What is Occupational Psychology?

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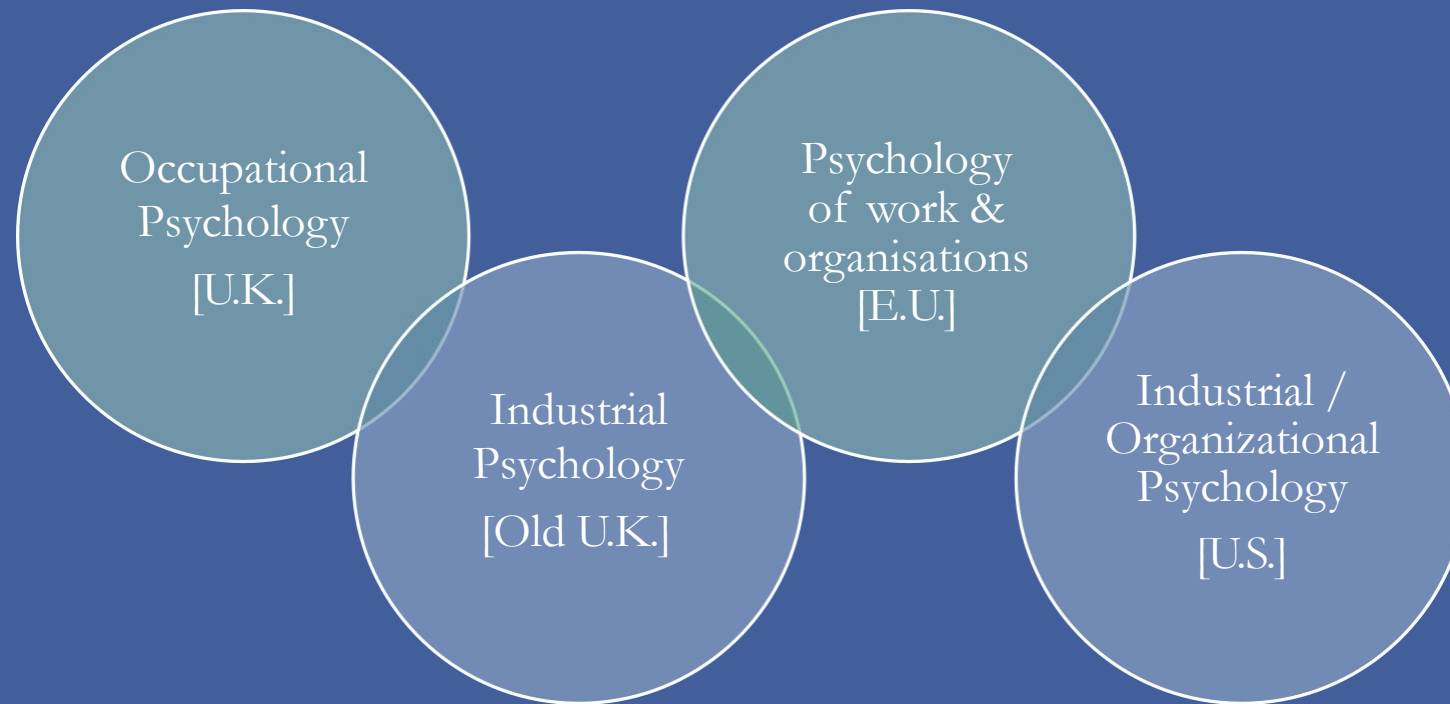
What is Occupational Psychology?

