Bridging the Scientist-Practitioner Gap: How Our Research Should Benefit the People We Study
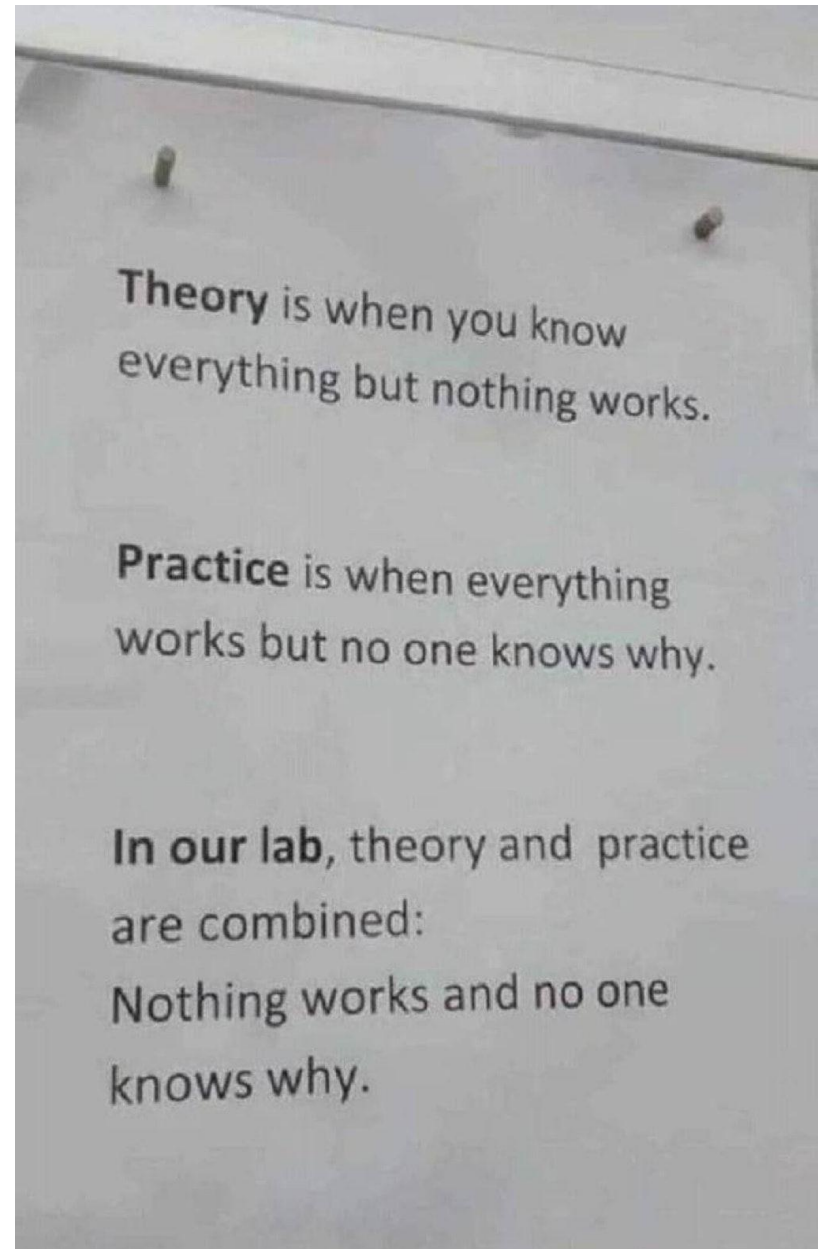
Steven Zhou, Ph.D., SHRM-CP

PTCMW Fall Event

November 21, 2024

The Scientist-Practitioner Gap

Theory is when you know everything but nothing works.

Practice is when everything works but no one knows why.

In our lab, theory and practice are combined:
Nothing works and no one knows why.

SIOP Strategic Goal #1

Collaborate with organization leaders, communities, and policymakers to understand and confront relevant real-world problems and **translate scientific knowledge** to promote individual and organizational health and effectiveness.
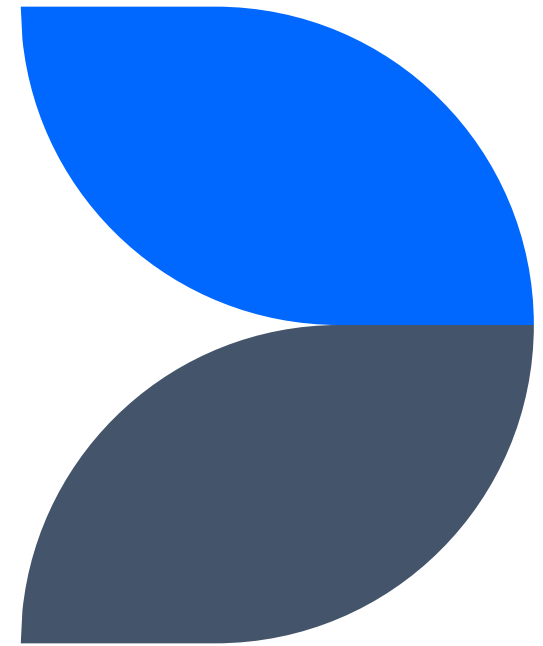
Some Celebrations

