Covid-19 is an opportunity to rethink I-O Psychology, not for business as usual

Covid-19 has resulted in dramatic and rapid changes to work, working conditions, and workplaces, all of which have an enormous effect on individuals, organizations, and societies. As such, these changes have attracted a great deal of attention from scholars of social and psychological sciences. In this backdrop, Rudolph and colleagues have aptly invited "I-O psychology researchers and practitioners to address the challenges and opportunities of COVID-19 head-on by proactively innovating the work that we do in support of workers, organizations, and society as a whole." Leading the charge, they discussed the work-related challenges and opportunities related to ten topics: occupational health and safety, work–family issues, telecommuting, virtual teamwork, job insecurity, precarious work, leadership, human resources policy, the aging workforce, and careers.

Although these topics cover many issues made salient by Covid-19, the discussion of each focused a great deal on the usual concerns of efficiency and organizations. This was jarring not only because the vision and mission of SIOP and I-O psychology have a broader focus, but also because the pandemic prompted calls to rethink business and management research and practice to create better societies (Bapuji, de Bakker, Brown, Higgins, Rehbein & Spicer, 2020; Brammer, Branicki, & Linnenluecke, 2020). Thousands of scholars cutting across disciplines have called for giving better share and voice to workers (https://democratizingwork.org/). The UN secretary general has urged for major reforms to global institutions to address systemic inequalities exposed by the pandemic (McVeigh, 2020). Closer to home, management researchers have been called upon to examine how organizational practices result in inequalities at the societal level (Bapuji, Patel, Ertug & Allen, 2020) and international HRM scholars have highlighted the need to redefine performance and reorient organizations towards sustainable development goals, in the context of Covid-19 (Caliguri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020).

In the backdrop of the larger societal challenges the pandemic has highlighted, in the remainder of this commentary, we highlight what we see as the problematic nature of the discussion in Rudolph et al. (2020) and offer a snapshot of how a more expansive view of I-O psychology would reveal a decidedly different and richer set of research and practice challenges and opportunities. Our intention is not to critique the specific content of the authors' article, but rather to make explicit several implicit underlying premises of the content they discussed, so that I-O psychology researchers and practitioners can reflect on their role and purpose in organizations and societies.

First, Rudolph et al. appear to consider a number of challenges (e.g., job insecurity, precarious work) and organizational responses to challenges as exogenous and given, rather than – in no small part – as outcomes of organizational choices related to particular ways of defining/understanding organizational boundaries, compensation policies, and staffing profiles. For example, in discussing occupational health and safety, the authors have assumed higher workloads and increased work stress as natural, rather than arising as a result of managerial decisions to not hire additional staff to deal with such workloads and/or reduce activity volume so as not to increase workloads to existing staff. Consequently, the authors offered recommendations and research opportunities (e.g., learn from extreme work environments such as the military or bush fire brigades) to identify "factors that help employees function well – even when experiencing high strain levels". This view – that employees need to work at the same level as before the pandemic, if not at a higher level – runs contrary to understanding and appreciating the vulnerabilities, fears, and anxieties of individuals who are working during a pandemic that has not occurred at such a global scale in living memory.

Second, the article focused more on managers and other white-collar employees, even if implicitly, rather than others (e.g., frontline staff, gig workers, contract workers, and freshly unemployed/underemployed) who have been severely affected by the pandemic. By focusing

on challenges faced mainly by those working within organizational boundaries and in virtual environments, the article has largely overlooked those who work at the boundary of organizations or who are not formally employees/members of organizations, but who still work for those organizations. Even when such workers are being discussed, they have been considered as research subjects, rather than as individuals equally deserving of attention in a work setting whose performance and well-being need to be studied within a larger context. For example, the authors encouraged research on non-traditional samples, to better understand the struggles of underrepresented populations in work-family research, rather than also reflecting on why previous research has overlooked those 'samples,' even though low-income workers are not a new population. With respect to work-family conflicts, the authors suggested that couples may emerge stronger, having learned more about each other, rather than weaker. This assumption is symptomatic of a focus on those who have the privilege to work from home (rather than stay at home without work and thus income) and possess the resources, including physical (e.g., new workspaces, help for domestic services) and psychological support services to manage conflicts to emerge stronger.