'Occupational Psychology is about applying the science of Psychology to people at work – where work is usually considered to be paid employment.'
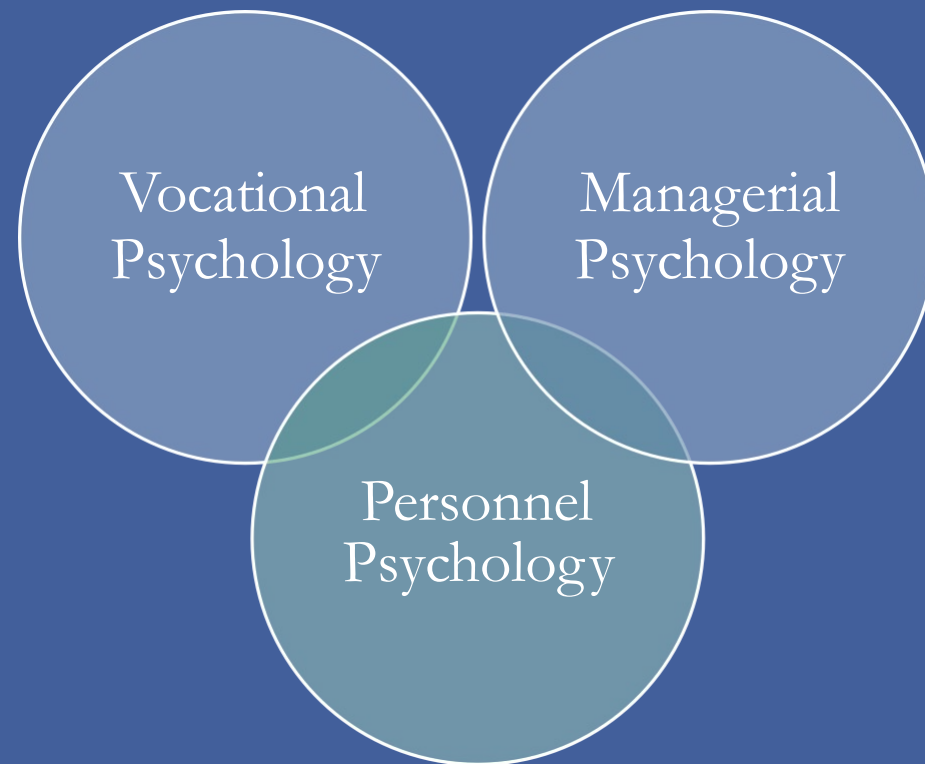
British Psychological Society (BPS)

Occupational Psychology is often also referred to as:

Occupational Psychology [U.K.]

Industrial Psychology [Old U.K.]

Psychology of work & organisations [E.U.]

Industrial / Organizational Psychology [U.S.]

Sub-branches in Occupational Psychology:

Vocational
Psychology

Managerial
Psychology

Personnel
Psychology

Contribution to wider disciplines:

Organisational Behaviour

Human Resource Management

A Brief History

1900's Many of the contemporary issues we regard today have research studies tracing back to the early 1900's.

