INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY: AN IDENTITY CRISIS AND FUTURE DIRECTION[1]

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ABSTRACT

The ontological and epistemological dimensions of Industrial Psychology originated from disparate psychology theories and multi-disciplinary attempts at solving problems related to employee satisfaction and productivity. From these developments, two notional clusters of competencies emerged to represent Personnel Psychology and Organisational Psychology. Industrial Psychology teaching, however, includes conflicting psychological theories which may potentially create something akin to an identity crisis among academics and practitioners. Educational strategies and the Industrial Psychologist's role in industry, should therefore be revised. Against the scenario of this background, the article offers guidelines which allude to competency based training; the influence of information technology on Industrial Psychology teaching; and a new anticipated role for the Industrial Psychologist.

OPSOMMING

Die ontologiese en epistemologiese dimensies van die Bedryfsielkunde vind sy oorsprong in uiteenlopende sielkundige teorieë en multi-dissiplinêre pogings om probleme m.b.t. werknemertevredenheid en produktiwiteit op te los. Vanuit hierdie ontwikkelings het twee hoofgroeperings van bevoegdhede ontvou wat Personeelsielkunde en Organisasie-sielkunde verteenwoordig. Bedryfsielkundige opleiding bevat egter teenoorstaande sielkundige teorieë wat potensieel 'n identiteitskrisis onder akademici en praktisyns kan skep. Opleidingstrategieë en die rol van die Bedryfsielkundige in die bedryf vra dus om hersiening. Teen die agtergrond van hierdie scenario, bied die artikel riglyne m.b.t. bevoegdheidsgebaseerde opleiding; die invloed van inligtingstegnologie op Bedryfsielkunde; en die verwagte nuwe rol vir die Bedryfsielkundige.

In the corridors of the academia it is argued that students of Industrial Psychology should be exposed to a wide variety of psychology theories. Industrial Psychology was traditionally, and remains to be, profoundly influenced by Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychologists with their psychoanalytical, behaviourist and humanist ideas. She is also influenced by those who were mainly educated in Cognitive Psychology Theory combined with a dash of behaviourism, a few humanist theories and even something on id, ego and superego as the archetypes of psychoanalysis. These ideas were so well entertained that so much confusion must have been created that some universities diverted towards Human Resources Management, in which they allude to Industrial Psychology within an array of psychology related topics.

Many researchers and practitioners of Industrial Psychology may disagree and rather ascribe this tendency to a survival strategy to align industrial psychological teaching with market related needs. The subject may, irrespective of the reasons for this diversion, potentially transform from a scientific field of study into a commodity of clichés, buzzwords and trademarks to tantalize the audience with so-called "new" developments. These developments include techniques such as re-engineering, team building and participative management which often represent no more than modified versions of outdated methods. Re-engineering appears to be a refurbishment of quality circles. Team building comprises any group activity involving a so-called facilitator or moderator, which may well be referred to as a "nuisance variable". Participative management suddenly became important after Alfred Marrow, a psychologist, had already in 1947 found that employee involvement influences productivity (see Pojidaeff, 1995). The question arises whether Industrial Psychology should be viewed as a scientific field of study, or a craft.

Industrial Psychologists may uphold either of two encompassing paradigms regarding the future. It may be based on scientific rigour in a quest for understanding human behaviour in industry, or be based on the subjective observations of industrial leaders who often believe in the duality between theory and practice. Against the background of this scenario, it should be borne in mind that many industrial leaders uphold dysfunctional paradigms which may profoundly diminish the effectiveness of industrial psychological teaching and research. Responding to the opinion of industrial leaders without at least considering organisational success factors to support their reasoning, may potentially be devastating to the subject.

Diverse approaches in psychology, and a duality between the requirements of research-based teaching and market-related needs, appear to create many intra - and interpersonal conflicts within and among Industrial Psychologists. They also seem to be deeply attached to assumptions about problems, solutions and methods and become rather defensive when those closely-held beliefs are challenged. The dynamic nature of these forces appear to have emerged into something akin to a serious identity crisis which would require urgent attention with the view of reconciling vastly different perceptions regarding the nature of the subject and its future direction.