Third, the authors take a decidedly organizational perspective and shift the burden of managing the fallout of the pandemic to employees and governments. For example, the strategies to manage work-family segmentation emphasize what the employees can do (e.g., walk around the block, have a separate office) rather than what the organization can do (e.g., stop e-mailing after hours, provide appropriate equipment, furniture, and tools or gadgets). Similarly, the authors suggest that "psychologists can play a key role in advocating for governmental and organizational policies that reduce precarious work and increase social protections." But, in the following sentence, they highlight "advocating for a living wage, increasing food and wage assistance, expanding Medicaid, eliminating work requirements, expanding unemployment benefits, improving the accessibility of job skills training, expanding

the earned income and child tax credits, or prohibiting unemployment discrimination" – all of which fall in the ambit of the government, thus overlooking the role and responsibility of organizations. Instead, or at least just as importantly, and keeping to matters/decisions they have control over, it might be useful to ask why organizations employ precarious workers and why they sometimes do not pay a living wage to precarious workers.

Fourth, the authors make some assumptions about organizational actions and practices rather than critically questioning them. These include the comment that "employers have turned to furloughing or laying off employees to stay afloat" whereas many companies have used the ongoing crisis as an expedient excuse to lay off people, squeeze suppliers, and cut back on wages and benefits (Knight, 2020). Similarly, they suggest that casualization of employment is a result of globalization, despite evidence that more complex factors are at play, including firm choices that are related to compensation practices (Bidwell, Briscoe, Fernandez-Mateo, & Sterling, 2013; Kristal & Cohen, 2017; Kristal, Cohen, & Navot, 2020). In addition, the authors make suggestions that are likely to further reinforce inequalities (e.g., use of volunteering to expand career prospects and work meaningfulness during the crisis), without considering the fact that being able to volunteer in an unpaid capacity is not an option available to a vast majority of populations.

Broadening the focus to society and well-being

Overall, in our reading, the authors' focus on managerial and white-collar workers and organizational perspective on managing performance, without questioning organizational choices and their effect on workers, are indicative of problematic trends in I-O research in general. These approaches limit the profession's vision of "science and practice transforming work that builds effective organizations and promotes worker well-being" and the mission "to enhance human well-being and performance in organizational and work settings." In light of ongoing and future health, economic, social, and psychological crises, including but not limited

to Covid-19, we have to reconsider how we evaluate research findings and impact. Further, the changing nature of work and organizations reflects the importance of constituencies other than managers and organizations, and also for research and interventions with goals that go beyond solely managerial or organizational relevance.

The architecture of I-O research and practice, including interventions, begets the questions, 'Good for what?' and 'Good for whom?'. The main premise of I-O psychology is the application of psychology to understand employee behaviors in work settings. Nonetheless, organizations are entities that are embedded within societies, dealing with similar challenges. The complex interplay between organizations, their work settings, and societies present opportunities for I-O psychology scholars to examine the implications of micro-organizational research to the societal level, combining 'managerial/organizational relevance' with 'societal relevance'. Therefore, I-O psychologists need to expand their primary constituencies to include the broader society, which is meant to benefit from the activities of businesses. Our research must look at both intended, as well as unintended, consequences of I-O psychology at the broader societal level by taking into account the *human* (i.e., each other, as opposed to manager and/or worker) and *well-being* (as opposed to performance alone) components of the profession's mission.

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Take, for instance, the practice of *telecommuting*, which can yield intended outcomes (i.e., performance and well-being) in both desirable and undesirable directions at the organizational and managerial level, due to variance within contextual factors in remote work arrangements (Table 1 provides details), something Rudolph et al. (2020) aptly explain. Our reading of Rudolph et al.'s recommendations for research and practice, though, are that their recommendations focus on researcher productivity (e.g. leveraging the large workforce currently working remotely; gather data from forced telecommuting time) or organizational policies and practices (e.g. longitudinally study organizational policies and attitudes), and also

that they assume that much of the burden of continued performance and well-being is on the individual (e.g. telecommuter boundary management strategies; participating in additional virtual time for socialization; assuming that productivity should stay the same else "accommodation" need be made). Such well-intended practices can nevertheless create unintended consequences at the societal level, reinforcing and sometimes even exacerbating collective issues.