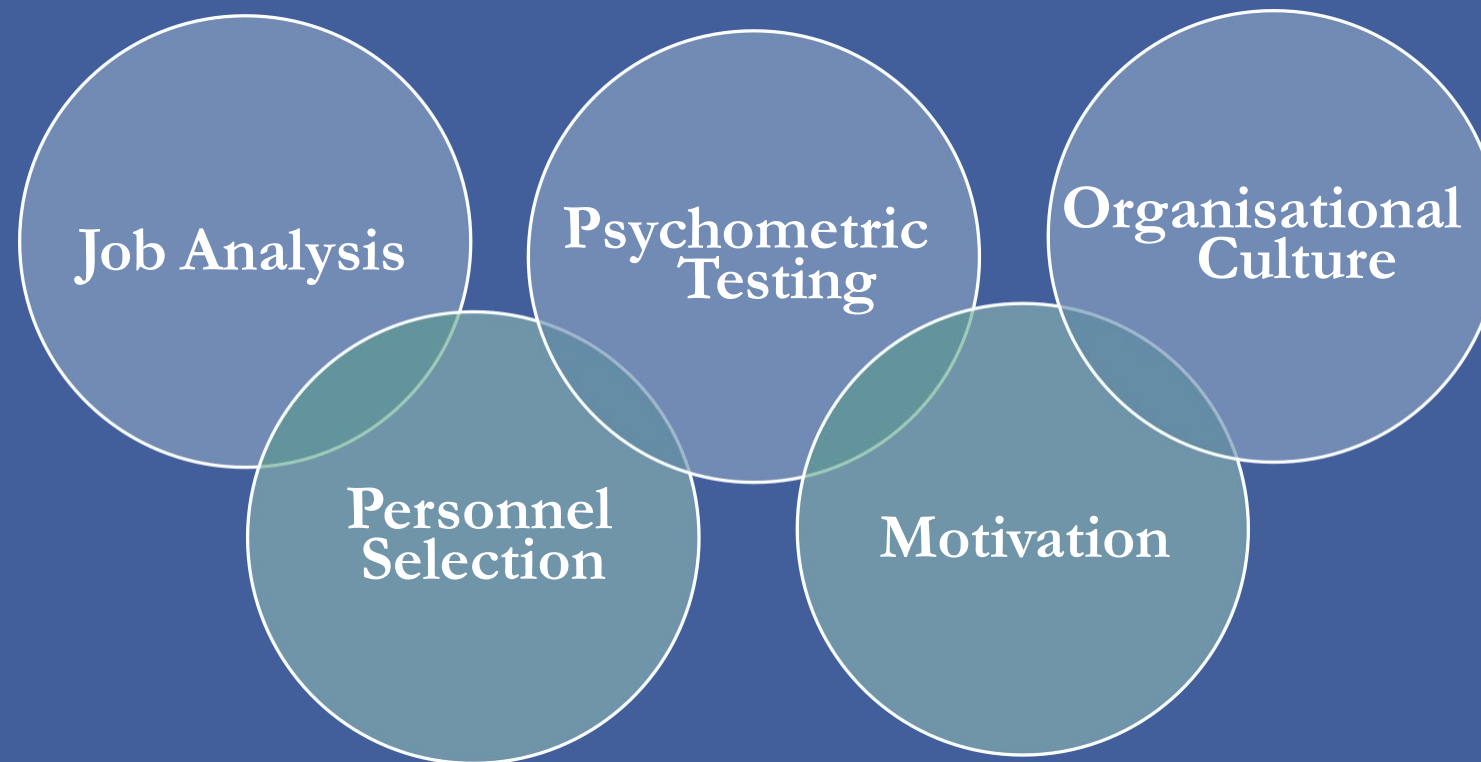**1915** During the First World War, applied psychology was used to aid the British war effort

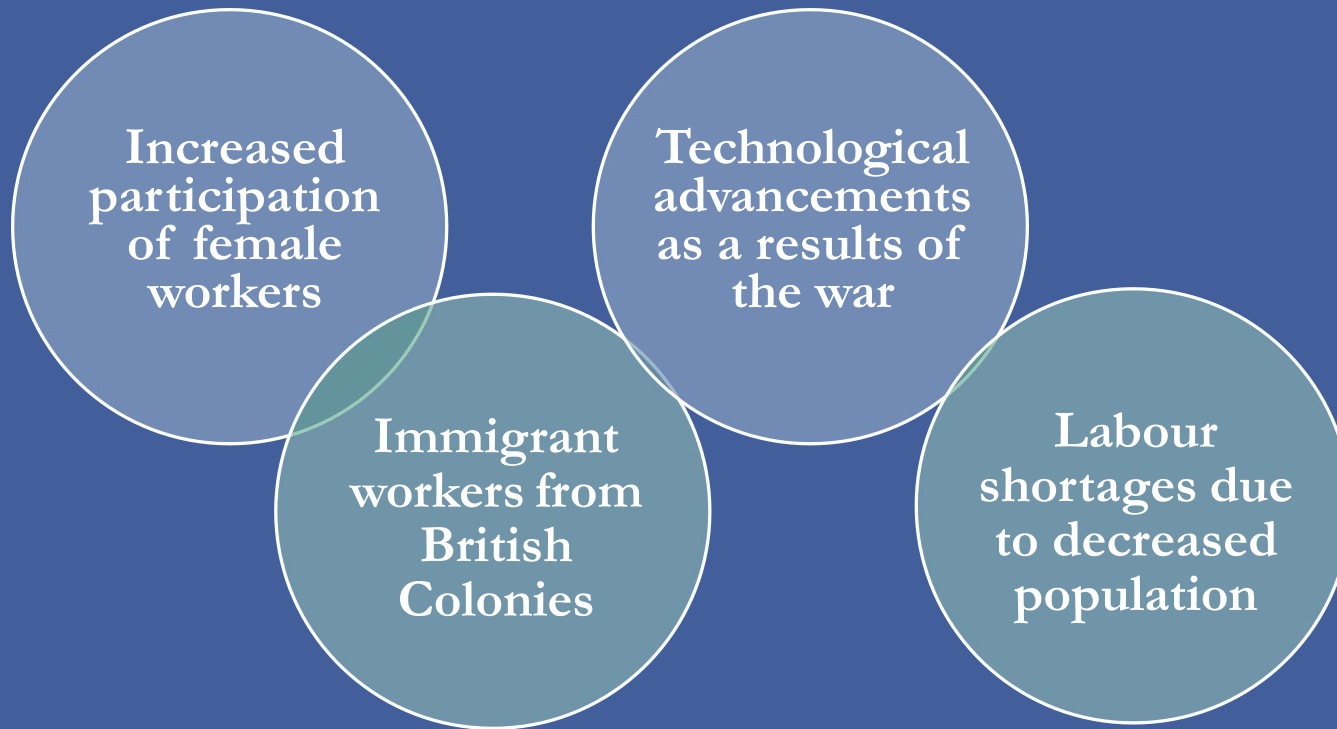**1921** Applied Psychology re-emerged into the industrial realm.

