The Values of Industrial-Organizational Psychology: Who Are We?[1]

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What are the values of industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology as a profession? According to Katzell and Austin's (1992) history of the field, this has never been a major topic of concern for us and there do not appear to be any explicit published statements of our values. In all fairness, though, the absence of guiding principles does not seem to be unique to I-O psychology: "Why is it that experts primarily teach techniques to young professionals, while ignoring the values that have sustained the quests of so many creative geniuses?" (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001).

This is an important matter because "it is the profession's core values that both anchor and trigger the virtues and duties expected of its members" (Gellerman, Frankel, & Ladenson, 1990). Thus, values underlie all ethical reasoning. A profession's values are reflected in what it considers important, the goals and objectives it tries to achieve, its reactions to sociopolitical events that impact it (e.g., civil rights legislation; downsizing), the choices made by its members such as where and for whom they work, what they work on and study, and the criteria by which they evaluate their work.

Perhaps the closest we get to a statement of values is our frequent veneration of "the scientist–practitioner model" (S–P). However, I-O psychology has never articulated a conception of the nature of the S–P model and exactly how it should direct our activities—as has been done explicitly in clinical, counseling, and school psychology (Baker & Benjamin, 2000; Raimy, 1950). And the S–P model has also been characterized as "an incomplete model of values" for I-O psychology (Lefkowitz, 1990, 2003) because it fails to encompass the moral perspective represented by the humanistic/beneficent tradition in psychology (Kimble, 1984). Almost from its inception, psychology in America has been comprised of both the scientific study of behavior as well as the utilitarian application of the knowledge gained for human betterment. Even when employed in an organizational or institutional setting, school, counseling, and clinical psychologists—by dint of the training, socialization, and cultural norms that characterize those subdisciplines—assume their primary responsibility to be to the student, client, or patient served, not the organization. Can the same be said for I-O psychology? What moral complications are introduced if the organization is defined as the client?

The humanistic tradition is reflected in the preamble to the APA (2002) code of ethics, which indicates that "Psychologists are committed…to improve the condition of individuals, organizations, and society." That objective is commensurate with the common understanding of what it means for an occupation to have achieved the status of a "profession" (Haber, 1991). Professions acknowledge responsibility not only to their clients but to society at large. In that vein, Donaldson (1982) has voiced the following concerns:

> In addition to the traditional categories of professions, modern corporate life creates new ones…. Many of the new "technocratic" professions, however, lack a key characteristic associated with traditional professions. With the professions of medicine, law, or teaching, we associate a spirit of altruism or service; but the new technocratic professions often lack this characteristic and thus raise special problems of moral responsibility…. The standards of the new professional do not explicitly include moral standards, in part because his or her profession does not recognize an altruistic element in its overall goals. The old professions have frequently failed to apply the moral standards articulated in statements of their professional goals; but the new professions fail, it seems, because they do not even attempt to articulate moral standards. (p. 113)

Accordingly, one might question whether I-O psychology is more akin to the minimally moral new "technocratic professions" than to the traditional professions in which responsibility and service to society at large is a major value component. This admittedly leads us into murky waters: To "improve the condition of individuals, organizations, and society" necessarily entails some-times-contested values choices concerning what constitutes "improvement."

Some psychologists, including many in I-O psychology, try to avoid making moral choices by taking refuge in the advocacy of "value-free" science and practice. As observed by Greenberg (2004), I-O psychologists have generally chosen to stand mute on social issues on the assumption that "to be credible scientists, we have learned, we must check our values at the door." But might "value-free I-O psychology" actually work to the detriment of using psychology for human betterment? Might a "moral compass" be necessary in order to direct the ends toward which social and behavioral science should be applied?

Even more to the point, it can be argued that the putatively "value-free" aspect of I-O psychology is not in fact neutral or benign but serves to mask the influence of a contradictory value system—one prizing productivity, profitability, and shareholder value above all else. It is that value system—and not a humane or beneficent one—that comprises the professional practice domain of the scientist–practitioner model in I-O psychology. That is why it's an inadequate professional model for I-O psychology. One might accept the 18th–19th-century logical positivist paradigm of value-free science as applied to the natural sciences (although, cf. Kuhn, 1996; Popper, 1972; Toulman,

1973). It is less tenable for social science, which has always included the aim of bettering the human condition—which entails making values choices regarding societal objectives (i.e., what constitutes "better"?). It is less tenable, still, for applied social science in which the pragmatic problems of real social systems define the object (and sometimes the methods) of study. The value-free assumption is clearly untenable when applied to professional practice in I-O psychology. Our applied research agendas, the problems on which we work, and the criteria by which our work is evaluated, are all set largely by the goals and objectives of the clients or employers for which we work and reflect their values and assumptions and those of the economic system in general.

