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## The Early Years of Industrial and Organizational Psychology.

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**Andrew J. Vinchur.** *The Early Years of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. xi + 363 pp., figs., tables, app., bibl., indexes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. £28.99 (paper). ISBN 9781107671683.

This is, in one sense, a very ambitious book, aiming to provide a “comprehensive picture” (p. ix) of the early years of what is now known as industrial-organizational (IO) psychology. It has a global scope (although the United States receives most attention) and covers roughly half a century, from the late 1800s to the 1930s. Apparently not content with this chronological restriction, Andrew Vinchur has added a twenty-page appendix sketching developments from the 1940s to the present day. In another sense, the aim of this book is modest, precisely because it provides an overview of the early years of IO psychology rather than proposing a new take on this history. The strength of the book lies in the wealth of facts it presents, not in its analysis or narrative.

If one is willing to accept its objective, there is much to enjoy in *The Early Years of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. The context of the emergence of industrial psychology is described *in extenso*, with due attention to developments in Europe and Asia as well as the United States and a separate chapter devoted to early research into the measurement of individual differences. Next, acknowledging that any choice for a starting point of the history of IO psychology is arbitrary, Vinchur lets his treatment begin with the research into worker fatigue in Europe in the late 1800s and the psychology of advertising that occupied American psychologists from the early 1900s. The latter topic receives little attention in the rest of the book, on the grounds that it is currently not considered part of IO psychology. We do not learn what happened with the research into fatigue. Instead, the early work on employee selection and vocational guidance is discussed, as well as that on performance appraisal, training, and human factors. The next chapter, on industrial psychology in World War I, is the best of the book, because here the facts are held together by a single context. The chapter that follows, on the other hand, on the postwar expansion of IO psychology, is admirably international in its scope but somewhat lacking in coherence. Still, for those who are used to a North American perspective there is a lot to learn here.

Chapter 7, on employee selection, is strong in its detailed discussion of the development of methodological thinking regarding validation and in the extensive overview of types of tests that it offers. Chapters on the teaching of industrial psychology, on its institutionalization and professionalization, and on the early years of organizational psychology follow. Vinchur’s conclusion is optimistic: IO psychology has made impressive progress since its inception, has become an important and beneficial factor in industry, and continues to improve its theories and practices.

There are points at which I would have preferred a bit more historiographical finesse. For example, in his discussion of the attempts to distinguish industrial psychology from the work of charlatans and pseudoscientists Vinchur stays too close to the categories of the psychologists, rather than describing how they were constructed and contested. For example: Why did Katherine Blackford’s “character analysis” based on physiological characteristics end up on the side of pseudo-science, whereas the Army Alpha and Beta, the intelligence tests that seemed to show that African Americans had an average mental age of 10.41 years, while contentious, still counted as science? Vinchur seems to underwrite this categorization but doesn’t scrutinize how it came about. Similarly, the concept of “the scientific method,” which Vinchur uses several times, seems to me to hide too much diversity to be useful in a historical text. It should be a topic rather than a resource.

Sometimes the text becomes a bit too encyclopedic and the reader is left wondering what the significance of this or that fact is. What are we to make of the fact that there were eleven psychotechnical institutes in Czechoslovakia in 1926? Is that a lot? Why did Emil Kraepelin, better known for his work on the classification of mental disorders, conduct research on “the distribution of work and on work length” (p. 135)? At such moments the absence of an overarching narrative or argument is keenly felt. But that is not the aim of this book. It is primarily an overview of the history of IO psychology, and as such it is impressive in its offerings and scope.

**Maarten Derksen**

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