The WW2 Era

- By 1945, at least 3 million recruits into the Army, Navy & Air Force had undergone at least some form of psychological assessment procedure.

- Occupational Psychologists were highly recognised for their contribution.

The Post-WW2 Era

- Governments were interested in re-integrating soldiers into the workforce as well as reviving businesses.

- Many psychologists continued to contribute, working within government departments to develop processes such as assessments centres.

- Through working with the government, Psychologists were able to collect large scale data & objectively show the benefits of assessment centres.

- These were soon taken up by other organisations & businesses, leading to a wider growth & reach of the profession.

The Post-WW2 Era - Changes

Increased participation of female workers

Technological advancements as a results of the war

Immigrant workers from British Colonies

Labour shortages due to decreased population

The 1960's

- During this time of increasing prosperity, Occupational Psychologists were increasingly in demand.

- Whilst a lot of research & interventions were developed during this time. Very few were published or disseminated widely.

- Working as consultants, many Psychologists kept their findings confidential.

- Psychologists working within the government & military were also bound to heavy restrictions on what they could discuss openly.

The 1980's

- A strong economy & increasing organisational diversity increased the opportunities for occupational psychologists to develop.

- Many of the consultancy ages that we recognise today (e.g. Saville consulting) developed during the 1980's.

- During this time the term Occupational Health Psychology was created.

- The number of journals relating to Occupational Psychology increased during this time (e.g. *Work & Stress*), meaning that research in this area was becoming more accessible & visible.

The Changing Nature of Work

CAN YOU THINK OF ANY WAYS IN WHICH WORK MAY HAVE CHANGED OVER THE PAST YEARS?

WHAT IMPACT MIGHT THIS HAVE HAD ON RESEARCH INTERESTS & CHALLENGES FOR OCC. PSYCH. PRACTITIONERS?

Changes to the World of Work

Ageing Population

- Training & development of older workers

- Engagement & satisfaction
- Built environment

Increasing participation of previously disadvantaged groups

- Fair selection Procedures

- Managing diversity in the workplace

- Built environment

Increasing workloads

- Stress & pressure at Work

- Burnout

- Work/life balance

Changes to the World of Work

Remote working	Cost cutting	Delayering & Outsourcing
• Work/life balance • Selection of people best suited to remote work • Remote leadership • Virtual communication • Virtual team work	• Impact of technology replacing jobs • Job re-design • Organisational change • Leadership • Conflict	• Fewer traditional career paths • Dealing with change & uncertainty at work • Entrepreneurship • In-group /out-group relations

Changes to the World of Work

Female participation in high level roles	Reduction of manual labour & widening opportunity gaps	Globalisation
• Dealing with gender stereotypes • Dealing with differences between female & male pay/rewards • Experiences of working in male dominated organisations	• Psychosocial impact of wealth differences • Consequences of unemployment & underemployment • Social mobility • Health consequences of sedentary work	• Cross-cultural comparisons • Working abroad • Appropriateness of selection, promotion, disciplinary practices etc across cultures • Diversity

What are the unique selling points of an Occupational Psychologist?

