

Organisational Psychology in Education Settings

A catalyst for optimising human potential

Introduction

Learning is a lifelong journey, percolating to our innermost core, shaping and defining our unfolding as mature, caring beings, loved and loving, sharing and giving, dreaming and hoping, building and innovating, while passing on the torch to our young as an extension of ourselves, an expression of spirit living on. (Hand-Campbell, 2017)

Work psychology has gained new impetus across every sector post-Covid-19, as incessant change, uncertainty, and unpredictability have become synonymous with the emerging world of work and the traditions of fitting the job to the person and the person to the job.

Education and its links with all other disciplines are often overlooked as the true home of work psychology in action – psychological assessment at work; learning, training, and development; leadership, engagement, and motivation; wellbeing and work; work design, change, and development. Equality, diversity, and inclusion, and gender, fairness, and justice permeate each area, the seeds of which are sown in education establishments both as workplaces and as centres of human formation. Has organisational psychology, applied to educational contexts, finally come home?

This short article addresses this question, grounding workplace dynamics in established theories and culminating in a model for action in the modern work setting.



Teresa Hand-Campbell

Director, Total Human Capital
Consultancy Ltd

Education is a natural home of organisational psychology in action. This article outlines the benefits of this approach and the various models of organisational psychology that may be applied in an educational setting.

Organisational psychology: benefits and models

Organisational psychology, when applied to educational contexts, can foster workplace synergies and optimise human potential. An organisational psychologist's primary goal is to enhance workplace performance, productivity, and wellbeing by understanding and optimising the organisation's interactions and dynamics.

Among the many areas pursued are: team collaboration, leadership development, conflict resolution, diversity and inclusion, employee engagement, communication, change management, work-life balance, performance appraisals and feedback, psychological safety, organisational culture, employee wellbeing programmes, talent management, performance metrics, and application of research and data analysis to identify trends and patterns in the organisation while providing evidence-based insights for decision-making and intervention planning.

Supporting research provides a theoretical foundation for understanding and implementing strategies towards optimising human potential in educational institutions, across staff, key stakeholders, and students. The literature on organisational culture emphasises the importance of shared values, beliefs, and norms. Applying these to an educational setting involves cultivating a positive and inclusive culture that promotes and supports everyone's wellbeing and potential.

Schein's model of organisational culture (2010) can guide interventions to shape and align the culture with the educational institution's mission and goals. Droichead, for instance, is an ideal vehicle through which seasoned educators ensure the transfer of skills, knowledge (including systems knowledge), and organisational aspirations to onboarding educators.

Hackman and Oldham's job characteristics model (cited in Kass et al., 2011) is pertinent in this context. It posits that certain job characteristics such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback lead to higher motivation and job satisfaction and enhanced performance. In an educational setting, applying this model may involve redesigning roles to give educators more meaningful and challenging tasks; their enhanced motivation and satisfaction improve productivity, quality of delivery, and student receptiveness.

The importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in promoting intrinsic motivation is emphasised in Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory (2017). Creating a supportive environment that facilitates teachers' autonomy in decision-making, opportunities for professional development, and positive relationships among staff can increase motivation and engagement while minimising conflict and its detrimental effects. Because 'learning hoarded is

An organisational psychologist's primary goal is to enhance workplace performance, productivity, and wellbeing by understanding and optimising the organisation's interactions and dynamics.

growth denied', sharing learning through strategically planned 'pop-ups' at staff meetings ensures the relevance and vitality of the learning community that is any education setting.

The transformational leadership theory introduced by Bass and Avolio (1990) is highly relevant in educational leadership. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers, encouraging them to put aside their own interests for the collective good. This leadership style opens avenues for creating a vision that resonates with educators, provides intellectual stimulation, and offers individualised support, allowing for the optimisation of human potential in the organisation.

How do people derive their sense of self from group membership? Social identity theory posits that understanding and leveraging social identities can be pivotal in building a positive organisational culture (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Encouraging a shared sense of identity among educators and staff can foster a collaborative and supportive environment, contributing to workplace synergies. The cohesiveness achieved through working towards a common goal is inestimable.

Goal-setting theory suggests that establishing specific and challenging goals can lead to enhanced performance when accompanied by appropriate feedback and commitment (Locke & Latham, 2013). Such strategies can be used by administrators to enhance teachers' performance and encourage professional development while aligning individual and organisational goals.

Human learning and behaviour change lie at the heart of education. Bandura's social cognitive theory (2012) highlights the role of observational learning and modelling in behavioural change, applicable to both educator and student. Human functioning, he writes, may be viewed through the triad of personal, behavioural, and environmental interactions. Key variables from this dynamic in an education setting include self-efficacy, outcome expectations, self-control, and reinforcements. Applying this theory involves creating opportunities for educators and students alike to observe and learn from each other, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and skill development.

