

The Practice of Industrial/ Organisational Psychology in New Zealand

Donald A.J. Cable, *The University of Waikato*

Michael P. O'Driscoll, *The University of Waikato*

A survey of 75 industrial and organizational (I/O) psychology practitioners in New Zealand was conducted to determine the actual work practices of those in the field. The majority of participants were employees (72%), and worked in consultancy (49%). Extending the work of other researchers on the role of I/O psychology practitioners, the present study investigated the extent to which participants engaged in nine areas of work, and assessed the current role of the I/O psychology practitioner. Training and development emerged as the most frequently specified area of work, followed by change management and organizational development, and recruitment and selection. The top three areas in terms of time commitment were change management and organization development, recruitment and selection, and education and research. Human factors and consumer psychology were reported the least often. Implications of the findings for the development of the practice of I/O psychology in New Zealand are discussed.

Over the years various studies have explored the practice of industrial and organizational (I/O) psychology in New Zealand. Hines (1972) surveyed 167 personnel managers asking them in what areas they believed I/O psychologists could contribute to their organizations. Hines concluded that I/O psychology experienced a “remarkably low acceptance of New Zealanders” (p. 127) and that less than 10% of New Zealand companies hired I/O psychologists. Hansson and O’Driscoll (1993) surveyed 116 managers from 15 organizations, seeking their views on the potential engagement of I/O psychologists, and concluded that “there has been little diminution of the “gap” between the profession and its consumers” (p. 16). They suggested that their findings confirmed a perception amongst company managers that I/O psychologists could help more with individual issues rather than with broader organizational issues.

More recently Cooper-Thomas and

Wright (2008) surveyed 46 members of IONet (New Zealand I/O psychology email network). Amongst other questions, they asked the participants what the major duties/responsibilities were for their current role, providing some insight into the practice of I/O psychology in New Zealand. They divided the responses into three categories based on frequency of citation. The first category, assessment and selection, included the most frequently cited activities of selection, interviewing, psychometrics, and job analysis. The second category, development, included amongst its activities training and development, team building, stress management, performance management, and organization development. The third category focussed on strategic and external relations and management, and included the least frequently cited activities of research/evaluation, business development, and strategic human resources and human resource policy development. Although their

study did not seek information on time commitment to the various activities, Cooper-Thomas and Wright did note that personnel issues appeared to predominate over organizational issues.

The current survey was designed to build upon these earlier studies by analysing the daily work activities of I/O psychology practitioners in New Zealand to define what it is that practitioners actually do. As a profession we are not alone in attempting to define this. The Australian College of Organizational Psychologists (COP) recently posed a similar question to its membership (B. Drury, personnel communication, 8th April 2009). Of the responses to the question ‘What do I/O psychologists do?’ the COP considered the following to best answer that question:

“Organizational Psychology is the science of people at work. Organizational psychologists specialise in analysing organizations and their people, and devising strategies to recruit, motivate, develop, change and inspire.”

The challenge, as explained by Drury, was for responses to the question to be within the scope of what was termed an ‘elevator pitch’, that is, a response that someone, confronted with the question while travelling in an elevator, would have sufficient time to deliver in a concise, consistent, and coherent manner. O*Net (USA Department of Labour online network of job information), in the occupational

summary report for I/O psychologists (O*Net code 19-3032.00), proffers another answer to that question:

“Apply principles of psychology to personnel, administration, management, sales, and marketing problems. Activities may include policy planning, employee screening, training and development, and organizational development and analysis. May work with management to reorganize the work setting to improve worker productivity.”

Like ourselves, the Australian COP is now reflecting on how it may respond to the likely follow-up question ‘Yes, but how do you do that?’ This is basically the question we sought to answer by taking these definitions of the practice of I/O psychology, and the fields of work they cover, to a more detailed task and/or activity level. Cooper-Thomas and Wright (2008) highlighted the struggle that I/O psychology has, both nationally and internationally, in establishing an identity and noted that a lack of clarity of what I/O psychology can offer is one of the factors hindering its public image. Hopefully by clarifying what practitioners of I/O psychology actually do, what they can offer becomes clearer and the public image of I/O psychology will be enhanced.

