

Pursuing a Career in Industrial and Organizational Psychology

ALL ABOUT INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

There are many variables that determine how well an organization or company operates. Effective communication and conflict resolution, process evaluation, professional competence, effective management — all of these and many more must work together for businesses to succeed.

Of course, oftentimes there are shortcomings in any one of these — or all of these — that get in the way, and they usually lead back to a human source.

I/O psychologists use their knowledge of human behavior to identify such weaknesses and offer solutions. Using quantitative research and evaluation methods, they are able to uncover best practices within a company and teach people how to work “better.”

To conduct original research, an I/O psychologist may observe employees performing their jobs or conduct surveys. This research might be aimed at increasing employee productivity, developing screening procedures for new applicants, increasing overall workplace quality, or perhaps getting to the root of why employees are unhappy about some work-related issue.

Often, such observation followed by the application of psychological principles can improve team performance.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you seek variety in your career and are interested in how people and teams can perform at their best, I/O psychology may be just the thing. That’s because there are so many applications, each different from the next.

Many I/O psychologists work in the business sector and focus on productivity, employee training, and assessment and human resources. This can be within blue-collar organizations, such as factories or plants, or within white-collar industries, such as aviation and health care. The industries can range from food distribution companies to NASA.

Other I/O psychologists work in research or hold academic positions in colleges and universities. In addition, they are qualified as trainers, facilitators, assessors, coaches and consultants. They may also work directly in an organization’s human resources department, or they may act as independent consultants, called into an organization to solve a particular problem..

MAKING IT HAPPEN

The career path toward becoming an I/O psychologist begins with a bachelor’s degree in psychology. Opportunities with a bachelor’s degree alone aren’t unheard of, but they are sparse, and most students interested in I/O psychology go on to earn an advanced degree, although they may take time off between degrees to work and gain real world experience..

Those with master’s degrees will usually be able to start their I/O psychology careers in entry-level positions. However, those with a doctoral degree will have more employment opportunities in this field.

According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook, in 2012, the largest area of employment (and highest-paying) for I/O psychologists was in management, scientific and technical consulting services. This was followed by state government. Other areas included scientific and development services, offices of health practitioners and educational institutions.

Industrial and organizational (I/O) psychologists focus on the behavior of employees in the workplace. They apply psychological principles and research methods to improve the overall work environment, including performance, communication, professional satisfaction and safety.

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Pursuing a Career in Industrial and Organizational Psychology, continued

WHAT YOU CAN EARN

The amount of money that an I/O psychologist can earn depends on his or her experience and the type of employer. According to the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology's 2009 income and employment survey, the starting salary for an I/O specialist with a master's degree was \$55,000, while the starting salary for those with a doctoral degree was \$75,000.

University professors make around \$70,000 and those in the private sector earn around \$100,000. Overall, the median salary for I/O psychologists is \$80,000. The highest earners can make \$250,000 and more each year.

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