Integrating IOOB and JDM Through Process-Oriented Research

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One of the most fascinating and counterintuitive insights from negotiation theory is that differences, rather than similarities, open up opportunities for value creation (Raiffa, 2002). Because of different values, beliefs, and perspectives, parties can benefit from their complementarities. Ironically though, negotiators tend to prefer negotiating with similar others, with others they like, presumably because negotiators expect interactions to proceed more smoothly. Differences make interaction more difficult but also potentially more rewarding, if managed correctly.

I suspect the same is true for the fields of industrial–organizational psychology and organizational behavior (IOOB) and judgment and decision making (JDM). These fields are very different in their research questions, methodology, and theorizing, as the focal article pointed out (Dalal et al., 2010). As a result, researchers from the two fields may rarely collaborate because of the difficulties expected in working with someone who does research so differently. Yet, if the negotiation analogy is correct, integration of IOOB and JDM has the potential to create a lot of “joint value.” Thus, I wholeheartedly agree with the focal article’s main argument: The fields of JDM and IOOB have much to give to each other. As someone who started out doing basic decision-making research (e.g., Reb, 2008) and who has steadily moved toward integrating JDM and IOOB research (e.g., Reb & Cropanzano, 2007), I might add that bridging the two fields is also intellectually rewarding.

Focus on Decision Processes as Part of Theory-Driven Research

It is interesting that decision making once did play an important role in organizational scholarship in general and IOOB in particular (examples are the pioneering work of Simon and March, or work on rater biases). For a variety of reasons, IOOB’s interest has since turned away from the more cognitive approach of decision making toward the emotional, social, and cultural. Fair enough. However, I believe that, partly facilitated by the more widespread use of sophisticated data analysis tools such as mediation analysis and multilevel modeling, now would be an excellent time to start another effort at integrating the fields of JDM and IOOB in theory-driven, process-oriented research.

The construct of a decision could play an important role in such process-oriented, multilevel research. I suggest that a decision can be thought of as a bottleneck into which a variety of factors, such as personality, values, beliefs, judgments, and preferences, are condensed through the decision process. This is shown in the basic model below (which, for simplicity, does not include chance and other factors that

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affect outcomes without going through the decision bottleneck).

Various Inputs → Decision Process → Decision → Implementation → Outcomes

For example, when a company decides on a new CEO, numerous factors at different levels are condensed into that bottleneck of having to make a choice among a relatively small number of candidates. The choice, when successfully implemented, then leads to a variety of consequences, again at different levels (e.g., CEO performance, organizational performance, and organizational culture). Hopefully, this model and example clarify that the judgment biases often associated with the JDM literature are not the only factors that determine decision processes and choices. Instead, studies of decision making can include a variety of factors and levels, including cognitive, emotional, social, cultural, personality, group, and organizational.

An excellent example of this theory-driven, process-oriented approach can be found in the work by Mitchell, Lee, and collaborators on the unfolding model of turnover, which describes the different decision processes that can lead to turnover (e.g., Lee, Mitchell, Weiss, & Fireman, 1996). Interestingly, some of these processes fit a more rational decision model, whereas others are more automatic and emotion driven. Further, turnover decisions can be linked to broad antecedents such as job embeddedness. Another great example is image theory (e.g., Beach & Mitchell, 1990), which provides a theory of behavior at the workplace through the lens of decision making. Because image theory has explicitly been tailored to describe decision making in organizations, it lends itself better than most theories of decision making to integrating typical IOOB variables.

A common approach to IOOB–JDM articles is to take an interesting finding from JDM regarding how decisions are made, apply it to an IOOB context, and show that the JDM-independent variable (say, a cognitive bias) explains a significant amount of variance in an IOOB-dependent variable (say, a performance rating). This can be a great contribution to our understanding of how certain important decisions (e.g., selection decisions) come about. But in order to get into more theory-oriented journals, the question arises: What is the theoretical contribution? Doing theory-driven, process-oriented IOOB–JDM research can meet the challenge of getting such interdisciplinary work into top journals that require theoretical contributions. Ideally, such research will move not only one but both fields forward theoretically and empirically.

The applicability of a decision process model is fairly obvious for the study of workplace decisions such as selection, termination, turnover, performance appraisals, and investment decisions, and I believe it has a lot to offer to researchers studying such decisions. However, to a considerable extent, IOOB research is concerned with broader outcome constructs, in particular performance. Here, the applicability is perhaps less obvious. From a conceptual view, a decision and its outcomes can be roughly equated with a performance episode. Performance could be considered as the aggregation of decision outcomes over a certain period and certain performance dimensions. Thus, although less straightforward, the application of a decision-process model may be possible in the study of broader outcome variables as well.

**Encourage Collaboration**

Unfortunately, there are a number of institutional and practical barriers for researchers trying to bridge the two fields, in addition to expected difficulties of collaborating described above. One of the practical problems is that with the ever-increasing number of articles published, it is difficult enough to keep abreast of one field let alone two. A resulting danger is that, because of the lack of depth in one area, the resulting research will not be at the cutting edge of at least one of the two fields. For example, an
IOOB researcher with limited familiarity of the JDM field may know about judgment biases, but may know little about more recent research. An excellent solution to this problem is using the expertise of different researchers through collaboration. In other words, in order to integrate IOOB with JDM research, we do not necessarily need more individuals who are experts in both areas, such as the outstanding researchers featured in the focal article; more collaboration between IOOB and JDM researchers can serve the same purpose.

How can such collaborations be encouraged? For one thing, institutions should pay more than lip service to the idea of interdisciplinary research. For universities, this could mean facilitating, valuing, and rewarding such interdisciplinary projects even if they are more risky and less likely to result in publications. Universities could also establish interdisciplinary research centers that bring IOOB and JDM together.

For journals, this could mean, for example, doing special issues on interdisciplinary IOOB–JDM research and appreciating experimental research more. Professional associations, such as SIOP, can play an important role as well. For example, the conference of the Society of Personality and Social Psychology has added a JDM preconference to its annual main conference. Perhaps SIOP could similarly feature a JDM preconference, special JDM–IOOB sessions, or JDM–IOOB miniconferences.

When I started working at the intersection between JDM and IOOB, I was both fascinated and frustrated at times by some of the difficulties. But over time, frustrations became fewer and excitement about such projects remained. Hopefully, the same will be true for the two fields of IOOB and JDM!

References