Areas of Occupational Psychology:

- Applying Psychology to Work & Organisations
- Research Design, Advanced Data Gathering & Analytical Techniques
- Leadership, Engagement & Motivation
- Work and Well-Being
- Learning, Training & Development
- Psychological Assessment at Work
- Work Design, Organisational Change & Development

7 Stages: Consultancy Cycle

Engaging: Making initial contact & building relationships

Contracting: Agreeing expectations, timescales & actions

Collecting Information: Accumulating key information

Analysing: Identifying strengths & areas for improvement

Options: Deciding on options, decisions & plans for the organisation

Implementation: Carrying out the agreed actions

Exiting: Handing back over to the client

Engaging

- The Consultant makes initial contact with the client.

- Familiarisation with the organisation in general.

- Identify who the key contacts are, who will you be working with, what their roles are.

Contracting

- Outlining exactly what the Consultant's role is.

- Explicit statement of responsibilities, time frames, and other information.

- Any factors that might restrict the Consultant's work.

- A client's expectations can be quite broad e.g. we want you to improve our recruitment strategy. The consultant will need to work with the client and ask questions to refine remits.

Questions to ask:

- What do you expect the outcome of the work to be?

- What date are you expecting the work to be completed by?

- How committed is the management team to the success of this project?

- What resources will be available to me to complete this work?

Once both Consultant & Client have mutually agreed…

A contract is formalised in writing and signed by all relevant parties for official recognition.

Confidentiality Agreements

- For both research and practice a Consultant will require confidentiality agreements.

- As a practitioner, one can be required to enter into multiple confidentiality agreements with multiple stakeholders e.g. with clients & their employees.

- A Consultant may also have to sign confidentiality agreements for your client before they are able to give you access to privileged information or data.

Important Points To Remember:

- **Consider everyone involved in the project** - no matter how small the impact might be on them.
- **Get all agreements in writing** - physical evidence of the agreement will help protect a Consultant should a legal challenge arise.
- **Research data** - What's done with the data collected? Who will have access to it? How long will it be stored for? Will it be anonymised?
- **Logistics** - If working at the client's location, the Consultant must ensure a private space / telephone where he/she will be able to have conversations privately.
- **Feedback** - How will the information be relayed to the various stakeholders without breaching confidentiality?
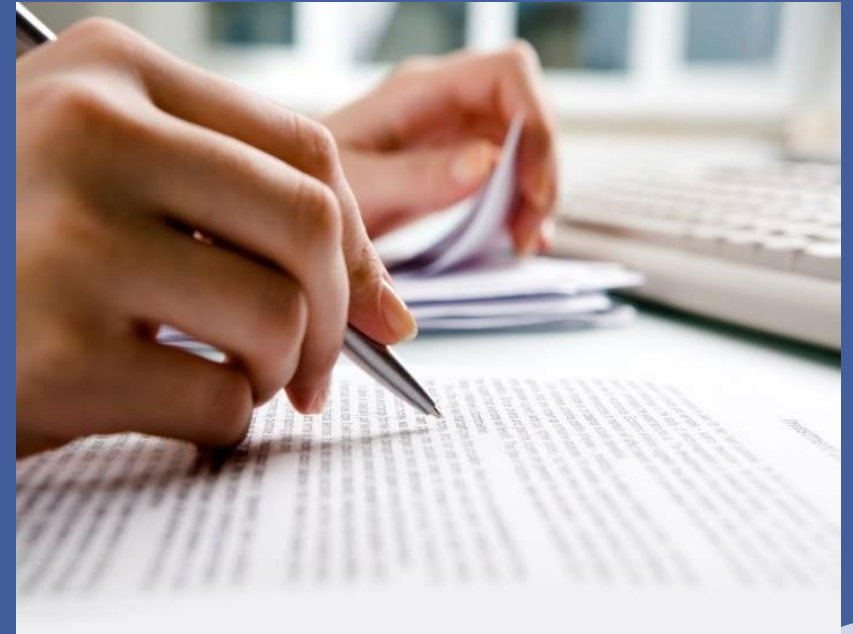
Collecting Information

- This stage involves finding out as much information about the organisational issue as possible.

