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Licensing of I-O Psychologists: Some Potentially Lethal Features

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The focal article (LCIOP Joint Task Force, 2017) is a painstakingly thorough discussion of licensing issues regarding I-O psychology as they have evolved over the last 40–50 years. There is also a very large literature produced by Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) members, and cited in the focal article, that discusses many of these issues in some detail (e.g., Campbell, Levy, Murphy, Schmitt, & Weiss, 2009). The focal article makes a very useful distinction between *health service providers* (HSP) and *general applied psychologists* (GAP). The position of SIOP for some time has been that licensure should be *required* for the former, but not for the latter, although a path to licensure should be provided for those who need it. I would certainly agree. Also, the Society of Consulting Psychology (SCP) is much more infused with applied clinical psychology than is SIOP. Consequently, the licensing needs of most SIOP members and most SCP members are most likely not quite the same.

The specific reasons that industrial and organizational (I-O) psychology practice should not require licensure have been summarized frequently. For example, Latham (2017) points out that there is no subject matter domain unique to I-O psychology, and many topics are shared, in some form or another, with economists, sociologists, workplace design engineers, organizational behavior researchers, and human resource management specialists. Also, as the result of much R&D, the content of I-O practice is constantly changing. This is one (desirable) consequence of the scientist–practitioner PhD training model. Unfortunately, too much of the discussion and policy making at the state/provincial government level views "psychology" as a single interrelated body of knowledge. It is not. During the last 40 years,

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we should have been much more proactive in helping state boards make the necessary distinctions (Vandaveer, 1991).

Licensing can also be used to protect guild interests (Kleiner, 2006, 2015) and to restrict competition. The SIOP membership seems always to have argued that we do not wish to restrict researchers and practitioners from other disciplines in this way. Protecting clients against charlatans is another matter, and Vandaveer (1991) presented a strong case for doing that.

Unfortunately, even though many of us might firmly believe that general applied psychology should not require licensure, a number of licensing trains have already left the station. As pointed out by the focal article (LCIOP Joint Task Force, 2017), some form of licensure is already required in most states for practitioners who wish to label themselves as I-O psychologists. Licensing requirements are determined by state and provincial licensing boards, which are empowered by their respective legislatures. However, boards seek advice from multiple interested parties about appropriate specifications for what the requirements for licensure should be. We must do all we can to inform and convince the state/provincial licensing boards that applied practice in psychology is truly multidimensional. One size does not fit all. Some areas do not need licensure, and even for health service providers in the organizational context, the requirements for licensure should probably not be the same as for clinical or counseling psychologists in private practice. However, if a state or province decides licensure is necessary, then the requirements for licensure should be appropriate for facilitating the public good. Restricting the practice of expert I-O psychologists because of inappropriate licensing requirements does not contribute to the public good.

A Personal Fear

Now, the principal reason for writing this commentary is to again voice concerns about I-O psychology licensure from the perspective of a long-term faculty member in a major I-O psychology PhD program in a major psychology department in a large land grant research university. I was area director of the I-O program at Minnesota for over 20 years, director of Graduate Studies for the Psychology Department for (gasp!) 39 years, and department chair for 5 years (2001–2006). In the course of filling these roles, I had many occasions to confront program accreditation issues (as specified by the American Psychological Association [APA]) pertaining to the clinical and counseling psychology training programs. My overall conclusions regarding the "graduated from an accredited PhD program" requirement are as follows.

The APA accreditation requirements put a heavy emphasis on taking a large number of introductory courses across a number of "named" areas. However, the knowledge base of our graduate students is well beyond the introductory level. High performance as an undergraduate (and

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undergraduate research experience); participation in high level graduate seminars; doing high level research, with its attendant need to know all the relevant literature; writing articles for publication or conference presentation; participation in research teams; and helping to generate research grant applications all contribute to this expertise. Having to take many introductory courses detracts from developing more advanced expertise and more sophisticated research training. It conflicts with the goals of the scientist–practitioner model. It conflicts with the goals of becoming a world class researcher. Unfortunately, in my opinion, the 2016 SIOP *Guidelines for Education on Training in Industrial-Organizational Psychology* come dangerously close to providing a lengthy checklist for PhD program accreditation/certification. It would be a disaster if they were implemented as such.

Along with specifications for course content, the APA accreditation requirements also demand predoctoral clerkships and internships that provide practice on specified clinical and/or counseling skills. Providing such clerkship and internship experiences is a burdensome and expensive administrative responsibility. It is only made possible because clinical and counseling have a specific body of skills involving one-on-one counseling that can be practiced. I-O psychology has no corpus of such "skills," with the possible exception of high-level statistical analysis and, perhaps, certain aspects of individual assessment. Again, the content of I-O practice is quite varied, dynamic, and complex in terms of its interactions with other disciplines and with the organizational HR issues that present themselves. This makes the certification of internship experiences problematic and counterproductive (Ford, Kozlowski, & Ryan, 2014; Sund, Smith, Bastos, Small, Mills, & Chaudhuri, 2014). Supervised experience: yes. Accredited or certified internships: no. Moreover, it is useful to distinguish "skill" capabilities from "problem-solving" capabilities. Skills can be specified and are used to address problems that have a known solution (e.g., was a specific structural equation modeling [SEM] algorithm used correctly?). In contrast, problem solving is the development of possible solutions for ill-structured problems, where neither the "correct" nor "best" answer, nor the best solution methods are known beforehand. I will submit that much of I-O practice involves developing solutions to ill-structured problems. Viewed in this way, I-O practice is not skill application but problem solving, which in turn is a function of a high level of expertise, which in turn is not produced by taking multiple introductory courses or by accredited internships.

One strong implication of the above is that if the requirements for licensure include having a PhD from an *accredited* program and completion of *certified* internships, then I-O psychology PhD programs will disappear from psychology departments in the major research universities. They will

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simply be viewed as too burdensome, too non-research–oriented, and too expensive in terms of resources that could be devoted to other research areas. Consequently, the academic research arm of I-O psychology would be cut off. Where does that leave us?

Consequences of a Disaster

The implications of I-O psychology disappearing from major psychology research departments are, at least, these:

- The primary source of new research on many issues in the world of work will disappear.
- The scientist–practitioner model will cease to function.
- Research-based innovation in I-O psychology will be degraded.
- The process of developing higher levels of expertise will be degraded.
- I-O practice will be degraded.
- SIOP will change drastically.

The above remarks are not directed at licensure itself but at certain counterproductive requirements for licensure. If licensure is required by a state or province, then appropriate paths to licensure must be found. They already exist in some states. Again, we should help state/provincial boards as much as we can. I-O psychology is an important contributor to increasing the effectiveness of organizations and the well-being of people who work as well as contributing to the common good. We should not destroy it.

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