Specialty Guidelines for the Delivery of Services by Industrial/Organizational Psychologists

The Specialty Guidelines that follow are supplements to the generic Standards for Providers of Psychological Services, originally adopted by the American Psychological Association (APA) in September 1974 and revised in January 1977 (APA, 1974b, 1977). Admission to the practice of psychology is regulated by state statute. It is the position of the Association that licensing be based on generic, and not on specialty, qualifications. Specialty guidelines serve the additional purpose of providing potential users and other interested groups with essential information about particular services available from the several specialties in professional psychology. Although the original APA Standards were designed to fill the needs of several classes of psychological practitioners and a wide variety of users, the diversity of professional practice and the use of psychological services require specialty guidelines to clarify the special nature of both practitioners and users. These Specialty Guidelines for the Delivery of Services by Industrial/Organizational (I/O) Psychologists are designed to define the roles of I/O psychologists and the particular needs of users of I/O psychological services.

Professional psychology specialties have evolved from generic practice in psychology and are supported by university training programs. There are now at least four recognized professional specialties—clinical, counseling, school, and industrial/organizational psychology. The knowledge base in each of these specialty areas has increased, refining the state of the art to the point that a set of uniform specialty guidelines is now possible and desirable. The present Guidelines are intended to educate the public, the profession, and other interested parties regarding specialty professional practices. They are also intended to facilitate the continued systematic development of the profession.

The content of each specialty guideline reflects a consensus of university faculty and public and private practitioners regarding the knowledge base, services provided, problems addressed, and clients served.

Traditionally, all learned disciplines have treated the designation of specialty practice as a reflection of preparation in greater depth in a particular subject matter, together with a voluntary limiting of focus to a more restricted area of practice by the professional. Lack of specialty designation does not preclude general providers of psychological services from using the methods or dealing with the populations of any specialty, except insofar as psychologists voluntarily refrain from providing services they are not trained to render. It is the intent of these Guidelines, however, that after the grandparenting period, psychologists not put themselves forward as specialists in a given area of practice unless they meet the qualifications noted in the Guidelines (see Definitions). Therefore, these Guidelines are meant to apply only to those psychologists who voluntarily wish to be designated as industrial/organizational psychologists. They do not apply to other psychologists.

These Guidelines represent the profession’s best judgment of the conditions, credentials, and experience that contribute to competent professional practice. The APA strongly encourages, and plans to participate in, efforts to identify professional practitioner behaviors and job functions and to validate the relation between these and desired client outcomes. Thus, future revisions of these Guidelines will increasingly reflect the results of such efforts.

Like the APA generic Standards, the I/O Specialty Guidelines are concerned with improving the quality, effectiveness, and accessibility of psychological services for all who require benefit from them. These Specialty Guidelines are intended to clarify questions of interpretation of the APA generic Standards as they are applied to I/O psychology.

This document presents the APA’s position on I/O practice. Ethical standards applicable to I/O psychologists are already in effect, as are other documents that provide guidance to I/O practitioners in specific applications of I/O psychology. (Note: Footnotes appear at the end of the Specialty Guidelines. See p. 669.)

The Committee on Professional Standards established by the APA in January 1980 is charged with keeping the generic Standards and the Specialty Guidelines responsive to the needs of the public and the profession. It is also charged with continually reviewing, modifying, and

These Specialty Guidelines were prepared through the cooperative efforts of the APA Committee on Standards for Providers of Psychological Services (COSPOPS), chaired by Durand F. Jacobs, and the APA Division of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (Division 14). Virginia Ellen Schein and Frank Friedlander served as the I/O representatives on COSPOPS, and Arthur Centor and Richard Kilburg served as the Central Office liaisons to the committee. Thomas E. Tice and C. J. Bartlett were the key liaison persons from the Division 14 Professional Affairs Committee. Drafts of these Guidelines were reviewed and commented on by members of the Division 14 Executive Committee.
extending them progressively as the profession and the science of psychology develop new knowledge, improved methods, and additional modes of psychological services.

The Specialty Guidelines for the Delivery of Services by Industrial/Organizational Psychologists that follow have been established by the APA as a means of self-regulation to protect the public interest. They guide the specialty practice of I/O psychology by specifying important areas of quality assurance and performance that contribute to the goal of facilitating more effective human functioning.

