

7 days of Psychology

Organisational Psychology

What is organisational psychology?

Organisational Psychology is the science of people at work. Organisational psychologists specialise in analysing organisations and their people, and devising strategies to recruit, motivate, develop, change and inspire.

Organisational psychologists base their practice on research evidence, drawing on tested strategies to make a positive impact on how people act, think and feel at work. By focusing on scientifically tested principles, organisations who use organisational psychologists can be more confident that the methods they use will produce measureable, repeatable and cost-effective results.

What do organisational psychologists actually do?

Contrary to the popular myth that all organisational psychologists do is follow you around at work with a clipboard, they can have multiple roles within an organisation.

Specific areas of practice include:

- Workforce planning and role definition
 - Working out how many workers an organization needs, what skills they need to have, and how they should be organized in terms of teams/departments

- Recruitment and selection
 - Development of selection criteria for jobs and identification of the best assessment tools
 - Formal assessment of job applicants using techniques such as assessment centres, psychological testing and behavioural interviewing
- Learning and development
 - Working out what skills individuals and teams need and the design and evaluation of programs to build those skills
- Leadership and talent management
 - Turning managers into better managers by helping them engage and motivate their employees
 - Introduction of programs to retain top performers and develop future leaders
- Coaching, mentoring and career development
 - Providing individual assistance to workers to improve performance
 - Help organisations implement career development programs so workers can be developed and promoted
- Workplace advice and advocacy
 - Provide advice to government, employers, employees and unions on the psychological impacts of industrial relations, HR and occupational health and safety policies
- Change management
 - Help organisations make significant changes to how they do business. For example, helping retailers adapt to an increasingly web-based retail environment
- Measuring employee opinions and other workplace research
 - Developing surveys of employees and customers to get useful insights on how to improve an organisation
 - Conducting novel research on topics like predictors of high productivity
- Occupational health and safety

- Development of programs that increase the health and safety of employees
- Performance management
 - Design, implement and evaluate the performance management processes that are used to regularly review employee performance
- Wellbeing, stress and work-life balance
 - Development and implementation of programs that improve employee well-being and work-life balance
- Human resources program evaluation
 - Evaluate whether the programs that organisations have in place to improve their workforce are actually working
- Consumer behavior and marketing
 - Help organisations better understand consumer needs
 - Help organisations match their branding and promotion to their internal culture, processes and values
- Organisational development
 - Put programs in place to improve organisational performance and the experiences of employees

Many organisational psychology activities revolve around **job analysis**, a systematic method for understanding the tasks of a job and the skill sets required to do that job. If the tasks and skills associated with a particular job are well defined, it helps organisations recruit people more easily, target ongoing training, evaluate ongoing performance and plan how to make those jobs more rewarding.

Think about your own job and how easy or difficult it would be to describe to someone else the key tasks of your job, and the exact skillsets that are required to do it.

What is the difference between organisational psychology and human resources (HR)?

It is likely that in your work that you've come across HR personnel (e.g. during the hiring process), but perhaps less likely that you've come across organisational psychologists.

There are many areas where the work of organisational psychologists and HR managers overlap (e.g. recruitment, performance management), but the key difference is the position of each in the organisation.

Organisational psychologists are typically brought into an organisation to study its practices, and apply psychological theory to modifying those practices and evaluating the outcomes. This might be through modifying their recruitment process or implementing programs to improve employee well-being. Whilst some organisations will have organisational psychologists on staff, often they are called in on a consultation basis.

HR managers, in contrast, are part of the ongoing management team that that plans and coordinates ongoing activities in relation to employees. They form a distinct part of an organisation and manage things like recruiting, interviewing and hiring new staff, and handling staff issues related to disputes, disciplinary procedures or employee terminations

So organisational psychologists typically develop the processes, that HR staff implement.

What makes an organisation a good place to work?

In August of 2017, [Great Place to Work Australia](#), a global workplace research and consulting firm, released a list of the top 50 best places to work in Australia.

