Industrial and Organizational Psychology (2020), **13**, 312–315
doi:10.1017/iop.2020.57

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

COMMENTARY

Publish or perish, but what about practice?

Alicia S. Davis[1], Sofia S. Van Sickle[2], Saskia Shirley[3], and Jennifer Feitosa[3,*]

[1]Claremont Graduate University, [2]Scripps College and [3]Claremont McKenna College
*Corresponding author. Email: jfeitosa@cmc.edu

The connection between science and practice is at the core of I-O psychology, providing the foundation for applying experimental findings to the real world (Rupp & Beal, 2007). However, in the current publishing environment, journals that publish practice-oriented research often have lower impact factors, as acknowledged in the focal article by Highhouse et al. (2020) and by many other scholars (e.g., Extejt & Smith, 1990; Marsh & Hunt, 2006). This is concerning, considering that the importance of publishing in high-quality and high-impact journals is deeply ingrained in the field of I-O psychology and even more so for our colleagues affiliated with business schools. The current structure of the scholar rewarding system, also known as "publish or perish," is grounded in chasing high numbers of publications in top-tier journals with high impact factors. However, a consequence of this structure is the shift away from applied research, disintegrating the fundamental connection between science and practice for the field (Aguinis et al., 2017). Therefore, we argue that although impact factor is still a highly valued benchmark to our field, we have the ability to flip the metric by encouraging our colleagues to publish in lower impact, practice-based journals. We call for a way to rediscover the roots of the field and grow the recognition of practice-based journals, truly bridging the scientist–practitioner gap.

High impact factor, but no real impact

Despite the high regard for impact factors, recent research has shown that a high impact factor does not necessarily equate to highly applicable and useful work for I-O psychologists (Antonakis, 2017; Selgen, 1998). Based on impact factor alone, articles that do not garner many citations are not able to contribute to a journal's impact factor. As a consequence, journals focused on attaining a high impact factor are not motivated to publish articles that are application oriented, which may not receive as many citations as rigorous, theory-based studies with tried and true methods (Hoffman, 2017; Marsh & Hunt, 2006). Therefore, meaningful and influential practical research is going largely unnoticed due to being rejected by top-tier journals.

Given that journals with high impact factors set the parameters for what is valued research, the downsides surrounding these journals are troublesome. Research has shown that journals with high impact factors often publish low-quality works, some with research design and analysis issues (Harris et al., 2011). Additionally, submitting work to these highly esteemed journals is an extremely lengthy process, which involves making sure the research has a sound theoretical background, rigorous methods, and is a good fit for the journal (West & Rich, 2012). This often leaves little room for innovative work that has rarely been studied or is difficult to study, as is the case with practice-based research, and draws out the process of publishing so that new research is already redundant by the time it is published. However, articles in high-impact journals continue to garner high quantities of citations by virtue of having more exposure regardless of the fact they may not actually make a meaningful contribution to practical solutions that are at the core of I-O psychology.

© The Author(s), 2020. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology.

https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2020.57 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This super-elite model of publishing means that I-O psychologists miss nuanced research from more diverse industries that require less mainstream methods of investigation, such as qualitative and applied methods, simply because they are not reading the journals that publish this material (Extejt & Smith, 1990). As a result, the field's expertise is narrowing to paradigms where rigorous, well-tested methods can be used, halting progress of research involving populations for which it is more difficult to gather rigorous data (e.g., teams, disability, NASA, etc.). By default, very context-specific studies may never have sufficient data to meet the standard of methodological rigor that these journals require. If rigor was to continue to be the focus of high-impact journals, many important practical works will not have an opportunity to influence the field, ensuring the stagnation of I-O psychology.

I-O academic career success goes beyond top tiers

Within the ever-changing field of I-O psychology, publishing innovative and important findings enriches an author's exposure and notability. Now more than ever, it is evident that most professionals view publications in journals with high impact factors as largely responsible for advancing careers, attracting desirable jobs, and retaining these positions (Marsh & Hunt, 2006). However, being published in a prestigious journal is seemingly becoming more important than publishing at all, especially as many schools place a high priority on this publishing practice for faculty (Schimanski & Alperin, 2018). Such hierarchy can shape scholarly literature by deterring researchers from pursuing meaningful, practice-oriented projects, especially when seeking a promotion (e.g., tenure, full professorship), due to the lack of return value of these efforts.

Promisingly, new research has found that impact factor may not be the be-all and end-all for employers when hiring academics. A recent series of experiments contradicted the widely held belief that including "weak" publications in journals with lower impact factors on a curriculum vita (CV) will make scholars appear to be less qualified. The results showed that adding "weak" publications to a CV along with "strong" publications increased the strength of the candidate, whereas a CV with fewer "strong" publications decreased the candidate's strength (Donnelly et al., 2019). This is an encouraging finding and demonstrates that authors should no longer look to publications with high impact factors as the gold standard to advance their careers.

Revering the prestige of a journal when publishing is a prevalent problem for business school scholars with I-O psychology backgrounds, and psychology departments themselves, who are increasingly inclined to devalue practice-oriented research (Highhouse et al., 2020). As such, these scholars and their students focus on publishing theoretical rather than practical works. However, I-O psychologists and professionals in the business world understand that to be operative beyond business school, graduates need to look toward creative, theory-derived solutions oriented in practice (Machado & Davim, 2018). If institutions emphasize theoretical research at the expense of practice, students will lack perspective and fail to develop managerial skill sets (Heskett, 2005). Therefore, in order to preserve and encourage applied research, scholars should be motivated to educate their students about the relevance of the intersection between science and practice. If schools continue to overlook this relationship, they run the risk of becoming static institutions, teaching only a one-way approach to a dynamic, multifaceted field. Business and psychology scholars would benefit from ignoring the attractive illusion of high impact factors and instead use practical work that enhances the field and their students' education as a benchmark for success.

