

# Meet Frank Schmidt

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## What inspired you to pursue your PhD in I-O psychology?

I was a biology major for over two years as an undergraduate. I even had 13 hours of advanced placement credits in biology when I entered college. Early in my junior year when I took the Intro Psych course, I found the textbook had a good chapter on I/O Psychology. I knew immediately that that was what I wanted to do. So I switched majors.

## What drew you to Purdue specifically for your graduate studies?

In my senior year I researched 10 different I/O programs; this included looking at the *Journal of Applied Psychology* and *Personnel Psychology* to see which programs were producing the most research articles. I found that the Purdue program was the largest and most productive program. Just to be safe I applied to all the programs and was admitted to all of them but Purdue was my first choice. To top it off, Purdue offered me a lucrative NDEA (National Defense Education Act) Fellowship. So there was no contest.

## What was Purdue like when you were a graduate student?

Three things stand out in my mind. First, there were a lot of PhD students—25 or so—and there was a friendly, cooperative atmosphere among the students. For example, students would share class notes and study for tests together. I later learned that in some other I/O programs this was not the case. The PAGES organization, with its meetings and “regression sessions” at local bars was a big part of this atmosphere. Second, the general orientation of the program was very applied and empirical rather than theoretical, which I understand is different from the program today. Third, the I/O faculty were really great, especially Bill Owens and Hubert Brogden. Ben Winer in the Quant program was a fantastic statistics teacher.

## What are some of your fondest memories from your time at Purdue?

These involve extra-curricular activities. One was the canoe trip down the Wabash River organized by the PhD students. This was the first time I'd ever seen a gar—a really ugly prehistoric fish. Another outing was a rock climbing outing, also a first for me. Then there was the expedition I organized with Jerry Olson, Jim Heimbach, and Ralph Jacobsen, three other I/O PhD students, into the wild mountains of Eastern Kentucky. We camped there in

Deliverance country and excavated Indian rock shelters for artifacts and returned alive. But Ralph Jacobsen was so worried he kept a revolver in his sleeping bag at night.

## **How did your research interests grow, develop, and shift during your time in graduate school?**

I came in with strong interests in job performance, personnel selection, and testing, but these interests later expanded to include minors in industrial sociology and anthropology. My interests in psychological measurement and statistics also intensified; training in these areas was very useful to me later in my career.

## **Was there someone who had a particularly large impact on you (e.g., a mentor) during your time at Purdue? If so, how did they influence you?**

In my case, it was two faculty members. The first was Hubert Brogden, the strongest of the faculty in statistics and methodology; I learned a tremendous amount from him, both applied and basic skills. The other was Bill Owens. His course on Individual and Group Differences opened a whole new world for me: mental abilities, personality traits, interests, behavior genetics, etc.

## **How would you say your personal background and life experiences impacted your research and career?**

The 2.5 years I spent as an undergraduate biology major influenced my general outlook on psychological research. I felt that too many areas of psychology, including I/O psychology, paid too little attention to the biological foundations of human behavior. Today that has changed. For example, Robert Plomin has just received the APA Distinguished Scientific Contributions Award for his work in behavior genetics. Also, Rich Arvey has published a book on the role of behavior genetics in organizational behavior.

## **What would you say has been your secret to a successful career?**

The most important determinant has been working with really smart people. I mentioned Hubert Brogden at Purdue. And for over 30 years I worked with Jack Hunter, the smartest person I've ever known. Also, I have been blessed with extremely smart and hard-working PhD students. Another important factor has been just stubborn perseverance in the face of opposition. For example, it took 20 years for our work in validity generalization and meta-analysis to be fully accepted. There was a lot of vocal opposition for about 20 years.

## **Looking back, is there anything that you would have done differently in your career?**

No, I wouldn't change anything: not the decision to join the Michigan State I/O faculty in 1970, or the decision to go to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management in Washington in 1974, or the decision to leave and go to University of Iowa Business College in 1985. I'd do it all over again.

## **You have a very diverse career, with experience in both research and applied settings. Of all the work you did, what did you find to be the most fulfilling as an I-O Psychologist?**

While I loved applied work in consulting and also being involved in selection court cases, what was most fulfilling was having a major impact on theory and practice in I/O psychology through the development of validity generalization, meta-analysis, selection utility, test fairness, etc. It was even more gratifying when the meta-analysis work was recognized as having a wider impact beyond I/O psychology on psychology in general and other social sciences [see W. R. Shadish & J. D. Lecy, (2015). The meta-analytic big bang. *Research Synthesis Methods*, *6*, 246 - 264]. I have always felt that I/O should not just borrow from other areas of psychology but should contribute new knowledge to those other areas. In the years since I retired in 2012 I have tried to do more of that [e.g., see the following: Schmidt, F. L. & Oh, I-S (2016). The crisis of confidence in research findings in psychology: Is lack of replication the real problem. Or is it something else? *Archives of Scientific Psychology*, *4*, 32 – 37; Schmidt, F. L. (2014). A general theoretical integrative model of individual differences in interests, abilities, personality traits, and academic and occupational achievement. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *9*, 211 – 218; Schmidt, F. L. (2017). Beyond questionable research methods: The role of omitted relevant research in the credibility of research. *Archives of Scientific Psychology*, *5*, 32 – 41.]

## **What were some of your favorite projects throughout your career?**

While I and my graduate students have had some great applied projects for companies and even consulting firms, my favorites have been the research projects like validity generalization and meta-analysis that have had the most far reaching and lasting impact on I/O psychology and other social science areas.

## **Based on your experience, what advice do you have for managing one's career?**

Always follow your interests regardless of opposition. Be persevering and stubborn if you are sure you are right and can prove it. Be willing to fight back against erroneous opponents.

## **Throughout your career, I am sure you have witnessed many changes within the field of I-O Psychology. Are there any changes that you think have been particularly beneficial and/or detrimental?**

The biggest beneficial change came decades ago: the addition of organizational psychology to industrial psychology. The most important detrimental change has been the increasing neglect over time in I/O programs of individual differences coursework and training in measurement. Another big change has been the migration of I/Os to consulting firms due to business outsourcing. When I was a young I/O every business of any size had a stable of I/Os on their staff—Ford, General Motors, GE, Sears, AT&T, etc. Now all this work is done by outside I/O consultants.

## **What do you feel are some of the biggest challenges to our field today?**

I believe the Big Data movement is going to be a major challenge. I/O must confront this challenge or the Big Data movement will eat a big chunk of our lunch. Based on atheoretical data search findings, it will attempt to replace many I/O services to organizations (e.g., in personal selection, employee motivation, etc.).

## **What do you see the role of I-O psychologists being moving forward in today's society?**

One new role that I/O will have to assume is in the management of sexual harassment issues in organizations.

## **What types of experiences would you recommend that students pursue during graduate school?**

Prepare yourself for both applied and theoretical (basic) work. Keep in mind the scientist-practitioner ideal. Working on applied problems can lead to discoveries that have important basic and theoretical implications. In my case, that's how validity generalization and meta-analysis developed [see Schmidt, F. L. (2015). History and development of the Schmidt-Hunter meta-analysis methods. *Research Synthesis Methods*, 6, 232 -239]