As stated by Macey (2004), "our clients expect that we will support the attainment of their goals." Indeed, in all fields of applied psychology, not just in I-O, it tends to be true that "the practitioner does not choose the issue to examine, the client does" (Peterson, 1991). However, might there be critical differences between an individual psychotherapy patient, a public elementary school, or nonprofit mental health clinic as client, versus a business corporation? If so, then maybe we should heed the warning of the philosopher of science, Alexander Rosenberg (1995):

> *A social science that sought to efface the moral dimension from its descriptions and explanations would simply serve the interests of some other moral conception.* It would reflect values foreign to those that animate our conception of ourselves (p. 205, emphasis added).

I believe that is in great measure exactly what we have allowed to happen. Miner (1992) probably speaks for a majority of us when he warns that "Humanistic values represent a problem for the field of organizational psychology because these features can conflict with the objectivity required of a science and because they can dilute a strong concern for performance effectiveness and productivity" (p. 293). A resolute focus on performance effectiveness and productivity may represent a defensible value system, but it is certainly not objective, neutral, or scientific. Surely, the issue is one of alternative—perhaps competing or even conflicting—values choices, not the intrusion of humane concerns into a social system devoid of any values preferences.

There are no explicit published expositions of our professional values. But just as we infer many aspects of people's intrapsychic lives, including their character, from their overt behavior and verbal statements, it may similarly be possible to infer a profession's values from its historical perspectives and its contemporaneous actions and concerns, as well as from what it chooses to ignore.

Putative Values Indicators

The following are some events, conditions or observations that I think have some evidentiary worth in inferring the values of I-O psychology:
- Most I-O psychologists have been "managerially oriented…motivat-

ed more by the interests of management than by concern for employees" (Katzell & Austin, 1992, p. 810). This is reflected dramatically in the many writings of Elton Mayo who was very much opposed to democratic principles and viewed industrial unrest as indicating worker irrationality not dissatisfaction with wages and working conditions (cf. O'Connor, 1999);

- Contemporaneously, there seem to be virtually no I-O psychologists working in or for labor unions, nor much if any I-O research even studying them qua organizations. Since the time when I-O psychologists actively worked against unions (cf. Gordon & Burt, 1981; Hamner & Smith, 1978; Jacoby, 1986; Schriesheim, 1978; Stagner, 1981; Zickar, 2001), our attitude has been one of neglect;

- Similarly, very few I-O psychologists have worked with, studied, or tried to benefit the conditions of nonprofit organizations, "nontraditional" (contingent, part-time, temporary, or contract) workers, the working poor, or the unemployed, et al. (Katzell & Austin, 1992; Lefkowitz, 2005);

- Perhaps the foremost fact of life in corporate America over the past 25 years has been the wholesale dismissal of millions of employees from their jobs. It seems at least ironic, if not morally obtuse, that during that time I-O psychology has focused on employees' emotional attachment to the organization. Among the most dominant topics in I-O psychology have been how to select more conscientious employees and how to increase their organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors;

- Despite considerable evidence that much of this downsizing is neither economically necessary nor particularly effective (Cascio, 1993, 1995, 2002; Henry, 2002; McElroy, Morrow & Rude, 2001; Pfeffer, 1998; Rousseau, 1995), little if any criticism of these actions that cause such widespread misery emanates from I-O psychologists. Instead, our primary reactions have been to silently accept the upheaval and/or actively facilitate the process: "The key is to discourage long-term career planning" (Hall & Richter, 1990);

- Contrary to the practice in moral philosophy and other social science disciplines such as political economy that study the distributive fairness of our economic system, I-O psychology defines and investigates issues of [organizational] justice and (un)fairness merely as psychological constructs—that is, *perceived* justice (e.g., James, 1993)—never considering the moral, or even economic, justification for real-world organizational actions and their adverse consequences for many;

