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COMMENTARY

Not all "small business" is the same, and I-O has shoulders to stand on

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Although I'm heartened to see a call for I-Os to research small businesses, I have two points to emphasize and extend from the focal article (Zhou et al., 2024), to help guide such efforts.

First, though they differ from large businesses in many ways, small businesses are far from a uniform entity to be studied. As Zhou et al. note, nearly 100% of businesses can be defined as small in one way or another. Logically, then, we cannot consider small businesses to be a uniform population; this would imply that nearly all organizations are alike! Zhou et al. suggest that a CEO with 10 employees has markedly different experiences than a CEO of 10,000 employees; I would add that a CEO with 10 employees has a markedly different experience than a CEO of 20, 50, or 100 employees (Brawley & Pury, 2017), even though all of those are considered a "small" business. In addition to business size, I encourage I-Os to consider the key substantive factors that meaningfully differentiate the population of small businesses, such as the owner's individual differences (e.g., gender, locus of control), different reasons for entering business ownership (such as necessity vs. opportunity), and so on (Brawley Newlin, 2020). Doing this will facilitate the practical application of I-O research on small business, by specifying and understanding the boundary conditions of our findings.

More generally, there is ample literature specific to small business that I-Os should review when building our own relevance to these organizations, which leads to my second point. Rather than a takeaway message being that small businesses have received little direct research attention so far, the takeaway should be that small businesses have received little direct research *published in I-O journals*. I make this point not to diminish the call for I-O's attention to small business, but to help I-Os avoid missing out on or recreating existing work. There's plenty to learn from, and to cite! It just isn't in I-O journals (cf. Zhou et al.), so we need to prioritize interdisciplinarity as we work on this "new" topic (e.g., Marquez et al., 2021).

There are numerous journals that publish research specifically about small business and entrepreneurship. In Table 1, I suggest relevant outlets for review by I-Os interested in working on small business research. One such example—also briefly mentioned by the focal article—is *Journal of Small Business Management*. This journal has been publishing articles since 1963, making it older than eight of the "top 10" I-O outlets. A search of the focal article's selected research topics (teams and leadership) within *Journal of Small Business Management* yields 560 articles mentioning "team" and 1,123 articles mentioning "leadership" in just the past 5 years. For example, on the topic of leadership, Renko et al. (2015) conceptualize and develop a measure of entrepreneurial leadership, and Miao et al. (2019) link this construct to psychological safety and team performance. Although articles in these journals often take a different perspective than an I-O might, there is still considerable literature to inform our efforts here.

Doing interdisciplinary research, though, comes with many challenges: There are not only institutional and policy barriers (e.g., how departments are physically organized, what sources of

Table 1. A Selection of Scholarly Journals Relevant to Small Business Research

Journal titles
Entrepreneurship Research Journal
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice
Family Business Review
International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research
International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business
International Small Business Journal
Journal of Business Venturing
Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship
Journal of Entrepreneurship
Journal of Family Business Strategy
Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development
Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Journal of Small Business Management
Small Business Economics
Small Enterprise Research
Small Group Research

funding are available, what are the relevant target journals), but the very nature of disciplinary specialization—such as graduate training in I-O—can create cognitive barriers to interdisciplinary work (MacLeod, 2018). Some partial solutions to these challenges include building an awareness of our epistemological values and methodological tendencies (MacLeod, 2018) and methodically reading for inspiration and knowledge outside of I-O outlets (Jiang et al., 2015). In particular, I-Os aiming to research a particular topic "in small business" should work to carefully identify and critically consider relevant constructs in the small business literature. For example, an interest in small business "leadership" may lead to reading about "entrepreneurial leadership." Defined by some as "a type of leadership that creates visionary scenarios that can be used to assemble and mobilize a 'supporting cast' of participants who become committed by the vision to the discovery and exploitation of strategic value creation" (Gupta et al., 2004, p. 242), entrepreneurial leadership is a heavily researched topic in the small business context. But this definition may ring some I-O bells of transformational leadership (e.g., with dimensions of vision, inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, supportive leadership, and personal recognition, per Rafferty & Griffin, 2004). Is this a case of the jangle fallacy? Or are there unique attributes of entrepreneurial leadership that would expand an "I-O" study of the topic, like a focus on innovation and strategy? What about their antecedents and outcomes? (Thankfully, there's also recent literature exploring exactly this question; see Chandranathan in press, and Ravet-Brown et al. 2024.) Armed with this new knowledge, I-Os can determine how existing work should inform their own small business research. Similarly, while conducting literature reviews, I-Os should remain open to surprising findings; for example, despite their relatively limited resources, even the smallest of businesses have some unique advantages, such as increased flexibility, close supervision, and a family-like environment (Brawley & Pury, 2017). Starting with a well-informed understanding of the small business literature will accelerate I-O's relevance here, making it so that we do not have to start from scratch.

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