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978-1-107-06573-4 — The Early Years of Industrial and Organizational Psychology
Andrew J. Vinchur
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THE EARLY YEARS OF INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Focusing on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this book provides a history of the origins of industrial-organizational psychology. Taking an international perspective, *The Early Years of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* examines the context in which industrial psychology emerged and its origins in the measurement of individual differences. Andrew Vinchur covers the initial applications of psychology in advertising, the study of fatigue, and especially employee selection. The role industrial psychology played in World War I and its post-war expansion are discussed, as well as the education of industrial psychologists, their efforts to establish industrial psychology as a profession, and the beginnings of the organizational side of the field.

ANDREW J. VINCHUR is a Professor of Psychology at Lafayette College. Long interested in the history of psychology, his published work has focused on the history of industrial and organizational psychology, especially the history of psychology applied to employee selection.

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

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www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107065734
DOI: 10.1017/9781107588608

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First published 2018

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
NAMES: Vinchur, Andrew J. (Andrew John), author.
TITLE: The early years of industrial and organizational psychology / Andrew J. Vinchur, Lafayette College.
DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references.
IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2018009844 | ISBN 9781107065734 (hbk)
SUBJECTS: LCSH: Psychology, Industrial – History.
CLASSIFICATION: LCC HF5548.8 .V536 2018 | DDC 158.7–dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018009844

ISBN 978-1-107-06573-4 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-107-67168-3 Paperback

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Preface

This book is my attempt to develop a comprehensive picture of the origins and early development of industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology. The time period covered is from the late 1800s until the early 1930s, an interval that saw what was then called industrial psychology evolve from the initial efforts of a handful of individuals to an established professional field. Narrowing the focus to the early years allows me to offer a more fine-grained analysis than writing a history of I-O psychology from the beginning to the present day. I view this book as primarily a work of synthesis, using primary and secondary sources to create an overview of the origins and early years of I-O psychology with an appreciation for both context and those individuals important in its development. Much of the historical work in I-O psychology has been justly criticized as overly focusing on developments in the United States.[1] I-O psychology developed in many countries; I have tried to reflect the global nature of its history. The United States does receive proportionally more coverage than other countries, however, because of its central role in the history of I-O psychology and because of my own limitations in accessing non-English relevant materials.

The structure of the book is neither strictly chronological nor strictly topical. I considered both approaches. The former proved too disjointed due to the uneven development of various content areas; the latter required excessive repetition and loss of narrative drive. I compromised with a hybrid approach: roughly chronological, combining coverage of topic areas with biographical sketches of important contributors that present the entire arc of their lives and careers. Psychology applied to employee selection was at the heart of early industrial psychology, and it receives attention appropriate to its importance in this narrative.

[1] This includes criticism Salgado, Anderson, and Hülsheger (2010) directed at me (Vinchur, 2007) for a history of personnel selection.

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All narrative history tells a story. In shaping that story, I had to decide what is relevant from the large amount of information available. It is impossible to include everything. While all history is told from a particular perspective, one should consciously avoid an unfairly biased perspective. This is easier said than done, as I am enough of a psychologist to realize that we are not always aware of our biases and that it is very difficult to step outside one's cultural and educational experiences. While my intention was to write an accurate, balanced account of the origins and early years of I-O psychology, it is critical to stress that this is *a* history, not *the* history. Other histories, with different perspectives, emphases, and information, are possible, inevitable, and welcome.

In writing this history of the beginning years of I-O psychology, I tried to find a balance between what are sometimes referred to as the "old" and "new" historiographical approaches to the history of psychology. External influences and context are important, but so are the actions and ideas of the participants, including biographical information relevant to their contributions. While this is a critical history in the sense that discontinuities and missteps are discussed, I believe that real progress occurred, and those accomplishments are noted. I used primary sources when possible and secondary sources when it was not or when those secondary sources added nuance or contributed to an understanding of the material. This was particularly true for non-English material. While I tried to write a history sensitive to how the historical actors would have experienced events at that time, I do at times draw connections between past and current research and practice, not to judge necessarily (although there is some of that) but to illustrate similarities and differences.

Deciding how much of a background in I-O psychology I could assume the reader possesses was a difficult question to answer. An earlier draft of this book was geared to a relatively naïve reader with little or no background in I-O psychology, statistics, measurement, or historiography. It even included a primer on I-O psychology, summarizing the content areas that comprise the field. Despite my efforts, reviewers noted that the book was, in fact, more suitable for a reader with some knowledge of I-O psychology, although not necessarily one who is familiar with historiography. While I did excise the primer, I have included explanatory footnotes explaining statistical and I-O psychology procedures and terms that may be unfamiliar, and included a section on historiography to introduce that topic to the reader who may be familiar with I-O psychology but not with historical research. It is my hope that the book can be read profitably by anyone with an interest in the history of I-O psychology.

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Acknowledgments

I have been blessed with a wonderful family and friends, and although they may not have contributed directly to this book, it would have been impossible to write it without having them in my life. Thanks to my colleagues at Lafayette College and to my colleagues and collaborators elsewhere for your kindness and support. I am grateful to Lafayette College for providing material support and a sabbatical leave to work on the book. In particular, I would like to thank the staff at the Lafayette College Skillman Library, who were generous with advice and amazing at procuring needed materials. Diane Shaw, the Director of Special Collections and College Archives, was very supportive and provided a photograph of James McKeen Cattell for the book. The staff at the Cummings Center for the History of Psychology at the University of Akron and at the Carnegie-Mellon University Archives were helpful in locating information and photographs. In addition, I am also grateful to the following archivists for their assistance in locating photographs: Fred Burwell at Beloit College, Leah Loscutoff at the Stevens Institute of Technology, and Anna Towlson at the London School of Economics.

I would like to thank Dave Repetto, my editor at Cambridge University Press, for his patience and faith that the book would actually be completed. Thanks also to content manager Bronte Rawlings, project manager Revathi Thirunavukkarasu, copy editor Karin Kipp, Robert Swanson for the indexes, and everyone at Cambridge Press who worked on the book. I am grateful to a group of anonymous reviewers for their time and thoughtful comments. And special thanks to my wife Bianca Falbo, Associate Professor of English and Director of the College Writing Program at Lafayette College, who helped wrestle my awkward prose into something resembling grammatical English. This book is dedicated to her.

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