For his diverse empirical and conceptual contributions to applied psychology, Frederick P. Morgeson’s integrative research examining how work is structured and how individuals perceive their work has made significant contributions to the field. His research has enhanced our understanding of how to reduce common work-design trade-offs, the accuracy of job analytic information, and the idiosyncratic changes individuals make to their work. His work on team leadership, personnel selection, and theory development has been marked by a variety of experimental and quasi-experimental field research designs that draw from both basic and applied psychological research to address critical theoretical and applied issues.

Frederick P. Morgeson
Award for Distinguished Scientific Early Career Contributions to Psychology

Citation

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Biography

Frederick P. Morgeson is the second child of Marilyn and Eric Morgeson and grandson of the late Mildred and Robert Wall, who have all had a major impact on Morgeson’s personal and professional success. Growing up in Dearborn Heights, Michigan, Morgeson watched his parents single-handedly build a thriving recording studio business, worked on his 1966 Pontiac LeMans (dubbed the “LeMonster” for its prodigious horsepower and appetite for gasoline), and played a variety of sports, culminating in a senior year state-meet appearance in the shot put. Beyond an appetite for books, however, there was little academic interest at this point in Morgeson’s life.

Like many college freshmen, Morgeson lacked a clear sense of his career goals and spent two years at Eastern Michigan University as a business major. Yet the popularity of the major made it difficult to register for the required business courses, so by his junior year Morgeson found himself in a handful of psychology and philosophy courses. This was a fortuitous and life-altering turn of events, as Morgeson soon realized his intrinsic interest in the science of human behavior and the world of ideas.

Upon graduation, Morgeson went to work for his parents, helping to manage the family business. Although this experience had its moments, it became clear to Morgeson that managing a recording studio was not his calling. As a result, Morgeson began to take graduate classes in psychology at Eastern Michigan University on a part-time basis. He had the good fortune to work with Monroe Friedman on a project that involved developing behavioral models to help older consumers avoid being defrauded. This experience proved crucial, because it exposed Morgeson to applied psychological research, which was radically different from the clinical and experimental research he had known up to this point. It was during this time that it became clear to Morgeson that the field of industrial and organizational (I/O) psychology would allow him to integrate his interests in psychology, business, and applied research. Realizing what path to take, Morgeson began to work full time on his master’s thesis on leadership and work design, with Stuart Karabenick as his advisor. Karabenick provided crucial support and encouragement throughout Morgeson’s undergraduate and graduate career.

Two more key events in Morgeson’s life occurred in 1994. First, he married Deborah, who would provide the counsel and partnership that sustains him to this day. Second, he was admitted to the I/O psychology program at Purdue University (although not until he had spent some time on the wait list). Having finally found his calling, Morgeson had a singular focus in graduate school. He realized that his success was dependent on three things. First, he realized his distinctive skills involved being able to integrate and synthesize disparate areas of research. As such, he focused on developing the conceptual and methodological skills that would enable him to be a successful researcher. Second, he realized that virtually every person in graduate school was smart and that motivation and the ability to persevere through adversity were more important for success. Fortunately, Morgeson had developed an entrepreneurial work ethic through his years working in the family business as he put himself through college by working nights and weekends. Third, he realized that the most successful research resulted from collaboration with others and that developing strong mentoring relationships would be essential to his own success.
With these realizations, Morgeson pursued three distinct research tracks in graduate school. First, he began to work with Michael Campion in the Department of Management at Purdue. Campion served as an outstanding model of the scientist–practitioner, blending applied research, consulting, and extensive publishing experience. This relationship has yielded research across multiple applied domains, including job analysis, work design, work teams, and personnel selection. Second, Morgeson worked with David Hofmann in the I/O psychology group. Hofmann was also an excellent model of the scientist–practitioner, and he and Morgeson shared the belief that one of the key roles of an I/O psychologist was to solve applied organizational problems. Morgeson’s work with Hofmann focused on level of analysis issues and the role leadership can play in high-risk environments. Third, Morgeson felt that he had to establish his own distinctive research identity and thus began to combine his interest in teams and leadership to study the phenomenon of team leadership, work that continues to the present.

After Purdue, Morgeson joined the faculty in the Department of Management at Texas A&M University, where he benefited from the supportive department climate and outstanding colleagues. There was likely no better place to start his career. After two years, the opportunity to return to Michigan presented itself when the Department of Management at Michigan State University offered Morgeson a position. At Michigan State University, Morgeson has been able to work with outstanding colleagues and graduate students in both the management and the I/O psychology departments. There is little doubt that the many relationships developed during his professional career are a key reason for Morgeson’s success.

During his career, Morgeson has pursued research in several different applied areas. One major component of Morgeson’s research involves attempting to understand the nature of work, which includes examining how work is structured as well as how individuals perceive their work. This has resulted in several distinct streams of research that have made significant contributions to the areas of job analysis, work design, and teams. In job analysis, Morgeson proposed and investigated the social and cognitive limitations inherent in descriptions of work. This work represents the first attempt to systematically describe inaccuracy in job analysis, taking job analysis research in a completely new direction.

Morgeson has also studied the ways in which work is structured. He authored a major review of the work design literature, which focused, in part, on the satisfaction–efficiency trade-offs commonly encountered. Morgeson has empirically studied how the choices made during work redesign have implications for this trade-off as well as expanding individuals’ conceptualization of what aspects of work design are important to consider when making redesign decisions. Growing out of his interest in work design, Morgeson has investigated the idiosyncratic changes individuals make to their work and the extent to which these changes can be predicted. This research highlights Morgeson’s boundary-spanning interests, in that it draws from a host of different research areas, including job analysis, work design, and role theory. Teams represent another way to design work, and Morgeson has studied several different team-related topics. One particular interest has been the role of leadership in self-managing team settings. Morgeson has suggested and empirically found that team leaders can play a critical role in managing the range of events that occur in the team context.

Morgeson continues to be interested in the effectiveness of different staffing techniques. His contribution in this area has been one of synthesis, as he has conducted several major narrative and meta-analytic reviews of the employment interview and situational judgment tests, in addition to primary research on selection in team settings. This work in personnel selection is likely to shape research for years to come. Morgeson is also interested in the role of leader–follower relationships and how the quality of those relationships influences a variety of important personal and organizational outcomes. Finally, in addition to these substantive areas, Morgeson has written on theory development, including the development of a general model for building multilevel theories. Prior to his work, there was little guidance about how to link constructs across levels. This model has already been cited by scholars in the development and testing of new theories across a diverse set of research topics. The influence of this article (Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999) is likely to increase as scholars recognize the importance of multilevel theorizing.

Although his research spans a number of diverse areas, Morgeson’s work is united by several themes. First, one overarching feature has been a focus on applied issues in organizational settings. Morgeson feels that examining theoretically relevant issues that also have practical relevance for organizations is at the core of what it means to be a scientist–practitioner. Second, Morgeson has been able to capitalize on his diverse interests and skills in synthesis to bring new insight into the areas within which he works. Third, Morgeson’s research has been characterized by a collaborative spirit. The opportunity to work with so many outstanding colleagues has yielded a diverse set of research that is marked by the best of the creative process. Morgeson looks forward to continuing his applied research in the aforementioned and as yet unrealized areas.

Selected Bibliography

Hofmann, D. A., & Morgeson, F. P. (1999). Safety-related behavior as a social exchange: The role of perceived orga-