A brief review of the most fundamental theories in psychology should broach an attempt to fully understand the conflicts which Industrial Psychologists have to endure. These foundations can broadly be classified according to the ontological and epistemological dimensions of behavioural science.

THE ONTOLOGICAL DIMENSION

The ontological dimension of Industrial Psychology can be found in Psychoanalytic, Behaviourist, Humanist and Cognitivist theories. Although these theories profoundly contributed to a clearer understanding of people at work, they were often flawed with misconceptions of how employees react to their work environments. It should, however, be mentioned from the outset that the purpose here is not to argue that psychology theory should be discarded from industrial psychology teaching. The article merely calls for a more critical consideration of theory in view of the "falsifiability" involved in the application of psychology theory to industrial settings, especially in multi-cultural environments, as in the case of

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South Africa.

Psychoanalysis

Freud's theory of the unconscious mind as a source of our motivation deserves particular attention. Although he was acknowledged as one of the most creative thinkers in psychology, scholars at a recent convention of the American Psychological Association explored the question whether Freud was right or not.

They besieged some of his most famous theories about defensive projection, gender differences in moral development and homophobia (Azar, 1997). The author, however, will, only illustrate how organizational dynamics may potentially be misinterpreted from a Freudian perspective. Freud, among other things, postulated that people try to repress feelings they find unacceptable and, should such attempts fail, they project those feelings onto other people rather than facing their own shortcomings.

In several empirical studies, Newman, Duff and Baumeister (1997) on the contrary found that repressed feelings are more likely to be projected than non-repressed feelings. "Repressors" are therefore more likely to interpret the behaviours of others against the background of suppressed feelings, than so-called 'non-repressors'.

In a recent South African study, it was claimed that Freud is well and alive in organizations. Among other things, the authors explain reasons for aggressive acts among members of an organizational unit (see Cilliers and Koortzen, 1999). Against the background of Newman et al.'s research, it could be reasoned that the results may have been cluttered with observational errors related to the projection of suppressed feelings onto the "department". Contrary to Freudian belief, suppressed feelings may therefore potentially intervene when observation methods are applied to organizational studies, only to create more questions than answers regarding a search for meaning in Industrial Psychology.

Jung added the idea of the collective unconscious, comprising a reservoir of previous experiences influencing the individual's future actions. According to Jung, individuals develop modes of psychic reactions comprising combinations of thinking, feeling, sensation and intuition to solve problems and make decisions. During the Second World War, Katharine Briggs and her daughter, Isabel, developed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to distinguish between the reaction modes of leaders. Irrespective of the caveats involved on the psychometric properties, the MBTI became one of the most popular tests for describing problem solving and decision-making styles among South African Managers. The MBTI, and other tests, augmented the importance of psychometric testing of employee and management assessment and selection.

It is therefore evident that, although psychoanalysis played an important role in the formation of Industrial Psychology, certain aspects should be revised.

Behaviourism

Vastly different from Psychoanalysis, Behaviourists believe that living systems function according to the principles of operant conditioning. In other words, behaviour is followed by a consequence and the nature of the consequence modifies the organism's tendency to repeat the behaviour. Skinner's classical laboratory studies showed that rats in a cage learn to acquire food by repetitively touching a mechanical devise. For Industrial Psychologists, it seemed to make sense to extrapolate Skinner's findings to industry by offering incentives to employees for their performance. Behaviourist thinking was therefore integrated with training and development methods and transactional leadership theories.

During the author's encounters with organizations, it was notable that employees often refer to a "jelly bean" approach, implying that they receive so-called "jellybeans" for their performances. Unfortunately, managers had also realized that "shocking the rat" appeared to be rather effective to ensure that employees perform adequately. Skinner referred to this phenomenon as an aversive stimulus, which entails no more than stimulating avoidance behaviour rather than motivating employees to attain desired outcomes.

Behaviourist theory ignores that fact that human beings possess creative, mental capacities, applied independently to decide the best course of action. Support is therefore found from Edwin Locke's (1997) opinion that Behaviourist Theory does not work. Laboratory research methods nevertheless created important insights for studying cause-and-effect relations between independent and dependent variables within organisms.

