Education and Training in Organizational and Consulting Psychology

By Rodney L. Lowman, PhD

On the line, not atypically, was a psychologist-in-training from another state. He was completing a clinical psychology internship and soon would be graduating from a PhD program in Clinical Psychology. He also had a Masters degree in Industrial-Organizational (I-O) psychology. How could he get licensed as a doctoral psychologist but practice in the I-O or consulting arena, he wondered?

I explained that although psychology licensing laws are generic, psychologists are bound by the ethics of their profession (American Psychological Association, 2002) not to practice outside their areas of specialty. The issue was not so much licensure as it was competence.

Boundary spanners are increasingly common among psychology practitioners, and as one who has spanned traditional academic and practice boundaries throughout my career, I support such cross-breeding. From such boundary spanning does much that is creative and innovative in psychology flow.

However, just as an I-O psychologist could not and should not set up shop as a clinician without further training and supervised experience, so too clinicians must be re-trained if they plan to practice in fields that are new to them and outside their original areas of expertise.

There are many opportunities for clinically trained or other non-I-O or consulting psychologists to retrain. First, several universities, including my own, offer post-doctoral respecialization opportunities in I-O and consulting psychology. Such programs are usually customized to the specific training needs of the student, and they do not replicate what the students already knows. Most such programs are tuition-based.

The fields of I-O and consulting psychology typically care more about the competencies of the practitioner, not what courses or programs they have completed. Therefore, psychologists contemplating retraining should consult the training guidelines for I-O and consulting psychologists. The I-O guidelines are found on the website of the Society for Industrial-Organizational Psychology (SIOP) [www.siop.org], and those for consulting psychology are found on the website for the Society of Consulting Psychology (SCP) [www.apa.org/divisions/div13]. Some of these competencies are ones quite compatible with clinical training; they just need specific application to the I-O or consulting arena. Others clearly require much more extensive training and supervised experience.

Whatever the training source, psychologists in consulting or I-O roles need to know research findings about what works and what does not (Halfhill, Huff, Johnson, Ballatine, & Byerline, 2002; Lowman, 2002). They need to know the literature as it relates to their specific areas of practice. And they need to know how to translate knowledge into practice. For that, supervised experience is often the best resource.

There are many other educational opportunities. The Society of Consulting Psychology offers workshop training on re-training issues for clinicians seeking to move into consulting roles. The APA, SIOP, and SCP all offer excellent workshop training opportunities at their mid-winter or annual conferences. Above all, psychologists who did not train in these areas need to approach I-O and consulting psychology as a new area of specialty, and get the training and supervision they need to be able to perform well and to stay within the bounds of their ethical and licensure mandates.

References

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