

Workplace Careers

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll continue our discussion of the different career specialties in the field of psychology.

The specific areas of focus include:

1. Category of Workplace Psychology
2. Fields Focused on Specific Workplace Aspects
 - a. Industrial/Organizational Psychology
 - b. Engineering Psychology
3. Environmental Psychology
 - a. Relationship to Evolutionary Psychology

1. Category of Workplace Psychology

Workplace psychology is more of a modern-day approach to psychology, in that it looks at the current environment, and attempts to understand and explain the effects that environment has on people and their behaviors.

This field began as an attempt to understand the conditions of working people in places like factories. Today, however, it has started to expand even further with advancements in technology. There are now a lot of new areas of research to go into; workplace psychology is a field that's very ripe for further exploration.

Workplace psychology is very much an applied research field, meaning that the research being done is used to solve practical problems and to improve current workplace conditions.

This is different from some of the other fields of psychology, in which the research being done is a bit more general, and for the purpose of explaining certain behavior and phenomena. Workplace psychology looks at specific problems in order to determine how the conditions for the people in that area can be improved.

2. Fields Focused on Specific Workplace Aspects

There are several subfields under the category of workplace psychology, and the first two of these fields attempt to improve upon specific aspects of the workplace.

2a. Industrial/Organizational Psychology

Industrial/organizational psychology, or I/O psych, has the goal of improving work environments and human relations in organizations and different work settings.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** An I/O psychologist might attempt to improve productivity within a certain factory, trying to get things to work more effectively and efficiently. Or, this type of psychologist might work in human relations, attempting to see what kinds of problems the workers might be having, and to resolve them in the best possible way. As you can see, industrial/organizational psychology is heavily focused on the human aspects of the workplace.

The work of people in this field can also involve selecting job applicants, analyzing different skills involved in the workplace, and evaluating on-the-job training to ensure it is the best possible education for the workers.



TERM TO KNOW

Industrial Organizational Psychology

Studies the issues of hiring, training, and employee assessment in the workplace

2b. Engineering Psychology

While it also focuses on specific workplace aspects, **engineering psychology** applies psychological concepts to the designing of work environments and equipment to ensure that they are better adapted to people's abilities.

One focus of engineering psychology is on computer-human interactions, studying how people are using computers, and how people can use them more efficiently. In this way, engineering psychology is often focused on the “ease of use” of various types of technology.



TERM TO KNOW

Engineering Psychology

Designing “user-friendly” technology and the environments; engineering a better human-machine interaction



THINK ABOUT IT

Take a minute to look at the computer, tablet, or other type of device you're using to view this lesson. Now that you know a little about engineering psychology, can you think about ways in which an engineering psychologist may have worked on this device to make its interface more accessible?

3. Environmental Psychology

Another area of study under the umbrella of workplace psychology is **environmental psychology**. Contrary to what you might think from looking at the term initially, environmental psychology is actually a very broad area of study.

In the simplest terms, environmental psychologists attempt to uncover the effects that surroundings have on the people living within them. These could be natural surroundings, such as forests or oceans; they could also be built environments, such as cities, towns, or villages.

➦ **EXAMPLE** An environmental psychologist might investigate the effect that urban noise and overcrowding have on the stress levels of people that are living in such cities.

Environmental psychology might not be as specific an applied research area as some of the other aspects of workplace psychology; however, there are definitely certain useful implications for this area of research.

Environmental psychologists might also be called in as experts for actual environmental issues as we think of them generally.

➦ **EXAMPLE** These psychologists may not only investigate the effects that humans have on the environment, but also might look at the effects that the natural environment has on people, and why that might be beneficial.



TERM TO KNOW

Environmental Psychology

Studies the interaction between humans and their environment, including urban issues (overcrowding, noise pollution), environmental impact of humans, attitude about one's environment and architecture design

3a. Relationship to Evolutionary Psychology

At this point in the course, you're very familiar with evolutionary psychology, which also has implications for the workplace itself. An environmental psychologist might try to solve problems that are the result of current working conditions and basic human tendencies that have evolved over time.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Think of the generally accepted idea of the 24-hour day. People expect the sun to rise and set within a certain period of time. The effect of modern technology and electricity has essentially been an extension of the workday to times when people might normally be asleep, which might disrupt the general flow of their days. The environmental effects that might be studied under evolutionary psychology could be whether it is healthy or possible for people to continue on in a workplace like this.

Thus, environmental psychology can have further implications in different areas of psychology when it comes to improving people's lives.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about some of the possible career paths within the **category of workplace psychology**. **Industrial/organizational psychology** (I/O psychology), **engineering psychology**, and **environmental psychology** are all specialties considered to be part of the larger field of workplace psychology.

You now understand that while I/O psychology and engineering psychology are **fields focused on specific aspects of the workplace**, environmental psychology has broader implications that can be related to other areas of study, such as **evolutionary psychology**, within the field of psychology.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Erick Taggart.



TERMS TO KNOW

Engineering Psychology

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Environmental Psychology

Studies the interaction between humans and their environment, including urban issues (overcrowding, noise pollution), environmental impact of humans, attitude about one’s environment and architecture design.

Industrial Organizational Psychology

Studies the issues of hiring, training, and employee assessment in the workplace.