Throughout one’s professional life, there are many paths that might be taken and many choices to make. Increasingly, one decision confronting a psychologist is whether to remain within the domain of psychology for teaching, scholarship, and service activities or to branch into related disciplines and functions. Here, I review several major choices that one faces and how my choices at these points shaped my journey as a scholar and teacher. These are broken into several categories: work domain, professional focus, and setting.

As a preface, I would mention my own journey has consisted of positions as a psychologist at a liberal arts college in a psychology department, psychologist at a business school, psychologist as an expatriate and consultant, and a transition from researcher/teacher to administrator (Department Chair and Dean of a business school).

**Work Domain**

For a number of psychologists whose background is based on more applied aspects of the field (e.g., industrial/organizational, social, clinical), there is often a relatively obvious path from psychology into related fields such as a professional school (e.g., business), industry (e.g., consulting, human resources, assessment), or government (e.g., federal agencies such as the Center for Disease Control, or the Office of Naval Research). Although my own experiences took me into consulting within industry, many psychologists have taken a more significant step by taking a position applying their trade in industry or government. APS’s own Alan Kraut is one such example in his role as the APS Executive Director. Psychologists have chosen to work in various areas within organizations including human resources, organizational development, training, executive coaching, and even strategic planning, as well as working as in-house experts on topics such as forensic psychology, attitude change and consumer choice, marketing, and healthcare practices, to name just a few. Sports psychologists populate the field and clinical psychologists counsel CEO’s of major corporations.

The psychologist who works in industry may well end up conducting field research using quasi-experimental designs or case-study analysis. He or she may also play a teaching role in a company as well by leading in-house educational programs on topics ranging from leadership to diversity initiatives to global teams to organizational design and change.

**Professional Focus**

Although the work domain captures differences in the oft-cited dichotomy of traditional versus applied domains, professional focus captures a relative emphasis on the distribution of activities among research, teaching, and service domains. An obvious trade-off facing many psychologists relates to research versus teaching. Some individuals seek a highly focused career on basic research pursuing purely academic goals such as theory development, establishment of scholarly reputation, and the perpetuation
of intellectual pursuits through the production of doctoral students. In contrast, other individuals seek a focus on teaching as an ultimate goal and gravitate toward less research-intensive and more teaching-related positions.

My first position was at the Claremont Colleges in California in which scholarly activity was present and pursued, but not at the expense of teaching in a significant and impactful fashion. During my brief stint at Claremont McKenna College, I had the honor of working alongside a number of very renowned scholars, but teaching was never lost in the professional mission. Although many researchers at major research universities pride themselves on quality teaching, the teaching incentive structure and push toward classroom innovation and collaborative learning environments tend to be weaker than that found in schools having a strong teaching mission.

Interestingly, this pseudo-dichotomy is much less prevalent in the highest quality business schools. While at London Business School (LBS), I saw instances of non-promotion for very strong researchers because of an inability to be effective in the classroom. Increasingly, the audience of a business school demands very high quality teaching as well as high quality research — and this is a fundamental reason why only a few schools have sufficient resources to shield their researchers from demanding teaching. In my role as a business school dean, I will not support a new hire for someone who either desires to avoid teaching “to have time to focus on research” or who does not have evidence of classroom effectiveness. For the psychologist in a business school, there is yet a third type of demand — effectiveness with executive clients through consulting and executive education. Although my background in industrial/organizational psychology from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, prepared me for a career in research and teaching, it really didn’t provide me with a basis for engaging in executive education; it took a prolonged effort on my part (and colleagues’ patience and mentoring) to develop this skill set.

Setting

A final parameter of increasing relevance for psychologists (as well as many others) is the place where one explores one’s craft. Specifically, there is an increasing demand for individuals to operate across national borders and regions.

With the globalization of business comes the globalization of higher education. In the early years, the globalization of higher education tended not to mimic strongly the path of business. In global business, the early trend consisted of an imperialistic model — having a home country send home country staff to a host country to essentially run copies of the home country in the remote location (e.g., a U.S. company operating in Chile while relying on U.S. expatriate managers to run the operation). This model has given way to an emphasis on either training host country nationals to run their own operations (e.g., a German manager working in Germany for a British company) or even using third country nationals (e.g., an Australian manager working in Jakarta for a Swiss food manufacturer).

However, this pattern of business has not been the dominant model for higher education. For many years, the dominant educational model has been for students from around the world to attend North American or European universities (those often viewed as the most prestigious and advanced). It is only within the past two decades that a number of key institutions have emerged outside of these two regions having sufficient status as to draw nationals away. Universities such as those found in Australia,
Singapore, India, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China have developed a reputation for excellence that is competitive with the finest universities across the globe. Combining this improvement in university education with the increasing difficulty and expense of studying in North America (the United States in particular) has led to a shift in the natural locus of study and education.

Although the path for some psychologists led to a decision to work outside of North America or Europe many decades ago (e.g., my friend and colleague Michael Bond who has spent well over three decades working his research and teaching magic in Japan and Hong Kong), this choice was limited typically to individuals whose focus was cross-cultural psychology or a related area. But the point remained that most professionals choosing to work outside of their home country tended to be from outside of North America or Europe, and they tended to work in these two education dominated regions.

My own decision to practice my craft abroad was a natural extension of my pursuit of cross-cultural organizational behavior and a logical extension of my various sojourns for the sake of research and teaching opportunities. In my case, my first multi-year exposure was a move to LBS after having experienced shorter visits (ranging from a month to eight months) in a number of Asian countries (China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Thailand, Singapore) as well as Israel, Ghana, and England. So in many respects, my decision to take on a faculty role in London was a very natural extension of my research (and life) interest in cultural work. However, my next choice point not only involved a locale shift (to Singapore) but a reassessment of my career objectives when I decided to become the Dean of the National University of Singapore Business School.

In many ways, a shift of setting (national or regional locale) may represent a rather significant commitment of one’s work domain and personal resources but, ironically, it might not require a fundamental readjustment of one’s professional emphasis. Although there were significant and meaningful differences for my work at LBS versus other employers (e.g., University of Minnesota), the differences tended to be one of relative emphasis rather than fundamental differences in kind. At LBS, the demands for high quality executive education are ever present alongside the demands for high quality scholarship. At Minnesota, I found the demand for scholarly work comparable (albeit, a slightly different focus) but with a milder emphasis on executive education.

“I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I needed to be.”

– Douglas Adams