

Increasing I-O and SIOP Brand Awareness Among Business and HR Professionals: What's the Baseline?

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For consumers, brands can simplify choice, increase trust, reduce risk, and promise a particular level of value (Keller, 2006). When customers are loyal to a brand, they may purchase offerings associated with that brand over those of competitors, even at a premium price (Aaker, 1996). In the non-profit sector, brands position organizations to build internal cohesion, develop credibility with external constituents, and achieve impact in the world (Kylander & Stone, 2012). For all these reasons, a brand can hold tremendous value, known as brand equity. Brand awareness is considered one of the key pillars of a brand's equity (Aaker, 1991).

The primary purpose of this study was to quantify current awareness of two "brands," I-O psychology and SIOP, among business and HR professionals. These results are to be used as a baseline against which future efforts at increasing I-O and SIOP visibility can be compared. Based upon previous studies (e.g., Gasser, et al., 1998) and personal experience, we expected that familiarity with I-O and SIOP would be low. A secondary purpose of this study was therefore to gather feedback from target respondents that could be used in increasing awareness of I-O and SIOP.

Method

In March 2012, a 15-item questionnaire was sent electronically to a panel of U.S. business professionals (final $n = 185$) obtained through MarketTools, an online market research firm, and in July 2012, an overlapping eight-item questionnaire was sent to U.S. HR professionals through the Society of Human Resources (SHRM; final $n = 527$). The HR sample received a shorter survey due to response rate concerns, as these participants were not provided with financial incentives for survey completion.

The majority of the business professional participants (business sample) worked for organizations with 1,000+ employees (80%), were male (59%), and were 41 years of age or greater (60%). Participants included executives and directors (48%), and managers, supervisors, and individual contributors (52%) from a range of industries. The majority of SHRM participants did not respond to demographic questions; those who did ($\approx 17\%$) represented a range of primary HR responsibilities (e.g., hiring/selection, training and development, employee engagement) and industries. Upon survey completion, all participants received information about SIOP and I-O psychology, and were directed to the SIOP website.

Questions focused on three broad areas: (a) awareness of I-O and SIOP, (b) channels of awareness, indicating how participants became familiar with I-O and/or SIOP, and (c) perceived value of the services offered by I-O psychologists and SIOP.

Results

Awareness of I-O and SIOP

Participants were asked to indicate their familiarity with the profession of I-O psychologist on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = not familiar to 5 = very familiar, and to indicate their familiarity with a range of professional organizations potentially relevant to business and HR professionals, including SIOP. Table 1 summarizes results of awareness of I-O psychology and SIOP.

Table 1
Familiarity With I-O and SIOP

Combined samples ($n = 712$)	HR professionals ($n = 527$)	Business professionals ($n = 185$)
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I-O brand	19.4%	14.8%	32.4%
SIOP brand	8.7%	7.8%	11.4%

Across the samples, 19.4% of participants indicated familiarity with I-O, and 8.7% familiarity with SIOP. Furthermore, more participants from the business sample (32.4%), relative to the HR sample (14.8%), were familiar with I-O. Based on the channels of awareness findings, discussed in the following section, greater familiarity with I-O for the business sample may reflect at least two influences: (1) frequency of coverage of I-O psychology in business classes (which in turn may reflect the increasing presence of I-O psychologists in business schools), and (2) a tendency for business professionals to stay current with news that references I-O psychology.

Table 2 further summarizes familiarity with SIOP as compared to other professional organizations. As shown, the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), National Human Resources Association (NHRA), and SHRM tended to be among the more familiar organizations across samples, whereas International Personnel Assessment Council (IPAC), Society for Consulting Psychology (SCP), and SIOP were among the less familiar. Academy of Management was relatively familiar to business (36.8%) but not HR professionals (7.8%).