iopsychmemes   Follow   Message   +👤   •••

1,835 posts   **11K** followers   **219** following
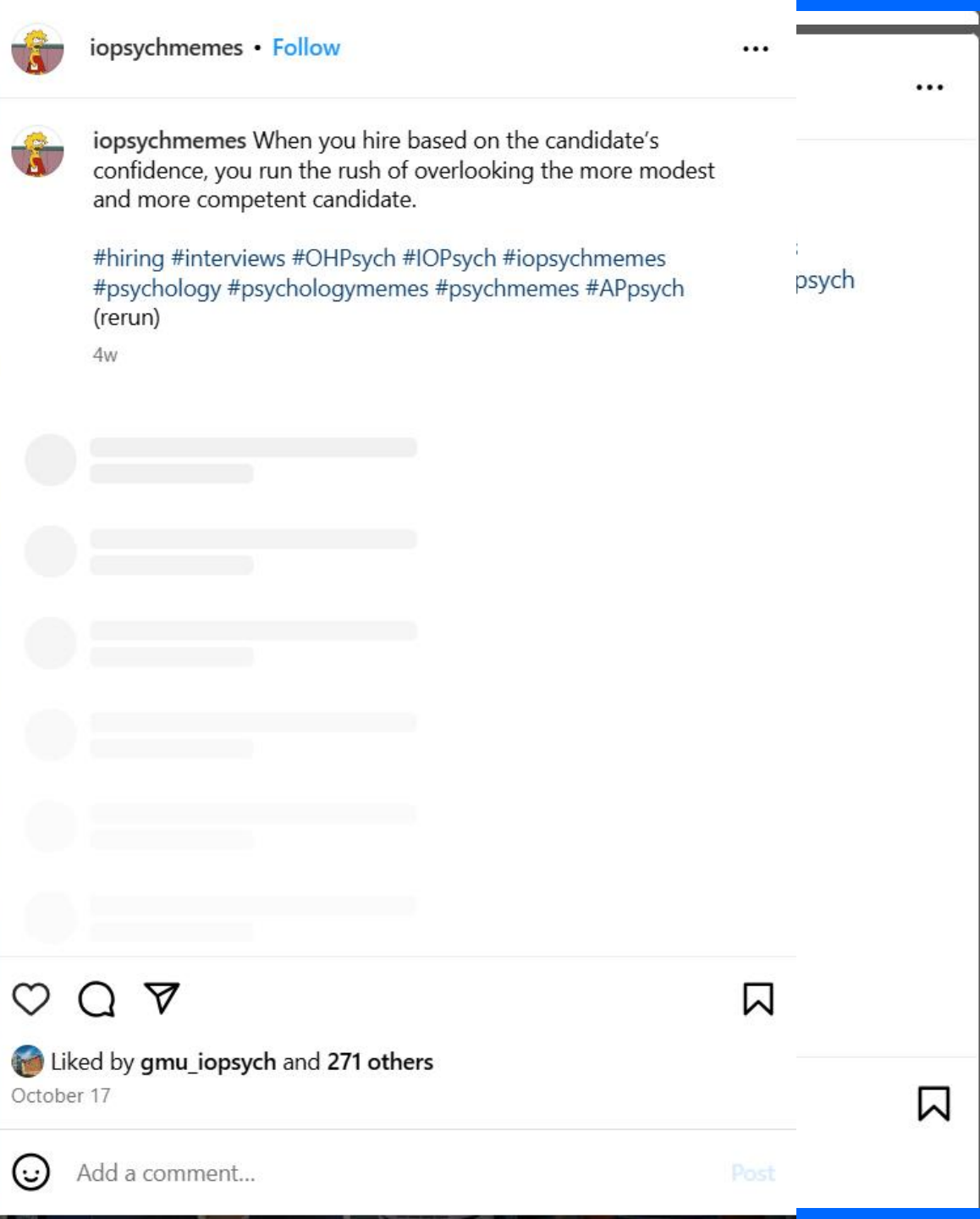
I-O Psych Memes
Scientist
"Surprisingly topical" memes about the best field ever: industrial-organizational psychology!
.
Unofficially run by San Diego St Univ
🔗 linktr.ee/iopsychmemes

Interviews that reward confidence

When you realize confidence doesn't mean competence

Reli

iopsychmemes • Follow

iopsychmemes When you hire based on the candidate's confidence, you run the rush of overlooking the more modest and more competent candidate.