Principles and Implications of the Specialty Guidelines

These Specialty Guidelines have emerged from and reaffirm the same basic principles that guided the development of the generic Standards for Providers of Psychological Services (APA, 1977):

1. These Guidelines recognize that where the practice of I/O psychology is regulated by federal, state, or local statutes, all providers of I/O psychological services conform to such statutes.

2. A uniform set of Specialty Guidelines governs I/O psychological service functions offered by I/O psychologists, regardless of setting or form of remuneration. All I/O psychologists in professional practice recognize and are responsive to a uniform set of Specialty Guidelines, just as they are guided by a common code of ethics.

3. The I/O Specialty Guidelines establish clearly articulated levels of quality for covered I/O psychological service functions, regardless of the nature of the users, purchasers, or sanctioners of such covered services.

4. All persons providing I/O psychological services meet specified levels of training and experience that are consistent with, and appropriate to, the functions they perform. Persons providing such services who do not meet the APA qualifications for a professional I/O psychologist (see Definitions) are supervised by a psychologist with the requisite training. This level of qualification is necessary to ensure that the public receives services of high quality. Final responsibility and accountability for services provided rest with professional I/O psychologists.

5. These Specialty Guidelines for I/O psychologists are intended to present the APA's position on levels for training and professional practice and to provide clarification of the APA generic Standards.

6. A uniform set of Specialty Guidelines governs the quality of I/O psychological services in both the private and the public sectors. Those receiving I/O psychological services are protected by the same kinds of safeguards, irrespective of sector.

7. All persons representing themselves as I/O psychologists at any time and in any setting, whether public or private, profit or nonprofit, observe these Guidelines in order to promote the interests and welfare of the users of I/O psychological services. Judgment of the degree to which these Guidelines are observed take into consideration the capabilities for evaluation and the circumstances that prevail in the setting at the time the program or service is evaluated.

8. These Guidelines, while assuring the user of the I/O psychologist's accountability for the nature and quality of services rendered, do not preclude the providers of I/O psychological services from using new methods or developing innovative procedures in the delivery of such services.

These Specialty Guidelines have broad implications both for users of I/O psychological services and for providers of such services:

1. Guidelines for I/O psychological services provide a basis for a mutual understanding between provider and user and facilitate effective evaluation of services provided and outcomes achieved.

2. Guidelines for I/O psychological services make an important contribution toward greater uniformity in legislative and regulatory actions involving I/O psychologists. Guidelines for providers of I/O psychological services may be useful for uniformity in specialty credentialing of I/O psychologists, if such specialty credentialing is required.

3. Although guidelines for I/O psychological services may have an impact on tomorrow's training models for both professional and support personnel in I/O psychology, they are not intended to interfere with innovations in the training of I/O psychologists.

4. Guidelines for I/O psychological services require continual review and revision.

The Specialty Guidelines here presented are intended to improve the quality and delivery of I/O psychological services by specifying criteria for key aspects of the practice setting. Some settings may require additional and/or more stringent criteria for specific areas of service delivery.

Definitions

A fully qualified I/O psychologist has a doctoral degree earned in a program primarily psychological in nature. This degree may be from a department of psychology or from a school of business, management, or administrative science in a regionally accredited university. Consistent with the commitment of I/O psychology to the scientist-professional model, I/O psychologists are thoroughly prepared in basic scientific methods as well as in psychological science; therefore, programs that do not include training in basic scientific methods and research are not considered appropriate educational and training models for I/O psychologists. The I/O psychology doctoral program provides training in (a) scientific and professional ethics, (b) general psychological science, (c) research design and methodology, (d) quantitative and qualitative methodology, and (e) psychological measurement, as well as (f) a supervised practicum or laboratory experience in an area of I/O psychology, (g) a field ex-
perience in the application and delivery of I/O services,
(h) practice in the conduct of applied research, (i) train-
ing in other areas of psychology, in business, and in the
social and behavioral sciences, as appropriate, and (j) prepa-
ration of a doctoral research dissertation.3

Although persons who do not meet all of the above
qualifications may provide I/O psychological services,
such services are performed under the supervision of a
fully qualified I/O psychologist. The supervising I/O
psychologist may be a full-time member of the same
organization or may be retained on a part-time basis.
Psychologists so retained have the authority and partic-
ipate sufficiently to assess the need for services, to review
the services provided, and to ensure professional respon-
sibility and accountability for them. Special proficiency
training or supervision may be provided by professional
psychologists of other specialties or by professionals of
other disciplines whose competencies in the given area
have been demonstrated by previous training and ex-
perience.

