

COMMENTARY

# The importance of reflective practices for decision makers: A possible part of the solution for helping the field

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This commentary expands on the focal article's (Hyland, 2023) notion about the importance of reflective and reflexive practice in the field of industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology. Hyland states that reflective practices could be beneficial to everyone, bringing out that it could have benefits across all types of stakeholders in the field of I-O. Nevertheless, with the aim of developing the field, we feel that there is a specific group of I-O professionals that should be targeted first, rather than simultaneously getting everyone on board with reflective and reflexive practices. We argue that reflective practices within the field will be most effective when exhibited by stakeholders with decision-making rights and responsibilities. Although we agree that teaching reflective practices as part of official education would improve the professional (and personal) capacities of I-O psychologists and thus further develop the field, a focus on junior I-Os seems to omit key decision makers (e.g., executives, journal editors, and those in similar leadership positions) who actively shape the field now. We introduce the importance of reflectivity across generations of I-O professionals and discuss the benefits of extending the emphasis of reflective practices to key stakeholders, decision makers, and practitioners in addition to trainees.

## The importance of reflectivity across generations

*“One of the great liabilities of history is that all too many people fail to remain awake through great periods of social change. Every society has its protectors of status quo and its fraternities of the indifferent who are notorious for sleeping through revolutions. Today, our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change.” - Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Society is in a rapid flux of change that has never been seen before. As I-Os, our aim is to understand social mechanisms and implement respective changes at workplaces that would be applicable now, not that were needed 10 years ago. But the issue lies in the fact that the underlying values and principles that guide us were developed in a world that differs drastically from today and thus can be outdated, which questions whether we are able to adjust to new ideas that would benefit the field of I-O with lasting change. In such a world, the decision makers of I-O (executives, journal editors, reviewers, stakeholders, etc.) could benefit from the habit of reflective practices, as it would help them determine their guiding values and principles, and in turn, how these values are in concurrence with where we believe the field should go.

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Graduate I-O programs aim to teach students the majority of KSAOs that they might need to enter the field. This is where the focal article's argument makes logical sense: If a systematic change is desired to be implemented, graduate (and undergraduate) education would be the most ideal point of intervention. Although trainees are the future of I-O, the changes in the field come from leadership executed by decision makers. Thus, if we would like to see changes now, the point of intervention would be the people who are already in higher positions, rather than the ones who will be there in 10 or 20 years. Furthermore, because younger generations are more flexible and naturally more liberal (Horn & Cattell, 1967; Schaie & Hertzog, 1983), it might be easier to get them on the reflective practice train, and thus, reflective practice within them could be established quickly. Thus, reflective practice is (a) more important for the I-Os who are already in leadership positions to be able to take a step back, conduct introspection, and calibrate their values and behaviors to be more in line with the actual goals of the field and themselves; and is also (b) harder to become routine practice for them due to the lack of an easy intervention point and lower natural plasticity. So, although it is harder to implement, it makes it more important to preach the importance of reflective practices among already established I-O psychologists. Even though trainees and fresh graduates could be extremely knowledgeable and conducting cutting-edge high-quality science supported by reflective and reflexive practices, if it isn't recognized by senior stakeholders with publication and funding decision-making authority, and who also might be the trainers of new I-Os themselves, positive feedback and progress may be curtailed. Thus, younger scholars, despite possibly being reflective and well intentioned, may continue to follow the patterns of the field that have existed for decades. Through this mechanism, we question how much innovation and development of the field is truly possible. In the following paragraphs, we discuss several professional and personal benefits of the key stakeholders and decision makers in our field engaging in reflectivity.

### **Benefit #1. Accounting for subjectivity in key decision-making processes**

A study conducted by Peters and Ceci (1982) illustrates the potential benefits of reflective practices to key decision makers and stakeholders. In the context of the study, 12 previously published research papers in prestigious psychology journals were resubmitted for publication. Three of the papers were recognized, and eight of nine papers that went through the review process were rejected. What makes this study interesting is the fact that the main comments recommending rejection were related to methodological shortcomings. This study clearly shows the subjectivity of the reviewing process, and although conducted 40 years ago, it seems that the situation has not improved much (for discussions about biases related to the peer-reviewing process, see Bazoukis, 2020, Lee et al., 2013, and Sato et al., 2021). Although many aspects of the peer-review process can be criticized, it frequently comes down to the *subjectivity* of the process, such as the different biases and underlying reasons, as to why reviewers (and editors) make their decisions (Eve et al., 2021). Realizing those biases and understanding how they guide their decisions through reflective and reflexive practice would likely help reviewers and editors to make more thorough decisions that better align with their true aims.