Table 2
Familiarity With Professional Organizations

Organization	HR Professionals (n = 527)	Business professionals (n = 185)
Academy of Management (AOM)	7.8%	36.8%
American Society for Training and Development (ASTD)	45.2%	31.4%
International Personnel Assessment Council (IPAC)	4.7%	17.3%
National Human Resources Association (NHRA)	23.9%	41.6%
Society for Consulting Psychology (SCP)	2.5%	14.1%
Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM)	98.5%	33.0%
SIOP	7.8%	11.4%
None of the above	0.8%	n/a

Participants also were asked to rate their familiarity with various well-known I-O consulting firms (e.g., DDI, PDI Ninth House, SHL Previsor). As Figure 1 illustrates, participants were much more likely to indicate familiarity with one or more I-O consulting firms than with either the I-O or SIOP brands. These findings may reflect low frequency of use of the title I-O psychologist by consultants trained in I-O psychology (at least in part) and suggest that I-O firms are likely to have experience or guidance that could be of use in building awareness of the broader field.

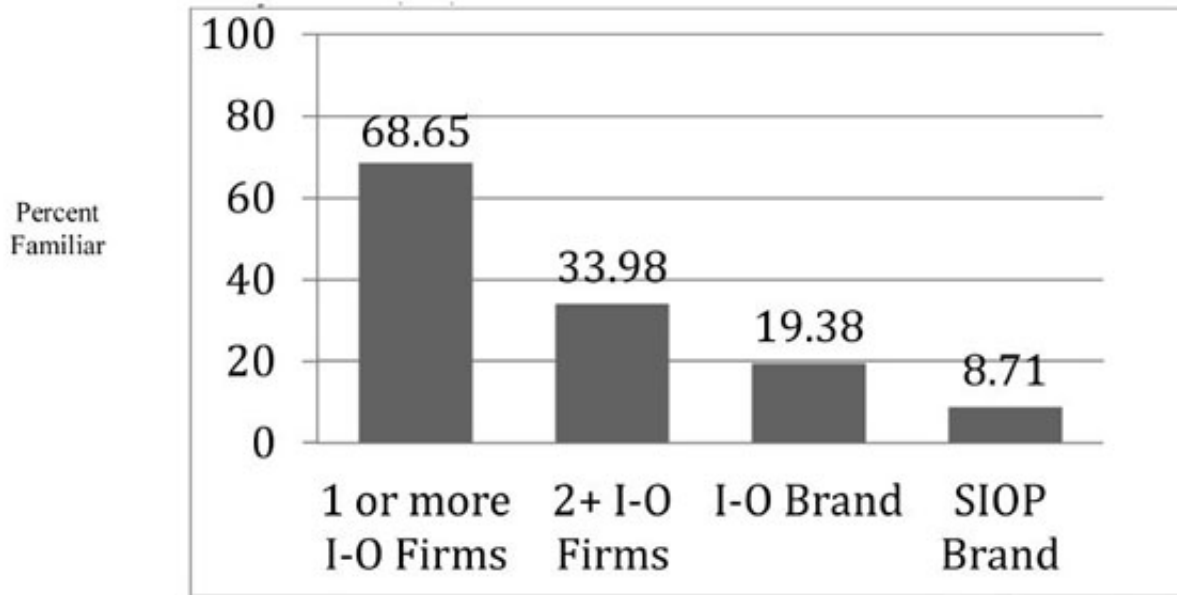


Figure 1. Familiarity I-O Firms, I-O, and SIOP

Note. Firms included in survey were AON Hewitt, APT Metrics, Inc., CEB Valtera Corporation, Development Dimensions International (DDI), Hogan Assessments, Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO), PDI Ninth House, SHL Previsor, and Sirota Survey Intelligence; Familiarity with I-O firms based on business sample (*n* = 185); familiarity with I-O and SIOP brands based on total sample (*n* = 712)

Channels of Awareness

The purpose of asking questions about how participants gained familiarity with I-O and SIOP was to gain insight about what channels may be most effective, and what channels are potentially underused, in conveying messages about the strengths and advantages of I-O psychology and SIOP.

Tables 3 and 4 summarize the channels through which participants gained familiarity with I-O and SIOP, respectively. Popular channels for learning about I-O were classes (I-O, other psychology, business), knowing an I-O psychologist, and the news. Popular channels for learning about SIOP were classes, knowing a SIOP member, the news, SIOP website, and SIOP-published materials. Notably, most of the more popular channels (with the potential exception of knowing an I-O psychologist) have been associated with sustained SIOP visibility efforts directed by SIOP and its committees, suggesting that these visibility efforts may be having some impact. For example, there have been ongoing efforts to educate students about the field, just one example of which is making I-O teaching materials available to non-I-O instructors.

