

DE RERUM NOVARUM

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS — A “BLIND SPOT” IN THE TEACHING, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE OF INDUSTRIAL/ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

It is argued that the way we teach, research and practise organizational psychology, and teach others to do so, is based on the erroneous assumption that we exist in non-unionised environments. The influence of union membership on behaviour in organizations is illustrated, the neglect of industrial relations by organizational psychologists documented, and the need for attitudinal, behavioural and ideological change by organizational psychologists is identified.

During the 1950s, industrial/organizational (I/O) psychologists frequently researched industrial relations (IR) issues, such as simultaneous loyalty to company and union (e.g., Dean, 1954; Purcell, 1954). Thereafter, the 1950s were called the “golden decade” of psychological research into unions (Straus, 1977). Since then, the reciprocal relationship between I/O psychologists and unionists has been characterized at best by neglect, at worst by mutual mistrust, suspicion and ideological differences. Numerous reasons for this situation have been documented elsewhere (e.g. Huszczo, Wiggins & Currie, 1984), and include ideological and methodological differences between the study of I/O psychology and IR, and will not be repeated here. Rather, it will be argued that avoidance of studying the effects of unions as a central aspect of industrial relations psychology results in the construction and dissemination of a truncated body of knowledge regarding organizational psychology.

If union membership and union activity (a) were rare, and (b) exerted no influence

on behaviour in organizations, avoidance of union issues by I/O psychologists would be of little consequence. However, union membership and activity in Canada is not infrequent and is associated with behaviour in organizations, and thereafter warrants further consideration.

The extent of union membership in Canada

The first issue that would be confronted is the extent of union membership. In general, total union membership across Canada as a percentage of the civilian labour force remains relatively stable (1981: 3,487,000; 1982: 3,617,000; 1983: 3,563,000; 1984: 3,651,000; 1985: 3,666,000). In 1984, total union membership represented 30.6% of the civilian labour force, the same proportion as 1983, while the rate was 30.2% in 1985. If only non-agricultural workers are considered, the proportions of the workforce that was unionised between 1980 and 1985 was 37.6%, 37.4%, 39%, 40%, 39.6% and 39% respectively. Thus, union membership involves a sizeable proportion of the Canadian labour force. (All data on union membership and trends are taken from Kumar, Coates and Arrowsmith, 1986, and Wood and Kumar, 1984).

Some effects of union membership on organizational behaviour

If union membership status explains some of the variation in individual functioning within organizations, its neglect would result in a truncated perspective of

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organizational psychology. Based on the available data (much of it generated by non-psychologists; see Freeman & Medoff, 1984), it is apparent that taking account of union membership and activity does increase our understanding of specific aspects of organizational behaviour, such as job dissatisfaction, wages, productivity and turnover.

Brett (1980) states that historically, graduate courses in I/O psychology ignored the consequences of job dissatisfaction for the unionization process. Yet Freeman and Medoff's (1984) archival review suggests that union membership influences job satisfaction; Berger, Olson and Boudreau (1983) show further that various facets of satisfaction are differentially affected. Specifically, union members are more satisfied with their pay, but less satisfied with work itself, co-workers, supervision and promotion. In their exhaustive review, Freeman and Medoff (1984) also show that (a) turnover is lower among union members than their non-unionized counterparts of comparable skill and wages, (b) wages are between 10% to 30% higher and fringe benefits better for union members, but (c) union-

nized companies achieve lower profits than non-unionized companies.

All this research, however, merely focuses on differences between union and non-unionized individuals. Within-group research on the psychological experiences of union members can also enhance our understanding organizational functioning. Two examples will suffice. First, the level of union activity amongst union members influences organizational functioning, for example through the incidence of strikes and lockouts. Although the number of disputes in Canada has decreased since 1980, the number of days lost per thousand employees remains disproportionately high compared to other major industrialized countries for which data is available (see Table 1). The existence of hostility (Stagner & Eflal, 1982) and the obvious loss of productivity during strikes and lockouts, might well influence organizational functioning. Curiously, I/O psychologists have tended to ignore studying this issue.