- Information can take a variety of forms including; objective, numerical, subjective, qualitative.

- Information can be collected in a variety of different ways including; existing organisational data such as number of sick days taken, interviews with employees, psychometric testing, etc.

- Any information collected needs to be valid & reliable.

Interpreting Information

- Actively engaging with the collected information.

- Identify its strengths and weaknesses.

- Identifying areas or specific processes that could be improved.

Generating Options

- Synthesising information that you have collected, considering options that are available to the organisation

- Developing a plan of action for the organisation taking into consideration:
    a) The outcome/s required
    b) The actions required to achieve the outcome/s
    c) Resources required – time, staff, money, etc.
    d) Timescale for implementing the interventions suggested
    e) Evaluation of the intervention – How will the Consultant know whether the intervention has actually worked?

Implementing Actions

- Following the plan so that all actions are taken within the required timeframe.

- It is important to involve the staff in any changes, they are more likely to feel ownership and co-operated.

- Simply implementing change without engaging staff can lead to resistance.

- Supporting smooth implementation by making sure everyone knows who needs to do what, where, when and why.

Exiting

- If the project has been successful & the outcomes achieved then exiting is relatively simple.

- If the outcomes haven't quite been achieved, then you may need to go back to a previous stage of the consultancy cycle e.g. information gathering or interpretation

- The main output of the consultancy cycle is a consultancy report which discusses in detail the issues that have been identified & proposed interventions.

Consultancy Report

Basic Structure

- Title
- Contents page
- Executive summary
- Introduction / Terms of reference
- Contextual theory
- Supportive information
- Case analysis
- Proposed interventions
- Recommendations
- Conclusions
- References

Title

- Clear & concise

- Clearly outlines the scope of the report

- The name of the author

- The name of the organisation

- The completion date of the report

Contents Page

- Clear format

- Professional style

- Each section should be clearly identified & page numbered

- Page numbers should match sections

Executive summary

- Similar to an abstract in a research report

- Should briefly cover all of the key aspects of the case; the current situation, what isn't working as well, what can be done to improve it & why this would work

- Usually written last

- Avoid personal pronouns- e.g. I, you, we, he, she

Introduction

- Provides the context & background information about the report:

    a) Who was the report written for

    b) What is the report about

    c) Which organisation is the report about

    d) When was the report presented

Contextual Theory

- Demonstrating that your report is based upon theoretical & research evidence

- Shows that you are not plucking ideas at random out of the air!

- Not a full literature review- you will need to be selective in the theories/studies you draw upon. Choose those which you feel are particularly strong in supporting the rest of the report.

- Explain to the reader that there is considerable research in the area that can be drawn upon to improve the functioning of their organisation.

Supportive Information

- This section outlines 'facts' that the organisation may need to be aware of before coming to a decision

- The 'facts' will vary according to the project

- Example 'facts' include; labour market trends, average number of sick days taken in the U.K, average cost of rebranding, number of employees working for a competitor

- Tables, graphs, data can be included in this section as long as they are clearly labelled and described.

Percentage of Chart Which Resembles Pac-man

Resembles Pac-man
Does not resemble Pac-man
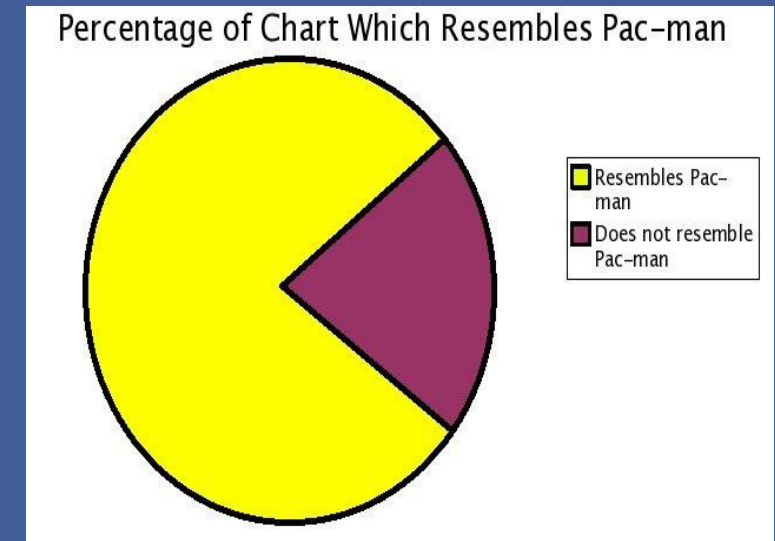
Case Analysis

- This section pinpoints the specific aspects of the organisation and their practices which you feel need Improvement.