From a Systems Perspective, organisms may also include larger social systems, for example work teams and organizations. Industrial Psychologists mainly concern themselves with the study of people interacting with their broad environments to create "open" systems. This is vastly different from closed systems, as in the case of rodents in a cage. Industrial Psychology research has therefore progressed to apply sophisticated statistical techniques, for example structural equation modeling, to study the effects of error variances involved in the relations between independent and dependent variables in open systems.

Humanism

The role of Humanist thinking can intuitively be attached to Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers's work, in which they suggested that people constantly strive towards becoming self-actualised or fully functioning individuals. In contract to psychoanalysis, Humanists view people as basically healthy and mental illness as a mere diversion from psychological health. Rogers's work suggested that individuals collectively form cultures which are audaciously larger than life and that society will disintegrate when it interferes with their need for becoming fully functioning individuals.

In South Africa it was probably not so much Rogers's work than the dynamic forces he described which inspired Industrial Psychologists to become concerned with cross-cultural issue in the country. From these concerns, various studies were conducted on the intra- and interpersonal attributes of racial groups and specifically, the performance motivation and life satisfaction of black employees (see Watkins, 1992). These studies often implied that organizations persisted in upholding traditional management practices, that the integration process was deliberately being slowed down, and that apartheid was well and alive in South Africa. Most of these concerns alluded to the stifling impediments of a society interfering with people's striving towards becoming a fully functioning nation.

According to Rogers, people almost instinctively value positive regard – an all-encompassing term for love, affection, attention and nurturance. Aligned with this notion, integration in South Africa was, and still is, characterized by a benign process of affirmative action, black advancement and upliftment to compensate for previous depravation. He, however, also referred to conditional positive regard, implying that society gives people what they need when they show that they are worthy of what they receive. In other words, individuals have an obligation towards society before being entitled to the rewards they receive. However, in a study by Watkins and Mauer (1994) it was found that exclusion of black people from management positions in the past, may have contributed to the absence of performance values among black managers, commonly held by white managers. In this situation, it could hardly be expected of individuals to feel obliged to contribute to organizational success or even society at large.

In a separate study Watkins (1995) reported that black managers also experienced a stronger sense of entitlement to rewards than their white colleagues in the work situation. This could be ascribed to a need for justice to prevail. These studies clearly reflected the need for social transformation in South Africa, but many mixed perceptions of the most appropriate measures for restoring equity seem to prevail. Some organizations portray the view that incremental change through employee development is most effective, while others seem

to favour what Gagliardi (1986) refers to as a "revolutionary" approach by replacing white managers with black managers. Then there are those who seem to favour "apparent" change by reverting towards traditional values which are clearly out of touch with the norms of modern society. In this notion, it would be difficult not to sense the potential for reversed discrimination and consequently, widespread unwillingness to simply acquiesce.

Carl Rogers is probably best known for his contributions to non-directive, client-centred therapy. From these contributions, Industrial Psychologists deduced that individual growth can be facilitated by allowing learners independently to attain learning objectives, even if it means making mistakes. Process Consultants use non-directive approaches with the view of capacitating a client group to understand the interpersonal dynamics of their organization, and are essentially known for applying reflection techniques. Should the client say: "I have no direction", the facilitator would reflect this back by saying something like: "So. you don't know where you are going with this organisation." Rogers, however, admonishes practitioners who apply reflection techniques without empathy and respect for the client. Reflection. without the core conditions for sensitive relation forming, may potentially create the impression of parrots with psychology degrees.

The non-directive approach unfortunately does not take cognisance of resistance to change, as in the case of employees who refuse to change without some coercion, as suggested in Hersey and Blanchard's (1982) work. It also fails to recognize time factors that are especially important in crisis management situations. It may be devastating to allow soldiers to learn from their mistakes in combat situations, or to apply a non-directive approach to an executive officer requiring a consultant's assistance with a prompt, risky decision involving large amounts of money. On the other hand, this may be the very reason why Cilliers (1991) distinguishes between facilitation and consultation.