Second, following the seminal work of Gordon and his colleagues (Gordon, Philpot, Burt, Thompson & Spiller, 1980), research has assessed commitment to labour

TABLE 1
Work stoppages in selected industrialized countries, 1980 to 1984^a

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
<i>Number of disputes</i>					
Canada	1028	1048	677	645	717
France	2118	2442	3113	3360	na
Italy	2000	1964	1691	1397	1587
United Kingdom	1330	1338	1528	1352	1154
United States	187	145	196	81	62
<i>Days lost/ 1000 employees</i>					
Canada	945	908	615	469	417
France	98	88	136	85	78
Italy	921	583	1120	819	507
United Kingdom	532	200	254	180	1263 ^b
United States	235	172	102	195	91

^a Data extracted from Kumar et al., 1986, p. 435.

^b Elevated levels probably due to the protracted, nation-wide strike by the National Union of Mine-workers.

organizations. There is an increasing body of empirical data on the construct validity of union commitment (e.g., Fullagar, 1986; Gordon et al., 1980; Ladd, Gordon, Beauvais, & Morgan, 1982). Research is now focusing on the antecedents and outcomes of union commitment (Fullagar & Barling, 1987a; Fullagar & Barling, 1987b). Perhaps more importantly, findings from research in different countries (denoting different labour relations contexts) now shows that union commitment enhances the relationship between company commitment and specific organizational behaviours. Larson and Fukami (1985) showed that while company commitment was associated positively with work performance, and negatively with turnover, absenteeism and reprimands, these relationships were stronger when commitment to the union was also high. Likewise, Fullagar and Barling (1987c) showed that both job involvement and participation in union activities was highest under conditions of dual commitment to company and union¹.

Consequently, both union membership and union experiences influence behaviours in organizations. Although Fullagar (1984) implies it is not possible to study I/O psychology whilst remaining ignorant of how organizational behaviour is influenced by union membership and activity, previous suggestions that I/O psychologists have ignored IR have been largely anecdotal. It remains to be seen whether this neglect can be documented empirically.

I/O psychology and unions: A continuing neglect?

To assess this issue, three questions were posed: (a) Do we take account of union membership in conducting and interpreting research; (b) How much coverage is devoted to IR issues in frequently-used I/O textbooks; (c) In teaching I/O psychology, to what extent do we focus on IR issues?

To address these questions, data were collected from three different sources. In the first instance, all articles from 1980-1986 in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* and *Academy of Management Journal* were inspected to see the extent to which

subjects' union membership status is mentioned. These four journals were not selected at random but were specifically chosen to provide a variety of perspectives on issues relevant to I/O psychology, to represent different professional organizations and different countries. The results of this analysis (see Table 2) suggest that union membership is ignored almost invariably, despite the need to provide all relevant subject characteristics to facilitate understanding and replication, for example for meta-analytic studies. Given the associations between union membership and diverse behaviours in organizations (Freeman & Medoff, 1984) union membership status is of obvious relevance. Hence, this represents an important omission.

To address the second question, 39 frequently-used introductory I/O texts and three advanced texts were selected and inspected to obtain an impression of the extent to which I/O psychologists confront union issues. This is important: Perhaps students of I/O psychology gain much of their knowledge from these specific texts. If these texts fail to consider, or perhaps devote only minimal attention to IR issues, what we may have is a generation of students emerging from I/O courses with no reason to suspect that union membership and activity are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of organizational behaviour.

The subject index of each of these texts was inspected; and the total number of pages devoted to IR (ascertained through subject index terms such as bargaining, negotiation, certification, union, trade union, labour union, industrial relations, labour relations, grievance, or strikes) was summed. From the results of this analysis (see Table 3) it must again be concluded that most I/O students are not exposed to the role of unions in organizations. Fifteen of these texts make no mention of unions in the subject index; in all, 29 suggest that less than 1% of their contents consider union issues.