### **Benefit #2. Becoming aware of personal shortcomings and biases**

In the focal article, Hyland asks the following question: "How do we account for our humanness as we practice our profession?" (p. 16). The importance of objective and bias-free research has been emphasized for many decades. However, we should also ask: How does reflectivity lead to improved practices and decision making? Olmos-Vega and colleagues (2022) argued that engaging in these processes might provide a way to become aware of personal, interpersonal, and

contextual factors, and provide a way to evaluate one's own shortcomings. In our everyday lives, we make decisions based on values and principles that are mostly molded by our surrounding environment and the personal and professional experiences that have shaped us as people. Often, these values and principles are deeply rooted and not adaptive. Thus, reflective practices would aid an individual to understand the reasons behind their own beliefs, values, and principles, and through them, biases and how they influence their everyday life, research, work, and even society. Aside from the numerous personal benefits, key stakeholders engaging in reflective practices could tremendously benefit the field in terms of creating a culture where this practice is valued and accepted, as well as passing knowledge and advice to less experienced academics and practitioners.

### **Benefit #3. Fostering change in discipline**

As Wilkinson (1988) put it, “one of our most powerful tools in working for change is a serious application of the concept of reflexivity” (p. 498). Wilkinson believed that reflexivity can help us think about how our subjective experience determines the kind of research we conduct, how epistemological foundation and methodological preferences limit the methodology we use, and how dominating ideology restricts the evaluation to which we are accustomed. Specifically, reflexivity provides us the opportunities to notice the shackles and encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and rebellious ideas in our discipline. It helps us create transformative change in science. Although not all change can be good, change is needed for natural development and to aid the field to find its path and get over the existential crisis. Reflexivity as a practice could play a guiding role in deciding which changes could be beneficial and thus help the field to become better established.

If we focus on the idea that proper reflection increases self-awareness and self-confidence, improves decision making and performance, and enhances the ability to manage complexity and ambiguity (Lyons, 2010), then this should be something for which everyone would like to strive. But for some reason, reflective practices are still not as popular as they could be. In the next sections, we focus on the challenges that are associated with implementing these practices.

### **Challenge #1: Personal challenges**

Engaging reflectivity poses several obstacles even for the most experienced researchers and professionals in many ways. Submitting oneself to thorough self-analysis requires vulnerability and the ability to confront one's own limitations, mistakes, and shortcomings. Even the most experienced researchers and practitioners may feel threatened, perhaps resistant, when critically interrogating themselves (Hsiung, 2008). Finlay (2002) described the process as a “swamp” in which individuals must navigate between interminable deconstructions and self-analysis. The process of reflectivity is further complicated by its idiosyncratic nature; there is no recipe for best practice (Probst, 2015). Sometimes, the most important things lie deep inside and might be difficult to access. In general, humans have a natural tendency of being unreflective. Mortari (2015) stated:

Most of cognitive life happens without us being aware of it, and this condition is problematic, because from the constructivist viewpoint the products of the mind (opinions, beliefs, theories, . . .) have a performative power on the lifeworld, in the sense that they imply the basic criteria by which we decide what to do and what not to do. (p. 2)

This suggests that reflection is not a natural ability that we possess but rather a conscious cognitive process that requires effort and the use of different personal resources.

