Some people like the name industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology because it sounds professional. Others like that it is descriptive and reflects an evolved interest in both individual and organizational processes. Many, however, find the title clunky, confusing, and antiquated. Some of these people would like the name shortened to simply “organizational psychology” or “business psychology.” These folks believe that the shorter title is more advantageous for communicating to managers that we can provide a competitive advantage to organizations. Some would like to see it changed to “work psychology.” These folks believe that this title would communicate to lay people, reporters, and funding agencies that we study the psychology of the workplace broadly defined. Still others would like to see the name changed to “work and organizational psychology” to take advantage of all of these benefits and to provide some consistency with our European cousins.\textsuperscript{1} As I point out in this essay, we have long been struggling with the issue of what to call ourselves.

**Name Change Attempts**

It appears that the first major attempt to change the current I-O label occurred in 1976. Popular alternatives at the time were “personnel psychology,” “business psychology,” and “psychology of work.” The leading contender, however, was “organizational psychology” because “all of the Division’s work is grounded in organizational contexts” (MacKinney, 1976; p. 2). Despite attempts by then chairman of the Long Range Planning (LRP) Committee Paul Thayer to shelve the issue in favor of “more important matters,” the Executive Committee asked LRP to forge ahead on the study of alternative names for Division 14. In a follow-up report, the LRP rather defiantly reported that it chose not to take up the name change issue (Long Range Planning Committee, 1976). The issue remained dormant for over 25 years.

The I-O tag most recently survived a name change vote in 2004. This initiative began in 2002 when Kevin Murphy suggested to the Executive Committee that they stop talking about the name change and “put it to a vote.” Ann Marie Ryan, who was SIOP president at the time, observed: “I think it is impor-

\textsuperscript{1} Some Europeans use the even longer title “industrial, work, and organizational psychology.”
tant to recognize that there were a lot of people on the Executive Committee who did feel strongly about this and that the idea came from committee work, focus groups, survey suggestions, etc...it was a ground-up kind of thing, and that it was an idea that had been around a long time” (personal communication, April, 2007). Although there were more votes from the membership to change the name than to retain the I-O label (see Table 1), no name change occurred.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Name</th>
<th>% Votes (n = 554)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Society for Industrial-Organizational Psychology</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society for Organizational Psychology</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society for Work Psychology</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society for Work &amp; Organizational Psychology</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society for Business Psychology</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is presumably because people could not agree on an alternative. Milt Hakel noted, however, “Someone should have realized that the status quo would win that contest—I think there should have been a runoff among the alternate names, and then a single choice between SIOP and whatever won the popularity contest in the first round” (personal communication, April 2007).

From the “I” to the “I-O”

So how did we get this name in the first place? In her *Handbook of Psychology* chapter on the history of I-O, Laura Koppes (2003) noted that the term “industrial psychology” became common after World War I. For example, Viteles’ classic 1932 text was entitled *Industrial Psychology*. The label was broadened in 1937 to “industrial and business psychology” when it became a section of the American Association of Applied Psychology (AAAP). Industrial and business psychology was maintained as a label for Division 14 when AAAP merged with the American Psychological Association (APA). The “business” part was, however, dropped from the division’s name around 1962.

To understand how we got from the “I” to the “I-O,” it is necessary to understand the intellectual and social influences occurring prior to the name change in 1973. Following WWII, industrial psychologists had become increasingly concerned with what Viteles (1944) described as “the sentiments, feelings, and attitudes of workers, supervisors, and managers, and with the interplay of people in the social organization of the industrial enterprise” (p. 182). Personnel types were getting increasingly involved in leadership and morale issues, along with group and organizational effectiveness. Leading figures such as McGregor, Argyris, Herzberg, Likert, Katz, and Kahn were advocating for a shift in focus to the organization not just individuals in them. The publication of Schein’s little book *Organizational Psychology* in 1965 was a reflection of where the field saw itself going in the future with regard to “O.”
In addition to these intellectual forces were social forces that were influencing how psychologists looked at work:

- The Nixon administration was shifting its focus from community development and civil rights toward workplace reform
- Sociologists and even some legislators were calling for an end to worker alienation or “blue-collar blues”
- The t-group, or sensitivity training movement, was at its peak in the 1960s and early 1970s
- Division 14 was sponsoring APA symposia on humanizing industrial psychology

As I have commented elsewhere (Highhouse, 2006), the recognition of organizational psychology was more than simply a reflection of the expanding interests of industrial psychologists to include organizational phenomena. It was also an acknowledgement of a young group of more humanistic psychologists, many of whom had training outside of traditional industrial psychology. In the 1970 issue of TIP, an announcement of the proposed name change noted “It is hoped, of course, that the proposed change [to industrial-organizational psychology] would encourage many psychologists now believing themselves excluded from our Division to apply for membership” (Notification of proposed change of name, 1970). In the same issue, outgoing Division 14 President Herbert Meyer commented on the lack of growth in the division’s membership over the last several years. The name change, therefore, may have also been an attempt to attract and retain a large group of professionals and scholars interested in social and clinical issues in the workplace, many of whom identified with the emerging field of OD (Hollenbeck, 1972).

The humanistic influences signaled by the name change led to tensions with the traditionalists over the relative value of a “hard” versus “soft” approach to research and practice, and over whether the field should be theory and science driven, versus practice and value driven (e.g., Alderfer, 1972). Prominent figures such as Marvin Dunnette and Fred Wickert grumbled about the “humanizing pressures” of the times and were dubious of such “mushy” concepts as growth, trust, and self-direction (Wickert, 1974). Outgoing Division 14 President Robert Guion (1973), interviewed in the first issue of The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist following its name change from The Industrial Psychologist, commented “I think that there is no real great difference between traditional industrial psychology and what has become called organizational psychology so far as the topics are concerned. I think the difference has been more in methods and I would like to see more rigor in the methods, regardless of what people call themselves (p. 30).”

**Final Observations**

Here we are today, with a name that is unable to garner the support of more than 50% of our membership but for which we are unable or unwilling...
to find a suitable replacement. Consider the experience of Cambridge physicist Sir Roger Penrose, announcing in 1969 what he thought was a monumental discovery. He called his finding a “gravitationally totally collapsed object,” and the world responded with a collective yawn. Months later, he began to refer to his discovery as a “black hole,” and it suddenly became headline news.

As I-O psychologists, we know the power of organizational branding, and we know the importance that an organization’s name can have on the social identity of its members. As this brief history of the current I-O name shows, the identity issue is not a new one. And, the name-change issue is not likely to go away. It would be useful to work with international I-O organizations, such as the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP), to find a name that unites the discipline worldwide. It would also be useful to have serious discussions about the locus of I-O psychology within academe and how a name change might best position the discipline for future growth.

References


Long-Range Planning Committee (1976, August). The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist, 13, 4.


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