problems of reporting mechanisms, too many layers of management, too much or too little centralization, impact of the environment and technology on organizational processes, etc.
10. *Change:* problems focusing on coping with change, keeping up to date with new knowledge, technical advances, new policies and organizational directions.
11. *Goals:* problems focusing on setting or achieving goals, lack of goal clarity, differences between personal and organizational goals.
12. *Job design:* problems focusing on the anatomy of the job, including standard procedures, specialization, task variety, job simplicity/complexity; also including inadequate job descriptions.
13. *Resources:* problems focusing on insufficient staff, money, materials, technology.
14. *Role tension:* problems focusing on role uncertainty and role conflict.
15. *Work demands:* problems focusing on time pressures, meeting deadlines, and heavy workloads.

16. *Awareness:* problems focusing on lack of awareness of others' roles and lack of understanding of the functions of other departments.
17. *Rewards:* problems focusing on dissatisfaction with material rewards, lack of recognition for performance.
18. *Policy:* problems focusing on policies perceived as inadequate or unfair.
19. *Politics:* problems focusing on use of power and influence.

Results

Problems experienced in the workplace

The types of problems which managers in this sample reported as being experienced by employees in the workplace are presented in Table 1. As noted above, perceptions were obtained in three areas: (a) problems individuals encounter in "doing their job" (b) problems in dealing with other people, and (c) problems associated with working for their organization. Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents identifying specific difficulties in each of these categories.

The most frequently cited problem in performing the job was *work demands*, which was listed by 46% of managers in the sample.

This included time pressures and heavy workload. Other problems identified under (a) were *leadership* (for example, lack of competence in management of the organization) and lack of resources, especially equipment and space, but sometimes human resources. These last two areas were mentioned by 30% and 29% of the sample, respectively.

Three major problems were identified under categories (b) and (c). These were *relations*, *leadership* and *communication*. Relations were cited by 53% as a problem associated with dealing with other people and by 24% as a difficulty in working for their organization. Leadership was mentioned by 37% under (b) and 59% under (c), while communication was listed as a problem by 36% and 31% of the sample. Table 1 illustrates that no other areas were identified frequently as major issues.

Responses in the three areas were combined to obtain a global appreciation of the job-related problems reported as being experienced by people at work. To avoid any bias due to repetition, each response was counted once only, even if it appeared in more than one category. The pattern emerging from this combination of items is very similar to that outlined above, with *leadership*, *relations*, *communication* and *work demands* heading the list as most frequently mentioned areas in which problems arise in the workplace.

Problems for I/O psychologists to deal with

The major area of interest in this research was managers' perceptions of the contributions which I/O psychologists might make to resolution of workplace problems. Responses to the open-ended question on this issue are also presented in Table 1 above, which illustrates that again *relations* and *communication* figured as prominent issues, followed by *stress*. It is notable, however, that the percentage of respondents listing these (and other) problem areas under this question is considerably lower than the percentages outlined above for the previous questions.

In addition to their responses to the open-ended question about the possible contribution of I/O psychologists, respondents were also asked to rate the relevance to I/O psychology of a range of topic areas selected from the I/O and human resource management literature. Ratings of each area in terms of (a) research and (b) practical contribution are depicted in Table 2.

Areas perceived as being most salient for I/O research were *stress*, *communication* and *leadership*, although several other areas were also rated as having some relevance, especially *motivation, employee counselling* and *management development*. Ratings of the applied contribution of I/O psychologists were, however, rather lower than those for their research contribution. Again *stress* figured as a prominent area for practical assistance, followed by *employee counselling*. It is evident from these data that, while respondents believed that I/O psychologists could make a moderate contribution in terms of researching various job-related issues, respondents were less positive in their views of the capacity of the I/O profession to resolve job-related and organizational problems.