Because of (a) the inaccuracy of judging a book's contents by its subject index, and (b) the availability of other information sources, a brief survey was conducted to ask instructors themselves the extent to which union issues are dealt with. Letters

TABLE 2
Number of articles reporting union status of subjects, 1980-1986^{a,b}

Year	JOP			JAP			OBHP			AMJ		
	Total	Union	%	Total	Union	%	Total	Union	%	Total	Union	%
1980	35	1	2.8	80	2	2.5	53	1	1.8	57	6	10.5
1981	29	1	3.4	108	4	3.7	45	1	2.2	62	0	0.0
1982	28	0	0.0	111	3	2.7	41	0	0.0	62	3	4.8
1983	33	1	3.0	79	0	0.0	47	1	2.1	60	0	0.0
1984	29	1	3.4	82	4	4.8	44	0	0.0	60	3	5.0
1985	28	1	3.6	87	2	2.3	41	3	7.3	74	6	8.1
1986	24	8	33.3 ^c	96	7	7.3	48	6	16.7	51	7	13.7
Total	206	13	6.3	547	22	4.1	319	12	3.8	426	25	5.9

^a JOP= Journal of Occupational Psychology; JAP= Journal of Applied Psychology; OBHP= Organizational Behaviour and Human Performance; AMJ= Academy of Management Journal.

^b The data may reflect an underrepresentation of those reporting union status: In some, union membership was not relevant, as when subjects were students, CEOs, in the military, or when articles report meta-analyses or literature reviews.

^c This data point is completely a function of one special issue of the journal devoted entirely to industrial relations issues.

were sent to 50 heads of English-speaking psychology departments in Canada with the request that a one-page questionnaire be passed on to individuals teaching graduate or undergraduate courses in I/O psychology. The questionnaires ascertained which general texts were used, and if union issues were dealt with at all. Replies were received from 31 course instructors (62%), of whom 22 taught I/O courses. Ten of the 18 undergraduate courses, and three of the four graduate courses did not deal with IR at all. Fifteen of these courses used texts depicted in Table 3 (Baron, Davis/Newstrom, Landy, McCormick/Ilggen and Schultz were each used in two courses, while Dunnette, Gilmer/Deci, Maier/Ver-ser, Schein and Wexley/Yukl were used in one course each). Seven of these 15 texts make no reference at all to union issues. The neglect of IR in most I/O research (Flanagan & Dipboye, 1981), texts and courses support Fullagar's (1984) assumption that many students of I/O psychology might indeed complete their studies unaware of the impact of unions on behaviour in organizations.

Conclusion

We can no longer afford to perpetuate the mistake of earlier I/O psychologists and ignore the importance of IR issues both as dependent and independent variables for an understanding of organizational behaviour. The continuing schism is detrimental to I/O psychology and IR, and retards a full understanding of both. As a discipline, IR has drawn heavily from economics, legal studies, politics and sociology. A more complete understanding of I/O psychology can be achieved if the mutual neglect between these two disciplines is replaced by reciprocal interest. Some of the issues relevant to I/O psychology that might be understood more fully include the study of union-management conflict (Bluen & Barling, in press) and one frequent and visible manifestation of such conflict, namely strikes (Barling & Milligan, 1987). Another issue worthy of investigation is the resistance frequently displayed by union leaders and union members to traditional work motivation approaches (Giles & Holley, 1978), which has led to recent guidelines aimed at enhancing the acceptability of motivational