Table 3
How Have You Heard About I-O?

Source	HR professionals (<i>n</i> = 78)	Business professionals (<i>n</i> = 60)
I have read/heard about I-O psychologists in the news	24.4%	23.3%
I had a class in business where I-O psychology was discussed	34.6%	36.7%
I had a class in I-O psychology	42.3%	11.7%
I know someone who is an I-O psychologist	30.8%	25.0%
My organization (current or previous) employed I-O psychologists	18.0%	18.3%

I have worked alongside I-O psychologists	18.0%	20.0%
I have hired I-O psychologists to provide services (i.e., as a vendor or employee) for my organization	16.7%	11.7%
I sell services to I-O psychologists	0.0%	6.7%
I have attended a SIOP conference (semi-annual or annual)	5.1%	8.3%
I have a degree in I-O psychology (MA, MS, PhD)	14.1%	3.3%
Not sure	1.3%	8.3%
Other (please specify): _____	10.3%	0.0%

Efforts are also underway to better utilize what the survey revealed as underused channels. For example, this year SIOP will be inviting a wide range of non-I-O business professionals from the Houston area to attend the annual conference, potentially increasing the annual SIOP conference as a channel of awareness for I-O and SIOP. Finally, it's likely that increased awareness through some channels may occur naturally as an outgrowth of other activities or developments, such as through the increasing number of graduate programs offering I-O and organizational psychology degrees (Silzer & Parson, 2013).

Table 4
How Have You Heard About SIOP?

Source	HR professionals (n = 41)	Business professionals (n = 21)
I have read or heard about SIOP in the news	17.1%	38.1%
I had a class in business where SIOP was discussed	22.0%	23.8%
I had a class in psychology (other than I-O psychology) where SIOP was discussed	12.2%	33.3%
I had a class in I-O psychology or organizational behavior where SIOP was discussed	43.9%	23.8%
I know someone who is a SIOP member	34.1%	28.6%
I am a SIOP member	4.9%	n/a
I am a member of a SIOP social network (e.g., LinkedIn)	12.2%	23.8%
I have visited the SIOP website	34.1%	23.8%
I have been invited to a SIOP conference (semiannual or annual)	9.8%	19.0%
I have attended a SIOP conference (semi-annual or annual)	7.3%	19.0%
I have purchased or read materials published by SIOP	26.8%	38.1%
I have a degree in I-O psychology (MA, MS, PhD)	14.6%	14.3%
Not sure	4.9%	28.6%
Other (please specify): _____	4.9%	0.0%

Perceptions of I-O and SIOP

Questions about perceptions of I-O and SIOP focused on services for which participants would recommend an I-O psychologist, ratings of I-O and SIOP value (five-point scale from 1 = *very low* to 5 = *very high*), ratings of I-O psychologists on key characteristics (seven-point scale from 1 = *weak* to 7 = *strong*), and perceived strengths and weaknesses of I-O and SIOP (open-ended).

Services that participants would recommend an I-O psychologist for are shown in Table 5, in descending rank order based on HR participant responses. Not surprisingly, items such as assessment centers, test development, and test

validation tended to be among those activities where HR professionals more frequently recommended I-O psychologists. Less specialized activities such as performance management, and items less clearly within the purview of I-O psychology such as workforce planning, were less frequently endorsed. For the business sample, services for which I-O psychologists were recommended were generally fewer and appeared somewhat less aligned with traditional perceptions about I-O skills. For example, the activity endorsed most frequently by business participants was compensation and rewards (30.0%), potentially reflecting unique needs of business relative to HR professionals.

We also asked participants to rate I-O psychologists in several areas relevant to the value I-O services provide, their commitment to various stakeholders (e.g., the organization; individual employees), and their effectiveness in key areas (ability to deliver high quality results, quickly, and cost effectively). All items presented to each sample received above average ratings. For example, Figure 2 shows the perceived value of SIOP and I-O psychology as rated by the business sample, and Table 6 presents ratings of I-O psychologists on key characteristics by HR professionals.