To the best of our knowledge, this survey is the first to heed the call of Hansson and O’Driscoll (1993, p. 18) to provide information on the actual

roles performed by I/O psychology practitioners, to “incorporate the full gamut of activities encompassed by I/O psychology”, and to “enhance our knowledge of what professional I/O psychologists do.” In doing so it extends the work of Cooper-Thomas and Wright (2008) by analysing, at a more detailed and task-oriented level, the work activities of I/O psychology practitioners.

Method

Procedure & Participants

Invitations to participate in the survey were issued to members of IONet, which at the time of survey (mid 2009) had 348 members. Invitations were also issued through the New Zealand Psychological Society *Connections* magazine, the Society’s electronic newsletter, and the New Zealand Human Resource Institute’s monthly newsletter. Participants were directed to a website where the survey could be completed either on-line or a hard-copy printed.

Membership of IONet is open to those expressing an interest in I/O psychology and as such does not necessarily reflect the number of people practicing in the field. Fifty-seven members of the New Zealand Psychological Society, representing approximately 16% of IONet members, were recorded as I/O members (C. Garden-Webster, personnel communication, 20th May, 2009). The New Zealand Ministry of Health (in 2008) recorded 76 active

psychologists reporting their work type as I/O psychology, a figure somewhat lower than the 150-200 suggested by O’Driscoll, Carr, and Forsyth (2007), but closer to the figure of 91 proposed by Cooper-Thomas and Wright (2008).

Of the 75 valid survey responses received: 33% percent of participants were in the 31-40 age group; 27% in the 21-30 age group; 64% were female; and 71% indicated New Zealand European ethnicity. No participants indicated Polynesian (Maori, Pacific Peoples) ethnicity, which may be seen by some in the profession as a cause for concern (see O’Driscoll, Carr, & Forsyth, 2007). Fifty-four percent reported income levels between \$40,000 and \$100,000 per annum, with 38% reporting incomes in excess of \$100,000 per annum. The majority of participants worked primarily in the Auckland region (47%) followed by the Wellington region (23%).

Seventy-two percent of participants described themselves as employees, with self-employed the next highest classification (19%). Forty-nine percent of participants worked as consultants while 17% worked in industry (16 different industries were reported). Maximum experience in the field in New Zealand was 35 years (mean = 8.6, standard deviation (SD) = 8.18). Thirty-one participants also reported overseas work experience (max = 34 years, mean = 5.6, SD = 7.44). Maximum years in current role was 23 (mean = 4.9, SD

Table 1. Analysis of Engagement in Fields of Work and Hours Worked (n = 75)

Field of Work	Working in field		Percentage citing this as their...		Hours worked	Working time in field
	Number	Percentage*	Primary Field of Work	Secondary Field of Work	Overall Ranking	Average Percentage
Training & Development	65	87	7	17	4 th =	11 - 20%
Change Management/ OD	63	84	36	16	1 st	31 - 40%
Recruitment/ Selection	63	84	32	13	2 nd	31 - 40%
Performance Mgmt/ Appraisal	57	76	9	12	4 th =	11 - 20%
Career Development/ Mgmt	56	75	9	11	6 th	11 - 20%
Quality of Work Life/ OSH	55	73	1	1	7 th	11 - 20%
Education / Research	41	55	12	4	3 rd	31 - 40%
Human Factors/ Ergonomics	18	24	0	0	9 th	01 - 10%
Consumer Psychology	13	17	0	0	8 th	01 - 10%

Note: *percentages rounded. Respondents could choose multiple fields.