#hiring #interviews #OHPsych #IOPsych #iopsychmemes #psychology #psychologymemes #psychmemes #APpsych (rerun)

4w

Liked by **gmu_iopsych** and **271 others**
October 17

Add a comment...

Post

Some Celebrations

The SIOP Advocacy Academy

The SIOP Advocacy Academy is a 9-month, fully virtual program aimed at providing I-O professionals and students with the knowledge and skills necessary for them to advocate for research funding, evidence-based policy, and other critical SIOP priorities. The Advocacy Academy will feature prerecorded webinars on topics such as the legislative process and engaging with congressional officials, and monthly virtual discussion sessions to provide interactive opportunities for Q&A.

November: Agencies and the Regulatory Process
- Advocacy on regulations and rulemaking
- How to submit comments

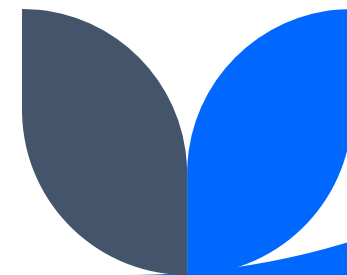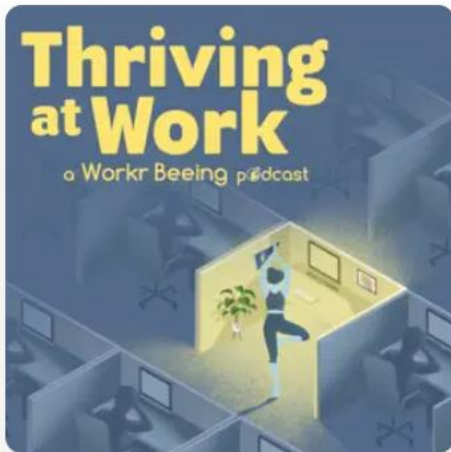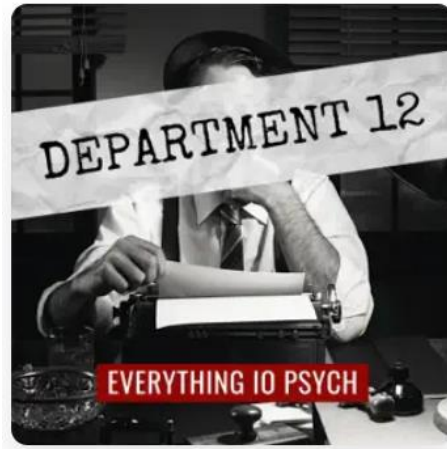**December: "Perspectives on Advocacy" External Presentation**

January: "Perspectives on Advocacy" External Presentation

February: Preparing for Congressional Meetings and Best Practices
- How to schedule, conduct, and follow-up on meetings with Congressional offices
- Discussion on best practices led by experienced SIOP advocates
- Potential opportunity for role-playing training

Throughout March: Advocacy Academy participants conduct meetings with Congressional offices on topics identified by the SIOP advocacy team.

Some Celebrations

The Science of Personality

DEPARTMENT 12
EVERYTHING IO PSYCH

HEALTHY WORK

Thriving at Work
a Workr Beeing podcast

Phronesis:
Practical Wisdom for Leaders
ila
International Leadership Association

Defining the Problem

Much of the discourse has been academics writing to academics in reviews, commentaries, and (occasionally) empirical studies

- *JOM, IOP, Annual Review, HRMR, JOB,* and *AMJ* have all published on this topic

- Less than 3% have practitioners as authors

Commonly presented as a rigor-relevance dichotomy:

- Researchers focus on sound evidence and theory

- Practitioners focus on problem solving and ROI

Defining the Problem

To be clear, academics have a lot of areas to improve on...

