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(Re)Applying Social Psychology to Organizational

Work, Well-being, and Leadership

David E. Rast, III[1], Carolyn Axtell[2] & Stephen McGlynn[2]

[1]University of Alberta; [2]University of Sheffield

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Corresponding author:
David Rast, III
Department of Psychology
University of Alberta
Canada
david.rast@ualberta.ca

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Abstract

Research on organizational behavior is fundamentally an application of social psychology theory and phenomena. While much of organizational psychology is inherently grounded in social psychological research, these two disciplines are largely disconnected from one another. More visibility of the commonalities may encourage discussion, collaboration, and integration between these two fields—an integration that will only benefit each discipline. The present article briefly reviews the historic overlap between these disciplines, the resulting divide between them, and then discusses recent developments demonstrating the potential power of reconnecting social psychology with organizational-relevant research. We then examine how the six empirical articles in this Special Issue benefit from applying social psychological theory to organizational research. We will conclude by identifying potential areas ripe for future research.

(Re)Applying Social Psychology to Organizational

Work, Well-being, and Leadership

It is reasonably clear that the locus of psychology applied to organizational problems has passed from the psychology department, probably never to return.

-Lawler, Cranny, Campbell, Schneider, MacKinney, and Vroom (1971, p. 10)

Over 25 years ago, Lawler, Cranny, Campbell, Schneider, MacKinney, and Vroom (1971) convened a symposium at the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology conference. Themes in this symposium covered the movement of organizational psychologists from psychology departments to business and management schools. As shown in the above quote, Lawler and colleagues predicted that organizationally relevant research conducted within psychology departments would decline. More recently, Aguinis, Bradley, and Brodersen (2014) supported this prediction showing a majority of psychologists conducting research applied to organizational concerns have moved to business and management schools. They note, this transition has resulted in many positive and negative consequences. However, there is one consequence specifically relevant to this Special Issue on Work, Well-being, and Leadership: research on organizational psychology is "starting to lose its root in psychology" (Aguinis et al., 2014, p. 294).

The idea of organizational psychology losing its roots in psychology, particularly social psychology, is alarming to us. Some of the earliest publications in psychology (and social psychology) focused on the application of social psychological theory to

organizational issues. Many leading psychologists in the past referred to industrial social psychology to describe the application of social psychological theory to organizational research (e.g., Haire, 1959; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Schein, 1965; Vroom & Maier, 1961). Sometime over the last 20 years or so this was shortened to remove the "social" from name where it is now referred to as industrial psychology or industrial-organizational psychology. Similarly, the Institute of Work Psychology, which inspired this special issue, originally began at the Social and Applied Psychology Unit. "The Unit" as it was colloquially called, was a group of social psychologists conducting organizational research. Also about 20 years ago, "The Unit" was renamed the Institute of Work Psychology as this shift away from "social" became more mainstream. The "social" did not disappear in just the name alone though: where has the 'social psychology' gone in organizational research? We believe there is a great deal of value in reconnecting industrial and organizational research with social psychology.

At the same time, we are concerned about the lack of organizationally relevant research published in social psychology. Throughout its history social psychologists have applied their theories and methodologies to all aspects of human behavior, including organizations, employees, and leadership (e.g., Bartlett, 1926; Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939; Deutsch & Pepitone, 1948). However, this application to organizations all but disappeared in social psychology throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (possibly related to reduction in group process research among social psychologists at the same time; Moreland, Hogg, & Hains, 1994). Even the landmark Handbook of Social Psychology series only recently published a chapter on leadership after a 25 year long hiatus (Hogg, 2010; cf. Hollander, 1985). So, at the same time we might ask, where has all the

organizational research gone in social psychology? However, while organizational

psychologists are publishing less using social psychological theory, there has been some

recent organizationally relevant research amongst social psychologists (e.g., Baas, De

Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008; Gelfand, Erez, Aycan, 2007; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, &

Ristikari, 2011; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Yet, there is still a disconnect between scholars

and research such that neither fields are communicating their findings to each other.

Special Issue Overview

It is in this spirit that we set out to gather papers for a special issue illustrating the

benefit reconnecting social psychology theory with organizational practice. The articles

that follow this introduction to the special issue draw on a number of social psychology

theories to help explain matters of importance in organizations such as improving health,

well-being, and leadership. Nevertheless, each of the papers in this special issue

contribute to the reconnection of social psychology theory with organizationally relevant

research.

In their paper "Organizational Identification and "Currencies of Exchange":

Integrating Social Identity and Social Exchange Perspectives", Tavares, van

Knippenberg, and van Dick (2015) integrate social exchange theory (Thibault & Kelley,

1959) and social identity perspectives (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987) to

examine the employee-organizational relationship. Specifically they investigate whether

strongly or weakly identified employees reciprocate the perceived organizational support

(POS) received using different "currencies of exchange"—reducing turnover intentions,

engaging in extra-role behavior, and so forth. A survey of 1000 employees revealed the

POS-turnover intentions relationship is stronger among weakly identified employees. However, for strongly identified employees, POS is more predictive of extra-role behavior. These results highlight the contribution of using social psychological theory to better understanding the employee-organizational relationship. Furthermore, this research also extends a longstanding integration of SET and SIT among social psychologists, whereby SET can predict low but not high social/organizational identification relationships while the opposite is true for SIT (e.g., Hogg, Martin, & Weeden, 2003).