Table 2. Analysis of Work Types in Fields of Work

Field of Work (N)	Work Activity	Engaging in Activity	
		Number (n)	Percentage*
Training & Development (65)	Leadership Development	48	74
	Coaching/Mentoring	39	60
	Team Development	39	60
	Training Delivery	37	57
	Executive Development/ Coaching	36	55
	Training Needs Analysis	33	51
	Training Design	32	49
	Training Evaluation	29	45
Change Management/OD (63)	Organization Culture/ Climate	52	83
	Leadership Development	49	78
	Organization Performance	47	75
Recruitment/Selection (63)	Job Analysis	44	70
	Psychological Assessment - Application	41	65
	Psychological Assessment - Development	35	56
	Recruitment - Internal	33	52
	Promotion Assessment/ Support	31	49
	Psychological Assessment - Consultant/Agency	31	49
	Recruitment - Consultancy/Agency	23	37
	Performance Mgmt/ Appraisal (57)	Performance Measurement	43
	Performance Criteria (Development)	42	74
	Performance Management Systems	40	70
	Job Evaluation	32	56
	Reward Systems	23	40
Career Development/ Management (56)	Counselling & Coaching	37	66
	Outplacement/Transition	25	45

Contd over page

Table 2. Analysis of Work Types in Fields of Work contd.

Field of Work (N)	Work Activity	Engaging in Activity	
		Number (n)	Percentage*
Quality of Work Life/OSH (55)	Employee Attitude/ Satisfaction Surveys	34	62
	Work Attitudes/Values	33	60
	Job Satisfaction	32	58
	Job/Occupational Stress	31	56
	Work Motivation	28	51
	Work-life Balance	23	42
	Commitment	21	38
	Job Design/Redesign	20	36
	Attendance/Absenteeism	16	29
	Employee Assistance Programs	13	24
Education/Research (41)	Health and Safety	12	22
	Research	32	78
Human Factors/ Ergonomics (18)	Teaching	21	51
	Work System Design	12	67
	Workplace Environment Design	8	44
	Human-Technology Interface	7	39
Consumer Psychology (13)	Market Surveys	8	62
	Marketing Strategies	7	54
	Consumer Behaviour	4	31
	Market Research	4	31

Note: * Percentage of number in field of work (rounded).

= 5.8). Most participants reported that they were working between 31 and 50 hours per week (31-40 = 32%; 41-50 = 39%), with the greatest percentage (53%) working no pro bono (unpaid) hours per month, followed by 25% working between one and five pro bono hours per month. Sixty-five percent of participants held a masters degree and 15% confirmed a PhD. Fifty-six percent of participants were registered as psychologists in New Zealand with 83% of those registered under the Psychologist scope of practice (mean period of registration = 11 years, *SD* =

9.9). Professional memberships included the New Zealand Psychological Society (51%) and the Human Resources Institute of New Zealand (47%). Participants could indicate multiple memberships.

Survey Content

The survey covered the fields of work that I/O psychology practitioners might be expected to engage in. A list of fields of work, and work activities covered by those fields, was developed based on the topics covered in text books utilized in university programs in I/O psychology (Gatewood, Feild, &

Barrick, 2008; Muchinsky, 2006; Noe, 2008; O'Driscoll, Taylor, & Kalliath, 2003; Waddell, Cummings, & Worley, 2007), as well as recent journal articles (Carless & Taylor, 2006; Cascio & Aguinis, 2008; Cooper-Thomas & Wright, 2008). The nine fields included in the survey were career development and management (4 activities); change management and organization development (OD; 15 activities); consumer psychology (6 activities); education and research (4 activities); human factors and ergonomics (5 activities); performance management

Table 3. Comparative Analysis of Studies on the Practice of Organisational Psychology in New Zealand