TABLE 3
Coverage devoted to union issues in 42 I/O textbooks

Author(s)	Title and Year	Total	Union
Arnold/Feldman	<i>Organizational Behavior</i> , 1986	616	12
Baron	<i>Behaviour in organizations: Understanding and managing the human side of work</i> , 1983	583	0
Bass/Barrett	<i>People, work and organizations</i> , 1981	673	0
Daft/Steers	<i>Organizations: A micro/ macro approach</i> , 1986		
Davis/Newstrom	<i>Human behavior at work: Organizational behaviour</i> , 1985	552	31
Dessler	<i>Organizational theory</i> , 1986	472	0
Donnelly et al.	<i>Fundamentals of management</i> , 1984	780	0
Drenth et al. (Eds.)	<i>Handbook of work and organizational psychology</i> , 1983	1229	20
DuBrin	<i>Foundations of organizational behaviour: An applied perspective</i> , 1984	475	1
Dunnette ^b (Ed.)	<i>Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology</i> , 1983	1740	0
Feldman/Arnold	<i>Managing individual and group behaviour in organizations</i> , 1983	595	11
Gilmer/Deci	<i>Industrial and organizational psychology</i> , 1977	453	9
Gray/Starke	<i>Organizational behaviour: Concepts and applications</i> , 1984	735	16
Hampton/Summer/ Webber	<i>Organizational behavior and the practice of management</i> , 1987	862	16
Hellriegel/Slocum/ Woodman	<i>Organizational behaviour</i> , 1986	631	3
Hersey/Blanchard	<i>Management of organizational behaviour: utilizing human resources</i> , 1977	360	0
Howell/Dipboye	<i>Essentials of industrial/ organizational psychology</i> , 1986	414	1
Ivancevich et al.	<i>Organizational behavior and performance</i> , 1977	568	0
Jewell	<i>Contemporary industrial/ organizational psychology</i> , 1985	481	3
Johns	<i>Organizational behaviour: Understanding life at work</i> , 1983	518	8
Katz/Kahn ^b	<i>The social psychology of organizations</i> , 1978	773	0
Klein/Ritti	<i>Understanding organizational behavior</i> , 1984	692	0
Korman	<i>Organizational behavior</i> , 1977	438	4
Kossen	<i>The human side of organizations</i> , 1983	558	24
Landy	<i>Psychology of work behavior</i> , 1985	622	0
Larwood	<i>Organizational behaviour and management</i> , 1984	550	7
Luthans	<i>Organizational behaviour</i> , 1985	672	3
Maier/Verser	<i>Psychology of industrial organizations</i> , 1982	626	17
McCormick/Ilgen	<i>Industrial and organizational psychology</i> , 1985	461	0
Mitchell	<i>People in organizations: Understanding their behaviour</i> , 1978	481	0
Organ/Bateman	<i>Organizational behaviour</i> , 1986	687	5
Porter et al.	<i>Behavior in organizations</i> , 1975	561	2
Rambo	<i>Work and organizational behavior</i> , 1982	485	32
Rashid/Archer	<i>Organizational behavior</i> , 1982	407	1
Reitz	<i>Behavior in organizations</i> , 1981	535	0
Robbins	<i>Organizational behavior: Concepts, controversies and applications</i> , 1986	536	3
Schein	<i>Organizational psychology</i> , 1980	252	2
Schultz	<i>Psychology and industry today</i> , 1982	509	8
Steers	<i>Introduction to organizational behavior</i> , 1984	580	0
Szilagyi/Wallace	<i>Organizational behavior and performance</i> , 1983	615	4
Tosi	<i>Theories of organization</i> , 1984	235	0
Wexley/Yukl	<i>Organizational behavior and personnel psychology</i> , 1984	570	11

^a To conserve space, these texts are not cited in the Reference list; a full reference list can be obtained on request.

^b Advanced level texts.

techniques (Locke & Latham, 1984). Before such positive benefits can be obtained, however, I/O psychologists must accept the inevitability and often positive function of union-management conflict in its many manifestations in organizations, and discard their attitudinal indifference toward, or ideological bias against labour unions.

1. Parenthetically, the findings of these two studies may be especially important. One reason for the continuing mutual suspicion is the fear amongst union leaders that high company commitment would be detrimental to the union, while organizational leaders in turn fear that loyalty to the union could harm the organization. Yet the data from Larson and Fukami (1985) and Fullagar and Barling's (1987c) studies suggest that dual commitment enhances both organizational functioning and participation in union activities.

RESUME

L'auteur prétend que notre façon d'enseigner, de faire de la recherche et de pratiquer la psychologie organisationnelle et de former les autres dans ce domaine, est basée sur la présomption gratuite que nous existons dans des milieux non-syndiqués. Il démontre l'influence des syndiqués sur le comportement des organisations, prouve que les psychologues organisationnels prêtent très peu d'attention aux relations industrielles et identifie le besoin d'un changement d'attitude, de comportement et d'idéologie chez les psychologues organisationnels.

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