- 49% of 1738 empirical articles published in five top-tier journals *did not* include any practical implications section (Bartunek & Rynes, 2010)

- Academics have few formal incentives (in terms of tenure evaluation) to engage in applied settings

- Metrics are biased towards favoring academic work and does not sufficiently value contributions of practitioners

Defining the Problem

And, many of the most well-known concepts among everyday managers are lacking in scientific rigor…

- "Leadership guru" books and resources based on "sample size of 1" research (Day, 2024)

- "Anti-I-O-psychology:" novel, trendy, simplistic frameworks that create buzz in industry (Rotolo et al., 2018)

Defining the Problem

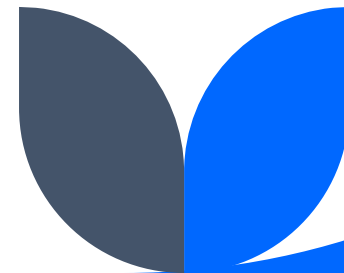… But the scientist-practitioner gap isn't as simple as just "be more relevant" and "be more rigorous."

- Some argue that academic theories and practitioner application are two distinct, parallel, and complementary types of knowledge (Banks et al., 2016)

- Others point out that no one journal or outlet can (nor should) meet the needs of all types of readers (Deadrick & Gibson, 2007)
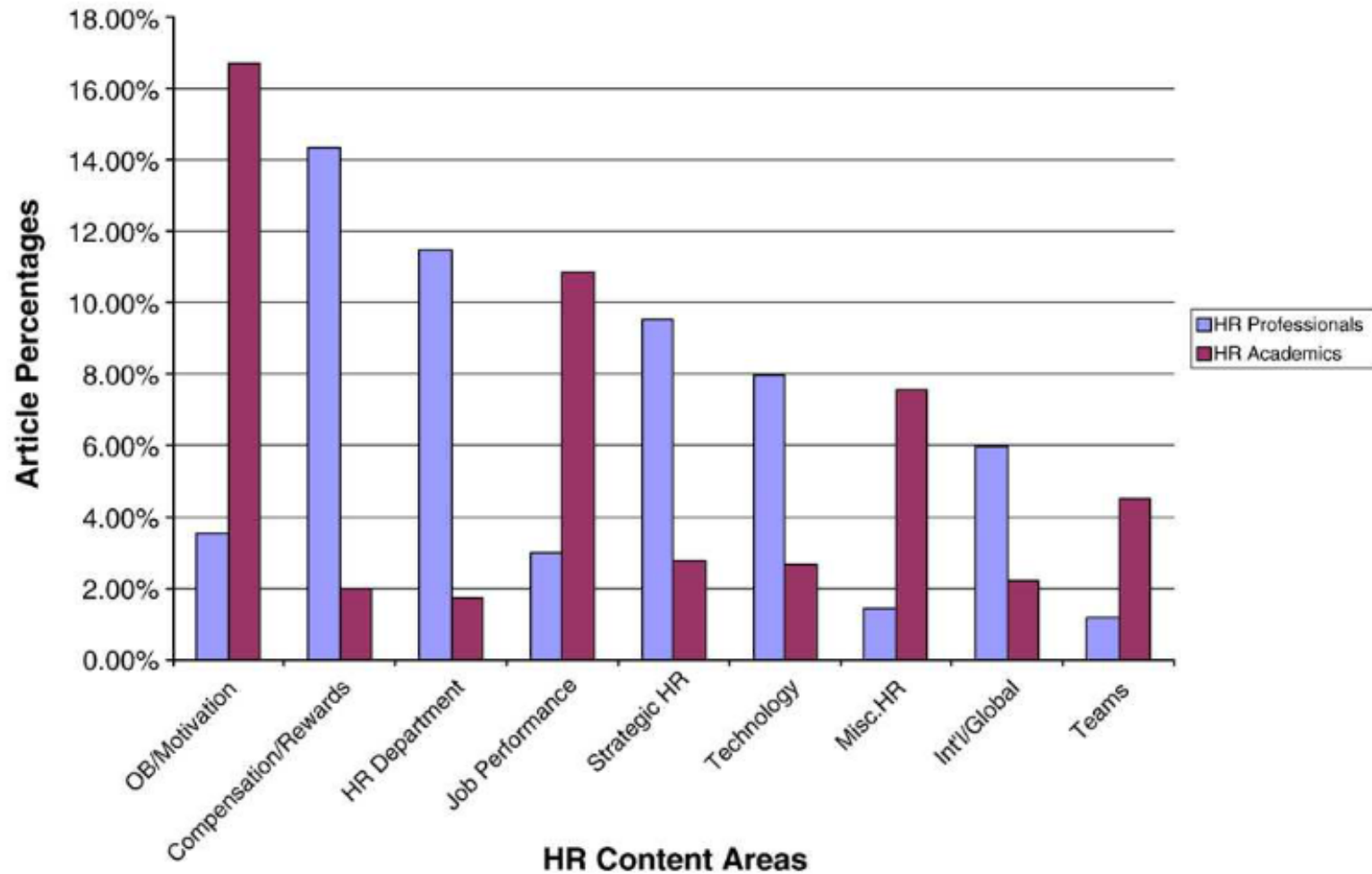
Three Questions