What constitutes a good workplace is different across industries, but there are some common themes. Highly ranked organisations typically had or

did 1 or more of the following:

- Sought regular feedback from employees (including anonymous feedback)
- Had programs designed to help employees move up in the organisation and/or to try working in different parts of the organisation
- Encouraged employees to work on fun activities
- Provided mentoring, coaching and leadership programs
- Supported employees in both their professional and personal goals
- Gave employees structured programs for how to deal with clients/customers
- Had comprehensive workplace wellbeing, wellness and mental health programs
- Allowed flexible working arrangements (e.g. part-time, compressed work weeks, alternative hours)
- Provided healthy food
- Had clear organisational values
- Encourage employees to engage in social initiatives (e.g. charity work, blood donation)
- Supported employees in their personal endeavours and building work-life balance
- Focused on employee strengths
- Had fitness programs in place
- Had managers provide personal recognition to employees

What are some of the key trends emerging in organisations that organisational psychologists are currently trying to address?

As we continue shifting to a more digital world, organisational psychology can play a key role in supporting workplace changes and developments.

Collating data from more than 10,000 businesses and HR leaders across 140 countries, Deloitte's 2017 *Global Human Capital Trends* report summarises current key trends.

You can [read the full report here](#).

- **TREND 1 - THE ORGANISATION OF THE FUTURE: ARRIVING NOW**
As organisations become more digital, they will need help to redesign themselves to move faster, adapt more quickly, learn rapidly, and embrace dynamic career demands.
- **TREND 2 - CAREERS AND LEARNING: REAL TIME, ALL THE TIME**
As companies build the organisation of the future, continuous learning is critical for business success and personal success. Organisational Psychologists can help redesign the way learning and development is delivered so that it is always available over a range of mobile platforms.
- **TREND 3 - TALENT ACQUISITION: ENTER THE COGNITIVE RECRUITER**
Recruiting is becoming a digital experience as candidates come to expect convenience and mobile contact. Savvy recruiters will embrace new talent acquisition technologies to forge psychological and emotional connections with candidates and constantly strengthen the employment brand.
- **TREND 4 - THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE: CULTURE, ENGAGEMENT, AND BEYOND**
Rather than focus narrowly on employee engagement and culture, organizations are developing an integrated focus on the entire employee experience. A new marketplace of pulse (in the moment) feedback tools, wellness and fitness apps, and integrated employee self-service tools are helping Organisational Psychologists keep companies sharply aware of their employees experiences.

- **TREND 5 - PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT: PLAY A WINNING HAND**
 Nothing is being left to chance. Across all industries and geographies, companies are reevaluating every aspect of their performance management programs, from goal setting and evaluation to incentives and rewards. They are aligning these changes to business strategy and the ongoing transformation of work.
- **TREND 6 - LEADERSHIP DISRUPTED: PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES**
 In 2015, leadership was the "perennial issue" that never seems to go away. The leaders organisations now want are more agile, and "digital-ready."
- **TREND 7 - DIGITAL HR: PLATFORMS, PEOPLE, AND WORK**
 People leaders are being pushed to take on a larger role in helping to drive the organisation to "be digital," not just "do digital." Digital management practices and agile organisation design become central to business thinking.
- **TREND 8 - PEOPLE ANALYTICS: RECALCULATING THE ROUTE**
 No longer is analytics about finding interesting information and flagging it for managers: It is now becoming a business function focused on using data to understand every part of a business operation, and embedding analytics into real-time apps and the way we work.
- **TREND 9 - DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: THE REALITY GAP**
 Fairness, equity, and inclusion are now CEO-level issues, but continue to be frustrating and challenging. Training and education are not working well enough. The new rules focus on experiential learning, process change, data-driven tools, transparency, and accountability.
- **TREND 10 - THE FUTURE OF WORK: THE AUGMENTED WORKFORCE**

Automation, cognitive computing, and crowds are paradigm-shifting forces reshaping the workforce. Organisations must experiment and implement cognitive tools, focus on retraining people to use these tools, and rethink the role of people as more and more work becomes automated.

Interested in studying Organisational Psychology?

A Google search of “*study organisational psychology*” will give you a good return of universities in Australia offering organisational, business and industrial psychology qualifications.

If you want to learn more, consider getting in contact with the relevant state section of the [**APS College of Organisational Psychologists**](#).

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