Theory into action

Putting theory into action is pivotal to developing successful interventions in organisational settings. One investigation (Hand-Campbell, 2013) extends Karasek and Theorell's demands-control model (1990) and the job demands-resources model of stress and engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001) while seeking to identify the stressors reported by 65 principals of Irish voluntary secondary schools. Principals who experience considerable strain yet remain engaged use the personal resource of *job crafting*: 'the self-initiated changes

Transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers, encouraging them to put aside their own interests for the collective good.

that employees make in their own job demands and job resources to attain/optimise their personal (work) goals' (Tims et al., 2012, p.173). The two-way flow between resources and engagement was deemed central to stress reduction.

The key to heightened understanding lies in finding the crossovers between the personal, professional, and organisational. 'Wired for Success' is one such training programme devised by the author at THC Consult and aimed at both leaders and their followers. The unifying role of emotional intelligence, fit, agility, and trust helps self-awareness and organisational awareness in any work setting.



In conclusion, the place of organisational psychology in the education setting is undeniable, as is its potential to strategically optimise human potential and enable workplace synergies. By drawing on and applying existing and emerging frameworks, such as those outlined in this article, educational institutions can create environments that promote motivation, engagement, collaboration, and continuous development: a solid foundation for the growth of future generations in formation.

REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (2012) 'Social cognitive theory'. In: P.A.M. Van Lange, A.W. Kruglanski, and E.T. Higgins (Eds.) *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, pp. 349–373. Sage.
- Bass, B.M. and Avolio, B.J. (1990) 'Developing transformational leadership: 1992 and beyond', *Journal of European Industrial Training*. ISSN0309-0590.
- Demerouti, E., Bakker, A.B., Nachreiner, F., and Schaufeli, W.B. (2001) 'The job demands–resources model of burnout', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86, 499–512.
- Hand-Campbell, T. (2013) 'Linking demands, resources and engagement to principals' levels of stress and strain in Irish voluntary secondary schools'. Master's thesis, University of Leicester.
- Hand-Campbell, T. (2017) *An Inheritance Celebrated*. The Manuscript Publisher.
- Karasek, R. and Theorell, T. (1990) *Healthy Work: Stress, Productivity and the Reconstruction of Working Life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Kass, J., Vodanovich, S.J., and Khosravi, J.V. (2011) 'Applying the job characteristics model to the college education experience', *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 11(4), 56–68.
- Locke, E.A. and Latham, G.P. (2013) 'Goal setting theory, 1990'. In: E.A. Locke and G.P. Latham (Eds.) *New Developments in Goal Setting and Task Performance*, pp. 3–15. Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. DOI: 10.4324/9780203082744
- Ryan, R.M. and Deci, E.L. (2017) *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development and Wellness*. Guildford Press. DOI: 10.1521/978.14625/28806
- Schein, E.H. (2010) *Organisational Culture and Leadership*, 4th edn. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Tajfel, H. and Turner, J.C. (2004) 'The social identity theory of intergroup behaviour'. In: J.T. Jost and J. Sidanius (Eds.) *Political Psychology: Key Readings*, pp. 276–293. Psychology Press. DOI: 10.4324/9780203505984-16
- Tims, M., Bakker, A.B., and Derks, D. (2012) 'Development and validation of the job crafting scale', *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 80, 173–186.



Dublin City wins the ‘Global Green City Award 2023’

Dublin City has been awarded the ‘Global Green City Award 2023’ by the Global Forum on Human Settlements during their 18th Annual Session of the Forum in Dubai, a COP28 associated event.

The ‘Global Green City Award’ has in the past been awarded to Vienna, Vancouver, Oakland, Curitiba, Nantes, Mannheim and Yokohama.

The 2023 win brings Dublin City into a group of leader cities on the global stage outstanding for their commitment to sustainable urban development that is green, fair, smart, and transformative.

Dublin City Council’s submission to the award was reviewed by a technical jury. The application was evaluated based on 85

Sabrina Dekker, Cllr Alison Gilliland and Derek Kelly accepting the award on behalf of Dublin City Council.

indicators in key areas that determined Dublin City’s performance in areas such as Sustainable urban Development, Climate Action, Transport, and Nature based solutions.

Receiving the award on behalf of Dublin City Council, COP28 delegate Cllr Alison Gilliland said “Dublin is very proud to win the award. I very much acknowledge the climate change journey we are on, all of us across Dublin.”

Chief Executive, Richard Shakespeare said: “This award marks a moment and signals that we need to continue the momentum and be global leaders.”