- Moreover, even perceived justice has come to be defined by us almost exclusively in terms of procedural or interactional justice (Schminke, Ambrose & Noel, 1997)—thus further avoiding the moral issue of distributive justice;

- Among a list of 31 values statements rated by a sample of SIOP practitioners ($n = 96$), rated near the very bottom of the list were *humanizing the work place, promoting autonomy and freedom, promoting democratic systems and policies, establishing systems based on equality*, and *emphasizing individual welfare* over the organization (Church & Burke, 1992);
- The three top-rated values of I-O psychologists in that survey were *increasing effectiveness and efficiency, enhancing productivity*, and *promoting quality of products and services*. The only "scientific value" included in the survey, *applying and utilizing organizational theory*, was rated #25. In other words, neither democratic/humanistic concerns *nor* scientific ones were rated by I-O psychologists as nearly as important as the corporation's economic objectives;
- I could find only one mention in the literature of I-O psychology concerning the frequent occurrence of individual employees being "wrongfully discharged" from their jobs. It is an educative warning from colleagues against such "troublesome practices"—because they may lead to costly litigation against the company not because they are disrespectful of employee rights, unethical, or simply wrong (Dunford & Devine, 1998).

What might one conclude from these indicators? They seem at least to suggest the following interrelated and tendentious questions:

Does I-O psychology emphasize concern for the client/organization and the organization's perspective and interests even to the detriment of concern for individual employees and other stakeholders?

Is I-O psychology one of the so-called "technocratic professions" that lack a salient sense of moral responsibility to society at large? Do professional psychologists who work in the private sector have an obligation to adopt a broader societal perspective?

Do we work for and benefit only those who are able to remunerate us handsomely?

Does I-O psychology lack a moral perspective for guidance, along with our scientific and economic perspectives? *Should* we have one—that is, should I-O psychology have an avowed social justice agenda accompanying its scientist–practitioner agenda?

Is the supposedly neutral scientific or values-free orientation we claim as a guiding principle simply a self-serving mask for corporate business values that drive our activities and provide the bases for personal reward?

Does I-O psychology have a managerialist bias, even to the point of anti-labor partisanship? If so, why?

Should we be educating and training I-O psychologists to incorporate values issues as part of their professional identities, including a consideration of the effects of our activities on the broader society?

Are we merely technocratic facilitators of corporate policies and practices—providing HR systems and psychological rationalizations for wholesale reductions in force and other aspects of "the new organizational reality" (e.g., pronouncements that most people no longer want secure, full-time, career-oriented jobs)?

Some Consequences

An individual with an inadequately developed sense of self is likely to also be lacking a clear conception of an ideal self and to experience a high level of ego threat. Perhaps the same is true for a profession. Industrial-organizational psychology seems to be subject to recurring identity threats. In the 1960s, our professional identity was threatened by the newly emergent field of organizational psychology or organizational behavior. The threat was resolved both by compartmentalization—of OB to business schools—and by introjection—the transformation of industrial psychology into I-*O* psychology. We defended the perceived 1970s identity challenge from organization development (OD) and the values-based process consultation model by disparaging its scientific status so that it, too, became compartmentalized—in separate professional schools and free-standing institutes such as NTL. In the 1980s and 1990s we were aroused by incipient incursions into our corporate domain by clinical psychology colleagues—to which we responded adaptively, co-opting much of their potential contribution by becoming "executive coaches."[2]

Currently, we seem to feel threatened by the activities of MBA B-school graduates/consultants, to which our responses so far have not been particularly constructive but simply cosmetic. In 2003, SIOP formally considered changing the name of the field. Without a clear rationale or target identity to be captured, it is not surprising that the effort lacked consensus. More recently, in these pages, we have been advised that "changing our name is irrelevant unless we market our profession, and we cannot carve out a market unless we have a clear understanding of our own identity" (Gasser, Butler, Waddilove, & Tan, 2004, p. 15). Those authors surveyed Fellows of SIOP concerning how, in their opinions, I-O psychologists differ from our B-school-trained counterparts. The replies reflected the science portion of the scientist–practitioner model: that we have greater knowledge of scientific principles, research methodology and statistics, psychological theories of human behavior, and individual-level phenomena. Not mentioned were any ethical or values issues.