Instead, I want to focus on three questions:

1. Are we studying the right topics?

2. Are we focusing on the right contexts?

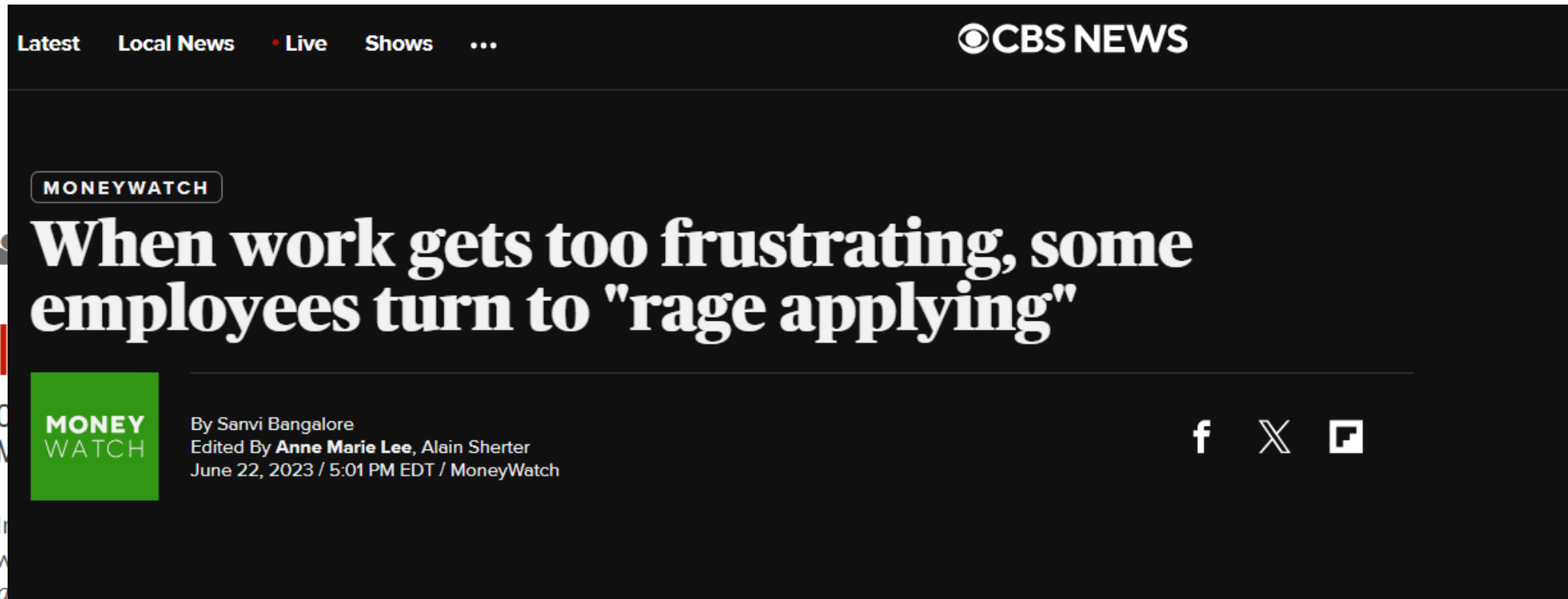3. Are we communicating it in the right mediums?

Are we studying the right topics?

Analysis of 4,356 articles from academic-oriented journals (e.g., *JAP, PPsych*) vs. practitioner-oriented outlets (e.g., *HR Magazine*)

Are we studying the right topics?

Latest   Local News   • Live   Shows   •••   ◉ CBS NEWS

MONEYWATCH

When work gets too frustrating, some employees turn to "rage applying"

MONEY WATCH

By Sanvi Bangalore
Edited By **Anne Marie Lee**, Alain Sherter
June 22, 2023 / 5:01 PM EDT / MoneyWatch

f   X   🅵

Similar to "quiet quitting," a phenomenon in which disenchanted employees choose to do the bare minimum at their job, a new trend is taking off among Gen Z: rage applying.

Are we focusing on the right contexts?