Between-manager comparisons

Following the recommendations of Nord (1978) and Strasser and Bateman (1984), analyses were conducted to determine whether managers at different levels in the organizational hierarchy varied in their perceptions of the potential activities of I/O psychologists. Percentages of senior, middle and first-line managers listing specific problem areas in the open-ended question were highly similar, and chi-square tests revealed no significant differences on any of the 19 specific categories derived from responses to this question.[1]

Numerical ratings given by the three managerial levels to the potential research and practical contributions of I/O psychologists were also closely aligned. Multivariate ANOVA's indicated no statistically significant differences between the three groups, in their perceptions of either research ($F = .75$) or practical contributions ($F = .71$). Essentially, these findings suggest that opinions about the role of I/O psychologists, both as researchers and as practitioners, were consistent across levels of management in the organizations included in this survey.

Finally, we compared the responses of individuals who had experienced previous contact with I/O psychologists against those who had had no previous contact. There were

[1] To save space, analyses are summarized here. Complete details are available from the authors on request.

Table 2. *Ratings of the Potential Research and Practical Contributions of I/O Psychologists*

Category	Research Contribution		Practical Contribution	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Stress	3.2	.9	3.2	1.0
Communication	3.0	1.2	2.6	1.2
Leadership	3.0	1.2	2.5	1.2
Motivation	2.9	1.1	2.6	1.2
Counselling	2.9	1.2	3.0	1.1
Managerial development	2.9	1.1	2.7	1.1
Selection	2.8	1.1	2.7	1.1
Recruitment	2.8	1.1	2.6	1.2
Training	2.7	1.1	2.4	1.1
Job satisfaction	2.6	1.1	2.1	1.1
Relations	2.6	1.1	2.6	1.2
Performance appraisal	2.6	1.1	2.3	1.1
Organizational productivity	2.4	1.3	2.0	1.1
Turnover/absence	2.4	1.2	2.0	1.2
Job analysis	2.3	1.3	2.1	1.2
Individual performance	2.3	1.4	1.8	1.2
Career planning	2.2	1.1	2.2	1.1
Job evaluation	2.1	1.3	1.9	1.2
Market research	2.1	1.4	2.0	1.4
Health/safety	2.0	1.2	1.8	1.1
Physical environment	2.0	1.2	1.7	1.2
Human resource planning	2.0	1.3	1.8	1.2
Organizational structure	1.8	1.2	1.5	1.1
Labour relations	1.6	1.3	1.4	1.3
Personnel administration	1.5	1.2	1.5	1.2

Notes: 0 = no relevance/usage, 4 = extremely relevant/useful

no significant differences in their ratings of the research contributions of I/O psychologists, but several differences were observed in respect of ratings of the areas which would be relevant for I/O psychologists to have practical involvement in. Differences which were significant at $p < .05$ were obtained for *management development* ($M_c = 3.0$, $M_{nc} = 2.5$; $t(105) = 2.09$); *motivation* ($M_c = 2.9$, $M_{nc} = 2.4$; $t(104) = 2.15$); *leadership* ($M_c = 2.8$, $M_{nc} = 2.1$; $t(104) = 2.90$); *performance appraisal* ($M_c = 2.6$, $M_{nc} = 2.0$; $t(101) = 2.67$); *career planning* ($M_c = 2.4$, $M_{nc} = 2.0$; $t(103) = 2.05$); *turnover and absenteeism* ($M_c = 2.3$, $M_{nc} = 1.7$; $t(103) = 2.49$). In each case, managers who had had previous contact with I/O psychologists rated the potential relevance of I/O psychology more highly than did managers with no previous contact.

Discussion

With the exception of a cross-national comparison conducted over 20 years ago by Hines (1972), there has been no systematic investigation of the perceived roles and utility of I/O psychology within New Zealand. The present study goes some way toward filling that gap in knowledge, by providing information on the reported needs of people within organizations and the association between those needs and their perceptions of the potential contribution of I/O psychologists. To achieve this, we focused on beliefs about the possible input of I/O psychologists in terms of (a) research and (b) practical application, comparing the problems identified as occurring in organizations with those which respondents believed I/O psychologists can assist with.