I could not agree more with the authors' observation that "improving the human condition at work is the correct goal for us to pursue given our back-

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[2] An activity that invites suspicion regarding possible ethical violations: "Psychologists provide services...only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study, or professional experience" (APA, 2002, Standard 2.01[a]).

ground as psychologists and the unique training we receive…. Surprisingly often, taking the human element into consideration is neglected in business" (Gasser, et al., 2004, p. 18, 19). My view departs from theirs insofar as their notion of "taking the human element into consideration" is limited to the domain of psychological knowledge. The situation harks back to earlier criticisms of I-O psychologists as mere "servants of power" (Baritz, 1960), to which we reacted similarly that we simply needed to become a more objective and "autonomous scientific discipline" (Wolf & Ozehosky, 1978, p. 181). But the issue was then, and is now, one of morality and values, not science.

A New Prospect

Notwithstanding how important is the recognition of psychological attributes, what seems needed additionally is an expanded conception of the field, that is, an enlarged professional self-identity that encompasses the humanistic tradition in psychology (cf. Kimble, 1984) and the professional service model that ideally characterizes any profession (Haber, 1991). That would mean making more salient a normative, that is, moral, perspective within the field. There are three elements to any profession: its theoretical and/or scientific base; its technical expertise, as reflected by its instrumental applications; and its moral or values perspective. The first is certainly salient in I-O psychology (Are the results statistically significant? At what effect size? Is the selection test valid?); the second is also well represented (Is the program cost-effective? Does the intervention increase productivity? Is this the most profitable alternative?). How often, however, have we engaged in serious deliberations with key organizational decision makers, asking "Is this the right thing to be doing?"

But would seeking the establishment of a normative dimension for I-O psychology be a hopelessly naïve, futile agenda? There are at least five reasons to reject that as cynicism. First, those who would dismiss the objective out of hand overlook the essential moral justification for the institution of business: the maximization of aggregate societal wealth and well-being (Danley, 1994). Although one should address the distributional inequities of the laissez-faire free market, a normative perspective is not inherently incompatible with the institution. Second, despite the obvious high-profile ethical and legal transgressions of executives in recent years, it ought to be acknowledged that they are a small minority of corporate managers. Not all managers are entirely self-serving (whether on behalf of the organization or for themselves, personally), and alternative perspectives abound (cf. Cavanagh, 1984; Donaldson, 1982; Epstein, 1999; H.B. Jones, 1995; T.M. Jones, 1995; Post, Frederick, Lawrence, & Weber, 1996).

Third, there is evidence that I-O psychologists and other human resource managers can, indeed, fulfill a role of ethical leadership and guidance in their organizations even though the norm of professional service "may place them

in direct conflict with their organization's business goals" (Wiley, 1998, p. 147). Fourth, many readers will not have failed to notice the marked increase in sessions concerned with ethical issues and professional values at the annual SIOP conference. Since 2003, Ethics and Values has been offered as an official category for conference submissions; these panel discussions have been well attended and lively. And this newsletter has introduced a regular column, **The I-O Ethicist**. Such consensual support may be critical in promoting the institutional values shift called for here. Last, and perhaps most important, there are ample indications of a potentially receptive audience for this proposed humanistic agenda. Many among us are studying and working to improve the human condition in areas such as worker safety (e.g., Griffin & Kabanoff, 2001), work stress (e.g., Lowman, 1993; Spector, 2002), job displacement (London, 1996; Waldo, 2001), and many others, as well as even contributing services *pro bono* to worthy causes (e.g., Klein, 2001, Ryan, 1999). But the challenge I raise here is in questioning the extent to which this "good work" (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2001) by some I-O psychologists has been conditioned by virtue of their education, training, and socialization as I-O psychologists. "Although it is obvious to anyone who cares to look that I-O psychology contains many generous and caring individuals whose professional goals include human betterment, there is room for improving the extent to which the profession qua profession reflects that sensitivity" (Lefkowitz, 2003, p. 327).

(References have been omitted in order to save space. A full reference list of all citations can be obtained from the author at Joel_Lefkowitz@ Baruch.cuny.edu.)