- You should point out the psychologically important aspects of the case & explain why you feel that they are important & what effects they may be having.

- You can use sub-headings in this section

- The combination of contextual theory, supportive information & case analysis should provide a clear and compelling rationale for your proposed interventions.

Proposed Interventions

- This is where change/s are proposed and may increase the functioning of the organisation

- All interventions should be based on contextual theory, supportive information & case analysis

- Should be written in prose; sub-headings can be used

- Interventions should be very specific outlining the nature & reason for intervention, timescale, costs

Recommendations

- A short, one-page overview of the proposed interventions.

- The organisation should be able to quickly read & refer to this page to know exactly what is being suggested.

- Should really sell the Consultant's ideas to the organisation
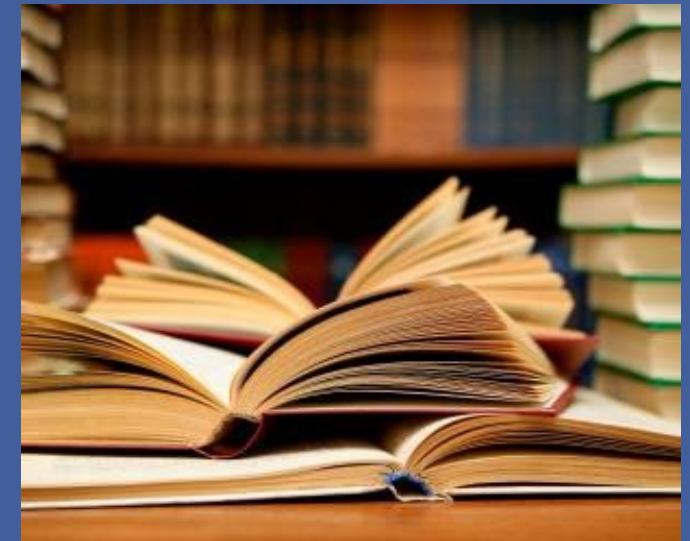
- Can be written in bullet points.

Conclusions

- A short summary to the report.

- Can be a paragraph.

- Ties everything together.

- Briefly summarise the main findings and how conclusions have been made.

References

- A reference list of all resources used in the report including all; books, journals, websites etc.

- Use an established referencing style e.g. Harvard, APA, ETC.

Finding resources

- **Textbooks** are a good starting point for anyone new to the field of occupational psychology. However, they only provide a broad overview & can become outdated very quickly.

- **Journals** are an excellent way to keep up with the latest research. You can read up on not only theoretical developments but also methodological approaches. However, be aware of the publication bias.

- **Networking & Conferences** minimise the impact of publication bias. Maintaining regular contact with researchers & practitioners can help you to discuss research that may not have been published yet & expand your career prospects.

Journals to consider

- Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology

- Journal of Applied Psychology

- Journal of Occupational Health Psychology

- Human Relations

- Work & Stress

- Journal of Vocational Behaviour

- Personnel Psychology

In whose interest does an Occupational Psychologist work for?

Loyalties

- Your loyalty is not necessarily to those who pay you.

- Your primary loyalties are to your legal and ethical responsibilities.

- For instance, a client might ask you to reveal individual test scores when you had informed the employees that data would be anonymised to their employer.

- It is best to establish clear boundaries regarding where everyone's loyalties lie up front and preferably get these in writing before the project starts.

- You should now have an understanding of the branches in Occupational Psychology, how it gained popularity and how the nature of work has changed over the years.

- You have had a chance to identify the selling points of an Occupational Psychologist and its consultancy cycle.

- You have an awareness of how an Occupational Psychologist collects and presents its observations to its client.

See you next week for

Lecture 2

Ethical & Legal

Considerations in

Occupational Psychology