Work Area	Hines (%, N = 167)	Hansen & O'Driscoll (%, N = 116)	Cooper- Thomas & Wright (N = 46)	Current study (%, N = 75)
Training & Development (F)	36		2	87
Executive Development/Coaching	48			48
Leadership Development		15		65
Team Development			2	52
Interpersonal Relations		35		-
Communication Skills		23		-
Change Management/OD (F)	15	13	2	84
Change Facilitation/ Management		6		45
Conflict Resolution			2	35
HRM Interventions			3	43
Labour/Industrial Relations	43		3	17
Recruitment/Selection (F)	56		1	84
Staffing (Selection & Training)		18		-
Managerial Selection	48			-
Psychological Assessment			1	55
Job Analysis			1	59
Performance Mgmt/Appraisal (F)	33		2	76
Job Evaluation	37			43
Reward Systems		3		31
Career Development/Mgmt (F)		8	2	75
Quality of Work Life/OSH (F)	17	19		73
Attendance/Absenteeism		11		21
Job/Occupational Stress			2	41
Work Attitudes & Values		11		44
Work Motivation	60	9		37
Education/Research (F)				55
Research			3	43
Human Factors/Ergonomics (F)	29	8		24
Workplace Environment Design	5			11
Consumer Psychology (F)				17

Notes overpage

Notes:

(F) = closest match with Field of work (current study) all others are closest match with work activity (current study).

Hines: Do you feel that the services of an I/O psychologist could be beneficial in your company in any of the following areas?

Hansen & O'Driscoll: Problems I/O psychologists can assist with.

Cooper-Thomas & Wright: Main responsibilities of respondents' current role (1 = Assessment & Selection, 2 = Development, 3 = Strategic/external relations/ management).

and appraisal (7 activities); quality of work life and occupational safety and health (OSH, 13 activities); recruitment selection and placement (9 activities); and training and development (10 activities).

Participants were asked whether they engaged in any of the nine fields of work (Table 1). Participants who responded affirmative were then asked "Which of the following activities do you engage in, in this field of work?" Space was provided for participants to add fields of work and/or activities not listed. Finally, participants were asked to indicate "Typically, and on average, what percentage of your working time would you spend in this field of work?" Response options were provided in 10% increments up to 100%.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the responses (Table 1) confirmed that practitioners work primarily in the fields of training and development, change management and organization development, and recruitment and selection. These fields were closely followed by performance management and appraisal, and career development and management. The two least frequently cited fields were human factors and consumer psychology. Other fields of work, not specifically included in the survey but mentioned by participants, included program evaluation (although this could be seen as a work activity within a specific field), employee engagement, issues related to cultural and ethnic diversity, and competency development and measurement.

As would be expected, the more common work activities (Table 2) of I/O psychology practitioners fell within the more common fields of work. Within training and development the most common work activities included leadership development (also included in change management and organization development), coaching and mentoring,

and team development. Organization culture and climate emerged as the most common activity within change management and organization development, and job analysis emerged as the most common work activity in recruitment and selection. Given that the outputs of job analysis (position description, person specification) strongly support personnel selection, as well as other fields of work, this result may not be particularly surprising.

The work activities of policy development/implementation and system/program development/implementation were listed under all fields of work, with participants indicating that they engaged in these activities at similar levels to other activities in those fields. Program evaluation, not listed as an activity in the survey questionnaire, emerged as a recurring work activity across many of the nine fields of work. Under both human factors and ergonomics, and consumer psychology, the rate that activities were engaged in reflected the low participation in these fields. Consumer behaviour, which could be seen as an activity open to the input of I/O psychology practitioners, was only engaged in by 31% of the participants who practiced consumer psychology. Some less obvious activities included budgeting, within the field of change management and organization development, advice to management, within the field of career development and management, and critical incident response, within the field of quality of work life and occupational safety and health. What did become apparent in the analysis of work activities were differences in terminology and the ways in which work activities were described. Many of the 'other' work activities listed by participants could be covered by those included in the survey, or were covered by activities listed under other fields of work.