Table 5
For Which Services Would You Recommend I-O Psychologists?

Service	HR professionals (n = 76)	Business professionals (n = 60)
Change management	35.5%	16.7%
Test development	35.5%	8.3%
Assessment centers	32.9%	18.3%
Test validation	32.9%	5.0%
Leadership development	31.6%	8.3%
Team building	28.9%	5.0%
Executive coaching	27.6%	11.7%
Research and statistics	26.3%	13.3%
Organizational surveys	25.0%	5.0%
Employee selection/hiring	19.7%	20.0%
Work stress	19.7%	3.3%
360 degree surveys	18.4%	13.3%
Competency modeling/job analysis	18.4%	11.7%
Creation of training and development materials	18.4%	20.0%
Selection interviews	18.4%	5.0%
Performance management	15.8%	3.3%
Workforce planning	14.5%	1.7%
Facilitation of training and development	10.5%	8.3%
Succession management	9.2%	1.7%
Compensation and rewards	4.0%	30.0%
Legal audits/expert witness testimony	2.6%	8.3%

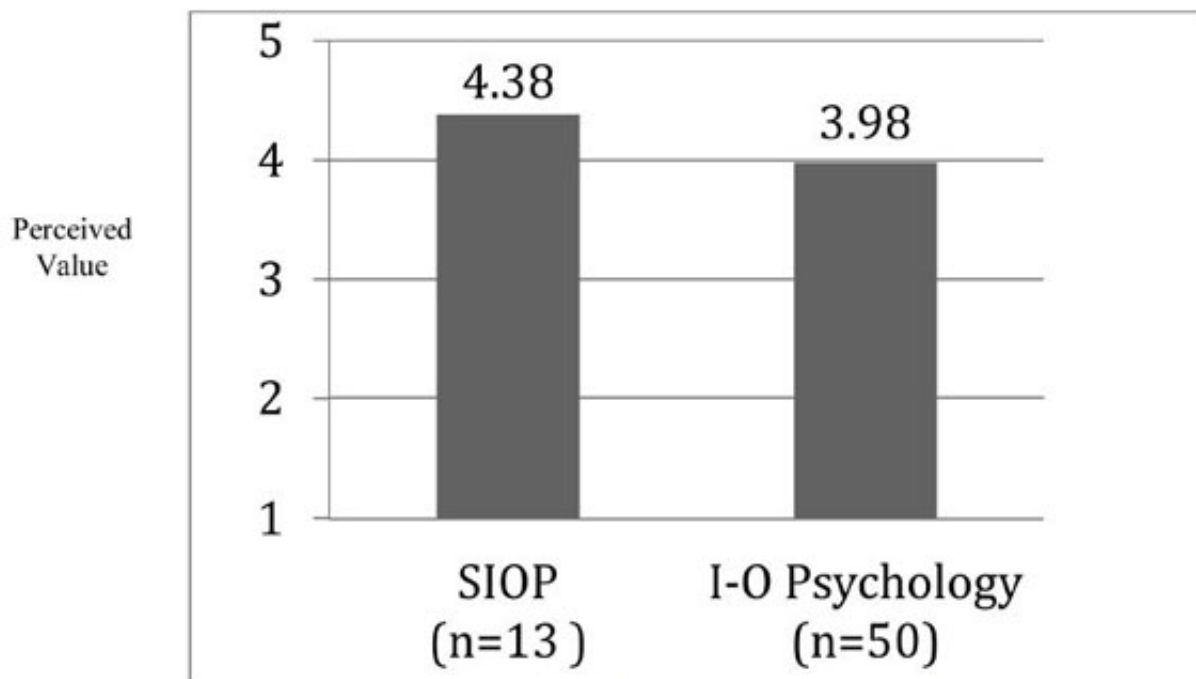


Figure 2. Perceived Value of SIOP and I-O Psychologists

Note. Five-point scale: 1 = very low to 5 = very high

Table 6
Rating of I-O Psychologists on Key Characteristics

Characteristic	HR professionals (n = 64)
Their commitment to bettering the organizations they work for or with	5.91
Their commitment to bettering the lives of individual employees of the organizations they work for or with	5.74
Their willingness to adjust methods to meet business needs	5.50
Their knowledge of strategic business issues	5.24

Note. Seven-point scale: 1 = weak to 7 = strong

Results indicate that those familiar with I-O and SIOP tend to see value in the products and services offered.

