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Return on an Investment in the Psychology of Work

A Review of

APA Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology

by Sheldon Zedeck (Ed.)

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Volume 1. Building and Developing the Organization
686 pp. ISBN 978-1-4338-0732-9

Volume 2. Selecting and Developing Members for the Organization
598 pp. ISBN 978-1-4338-0733-6

Volume 3. Maintaining, Expanding, and Contracting the Organization
960 pp. ISBN 978-1-4338-0734-3

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Reviewed by

James M. Topolski

The first reaction many might have to the massive tomes constituting the *APA Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* is that they require a large investment—not only monetary investment but also investment of time and commitment to understand the treasure trove of knowledge contained within the three-volume set. This work is the first of the APA Handbooks in Psychology series, which is intended to establish a reference literature for the field. It targets three major audiences: (a) researchers, clinicians, and practitioners; (b) professionals in related fields; and (c) graduate students in psychology.

The massive and monumental effort to create this first set is indicative of the growth of industrial and organizational psychology. Perhaps the best indication of development in any field, within psychology or another discipline, is the production of specialized works that provide an overview and serve as *the* go-to reference.

Industrial and organizational (I/O) psychology is no different, having seen a number of seminal works that significantly elevated the field upon publication. Past attempts to capture the field are most identified with Dunnette (1976) and, later, with his multivolume works with fellow editors Hough and Triandis, all of which were quite successful, given the history and maturity of I/O psychology at the time. Of course, membership in the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology numbered only 1,370 in 1975 (Koppes, n.d.) but had grown to over 7,000 by January 2010 (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 2010).

Sheldon Zedeck's work certainly places him well within the same league as his predecessors. With the help of a large cast of authors, he has edited a work that seeks to cover the domain of I/O psychology today and which any who follow in the handbook series will be hard pressed to top.

Structure

The *Handbook* is composed of three volumes totaling more than 2,200 pages, designed to capture I/O psychology and a full range of topics of interest to those in the field. The three volumes are presented logically from *Building and*

Developing the Organization (Volume 1), to *Selecting and Developing Members for the Organization* (Volume 2), to *Maintaining, Expanding, and Contracting the Organization* (Volume 3). The simplicity of these three categories belies an impressive depth of scholarship, with over 60 chapters that provide a wealth of knowledge derived from the experiences and research of contributing authors.

The structure of the volumes, parts within each volume, and chapters within those parts surprisingly result in a very fluid work. Moreover, an attempt to have chapters follow a general outline adds to overall readability and smooth flow across topics. However, as a reference work, few would likely read the work from cover to cover, although a conscientious graduate student, preparing for exams, or a studious practitioner, anticipating licensure requirements, might find that a promising strategy. More realistically, the *Handbook* should and probably will be used as a reference to an amazing amount of knowledge and will surely become tattered and dog-eared after years of continuous use.

Coverage

One cannot go wrong by starting any work in psychology by reviewing the history and basic research methods, something that this *Handbook* does quite well, setting the stage for the reader to understand the richness of the field of I/O psychology. Emphasis on applied and basic research, as well as the interplay between the two, is woven throughout the volumes, which creates a consciousness that the field has developed through this interplay and not as the result of fads or as a result of owning a bookcase full of best-selling, popular books on management.

Topics covered in the first volume fit well, given the overall plan of the *Handbook*: They describe aspects of the human resource system as well as the nature of work. The *Handbook*'s goal of promoting an understanding of *work* results in a literary autopsy of the workplace, which dissects the major components of the workplace and fully examines each by looking at both healthy and diseased aspects of work.

If one wants to know what happens in an organization, begin with this volume. For each reader, some chapters might be more interesting and readable than others—those for which the reader (a) is familiar with the chapter topic and so reads with interest or (b) is unfamiliar with the topic but becomes interested and wants to learn more. For me, the chapter on organizational climate and culture is an example of (a) above, whereas the chapters on flexible work schedules and team development and functioning are examples of (b).

The second volume, on selecting and developing members, addresses major topics most readers would expect to see covered; again, this volume is marked by readable, comprehensive material. The chapter on work analysis is a good example, providing an excellent summary of the topic as well as presenting a useful table of published studies. The chapter also includes the type of information that one expects to see in a reference work.

Similarly, Chapter 3, on career issues, is yet another good example of the book's contents, with easy-to-understand writing combined with a copious amount of valuable information, including excellent recommendations. One could quibble that the chapter might have included more information about preretirement, retirement, and other job transitions, but this is a minor complaint. In Chapter 11, on organizational exit, a need for more research on retirement is recognized and suggested as one topic that might guide the direction of future research. As if at a smorgasbord, the reader will doubtless choose from a variety of favorite topics, skip those of little interest, and select those that may be new but appeal to the individual palate.

The third volume concerns expanding and contracting the organization; it, too, continues the pleasantly palatable style of its predecessors. For a work of this magnitude, so dense with information and scientific language, the chapters are amazingly readable, no doubt resulting from clear editorial direction. Chapter 1 is a perfect example: It provides an excellent summary of effect sizes as found in major works about person–environment fit. Chapter 4, on job attitudes and work values, also provides a first-rate summary of that topic. These are highly useful for constructing an overview of a topic area and for providing a map for additional research. It cannot be said that there is a weak chapter in any of the three volumes.

What Topics Are Missing?

Given more than 2,200 pages and 60 chapters, it is hard to criticize the breadth of topics covered in the *Handbook*. Undoubtedly, individual users will note gaps in their areas of expertise and perceive overkill on topics of little personal or professional interest to them. I would have preferred more about transition to retirement, strategic planning, and evaluation in organizations, but these are topics that reflect personal interest and bias. After looking through the three volumes, I conclude that, all things considered, the *Handbook* has captured the essence of I/O psychology today.

Audience

The *Handbook* should be on the shelves of all major university libraries, should serve as easily accessible reference material for all departments of psychology, and is a must-have for all programs in I/O psychology. Furthermore, it should be popular reference material at all business schools, as it serves as a major interface between psychology and business and management programs. Research and consulting firms would find this work quite useful, as well. Individual I/O psychologists should certainly consider investing in this set, if one is not readily available through other sources.

A frequently forgotten audience that might greatly benefit is undergraduate psychology majors, especially those who contemplate graduate education in I/O psychology. Although an undergraduate may not grasp all content, an afternoon in the library or a career counseling center spent leafing through the three volumes would reveal a comprehensive picture of the I/O field. The *Handbook* provides a survey of major topics, exposure to the modus operandi of I/O psychology, and a comprehensive overview of research and practice. These elements allow a wide-angle view of the field and offer substantial insight into the potential of a career in this field.

Value

Is the *Handbook* a good investment? According to criteria such as breadth of coverage, scholarship, author qualifications, and readability, there is no doubt. Furthermore, the work is extremely well organized and well written. Multiple audiences would clearly find this work of interest. Most persons committing resources to the *Handbook* would undoubtedly conclude that the return on investment is quite high. The extensive use of references and cross-references provides multiple portals to a tremendous body of literature. Many chapters provide comprehensive summaries of research, and the frequent use of a standard outline and reporting of effect sizes makes the *Handbook* the first place to look to learn more about I/O psychology.

Zedeck's work represents one of the crowning achievements in the literature of psychology and now stands as the standard for those who follow in the APA's Handbooks in Psychology series.

References

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