For example, the vanishing of daily commute due to remote working provides lessons about the reduction of carbon footprint (Butner & Hein, 2020), a desirable effect albeit unintentional. At the same time, remote working has highlighted the importance of digital inequalities and their impact on disadvantaged, or traditionally underrepresented, segments of the population, another unintentional outcome, but this time undesirable. Similarly, beyond the individual worker, telework can also impact, again unwittingly, familial mental and/or physical health, well-being, satisfaction, as well as existing health disparities among higher versus lower socio-economic status (SES) employees' families.

The rich I-O tradition has indicated that mechanisms that explain intended versus unintended effects of work practices are likely to be distinct (e.g. Leslie, 2019). What is needed now more than ever is an examination of the manifestations of these mechanisms that might be of a different degree and form at the societal level. For example, what is teleworking's impact on long-term skills acquisition of different socio-demographic groups, in turn affecting their socio-economic status and occupational mobility? What are the interrelationships between teleworking and family life, and do factors conducive to the success of teleworking come with the cost of familial well-being/health? By underscoring such circumstances and externalities that are related to organizational and work practices and processes, which might not be evident at the organizational level, I-O psychology research can shed light on the

complex and multidimensional psycho-social dynamics of workplace practices at the societal level.

  With this agenda in mind, we illustrate some future research questions in Table 1 about how a change in our research orientation and focus – from managerial to human, and performance to well-being – can help us better understand the implications of organizational practices at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. We hope that this serves as an inspiration for I-O psychology researchers and practitioners to join the broader conversations in the business and management disciplines to rethink and revisit the purpose of the work we do to support the performance as well as well-being of workers, organizations, and society.

Table 1: Teleworking Research and Practice Questions

	Performance	**Well-being**
Managerial/Organizational Relevance	- How to ensure that remote workers work during paid hours? - How can goals and tasks be made more measurable in the context of remote work? - What are the benefits of remote work to organization? - How can remote work be used to reduce costs, e.g., pass on the costs to employees (citing revenue pressures and job losses to reduce bargaining power of employees) or government (tax deductions)? - What lessons does current remote working experience offer about essential and non-essential work, and work that can be performed remotely or not? - What might be the class ceiling effects of telecommuting on task and contextual performance?	- How does remote work affect physical and psychological health and resilience? - How can organizations provide (in a remote working environment) the downtime and transitions that naturally occur in a work environment thereby impacting employee well-being? - How can organizations facilitate engagement and communication among remote workers and their peers? - How does remote work affect work-life balance of employees, work-centrality, workaholism and burnout? - How does isolation induced by remote work affect health (e.g., anxiety, stress, sleeplessness) and lifestyles (e.g., alcoholism, drug use, addiction, food choices)?
Societal Relevance	- How can tasks that cannot be performed remotely be safely continued keeping in mind public health concerns? - What lessons does current remote working experience offer to reduce carbon footprint for work-related travel? - In what ways does telecommuting highlight digital inequality and its impact on disadvantaged or traditionally underrepresented segments of the population? - How does telework impact long-term skills-acquisition of different socio-demographic groups, thereby affecting their socio-economic status and occupational mobility? - In what ways does telecommuting impact the participation of the aging workforce in labor market?	- How does remote work affect mental health and life satisfaction of employees' families? - Does telecommuting affect dual career couples' spousal conflict? What are its impacts on family satisfaction and familial well-being? - What are the effects of telecommuting on family health and safety behaviors at home? - In what ways does remote work impact childcare duties and responsibilities, thereby impacting physical and mental health and well-being of children? - How does telework impact existing health disparities among higher versus lower SES employees' families?

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