Most I-O research is conducted on… (Bergman & Jean, 2016)
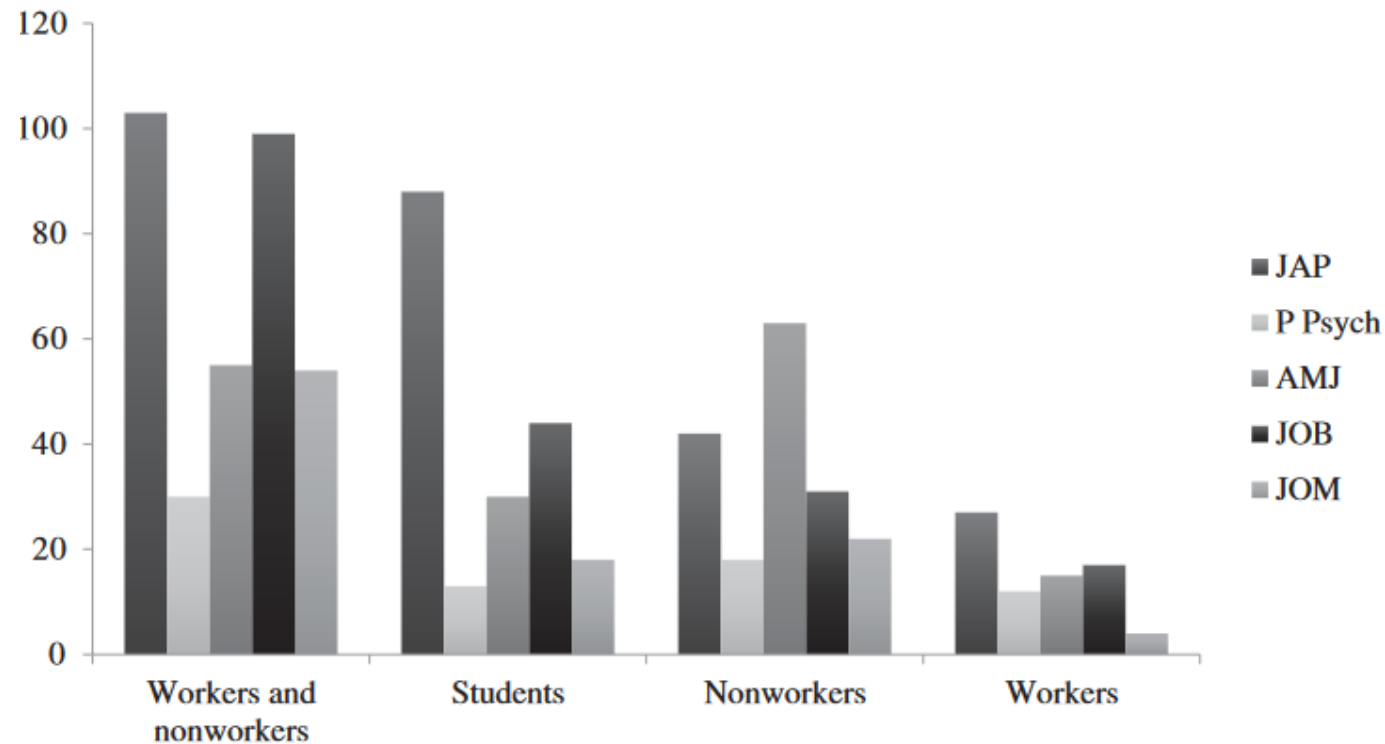
Are we focusing on the right contexts?

Recently, we (Zhou, Campbell, & Fyffe, 2024) downloaded abstracts and "practical/managerial implications" sections of 474 articles on leadership and/or teams in five I-O journals...
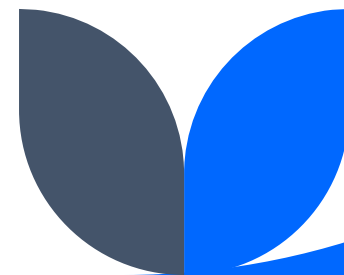
- 31.6% of articles were based on data from organizations with 100+ employees

- 21.9% of articles used student samples

- 37.7% of articles recruited a large pool from a variety of different organizations

- 8.7% had data that *might* have come from small/medium businesses

Are we focusing on the right contexts?

We gave the articles to small business owners and managers to rate whether or not the articles were helpful for their context...

In general, ratings were above average on quality, average on appropriateness/effectiveness/ROI of the recommendations, and below average on relevance/interest in the abstract.

Are we focusing on the right contexts?