Conclusion

It is apparent that impact factor will remain an important index in determining a journal's prestige into the future. Yet, as a field, we have seen that high-impact journals rarely publish innovative practical work because they are too concerned with maintaining high levels of citations. If the

https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2020.57 Published online by Cambridge University Press

attention continues to be too narrowly focused on impact factor, researchers will continue to avoid practice-oriented projects, especially while seeking to establish their careers. Unless changed, the publishing hierarchy will continue to downgrade the status of practice-based work, eroding the core identity of I-O psychology.

How then should we go about changing the way we view impact factors in I-O psychology? We should begin by not being afraid of publishing in lower impact journals or journals that publish practice-based work. In fact, we should be encouraging our colleagues and students to read and publish in these types of journals. If researchers are motivated to publish in applied journals, the impact factor of these practice-oriented journals will increase, bringing further attention to important publications that may otherwise be lost.

Perhaps the most necessary change, however, is to the scholar rewarding system. For instance, when candidates apply for a promotion, rather than solely asking them for the impact factors of the journals they have published in, they should be asked to map their papers in terms of practical value and influence, such as how many employees or organizations have undergone their practical training intervention. This indicator may be measured through altmetrics, which account for the influence of research that is disseminated by social media (Cho, 2017). Another way to change our view of the quality of a researcher's contributions could be to measure students' evolution in theoretical and practical perspective as well as their productivity in creating and applying new research (e.g., campus workshops, policy changes). These are potentially better measures of the legacy and influence that a researcher has on the field and the world as a whole, but they do call for innovative lenses to further develop and implement them.

As a field, we have the power to change the metric for our practice-based journals by reading and citing these publications, disregarding our pride, and finding more productive and meaningful ways to measure our influence as scientists. In doing so, the status of I-O psychology will be elevated, allowing for other disciplines and business school scholars to recognize the importance of practice-oriented work. Publishing more practice-oriented work, even if this begins in journals with lower impact factors, enables I-O psychologists to renew an interest in practice-based research. Instead of pressuring to publish in top-tier journals, which is motivated by the fear of perishing as a scholar, I-O psychologists should return to the field's core identity: the scientist–practitioner model.

References

Aguinis, H., Ramani, R., Campbell, P., Bernal-Turnes, P., Drewry, J., & Edgerton, B. (2017). Most frequently cited sources, articles, and authors in industrial-organizational psychology textbooks: Implications for the science–practice divide, scholarly impact, and the future of the field. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*, **10**(4), 507–557.

Antonakis, J. (2017). On doing better science: From thrill of discovery to policy implications. *Leadership Quarterly*, **28**(1), 5–21.

Cho, J. (2017). A comparative study of the impact of Korean research articles in four academic fields using altmetrics. *Performance Measurement and Metrics*, **18**(1), 38–51. https://doi.org/10.1108/PMM-02-2016-0005

Donnelly, K., McKenzie, C. R. M., & Müller-Trede, J. (2019). Do publications in low impact journals help or hurt a CV? *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, **25**(4), 744–752.

Extejt, M. M., & Smith, J. E. (1990). The behavioral sciences and management: An evaluation of relevant journals. *Journal of Management*, **16**(3), 539–551.

Harris, A., Reeder, R., & Hyun, J. (2011). Survey of editors and reviewers of high impact psychology journals: Statistical and research design problems in submitted manuscripts. *Journal of Psychology*, **145**(3), 195–209.

Heskett, J. (2005, July 4). *How can business schools be made more relevant?* Harvard Business School. https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/4886.html

Highhouse, S., Zickar, M. J., & Melick, S. R. (2020). Prestige and relevance of the scholarly journals: Impressions of SIOP members. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*, **13**(3), 273–290.

Hoffman, A. J. (2017, March 28). *In praise of "B" journals.* Inside Higher Ed. https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/03/28/academics-shouldnt-focus-only-prestigious-journals-essay

https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2020.57 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Machado, C., & Davim, J. P. (Eds.). (2018). *Organizational behavior and human resource management: A guide to specialized MBA course*. Springer.

Marsh, S. J., & Hunt, C. S. (2006). Not quite as simple as A-B-C: Reflections on one department's experiences with publication ranking. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, **15**(3), 301–315.

Rupp, D. E., & Beal, D. (2007). Checking in with the scientist–practitioner model: How are we doing? *The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, **45**(1), 35–45.

Schimanski, L. A., & Alperin, J. P. (2018). The evaluation of scholarship in academic promotion and tenure processes: Past, present, and future. *F1000Research*, **7**(1605), 1–21.

Seglen, P. O. (1998). Citation rates and journal impact factors are not suitable for evaluation of research. *Acta Orthopaedica Scandinavica*, **69**(3), 224–229.

West, R., & Rich, P. (2012). Rigor, impact and prestige: A proposed framework for evaluating scholarly publications. *Innovative Higher Education*, **37**(5), 359–371.

Cite this article: Davis, A.S., Van Sickle, S.S., Shirley, S., and Feitosa, J. (2020). Publish or perish, but what about practice? *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* **13**, 312–315. https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2020.57

https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2020.57 Published online by Cambridge University Press