Data from our survey indicated that senior, middle and first-line managers had similar views of the types of problems experienced in the workplace, as well as of the areas in which I/O psychologists might make a contribution. All three groups cited leadership, relations, communication and work demands as the major problem areas which occur in organizations and, with the exception of work demands, believed that these areas were relevant for I/O

psychological research. However, they did not perceive substantial practical input from I/O psychologists in relation to these problems. Although these findings provide encouraging news for the application of I/O psychological research in this country, they also suggest that more attention could be given by the profession to promoting the *applied* contributions of I/O psychologists to the above areas. Without such promotion, the image of I/O psychology formed by members of New Zealand organizations is unlikely to show significant change.

Comparison of the present data with those reported by Strasser and Bateman (1984) and by Binning, Brockwell, Williams and Baker (1991) illustrates some differences, but an overall similarity in pattern. Our data confirm that perceptions of I/O psychology are fundamentally similar in New Zealand to those expressed in the United States, and that over time there has been little diminution of the "gap" between the profession and its consumers. While Binning and his colleagues commented that the gap may be narrowing, there is little evidence from our study to suggest that this is indeed happening.

Correspondence between problems and contributions

A major objective of this research was to explore the extent to which the organizational problems identified by respondents corresponded with their beliefs about the role(s) of the I/O profession. Although there was some similarity between reported problem areas and respondents' perceptions of the possible input of I/O psychologists, the number of times various job-related difficulties were cited far exceeded the number of respondents who believed that I/O psychologists could have an impact in these areas. This finding echoes concerns raised by Campbell et al. (1982) and Strasser and Bateman (1984) that I/O psychologists are not perceived as having a significant input to the resolution of salient work-related problems. Again, as noted above, this highlights the need to disseminate more information about the applied contribution of I/O psychology.

Responses to the question about "where I/O psychologists might help" illustrated a common focus on problems associated with individuals, rather than broader organizational issues. In particular, managers listed interpersonal relations, difficulties in communication, individual stress and employee counselling as those areas where the input of I/O psychologists was most likely to be useful.

In our view, this pattern may reflect two trends. On the one hand, participants in our study may simply have lacked knowledge about the specific expertise and skills associated with I/O psychology. As has been noted by other commentators (e.g. Muchinsky, 1990), the lay view of psychology is typically associated with the activities of clinical psychologists, who work predominantly with individuals to resolve their particular difficulties. Other branches of psychology, including I/O and community psychology, which frequently operate in organizational settings and deal with group and organizational issues, are less well known outside the discipline.

Secondly, it is evident that there still exists a communication gap between the I/O profession and consumers of its services. Contemporary textbooks (e.g. Landy, 1989; McCormick & Ilgen, 1985; Muchinsky, 1990) uniformly focus on topics such as personnel selection and training, performance appraisal, job design and organizational development as core content areas of I/O psychology. In the early 1980's Schmitt and Fine (1982) conducted a job analysis of the tasks and competencies of I/O psychologists in the United States. Major task domains emerging from this exercise were personnel selection and training, job evaluation, employee compensation, organization development, human factors, and employee counselling. In sharp contrast, participants in the present study listed only the last of these dimensions with any frequency. Our findings confirm that, in New Zealand as in other countries, the profession needs to communicate more effectively the range of skills and competencies possessed by its members.

Finally, greater attention to the expressed needs of organizations would help to improve the perceived relevance of I/O psychology. Reviews of the empirical research literature by Campbell et al. (1982) and more recently by Binning et al. (1991) have established that the research topics pursued by I/O researchers do not correspond all that closely with the issues identified as priorities by I/O practitioners and by both managerial and non-managerial personnel within organizations. Strasser and

Bateman (1984) commented that one possible reason for the lack of attention by I/O psychologists to areas such as interpersonal relations and communication may be that I/O psychologists feel that sufficient research has already been conducted in these areas and that they are primarily the province of social, rather than I/O, psychology.