In the optional comments, 20.3% expressed that the articles were confusing to read.

13.1% expressed that the topic was not helpful to their small business context:

- "I think small companies don't need to worry about this stuff yet. People are not suing them to death"

- "Most leadership roles in our organization are predetermined. I'm not sure how this information could be used to better identify leaders in the interview process"

- "I don't have the money to hire many leaders right now"

Are we communicating in the right places?

In six popular I-O textbooks, 39% of the top-cited sources aren't traditional academic journals, and the top 6.5% of sources include popular press outlets like *NYT* and *HR Magazine* (Aguinis et al., 2017).

Out of 959 HR professionals, fewer than 1% "usually" read academic journals like *PPsych*, *JAP*, and *AMJ*; most read *HR Magazine*, *WSJ*, *Forbes*, *HBR*, *Inc.*, and *Fast Company*

Are we communicating in the right places?

An aside: what *does* get communicated in popular press?

We found 124 popular press news articles (in *NYT*, *WSJ*, etc.) citing 346 research articles in psychology → faculty authors were contacted, and 62 completed a short survey.

- Faculty generally had positive reactions to the quality and accuracy of the popular press articles

- Less than half were aware of the popular press article, and less than a quarter had been interviewed or contacted about it before publishing

- Willingness to engage in scicomm *decreased* after reading the article

Towards a Public Understanding of Social Science

Lewis et al. (2023) proposed a new branch of research in scicomm, dubbed a "Public Understanding of Social Science"

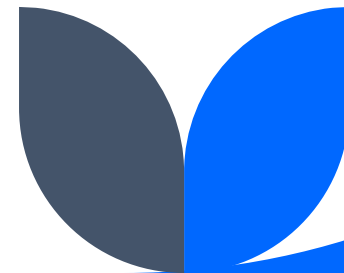"[Social science] has a much broader range of people who are able, and feel able, to make legitimate knowledge claims... this can be problematic. We expect those who make knowledge claims in public about, say, genetics, chemistry or astrophysics to be, respectively, geneticists, chemists, or astrophysicists... By contrast, the social world is the site of public knowledge-making by a wide range of actors."

Towards a Public Understanding of Social Science

Lewis et al. (2023) proposed a new branch of research in scicomm, dubbed a "Public Understanding of Social Science"

"Everyone, including journalists and editors, fancies himself or herself something of a psychologist, but not an astrophysicist."

Towards a Public Understanding of Social Science

This leads to a "flattening and devaluing of social science expertise in public spaces"

Consider proliferation of non-experts promoting theories about [insert your favorite leadership topic here]

Social scientists need to reclaim the public narrative by engaging clearly, quickly, and frequently in the public discourse
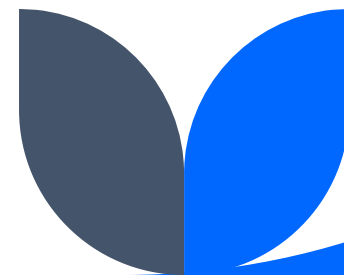
… as does I-O!
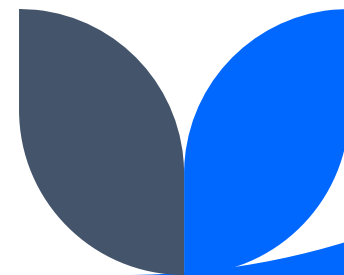
Writing for the Public

1. Flip the order: main takeaway/conclusion first, then rationale

2. Paragraphs are phrases, not topic sentences + proof (try speaking your piece out loud; pause between paragraphs)

3. Short and sweet: fewer prepositional phrases, shorter sentences (average of < 15 words, as opposed to 20-30), total of only ~800 words

4. There's no room for hedging: focus on takeaway actions and memorable phrases

Writing for the Public

5. Speed is of essence: information becomes outdated quickly, and readers want to know the relevance to current events

6. Practice your pitch: most editors will only take short 1-2 paragraph email pitches rather than the whole article

7. Know your audience: they probably don't know what a p-value is, much less how to interpret one

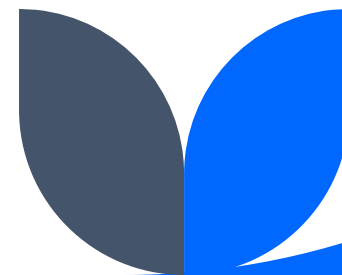8. All op-eds are wrong, so get used to it

Writing for the Public

Rogelberg et al. (2022) How we can bring I-O psychology science and evidence-based practices to the public [Focal Article].
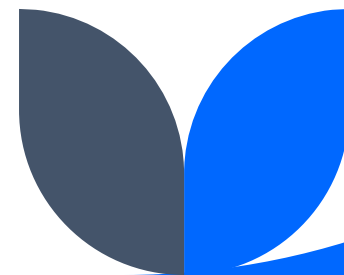
Zhou (2022) Science communication: Eight perils, but one pearl to make it all worth it [Commentary].

