

Organizational Psychology

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Just as general psychology is the study of an individual's behavior with the goal of explaining and perhaps treating dysfunction or maladaptive behaviors, organizational psychology is the study of the behavior of individuals or groups found in various organizational settings. In this paper, the author shall attempt to define organizational psychology in greater depth, and explain the evolution of the field of organizational psychology. Additionally, the author shall compare and contrast organizational psychology with two related disciplines, and analyze the role of research and statistics in the field of organizational psychology.

Organizational Psychology

Jex and Britt (2008) define organizations as any group of individuals brought together by a common cause, which could include a bowling team of four or a corporation whose reach extends beyond national boundaries. Placing organizations into two more defined groups, Jex and Britt (2008) suggest that the former organization, the bowling team, is a less formal group that can be dissolved should two or three member leave town, whereas a formal organization, such as a larger corporation is a formal organization, and for the sake of organizational psychology, the one of interest to organizational psychologists. More specifically, organizational psychology uses scientific method in an attempt to understand individual behavior in the workplace with the goal of making the organization more productive, effective, and efficient (Jex and Britt, 2008).

The Evolution of Organizational Psychology

Katzell and Austin (1992) make the argument that it was perhaps Jethro, father-in-law and a Midianite priest who was the father of organizational psychology. It was he, after all, who instructed Moses to appoint lower judges of the people and delegate authority to them (Exodus,

18). However, it is not until more recent that formal attempts to study, understand, and attempt to influence behavior on an organizational level came to pass.

On a broader spectrum, organizational psychology is a sub-category of industrial/organizational psychology. According to Katzell and Austin (1992), the earliest pioneers of I/O psychology are individuals like Hugo Munsterberg, Walter Bingham, and Walter Dill Scott. However, most of their work dealt with subjects such as personnel and skill acquisition rather than behavior. Organizational psychology as its own category was more heavily influenced by individuals like Frederick Winslow Taylor, a non-psychologist, who advanced the doctrines of scientific management (Taylor, 1911). From Taylor's work we learn three important principles. First, work should be designed by other than those who perform the work. Second, workers will work more diligently when provided with favorable incentives. And third, workplace issues would be "subjected to empirical study" (Jex & Britt, 2008, p. 10).

Although looked upon today with a measure of distrust and dislike, bureaucracies were another outcome of early organizational psychology, though like Taylor, the developer of the bureaucratic system, Max Weber, was also a non-psychologist. The idea of the bureaucracy is that each employee in the organization knows what he or she is supposed to do, and there is a clear chain of command or line of authority. Along with this line of authority comes meritocracy, where each individual is rewarded based on merit rather than cronyism, family ties, or social status.

Compare and Contrast

Organizational Behavior

Whereas organizational psychology is the study of how individuals behave within an organization, organizational behavior is a separate and distinct, but closely related field of study.

Organizational behavior seeks to go two steps beyond organizational psychology in that it also considers how the individual behaves or interacts with the organization, and the behavior of the organization itself (Jex & Britt, 2008). Although organizational psychology and organizational behavior are both concerned with the influence of high-level variables and processes, organizational psychology stops at the point that such variables and process influence the individual. Organizational behavior, on the other hand, continues on to how the individual then interacts with the organization, and how the organization itself behaves (Jex & Britt, 2008).

Industrial Psychology

Industrial/Organizational psychology is in and of itself a discipline. However, each of these looks at the organization from different perspectives. Jex and Britt (2008) illustrate the difference in each side of the field of I/O psychology as follows: Industrial psychology is concerned with classification, recruitment, selection, training, performance appraisal, and compensation; organizational psychology is concerned with organizational development, socialization, motivation, leadership, group performance, and occupational stress. It should be stressed that while the industrial side of I/O is distinct from the organizational side of I/O, each have certain interdependencies on the other. Group performance, for example, is principally an organizational issue, and yet selecting the proper mix of group members is an industrial side concern.

Research and Statistics

Organizational leaders depend on accurate and reliable information when making decisions for their organizations. As it relates to the individual behavior of the several employees of the organization, leaders turn to organizational psychologists. Whether a simple observation of employee's behaviors or a more complex design for determining employee

attitudes, organizational psychologists provide important and useful information to organizational leaders (Jex and Britt, 2008). Likewise, statistical data is an important element of any research project, and the data may be presented in a simple format such as an executive summary, or in a more complex model with charts and graphs and all the formulas used in the process (Jex and Britt, 2008).

Research entails the gathering of data and as mentioned earlier may be as simple as observation, or as complex as experimentation. Jex and Britt (2008) describe four methodologies of research: observation, archival data, surveys, and designed experiments. Observation may also be simple and obvious- sitting in a board meeting and observing the interaction of the members- or more stealth- secret shopping at the local coffee shop. With known observance, there is the risk of behavior modification on the part of the observed in light of the knowledge they are being observed. Archival data includes reviewing information compiled by others separate from the research being conducted. Survey research is the process of asking participants a series of questions on any number of subjects and then compiling their responses and may be done verbally, or in writing (Jex and Britt, 2008). A well-controlled situation in which the researcher is able to establish causal relationships is called experimentation, another well used form of research.

Those statistical methods used most frequently in organizational psychology are descriptive statistics, tests of mean differences, correlation and regression analysis, and meta-analysis (Jex and Britt, 2008). As it indicates, descriptive statistics includes means, median, mode, range, variance, and standard deviation. Reduced to its simplest form, tests of mean difference is the difference between two groups. Correlation and regression analysis is a lesser determining statistical measure. For example, what may not be determined through correlation

analysis is whether A influences B, or B influences A (Jex and Britt, 2008). Meta-analysis involves the study of multiple already completed research studies and involves averaging effect sizes (Jex and Britt, 2008). In all of these instances, it is a pre-determined hypothesis that is being tested.

Conclusion

In general psychology is concerned with how individual behave, and explain and treating behaviors that are dysfunctional or maladaptive. Organizational psychology is more interested in understanding why individuals act or interact as they do within organizations. In this paper the author provided a definition of organizational psychology and explained the development of the field of organizational psychology. The author also provided and comparison between organizational psychology and the two related fields of organizational behavior and industrial/organizational psychology. Lastly, an analysis of the role of research and statistics in organizational psychology was provided.

References:

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