Industrial/organizational psychological services in-
volve the development and application of psychological
theory and methodology to problems of organizations
and problems of individuals and groups in organizational
settings. The purpose of such applications to the assess-
ment, development, or evaluation of individuals, groups,
or organizations is to enhance the effectiveness of these
individuals, groups, or organizations. The following areas
represent some examples of such applications:

A. Selection and placement of employees. Services
include development of selection programs, optimal
placement of key personnel, and early identification of
management potential.

B. Organization development. Services include ana-
lyzing organizational structure, formulating corporate
personnel strategies, maximizing the effectiveness and
satisfaction of individuals and work groups, effecting
organizational change, and counseling employees for
purposes of improving employee relations, personal and
career development, and superior–subordinate relations.

C. Training and development of employees. Services
include identifying training and development needs; for-
mulating and implementing programs for technical
training, management training, and organizational de-
velopment; and evaluating the effectiveness of training
and development programs in relation to productivity
and satisfaction criteria.

D. Personnel research. Services include continuing
development of assessment tools for selection, placement,
classification, and promotion of employees; validating
test instruments; and measuring the effect of cultural
factors on test performance.

E. Improving employee motivation. Services in-
clude enhancing the productive output of employees,
identifying and improving factors associated with job
satisfaction, and redesigning jobs to make them more
meaningful.

F. Design and optimization of work environments.
Services include designing work environments and opti-
mizing person–machine effectiveness.

Guideline 1

PROVIDERS

Staffing and Qualifications of Staff

1.1 Professional I/O psychologists maintain current
knowledge of scientific and professional developments
that are related to the services they render.

INTERPRETATION: Methods through which knowledge of
scientific and professional development may be gained
include, but are not limited to, continuing education,
attendance at workshops, participation in staff devel-
opment, and reading scientific publications.

The I/O psychologist has ready access to reference
material related to the provision of psychological ser-
vice.

1.2 Professional I/O psychologists limit their practice
to their demonstrated areas of professional competence.

INTERPRETATION: I/O psychological services are offered
in accordance with the providers’ areas of competence
as defined by verifiable training and experience.

When extending services beyond the range of their
usual practice, professional I/O psychologists obtain per-
tinent training or appropriate professional supervision.

1.3 Professional psychologists who wish to change their
specialty to I/O areas meet the same requirements with
respect to subject matter and professional skills that
apply to doctoral training in the new specialty.

INTERPRETATION: Education and training of doctoral-
level psychologists, when prior preparation has not been
in the I/O area, includes education and training in the
content, methodology, and practice of I/O psychology.
Such preparation is individualized and may be acquired
in a number of ways. Formal education in I/O psy-
chology under the auspices of university departments
that offer the doctoral degree in I/O psychology, with
certification by the supervising department indicating
competency in I/O psychology, is recommended. How-
ever, continuing education courses and workshops in
I/O psychology, combined with supervised experience
as an I/O psychologist, may also be acceptable.

1.4 Professional I/O psychologists are encouraged to
develop innovative procedures and theory.

INTERPRETATION: Although these Guidelines give ex-
amples of I/O psychologist activities, such activities are
not limited to those provided. I/O psychologists are en-
Guideline 2

PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Protecting the User

2.1 I/O psychological practice supports the legal and civil rights of the user.

INTERPRETATION: Providers of I/O psychological services safeguard the interests of the user with regard to legal and civil rights. I/O psychologists are especially sensitive to issues of confidentiality of information. In the case of dual users (e.g., individuals and organizations), I/O psychologists, insofar as possible, anticipate possible conflicts of interest and clarify with both users how such conflicts might be resolved. In addition, I/O service providers make every effort to safeguard documents and files containing confidential information.

2.2 All providers of I/O psychological services abide by policies of the American Psychological Association that are relevant to I/O psychologists.

