

Understanding Occupational Psychology

Occupational Psychology is a specialist branch within the field of Psychology. Commonly referred to as Industrial Psychology (I/O) or Organisational Psychology, it is the scientific study of human behaviour within the workplace. Scientific principles of psychology are applied to the workplace for the purpose of enabling optimum performance and well-being of employees, therefore, doing contributing to the success of an organization.

Like most areas of specialisations, occupational psychology has a scope of practice. The first area is concerned with personnel psychology. It is primarily concerned with analysing jobs and undertaking matters such as the recruitment and selection of applicants and matching them with employers. In the same breadth, it is concerned with the training and development of employees, evaluation and the determination of salary levels. Within the same scope of practice, there is the subset of psychology that is concerned with the analysis of organisational issues. For example, this is in areas such as employee motivation, job satisfaction, group processes, leadership, conflict management and organisational communication. Lastly, there is the area of human engineering, which is concerned with the interaction of man with machines. This involves concerns on the layout of the workplace, human computer interaction or man machine adjustment, fatigue and boredom, industrial safety and stress management. Essentially, the application of occupational psychology in brief, is in areas such as personnel selection, job analysis, performance appraisal, occupational health, quality assurance, modernization, individual assessment and organisational culture.

One may ask, what benefit can be derived from undertaking the services of an I/O practitioner and what value can it be for the organisation. As I/O psychologist we offer a range of tests that can be utilized, for example, in the scientific selection of employees to measure intelligence. These psychological tests of intelligence, aptitude, skills, abilities and interest ensure that there is a person environment fit of the individual with the job. Through these tests we apply scientific and reliable tests that will have relevance to the skills that an organisation requires to enhance performance and organisational return of investment. Through the implementation of targeted hiring procedures, organisations are able to realize their potential on the market and globally as competitors.

Similarly, it is beneficial for an organisation to hire an I/O psychologist to undertake consultancy in areas of training and development. As eluded before, I/O psychologists have various scientific principles that they apply to situations arising in the workplace. For example, for training to take place, a registered I/O would know that the first step would be to analyse the job and the knowledge, skills and other abilities that are required before designing the learning that is required. Furthermore, hindsight of knowledge of individual differences allows the practitioner

scope to design learning that accommodates the different approaches people have when assimilating and applying what they have learnt to their job. In fact, through the process of analysis of the job, we are able to identify the key skills that are relevant to the role. In the same breadth, the objectives of training are met and therefore, the employee executes their role well resulting in job satisfaction and they feel valued hence improving the success of the organisation as a result of its financial gain.

In a nutshell, the primary goal of an I/O psychologist is to ensure workplace productivity and efficiency among employees. For example, one may find that within their work environment, certain policies produce a negative reaction among employees that in turn affects productivity and behavior whilst at work. Through the vast scope of abilities that I/O practitioners have, they go about this by interviewing and counseling employees, observing the interaction between the employee and the employer, helping rewrite the company policies and procedures to benefit the employees at large and the organization and its officials.

Workplace trends are rapidly changing and these trends represent broad and complex issues as well as challenges met within the world of business. The role of the I/O psychologists is to work with organisations to find solutions to these challenges for the development of their organization and the wellbeing of their employees. The future therefore, requires the competencies of an I/O psychologist in order to elevate businesses, productivity and workplace interaction through practical business applications.

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