However, while it is true that considerable social psychological research has been devoted to social interaction processes and phenomena, it would appear that little of the knowledge gained from this research has been applied to organizational settings. Given the ubiquity and pervasive impact of interpersonal relations, communication and conflict on organizational behaviour, clearly a case can be made for more systematic exploration of these issues by I/O psychologists.

Developing links with the community

Consistent with suggestions made by Campbell et al. (1982) and Strasser and Bateman (1984), we would advocate closer liaison between I/O psychologists who conduct empirical research and their practitioner colleagues, and increased awareness from both these groups of the needs of organizations and their members. As noted earlier in this paper, these two "gaps" are distinct but interrelated facets of an overall perceptual discrepancy that continues to undermine the impact of this discipline.

Our findings illustrate that contact between the profession and the community does enhance the image which is held of I/O psychology. While there were no significant differences between "contact" and "no contact" respondents in their beliefs about *research* contributions, personnel who had experienced previous contact with I/O psychologists rated the potential *practical* contributions of the profession more highly than did respondents with no experience of the discipline. Although we were unable to differentiate individuals further in terms of both the extent and nature of this contact, it is evident that exposure to I/O psychologists in the work setting had at least some influence on expectations of their possible utility. We believe this trend is encouraging and illustrates that increasing the public profile of I/O psychology and its areas of activity may have positive benefits for the image of the profession in the eyes of consumers.

Nord (1978) and Strasser and Bateman (1984) have commented that research and applications within the discipline tend to concentrate on managerial perspectives, especially those of senior managers and executives. In fact, this focus has often resulted in I/O psychology being labelled as a "tool of management". To offset this, these authors argued that more attention should be given to the perceptions and expressed needs of lower-level personnel within organizations.

Interestingly, however, in both the present research and the Strasser and Bateman (1984) study, there were no real discrepancies between the perceptions of different groups. The three samples in our study reflected similar themes in suggestions they made about the role of I/O psychologists, while participants in Strasser and Bateman's investigation expressed closely aligned opinions of the research areas which I/O psychology should concentrate on. Although the present study did not solicit the views of non-managerial personnel and we cannot infer that they would necessarily corroborate those expressed by managers, Strasser and Bateman's research suggests that there may be few substantive differences between managerial and non-managerial personnel in their beliefs about the input of I/O psychologists.

Nevertheless, data from these studies do not imply that we should ignore the perceptions of individuals at different levels within organizations, nor do they suggest that there is complete unanimity in their perceptions. They do indicate, however, some convergence both in terms of perceived need and beliefs about potential areas for the involvement of I/O psychology.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, there has been little investigation in New Zealand of the images of I/O psychology held by potential consumers of its services. Furthermore, there has been no documentation of the activities and tasks which I/O psychologists in this country are engaged in. The present data shed some light on the former issue, but information on the actual roles performed by I/O psychologists would provide a valuable complement to the insights gained from this research. In an earlier study, O'Driscoll (1990) examined some of the activities of organizational development con-

sultants in New Zealand. Extension of this research to incorporate the full gamut of activities encompassed by I/O psychology would enhance our knowledge of what professional I/O psychologists do.

Clearly I/O psychologists do make a contribution to major areas of organizational functioning, such as the selection and training of new personnel, development of performance appraisal systems, and a host of organization development actitivities. However, the current findings and those of studies in the United States indicate that our contribution to organizational processes and performance could be extended by consideration of issues which members themselves believe to be important and in need of dealing with. Finally, as indicated earlier, enhancement of the profession's image could be achieved by increased communication with consumers of our services and more effective marketing of the expertise and areas of competence of industrial/organizational psychologists.

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