INTERPRETATION: While many official APA policies are relevant to I/O psychology, such as those embodied in the Ethical Principles of Psychologists (APA, 1981) and the Standards of Educational and Psychological Tests (APA, 1974a), it is recognized that some specific policies which apply only to certain subspecialties (e.g., health care providers) may not be applicable to I/O psychologists.

2.3 All providers within an I/O psychological service unit are familiar with relevant statutes, regulations, and legal precedents established by federal, state, and local governmental groups.

INTERPRETATION: Insofar as statutes exist relevant to the practice of the I/O psychological service provider, the provider is familiar with them and conforms to the law. In addition, the provider is familiar with statutes that may govern activities of the user as they relate to services provided. For example, an I/O psychologist who establishes selection systems for a user is aware of and conforms to the statutes governing selection systems for that user. This guideline does not imply that inappropriate statutes, regulations, and legal precedents cannot be opposed through legal processes.

Although I/O psychologists may be required by law to be licensed or certified, most I/O psychological services can be provided by persons who are not licensed or certified. Examples of such services are the administration of standardized group tests of mental abilities, aptitudes, personality characteristics, and so on for instructional or personnel screening uses; interviews, such as employment or curriculum advisory interviews, that do not involve the assessment of individual personality characteristics; the design, administration, and interpretation of opinion surveys; the design and evaluation of person–machine systems; the conduct of employee development programs; the counseling of employees by supervisors regarding job performance and working relationships; and the teaching of psychological principles or techniques that do not involve ameliorative services to individuals or groups.

Planning Organizational Goals

2.4 Providers of I/O psychological services state explicitly what can and cannot reasonably be expected from the services.

INTERPRETATION: In marketing psychological services, the I/O psychologist realistically appraises the chances of meeting the client's goal(s) and informs the client of the degree of success that can be anticipated. Since the user may or may not possess sophistication in psychological methods and applications, the limitations are stated in terms that are comprehensible to the user.

In presenting statements of reasonable anticipation, the I/O psychologist attempts to be accurate in all regards. This guideline also applies to statements of personal competency and of the competency and experience of the psychological service unit that the I/O psychologist represents. Statements and materials do not make claims or suggest benefits that are not supportable by scientifically acceptable evidence. Since the I/O psychologist may stand to gain financially through the recommendation of a given product or service, particular sensitivity to such issues is essential to avoid compromise of professional responsibilities and objectives.

2.5 Providers of I/O psychological services do not seek to gain competitive advantage through the use of privileged information.

INTERPRETATION: In the course of work with a user, I/O practitioners may become aware of the management practices, organizational structure, personnel policies, or financial structure of competing units. Since such information is usually revealed in a privileged context, it is not employed for competitive advantage. Similarly, practitioners may be called on to review the proposal of a competing unit. Information so gained is not used to gain competitive advantage.

2.6 Providers of I/O psychological services who purchase the services of another psychologist provide a clear statement of the role of the purchaser.

INTERPRETATION: When an I/O psychological service unit purchases the services of another such unit, the purchasing unit states in advance whether it perceives its
role as that of a collaborator, a technical advisor, a scientific monitor, or an informed layperson. The purchaser clearly defines its anticipated role, specifies the extent to which it wishes to be involved in various aspects of program planning and work definition, and describes how differences of opinion on technical and scientific matters are to be resolved. Members of the staff of both the unit purchasing services and the unit providing services are made fully aware of the various role definitions. Deferring all major project decisions to the purchaser is not necessarily considered appropriate in scientific development.

2.7 Providers of I/O psychological services establish a system to protect confidentiality of their records.

INTERPRETATION: I/O psychologists are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of information about users of services, whether obtained by themselves or by those they supervise. All persons supervised by I/O psychologists, including nonprofessional personnel and students, who have access to records of psychological services are required to maintain this confidentiality as a condition of employment.

The I/O psychologist does not release confidential information, except with the written consent of the user directly involved or the user's legal representative. Even after the consent for release has been obtained, the I/O psychologist clearly identifies such information as confidential to the recipient of the information. If directed otherwise by statute or regulations with the force of law or by court order, the psychologist seeks a resolution to the conflict that is both ethically and legally feasible and appropriate.

Users are informed in advance of any limits in the setting for maintenance of confidentiality of psychological information.