Writing for the Public

How you learned to write in grad school (and what you're used to reading in journals) won't work for public audiences!

- "Its use of larger, technical language is not only extremely clunky but also ostracizing to those not familiar with the jargon. Though its information might be good, it's inconsequential if I can barely get through it"

- "It's all academic language that makes no sense to actual humans, so I am not entirely sure what it is about, but it seems to be using $100 words to hide the pretty obvious conclusion"

Writing for the Public

How you learned to write in grad school (and what you're used to reading in journals) won't work for public audiences!

- "I read this 3 times and for the life of me I can't even understand what they're trying to get at. I don't see anything here that is valuable or actionable from a business standpoint"

- "This text is giving me a headache. I simply cannot comprehend what the author is trying to convey. The language in the article sort of sounds clinical and authoritative, but as far as I can [tell] it makes no sense."

Writing for the Public

Consider how you present data…

- Most of you know how important data visualization is

- Business leaders want to see interactive, flashy, informative but not complex dashboards
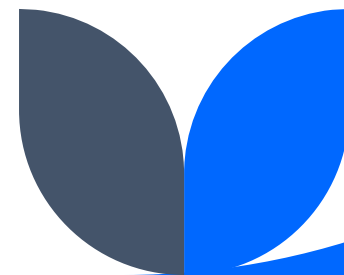
An example pitch

Hi Diana,

My name is Steven Zhou, and I am a PhD student in psychology at George Mason University, where I research personality measurement especially in workplace settings. I'd like to submit an original piece, *Three warnings to consider the next time you talk about personality at work*, to be considered for publication at *Fast Company*. In it, I describe three concerns for why most popular personality tests are flawed in their theory, measurement method, and assumptions of personality stability. I end with a discussion on why personality does in fact matter for work, and the best way to approach it in a work setting.

Given recent articles, including some at *Fast Company*, that have been published discussing why personality is important for work, I believe this piece is a relevant and helpful perspective drawn from scientific research on personality. I've pasted the piece (861 words) below for your consideration. It is a complete and unpublished article. Thank you in advance for your consideration!

An example pitch

qualifications

catchy title

main point

action-oriented takeaway

current events relevance

word count

Hi Diana,

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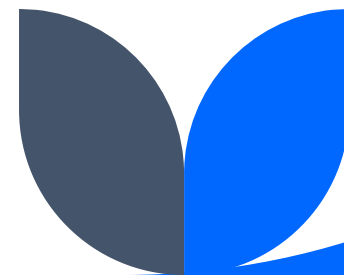
Resources

- Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science: resources and workshops for science communication (https://aldacenter.org)

- ComSciCon: workshops on science communication for graduate students (https://comscicon.com)

- Psychologist Media: helping psychology researchers share their research with the public (https://psychgeistmedia.org)

- Footnote: helping researchers from various fields share their research with the public (https://footnote.co)

- I-O at Work: I-O specific blog (https://www.ioatwork.com)

Resources

- The Civilian: helps faculty write blog posts about their studies for public audiences (https://www.thecivilian.co)

- Young Voices: talent agency and PR firm for young writers under 35 to practice op-ed writing (https://www.young-voices.com)

- Beyond the Ivory Tower: workshops led by NYT editor for early career faculty to write and submit op-eds (https://www.beyondtheivorytower.com)

- Your local school newspaper!

The Charge

Practitioners likely need to lead the way for us.

Academics are not rewarded (some even penalized), and it goes against the grain for the academic writing and work style.

It can be a lonely journey – partner up!

Got time to practice?

1. Choose a topic: let's say we want to write an article about the latest research on the four-day work week...

2. Write a 1-2 sentence takeaway message. What is the main point you will communicate in your op-ed?

3. Identify your "hook" that will open your article and capture your readers' attention. Many editors will want this to be linked to current events. Look up recent news articles in your target outlet.

4. Come up with 2-3 "Tweet-able" phrases to use in your body. Usually these sentences summarize evidence that you provide in your body that contribute towards your main takeaway message.

Slides Here →

Thank you

Steven Zhou

www.stevenzhou.us