A recent addition to humanistic thinking can be found in Antonovsky's (1987) work on Saluogenesis, comprising the study of personal dispositions of psychological well-being. Independent studies among South African subjects (Strimpfer, 1990; Viviers, 1996; Breed, 1997) showed that Sense of Coherence and Personality Hardiness, offer viable explanations of why some individuals are more efficaciously able to cope with stressful change than others. Although Industrial Psychologists do not emphatically deny the importance of Salutogenesis for organisational studies, more research will be needed to earn widespread recognition of these factors.

In the context of Organisational Development, Salutogenesis potentially offers a rationale for seeking answers to questions about the meaningfulness of continuing with an organisation, the adequacy of coping resources, and the belief that the organisation will be able to endure the constraints of change. Organisational "hardiness" would include a commitment to change, a positive response to the challenge involved in the change process and an internal locus of control.

Human capacities and assets are therefore "pushed" towards a vision, rather than being "pulled" by solutions to ailments and deficits, as in the case of the traditional approach to Organisational Development.

In the January, 1998 edition of the APA Monitor, Martin Seligman and President of the American Psychological Association, said: "Fifty years later, 1 want to remind our field that it has been sidetracked. Psychology is not just the study of weakness and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken. It is nurturing what is best within ourselves".

Unlike Psychoanalysis and Behaviourism, Humanist Theory implies that individuals consciously choose between alternative actions, rather than relying on instinct and the subconscious mind. Unfortunately, meagre attention has been paid to the potential pitfalls of non-directive approaches in Industrial Psychology and it needs to be further explored rather than unconditionally accepted as the best avenue for change.

Cognitivism

During the past twenty years or so, Industrial Psychology was profoundly influenced by Cognitivist thinking which is well aligned with the rationality of Management Science. Cognitive Theory either focuses on goal achievement, or the rewards individuals receive for attaining those goals. One of the first contributions to Cognitivism can be found in Control Theory in which people are referred to as "effectors", producing outputs to be observed by "detectors", and "comparators" of actual and desired performance.

Comparators feed information about discrepancies back into the so-called "system" or human being. In stark contrast to the previous approaches, control theory uses terminology which alludes to the basic functioning of a power station to describe human behaviour. Control theory is well recognized in the study of ergonomics (see Kroemer, Kroemer and Kroemer-Etbert, 1994) and was, during the eighties, commended as an all-encompassing theory for explaining work motivation (see Locke, 1991). Locke, however, questioned the validity of control theory and proposed Goal-Setting Theory suggesting that conscious goals and intentions are the primary antecedents of behaviour.

Bandura (1986) elaborated on goal-setting theory by integrating it with behaviourism, to become known as Social Cognitive Theory. From a neo-behaviourist, social-cognitive stance, behaviour is described as a result of interaction between personal beliefs and the environment. Employees are therefore self-efficaciously able to judge their own capabilities to make decisions about the best way of attaining desired outcomes. From goal-setting and social cognitive theories, Industrial Psychologists learnt that efficacious individuals prefer challenging tasks, set challenging goals for themselves, and persistently strive towards goal attainment. Expectancy Theory elaborated on this notion by studying employee beliefs regarding the relation between efforts, performance and desired outcomes (Schwarzer and Fuchs, 1995).

Social Referent and Social Exchange Theories emphasize rewards and link the core aspects of Greek and Roman justice, namely "the equal treatment of equals" and "to give each person his or her due". According to Social Referent Theory, distributive justice is explained in terms of perceived, comparable or incomparable input-output ratios, based on interpersonal comparisons. The notion that individuals should proportionally be rewarded according to their contributions or inputs, is viewed as the only relevant standard for justice (see Watkins, 1995). Adding a further dimension to the notion of fairness, Social Exchange theory suggests that interpersonal relations evolve around the extent to which two or more parties offer something valuable to the other. The greater the value of tangible and intangible commodities, the greater the quality or the relationship (see Wayne, Shore and Liden, 1997). These theories augment the importance of trust and business ethics in the relationship between the constituencies (or stakeholders) of an organisation.

Although Cognitive Theory most significantly contributed to the subject, it is criticized for being biased towards cognitive explanations of motivation, ignoring the role of personal meaning and self-concept. Shamir (1991) identified a number of discrepancies between Cognitive Theory and work contexts, especially under conditions of cultural diversity and the absence of clearly defined goals. Cognitive Theory strongly emphasizes enacted behaviour rather than the role of underlying feelings and interests, intrinsic motivation, values and moral obligations in the motivational process. It also ignores the fact that individuals are self-expressive and that they develop and maintain self-identity.