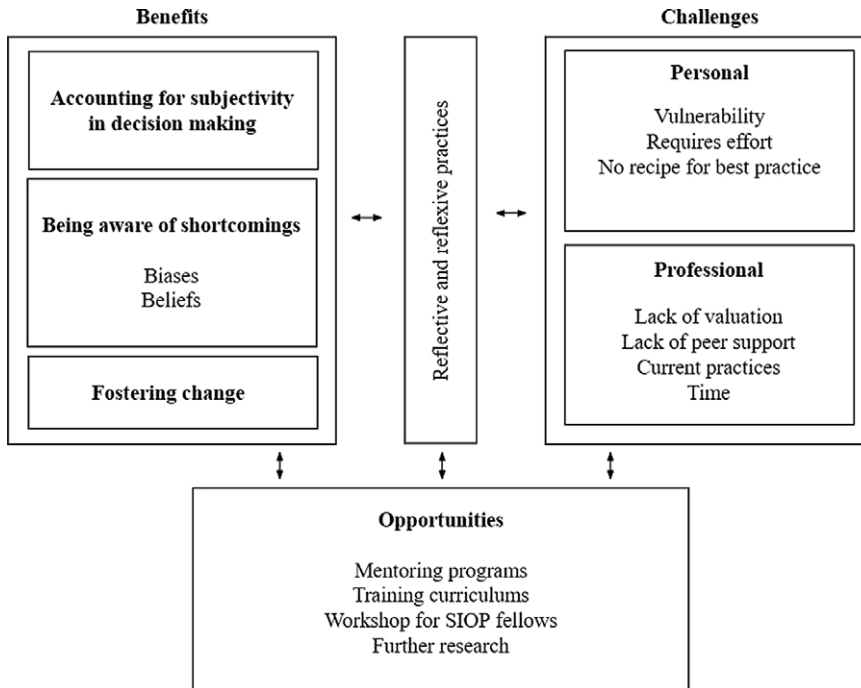


Figure 1. Reflective and Reflexive Practices Among Key I-O Decision Makers.

## Challenge #2: Professional challenges

In a fairly recent study, Probst (2015) found that a lack of valuation by journals, colleagues, funders, and administrators posed a major obstacle when engaging in reflective and reflexive practices. One participant of the study stated that: “You need colleagues who believe in and practice reflexivity to be able to maintain your own resilience.” (p. 45). The way academia and organizational practices are currently set up may inhibit engagement in reflectivity and reflexivity at a deeper level. Oftentimes, scholars and practitioners face pressure from peers, co-researchers, and journals in regard to adherence to certain procedures and deadlines. This pressure, paired with additional occupational commitments (i.e., teaching, advising, etc.), prohibits the ability to thoughtfully prepare, draft, and submit reflective and coherent thoughts. This challenge further emphasizes the importance of a collective effort from key decision makers and stakeholders in I-O in terms of having the ability and capacity to implement a systematic change. By being the role models for the field, the main stakeholders and decision makers of the field have the opportunity of creating a culture of accepting and encouraging reflective and reflexive practices that would help remove these obstacles.

## Opportunities

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, a systematic change may be needed to promote reflective and reflexive practices in our field. A potential way of involving key decision makers and stakeholders in collaboration with younger scholars and practitioners in reflective–reflexive practices could be through the development of mentoring programs. As part of the mentoring program, early career scholars and practitioners could be paired with senior I-O psychologists and engage in these practices together. Furthermore, the development of training curricula on reflective and reflexive practices is also much needed in our field. As Hyland mentioned, these practices

are not considered common in I-O psychology, and we lack clear guidelines on how to engage in these practices. Thus, training materials and curricula should be developed and made available to the public. Moreover, research on the benefits and challenges of reflective–reflexive practices should be encouraged in order to gain a better understanding of these practices and their potential implications.

## Conclusion

The focal article brought attention to the importance of reflective and reflexive practices in the field of I-O psychology. As a way of promoting reflective–reflexive practices, the focal article mainly discussed educating younger scholars and practitioners. Although we recognize that this is important across the whole field of I-O psychology, our commentary focused on emphasizing the importance of key decision makers and stakeholders in the process. In our commentary, we highlighted the potential personal and professional benefits of this influential group of I-O psychologists engaging in these practices, along with potential challenges they may face along the way. Despite the potential challenges of the endeavor, we, as a discipline, should try and use all the possible ways to make engaging reflective and reflexive practices as being a standard part of an I-O psychologist's career. The main takeaways of the commentary are illustratively concluded in Figure 1.

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