In their paper "Every Light has its Shadow: A Longitudinal Study of Transformational Leadership and Leaders' Emotional Exhaustion", Zwingmann, Wolf, and Richter (2015) examined the effects of being laissez-faire and transformational on leaders' own emotional exhaustion over time. In a large multisource, time-lagged survey (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012), 2,324 subordinates and 76 supervisors were surveyed with data collected at two time-points, 24 months apart. Leadership measures were completed by the subordinates, who were asked to evaluate their direct supervisor, while emotional exhaustion was evaluated by the leaders themselves. This is a data collection strategy commonly employed in organizational surveys to reduce mono-method bias but is far less common in mainstream social psychology research. Regression analysis did reveal direct longitudinal effects of laissez-faire and transformational leadership on emotional exhaustion of leaders themselves. Building on Hobfoll's conservation-of-resources theory (1989), they found laissez-faire and transformational leadership were related to increased emotional exhaustion of leaders. For transformational leaders, this effect was even more pronounced when their organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) was high rather than low. That is, OBSE did not

buffer against leaders' emotional exhaustion. No such moderation emerged for laissez-faire leaders. Not only does this research point to the 'dark-side' of transformational leadership, it also harks back to one of the classic social psychological papers on autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership study by Lewin, Lippit, and White (1939). This research also highlights the potential benefit for social psychological theory on emotional regulation and self-awareness applied to leadership research (e.g., Day, Harrison, and Halpin, 2009).

Professional social networks are definitely important in assisting people in their careers. In their paper "Are Support and Social Comparison Compatible? Individual Differences in the Multiplexity of Career-Related Social Networks", Tschopp, Unger, and Grote examined the extent to which the functions of different career-related social network ties are segmented or multiplex. Networking can increase opportunities for career support as well as affecting one's career identity by setting standards for social comparison. Additionally, individuals may differ in terms of their preferences for more or less multiplex networks, the authors examined the moderating role of career preferences (independent- vs promotion-oriented). In a survey of 450 part-time postgraduate management students, participants provided information on 2499 contacts in their social networks. Analysis was conducted using hierarchical modelling. Consistent with their hypotheses, segmentation was stronger and multiplexity weaker for those with an independent- versus promotion career-orientation. This research indicates that future researchers would benefit from differentiating psychosocial and instrumental support in social network and career research, as opposed to assuming they are one and the same. The career literature has mostly focussed on the development of supportive career

networks with little attention paid to their comparative function. This again emphasizes the utility of including social psychological theory (in this case, social comparison theory) into organizationally-relevant research.

In their article "The Emotional Experience Matters: Disentangling the Effects of Experiencing Versus Regulating Emotions at Work", Semmer and colleagues (2015) examined how feeling versus regulating an emotion impacts well-being. Across three studies (2 experience/diary sampling, and 1 cross-sectional survey) a complex relationship between surface acting, felt emotions, and emotional regulation in the workplace was demonstrated. Surface acting can be an important component of interpersonal and group interactions whereby personel have to regulate their behaviors and emotions such that they are situationally appropriate (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Semmer and colleagues showed that surface acting has to be disentangled from felt emotions in studies conducted outside of the laboratory because felt versus displayed emotions can be confounded during real-world social interactions. That is, even when trying to mask or suppress a felt negative emotion, the felt emotion still might 'leak' through and be displayed. Although studying a complex interaction among emotions felt vs displayed, this paper highlights the importance of integrating work on emotional regulation, self-monitoring, and similar concepts in social psychology to improve employee well-being. These studies also have implications for authentic and moral behaviors, which is related to the next paper.

Knoll, Lord, and colleagues (2015) further the discussion of authenticity and moral behaviors in their paper, "Examining the Moral Grey Zone: The Role of Moral Disengagement, Authenticity, and Situational Strength in predicting Unethical

Managerial Behaviour." Using an in-basket experimental paradigm, two studies explored the moral gray zone of employees in a business context. They found individual differences in moral engagement predicted people's willingness to engage in unethical business practices. This effect was moderated by authenticity such that authenticity was more strongly related to ethical practices among individuals who are morally engaged. Study 2 further supported this finding but showed this effect is more likely to persist in morally ambiguous situations. This research is consistent with classic studies in social psychology demonstrating the power of the situation on individual behavior (e.g., Mischel, 1977; Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973). Nevertheless, moral engagement, authenticity, and ethics are becoming extremely popular research topics among organizational scientists. However, much of this research is driven atheoretically. Knoll and colleagues nicely illustrate how social psychological theory can improve research design and allow for clear hypothesis testing on these topics.

Conclusion

Although this Special Issue cannot represent the entire gamut of ways social psychology research and theory can help inform and influence organizational research, the papers here cover a wide range of topics, methods, statistics, and implications for the reconnection of social and organizational psychology. Although they cover a range of topics and theories, these papers demonstrate the subtle methodological differences between organizational psychology from social psychology. For instance, the majority of the special issue papers recruited current organizational employees as participants rather than students (e.g., Tavares, van Knippenberg, & van Dick 2015; Tschopp, Unger, & Grote, 2015; Zwingmann, Wolf, & Richter, 2015). While organizational psychologists

tend to employ survey methods, specific techniques can be used to minimizes the weaknesses inherent in using surveys (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Many of these techniques are not yet common in social psychology. As an example, to reduce common-method bias, Tschopp, Unger, and Grote (2015) use a multisource survey, while Zwingmann, Wolf, and Richter (2015) employ a time-lagged multisource survey. These methods might be of benefit to non-experimental social psychology research.

We hope these papers will encourage others to start looking for cross-disciplinary approaches and collaborations to solve organizational, political, and social issues. As each of these Special Issues contributions illustrate, much can be gained from both integrating social psychology theory into organizational research, but also from social psychologists adopting advanced non-experimental methods used by organizational researchers (e.g., multisource data collection). The findings presented in this Special Issue provide numerous potential future research avenues forward that will benefit exponentially both disciplines.

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