It is inevitable that Industrial Psychologists would become adherents of very disparate approaches in psychology, only to bemuse their clients and students. The author wishes to illustrate this point by way of an example of a manager confronted by underpaid employees and who decides to seek advice from

Industrial Psychologists. Firstly, the manager calls upon the Cognitivist who advises him/her to develop a remuneration system to ensure that everybody is fairly payed according to their contributions. (S)he then decides to consult a Behaviourist, who advises that employees should be given a bonus for their extra efforts. Somewhat confused, the manager approaches a Humanist who facilitates his/her behaviour to experience the feelings of underpaid people and then decide on appropriate actions. Desperately and despondently, the manager decides to consult a Psychoanalyst who advises him/her to suppress the previous advice, because the subconscious minds and motives of employees will evidently drive them towards a strike, to which (s)he would instinctively react by offering them an increase. In Freudian terms the manager may probably suppress the idea of ever consulting an Industrial Psychologist again.

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIMENSION

The epistemological dimension of Industrial Psychology is found in work done by Psychologists, Sociologists, Anthropologists and researchers from other disciplines in Behavioural Sciences. Here the focus is on solving problems related to employee satisfaction, productivity and organisational change. The importance of applying psychological principles to industry was recognized in 1923 when Oliver Sheldon said: "Industry cannot be rendered efficient while the basic factor remains unrecognized that it is primarily human. It is not a mass of machines - it is a body of men" (Sheldon, 1923, p.7-) and nowadays, certainly females. This inspired many applied researchers such as Hugo Mqnsterberg, the father of Industrial Psychology, to find methods for selecting employees, designing motivating work environments, and enhancing employee performance (George, 1972).

The Hawthorne Studies then followed, from which it was it was learnt that group behaviour significantly influences productivity. The potential influence of individual and group needs on organisational effectiveness, steered the practice of Industrial Psychology in two directions. In the one direction, attempts were made to develop incentive schemes for outstanding performance, and in the other the focus was on solving group-related problems regarding supervision, leadership and organisational structures (see Herzberg, 1994).

Industrial Psychology, therefore, emerged into two clusters of competencies representing Personnel Psychology and Organisational Psychology. Personnel Psychology would focus on a quest for productivity and employee satisfaction through assessment and selection procedures, job evaluation, performance appraisal, ergonomics, and career planning methodologies. Organisational Psychology would concentrate on organisational responsiveness to psychological, sociopolitical and economic forces. Here, the focus would be on individual, group and system-level interventions including Human Resources Development and Consumer Psychology. This framework has been thoroughly debated in South Africa with the view of Industrial Psychology teaching and does not warrant further attention here.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Irrespective of sound theoretical foundations, the precise role of the Industrial Psychologist in industry remains unclear. The vast amount of knowledge and competencies originating from many different, and even conflicting paradigms in the Behavioural Sciences would inevitably have created so much role ambiguity that the teaching of the subject needs to be revised. Industrial Psychologists were traditionally trained to become registered psychologists, working either as practising consultants or under the auspices of a human resources function, as practitioners of employee selection, remuneration, organisational development and so on. They are often rotated between functions that require diverse theoretical backgrounds and beliefs about employee behaviour such that they apparently revert to obstruse combinations of theory and common

sense approaches which at least would require redirection towards a common purpose.

Although many future scenarios may be considered, the focus here will be on training strategies in view of the socio-economic needs of the country, the potential influence of information technology on Industrial Psychology teaching, and a brief note on the anticipated role of the Industrial Psychologist in industry.

Training strategies aligned to the socio-economic needs
of our country
An urgent need for restoring social equity in industry, against the background of at least six years required to train an Industrial Psychologist, would inevitably call for consideration of alternative educational strategies. Some academic departments at universities and technikons had, either purposefully or unintentionally, addressed this issue by offering certificate programmes in Human Resources Management to create a haven for those who need a basic qualification to supplement affirmative action measures. This may not only threaten the very existence of the Industrial Psychologist in industry, but it potentially offers a boarding pass for a journey on a gravy train towards a millennium with challenges of globalization, electronic commerce and the changing role of government. This would obviously require a counter strategy to prepare students for an economically active role in the shortest possible period of time.