Finally, to assess the extent to which

I/O psychology has made progress in establishing a place in industry, the findings of the present study were compared to the findings from three previous studies (Cooper-Thomas & Wright, 2008; Hansson & O'Driscoll, 1993; Hines, 1972) (Table 3). Note that Cooper-Thomas and Wright ordered their responses based on frequency of citation. In their study, work areas scored 1 were those cited most frequently, while work areas scored 3 were those cited least frequently. Hence it is difficult to directly compare their findings with the present study.

From the comparison of the three studies referred to above, participation rates in the traditional fields of work, deemed by industry as areas that I/O psychology practitioners can contribute (Hansson & O'Driscoll, 1993; Hines, 1972), remain major activities engaged in by practitioners. Some activities have emerged more strongly, for example leadership development, change management, and quality of work life, whilst others, for example interpersonal relations, labour/industrial relations, and work motivation, are areas of work that possibly remain underdeveloped, providing opportunities for practitioners to widen their scope of practice.

Contributions and Limitations

The results of this survey provide information not only to current practitioners but also to students considering I/O psychology as an occupational choice and how they may maximize their career opportunities through that choice. Current practitioners may also consider realigning the services they provide to capture work opportunities within areas of I/O psychology that may be perceived as under-supplied or untapped. This survey may also have implications for the on-going training and development of I/O psychology practitioners. As well as providing direction to current practitioners seeking to pursue their own

development, this information may also be useful to universities in New Zealand seeking to align their I/O psychology programs with current work practices.

We must, however, record one limitation to the survey. Given that only 56% of participants were New Zealand registered psychologists, we cannot necessarily claim that the sample is fully representative of I/O psychologists in New Zealand. Nevertheless, as a diverse range of work settings was included our findings could be considered indicative of the work practices of I/O psychologists in New Zealand.

Conclusion

At a higher level of analysis, the more popular fields of work of I/O psychology practitioners may be seen as differing little from those engaged in by other practitioners. This may be a reflection of available work opportunities. However, at a more detailed level of analysis, the work activities of I/O psychology practitioners may be seen as more reflective of the application of the principles of the behavioural sciences, embracing the humanistic model of organizational functioning. It is at this level of analysis that I/O psychology practitioners may best differentiate themselves from other practitioners by extending their scope of practice into what may be perceived as opportunities for the further application of the behavioural sciences.

References

- Carless, S., & Taylor, P. J. (2006). Industrial and organisational training in Australia and New Zealand. *Australian Psychologist*, 41(2), 120-129.
- Cascio, W. F., & Aguinis, H. (2008). Research in industrial and organizational psychology from 1963 to 2007: changes, choices, and trends. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(5), 1062-1081.
- Cooper-Thomas, H. D., & Wright, S. (2008). Industrial-Organizational psychology in New Zealand: Who are we and where we are going? *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Organisational Psychology*, 1, 12-21.
- Gatewood, R. D., Feild, H. S., & Barrick, M. (2008). *Human Resource Selection* (6th ed.). Mason, OH: Thomson.
- Hansson, G., & O'Driscoll, M. P. (1993). Roles for industrial/organizational psychologists: A survey of New Zealand managerial personnel. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 22, 9-18.
- Hines, G. B. (1972). Management attitudes toward industrial psychologists: A cross-cultural study. *Australian Psychologist*, 7(2), 123-130.
- Muchinsky, P. M. (2006). *Psychology Applied to Work* (8th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson.
- Noe, R. A. (2008). *Employee Training and Development* (4th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Irwin.
- O'Driscoll, M. P., Carr, S., & Forsyth, S. (2007). I-O psychology in Aotearoa, New Zealand: A world away? *The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, 45(2), 59-64.
- O'Driscoll, M. P., Taylor, P., & Kalliath, T. (Eds.). (2003). *Organisational Psychology in Australia and New Zealand*. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Waddell, D. M., Cummings, T. G., & Worley, C. G. (2007). *Organisation Development & Change* (3rd Asia Pacific ed.). South Melbourne, Vic: Thomson.

Corresponding Author:

Donald A J Cable
School of Psychology
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton
New Zealand.
dcable@waikato.ac.nz