When the user intends to waive confidentiality, the psychologist discusses the implications of releasing psychological information and assists the user in limiting disclosure only to information required by the present circumstances.

Raw psychological data (e.g., test protocols, interview notes, or questionnaire returns) in which a user is identified are released only with the written consent of the user or the user's legal representative and released only to a person recognized by the I/O psychologist as qualified and competent to use the data. (Note: The user may be an individual receiving career counseling, in which case individual confidentiality must be maintained, or the user may be an organization, in which case individual data may be shared with others within the organization. When individual information is to be shared with others, e.g., managers, the individual supplying the information is made aware of how this information is to be used.)

Any use made of psychological reports, records, or data for research or training purposes is consistent with this Guideline. Additionally, providers of I/O psychological services comply with statutory confidentiality requirements and those embodied in the American Psychological Association’s Ethical Principles of Psychologists (APA, 1981).

Providers of I/O psychological services remain sensitive to both the benefits and the possible misuse of information regarding individuals that is stored in computerized data banks. Providers use their influence to ensure that such information is used in a socially responsible manner.

Guideline 3
ACCOUNTABILITY

Evaluating I/O Psychological Services

3.1 The professional activities of providers of I/O psychological services are guided primarily by the principle of promoting human welfare.

INTERPRETATION: I/O psychologists do not withhold services to a potential client on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap, or national origin. Recognition is given, however, to the following considerations: the professional right of I/O psychologists to limit their practice to avoid potential conflict of interest (e.g., as between union and management, plaintiff and defendant, or business competitors); the right and responsibility of psychologists to withhold a procedure when it is not validly applicable; the right and responsibility of I/O psychologists to withhold evaluative, diagnostic, or change procedures or other services where they might be ineffective or detrimental to the achievement of goals and fulfillment of needs of individuals or organizations.

I/O psychologists who find that psychological services are being provided in a manner that is discriminatory or exploitative to users and/or contrary to these Guidelines or to state or federal statutes take appropriate corrective action, which may include the refusal to provide services. When conflicts of interest arise, the I/O psychologist is guided in the resolution of differences by the principles set forth by the American Psychological Association in the Ethical Principles of Psychologists (APA, 1981) and the “Guidelines for Conditions of Employment of Psychologists” (APA, 1972).

3.2 There are periodic, systematic, and effective evaluations of psychological services.

INTERPRETATION: Regular assessment of progress in achieving goals and meeting needs is provided in all I/O psychological service units. Such assessment includes both the validation of psychological services designed to predict outcomes and the evaluation of psychological services designed to induce organizational or individual change. This evaluation includes consideration of the effectiveness of I/O psychological services relative to
costs in terms of use of time and money and the availability of professional and support personnel.

Evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the I/O psychological service delivery system is conducted internally and, when possible, under independent auspices as well.

It is clearly explained to the user that evaluation of services is a necessary part of providing I/O psychological services and that the cost of such evaluation is justified as part of the cost of services.

FOOTNOTES

1 See Ethical Principles of Psychologists (APA, 1981).

2 See Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures (APA Division of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 1980).

3 The following two categories of persons who met the criteria indicated below on or before the adoption of these Specialty Guidelines on January 31, 1980, shall also be considered professional I/O psychologists: Category 1—persons who on or before September 4, 1974, (a) completed a master’s degree from a program primarily psychological in content at a regionally accredited university, (b) completed 5 post-master’s years of appropriate education, training, and experience in providing I/O psychological services as defined herein in the Definitions section, including a minimum of 2 years in an organizational setting, and (c) received a license or certificate in the state in which they practiced, conferred by a state board of psychological examiners; Category 2—persons who completed (a) a doctoral degree from a program primarily psychological in content at a regionally accredited university and (b) 3 postdoctoral years of appropriate education, training, and experience in providing I/O services as defined herein in the Definitions section, including a minimum of 1 year in an organizational setting.

REFERENCES


American Psychological Association, Division of Industrial and Organizational Psychology. Principles for the validation and use of personnel selection procedures (2nd ed.). Berkeley, Calif.: Author, 1980. (Copies may be ordered from Lewis E. Albright, Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corporation, 300 Lakeside Drive—Room KB 2140, Oakland, California 94643.)