Australian Award Based Achievement and Direction in Industrial and Organizational Psychology

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This paper outlines actual achievements in industrial psychology and OP (organisational psychology) in Australia as recognised by awards in research, teaching, and practice. This paper reports on and explores the interviews the author conducted with the three awardees for the period 2008 to 2011 as recognised by the APS (Australian Psychological Society). The interviews consist of agreed standardised questions covering personal motivations and achievements together with suggested direction for OP. As a result, current and emerging directions for industrial/organisational/work psychology research and practice are explained.

*Keywords:* psychology, career, motivation, industrial, organisational, well-being, emotion

*Awards in Research, Teaching, and Practice*

The professional association for industrial/organisational/work psychology in Australia is the College of OP (organisational psychology), a college of the APS (Australian Psychological Society). The college recognises outstanding achievement in the field through its awards. For the period 2008 to 2011, three college members have received three available awards and additional awards may not be granted until 2013. Dr. Elizabeth Allworth was awarded the Elton Mayo Outstanding Contributions to Industrial and Organisational Psychology Practice Award in 2009, Professor Neal M. Ashkanasy received the Elton Mayo Research and Teaching Award, and Dr. Crissa Sumner-Armstrong received the Early Career Award in 2011.

*Research Procedure*

The author conducted interviews with the three awardees. The interviews consist of agreed standardised questions covering personal motivations and achievements together with suggested direction for OP. The interview outcomes provide a concise insight into personal motivations behind outstanding achievement and a taste of the achievements real and possible in the field. The interviews were recently held and the interviewees are experts across the field, enabling current and emerging directions to be explained.

*Significant Contributions to the Profession by the Awardees*

Neal’s contributions are as follows:

1. Co-editing a book series on emotions in the workplace;
2. Role with *Emotion Review*, published by the International Society for Research in Emotion;
3. Establishing a list serve with 1,500 members;

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(4) Publishing with some of the leading publishers and in some of the leading journals, including *Leadership Quarterly*;


Elizabeth’s contributions are as follows:

1. Building and sustaining an OP consultancy over 20 years, applying psychometrics in areas, such as selection and career development, leadership development, outplacement, and career transition;
2. Taking masters students on placements and supervising interns or early career psychologists;
3. Involving with the APS Ethics Committee, Ethical Guidelines Committee, National Regulatory Development Working Party, OP College State Committee, and National Media Panel;
4. Teaching in the Coaching Psychology Unit at the University of Sydney for seven years;
5. Reviewing submissions for professional journals and conferences.

Crissa’s contributions are as follows:

1. Involvement in evaluation of health policy and programs for state and federal governments, e.g., national drug strategy, multi-disciplinary teams, and managed clinical networks to enhance cancer care, especially in rural and remote areas;
2. Leadership development to support cultural transformation;
3. Assisting a major bank to lead resilient teams and better support customers following a serious natural disaster;
4. State Chair of the Queensland State College of OP.

**Choice and Motivation to Engage in the OP Field**

Interestingly, Neal, Elizabeth, and Crissa all came to work in the field from other careers, or for Crissa, intended occupation. Elizabeth began as an OT (occupational therapist), studied psychology, returned to work as an OT, and then discovered OP. Neal, after being a 20-year career as an engineer, concerned about the quality of management in the state government turned to OP. Crissa studied psychology in order to then study medicine but discovered OP on the way.

Neal, Elizabeth, and Crissa were all motivated to pursue OP through an experience with an inspirational participant in the field. Crissa was initially inspired by an OP lecturer in a third year psychology elective and then by a participant at an APS Postgraduate Expo who switched from clinical to OP. Neal was inspired when he heard Bob Dick speak at an executive development course. Elizabeth was persuaded by Professor Beryl Hesketh whom she describes as a very influential person. Elizabeth says that it was Professor Beryl Hesketh who encouraged her into OP—the discipline that was most likely to be compatible with her philosophy about people and well-being, and her interest in psychological measurement.