The author, however, does not wish to suggest that Industrial Psychology training should, in its present form, be accelerated. This may create the impression of an attempt to have one's cake and eat it, but modern techniques (for example, modular competency-based training) offers viable options in this regard whilst complying with government policy regarding the so-called "National Qualifications Framework". This implies that students earn recognition for competencies acquired, even at different universities and technikons, to be utilized in the labour market. The student would therefore be able to either specialize in a particular field, or pursue an aggregate of competencies, to meet the requirements of registration as an Industrial Psychologist.

This is well out of step with the fashionable notion of acquiring all relevant competencies from the same university. Due to the general nature of present teaching, most academic departments may lack the expertise to fully comply with the requirements of specialized training. This proposal may therefore appear peculiar, bold and even ludicrous, but it does suggest competition between academic departments which may serve as an agent for quality enhancement.

Industrial leaders should, however, by means of sponsorship support the effort rather than expect academics to transfer useful skills to students when they themselves have to rely on limited resources for self-development. The challenge for universities will therefore be to develop the required expertise within an agreed framework of competencies. In view of obvious limitations regarding the procurement of sponsorships for specialized training, Industrial Psychology departments may alternately add value to present courses through specialized training in selected areas, partially to comply with registration requirements. This would, however, require consensus on the learning content involved in the teaching of the subject, rather than reaching agreement on obvious disciplines and peripheral focus points.

The potential influence of information technology
Societal needs in a multi-cultural South Africa with strict legislation regarding labour practices and human rights, against the background of an information age with advanced computer technology, would however require integration of specialists from diverse fields, for example Business Management, Computer Sciences and Law. This may imply that the competencies of an Industrial Psychologist should no longer be reserved for those who wish to become professional psychologists. Industrial psychology teaching should also aim to equip practitioners from other fields with core competencies to function in a "humanized" industry in which individual needs and rights have become more important than

economic gain.

This may include aspects such as Consumer Psychology for marketing specialists (to avoid human rights violations in advertising), Organisational Psychology for managers (to understand the dynamics of transformation), and Personnel Psychology for information technology specialists (dealing with computerized human resources systems).

The anticipated role of the Industrial Psychologist in industry
Advanced computer technology creates the impression that students will in future be able to learn what they want, when they want, where they want, and in the language they prefer. The impression is also created that computer technology is partially able to replace advanced skills, for example the interpretation of certain psychometric tests. Regarding the learning of has basic psychology theory and skills involved in say, the scoring of tests, this notion is quite tenable and computer technology certainly has a role to fulfill. The Industrial Psychologist, however, develops complex cognitive and affective competencies over a long period of time, reaching far beyond the digital information processing capacities of a computer. Industrial Psychology is in fact a peculiar but vastly different form of information technology. The core competencies of an Industrial Psychologist involve complex intra - and interpersonal skills to retrieve analogue information from human systems. The information is converted against the background of programmed thinking and feeling processes, and fed back into the system with the view of individual, group and organisational growth and development.

CONCLUSIONS

"High tech and high touch" may become an aphorism for the modern Industrial Psychologist. This poses the challenge of integrating rationality and emotions and it almost seems logically tenable that the complementary strengths of Humanist and Cognitivist thinking, as applied to work situations, will pave the way into the future. The future role of the Industrial Psychologist would require astute sensitivity to organisational needs and sound strategy formulation to integrate those needs with individual aspirations. The skilful application of personal and conceptual competencies should distinguish the Industrial Psychologist from a Human Resources Practitioner performing specialized functions in pursuit of an aggregate of competencies required for registration.

The anticipated role of the Industrial Psychologist can also clearly be distinguished from that of a Human Resources Manager responsible for translating strategies into appropriate actions, to be performed by practitioners. A sense of fairness, vision, sensitivity and the selective transference of competencies to other professions should, in a quest for employee development, labour peace and reconciliation, profoundly contribute to human capacity development and positive relations between management and employees.

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