They also view I-O psychologists as committed to bettering both the organizations they work with and lives of individual employees. Absolute ratings of “willingness to adjust methods to meet business needs” and “knowledge of strategic business issues” also were high, although their lower relative position mirrors open-ended comments about the strengths and weaknesses of I-O and SIOP.

Open-ended comments generally paralleled participants’ ratings and, perhaps more importantly, what may be viewed as key aspects of I-O’s self-identity (e.g., Ryan, 2003; Zickar & Gibby, 2005). Qualitative review of open-ended comments revealed four themes among responses about strengths of I-O (research, focus on behavior, knowledge base,

quality/education) and three themes among responses about weaknesses of I-O (visibility/branding, lack business/organizational understanding, not taken seriously). Table 7 presents examples of each.

Table 7
Strengths and Weaknesses of I-O

Category	Examples
Research	"Primary strength is research and consulting" "scientist–practitioner model" "using objective data and methods to support initiatives" "Strength in statistical and validated tools that can be used on an individual and organizational level"
Focus on behavior	"Behavioral science" "Behavioral approaches" "Focus on improving actions, behaviors, results within organizations"
Quality/education	"Well-educated" "Recognized discipline that is respected by those who are familiar with it" "Education is a strength"
Visibility/branding	"Weakness is many are not familiar with it" "Lack of clarity of profession, recognition" "Management's lack of understanding about what they do" "There is little information regarding the full scope of their abilities and functions"
Lack business/organizational understanding	"Understanding business processes and the bottom line" "Typically used in a silo with limited exposure to the businesses they support" "Often brought in from the outside, difficult to find ones that have a clear understanding of business challenges" "As a weakness, they may not know the organization in great depth" "They seem to be somewhat out of touch on the day to day requirements and demands"
Not taken seriously	"Overly academic" "Senior leadership often dismissed the value of I-O psychology" "Not sure if they are always taken seriously" "Some associates/directors/executives think I-O psychology is too much about feelings and not about business... I-O psychology is about business!"

Comments about SIOP were closely aligned with those about I-O. Perceived strengths of SIOP were research, knowledge base, and quality/credibility. The major perceived weakness for SIOP was lack of visibility. Comments about lack of visibility, some of which are shown below, were even more pointed than similar comments about I-O:

- "Not known very well outside its own industry"
- "Not a very open or sharing group"
- "Branding needs to be improved"
- "Needs to be out there showing up on websites about related things"
- "Should be marketed more to professionals through e-mails and flyers"

Conclusions

This survey of I-O and SIOP brand awareness provided baseline metrics for use as comparison points in future visibility surveys. It also provided new insights as well as findings that confirmed expectations. Both types of results should help guide visibility efforts and allow them to move forward with greater confidence. Although there are several findings worth emphasizing, we note two that were especially encouraging. First, in the open-ended comments, with no predefined guidance or priming, participants highlighted the value of the I-O and SIOP knowledge base. As noted by Ryan (2003), “we cannot be defining ourselves through just a reference to the types of practice we engage in, but we must be referring back to our knowledge base and our disciplinary core. It isn’t being a test developer, or a change agent, or a trainer, or a survey designer that defines our identity—other people do these things. Our identity derives from how we do it, how we approach it, what we base it on.” We view the fact that customers recognized our knowledge base as a strength as a very positive sign for defining and differentiating the field. Second, based on ratings and open-ended questions, customers viewed I-O and SIOP as providing a high level of customer value. Although we need to closely attend to criticisms such as lack of business/organizational understanding, feedback that a major weakness is “needs to be out there showing up on websites” and “should be marketed more to professionals” bodes well for the success of future visibility efforts, which continue to strengthen and grow (Persing & Corbet, 2013; Reynolds, 2013).

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