After that “Eureka moment” of thinking “this is the answer” upon hearing Bob Dick speak, Neal retired as an engineer, studied undergraduate psychology, honored Bob Dick as his supervisor, then completed a Ph.D.. The introduction of free education by the government was a further motivation for Neal to switch careers. A strong group in the University of Queensland Psychology Department proved of great benefit. Subsequent sabbaticals at overseas universities have provided an international focus and importantly, a presentation on emotions in the workplace by the late Peter Frost has inspired a new career of research.

Professor Hesketh has remained a support and mentor over Elizabeth’s 20-year-career of OP. Motivation and support are closely linked, with Elizabeth’s parents having imparted the importance of education, her
husband’s encouragement, and business partner’s support for research and study in addition to practice being important considerations.

Crissa has benefitted from a number of mentors, with her honorable supervisor, Peter Newcombe, providing continuing support through her Ph.D.. Two of her previous directors, Mel Miller and Greg Dean, have in turn inspired her to pursue the academic practitioner model. As for Elizabeth, Crissa’s parents have instilled a love of education and her partner is very supportive.

**What Inspires and Sustains Ongoing Work in OP**

For all three, the capacity to make a difference through OP is of paramount importance.

For Neal, despite criticism that real managers do not read academic journals, they do attend MBA (Masters of Business Administration) courses where academic information is discussed and analyzed. Neal’s work on emotions is cited in US (United States) textbooks, which is very gratifying. Further academic research is being encouraged through Ph.D. students that Neal supervises—they are bright young people who are full of enthusiasm which is sustaining.

Elizabeth’s interest in people and the workplace led her into OP where she is contributing in a part of the world that is really very significant in people’s lives. Through OP, Elizabeth is very inspired by having a direct impact where people spend a lot of their time.

Crissa speaks of making a difference for individuals, teams, organizations, and communities through OP. An example of tangible outcome was a mediation that started with the two protagonists not looking at each other and ended with them embracing a relationship re-built. Her leadership coaching has made a marked difference in the way that they are seen in the organization and what they are able to achieve. The ability to learn and grow through working in such a broad field is inspirational.

Fresh new areas of learning or new ways of thinking are inspirational. Crissa anticipates significant change in the way leadership is considered, believing there is a growing interest in a more wholistic approach. Leadership development may consider individual attributes, such as physical and emotional health, self-awareness, and awareness of what drives others. Positive psychology, happiness, and age friendliness with changing demography in the workplace and providing support for remote workforces are all emerging theoretical and social/industrial areas that will inspire innovative practice by OP.

Of note, despite the generational differences between those interviewed, there is a common aim to “make a difference” through organizational psychology. Recent research (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012) in terms of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intent to turnover show differences among generations probably do not exist. Motivation in the workplace appears to be an enduring variable across generational and associated time differences.

**Emerging Directions for OP**

OP needs to be promoted by potential students, clients, and society at large as a profession that can make a real difference. That promotion is best carried out by OP practitioners face to face with others or perhaps through the media. It is not the written information that has been inspiring about OP but the provision of that information on a personal level.

The researcher/practitioner model is an important means for OPs to engage with individuals, organizations, and society to add value and make a difference. Neal as a researcher/teacher achieves this by advancing
research in his field of emotions in the workplace and conveying it to the business world through teaching in a business school. Crissa and Elizabeth are active in the profession, academically and through their practices. They serve as three models for practitioners in the field aiming to achieve excellence. This is how competitive advantage is achieved for the profession and a positive difference made in the world of work.

The post-graduate education of and placements for OPs are an unresolved and seriously emerging issue for the profession. The universities are increasingly reluctant to support this training through schools of psychology, which opens up the potential for private providers or business schools to become involved. How the training occurs will have an impact on the future of the profession, for example, training through business schools may introduce a more business orientation to OP.

OP needs to adapt to the changing economic, technological, and demographic environment, which is true for any business but perhaps more the case for OPs than other branches of psychology. Computer technology is impacting in ways that will enable OP specialists to connect and influence in ways that have not occurred to date. For example, remote rural and regional areas of Australia and perhaps beyond will be increasingly more accessible for OPs which will be more readily able to add value.

References