

Applying psychology in today's HR management

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Over decades, human resource management (HRM) has transformed from a largely administrative function into a dynamic, multi-faceted and rich role in the business, which today, is at play throughout the organisation. Business needs have made a seismic shift from labour to talent, and never before have workplaces across the world been so human-centric. Ever-increasing diversity is raising the bar for organisational ethics, equality and fairness.



The millennial generation, with its demand for individualised work experiences, is now the majority of the workforce and they are igniting the trend for companies to provide an 'employee journey' blending inspiring engagement, high performance and a culture employees can feel proud of. The demand for the organisation to consider the whole person is underpinned by the drive for work-life balance and corporate health and wellness programmes.

For quite some time the deployment of industrial psychology by HR practitioners has focused on applying traditional psychological models to improve effectiveness and efficiencies in the organisation. But does this go far enough in 21st-century workplaces where employees want to be recognised as human beings rather than 'human doings'?

According to Bernadette King, Human Resource Management Curriculum Developer at SACAP (the South African College of Applied Psychology), their recent launch of a BAppSocSci degree with majors in both Psychology and Human Resource Management is aimed at meeting today's need for HR practitioners to have a richer, deeper and more nuanced understanding of human behaviour and motivation. "HRM has shifted out of simply administering the traditional, straightforward transactional relationship between employer and employee," King says. "The workplace as the bleak setting for merely 'making a living' is over. Today's workplaces are also not just the competitive grounds to gain higher remuneration or loftier job titles. To attract and retain top talent the workplace needs to be a vibrant, fertile ecosystem where personal aspirations and fulfillment can also flourish."

In this corporate ecosystem, the HR practitioner finds themselves playing many roles. Apart from the traditional recruitment, policy-making and administrative functions, HRM today is the curator of corporate culture, the change agent facilitating

diversity and the coach of high-performance individuals and teams. As Bernadette points out, today's HR practitioner needs a diverse skills-set to fulfill multiple roles in the workplace and function effectively in an environment that is tumultuous, highly varied and variable. "Having a qualification that incorporates both HRM and Applied Psychology ensures the practitioner has the ability to understand behaviours of people, and of groups, and can blend their knowledge of all facets of professional HRM with their capacities to understand both cognitive and emotional intelligences."

A deeper grasp of psychology is also useful in workplaces where mental health issues are on the rise, and are more openly revealed. "There is widespread recognition that employee health and wellness makes a direct impact on the triple bottom line, and it is up to the HR practitioners to lead these programmes and initiatives in the workplace," says Bernadette. "It stands to reason that having a deep understanding of psychological and mental health gives HR practitioners a solid foundation to foster a positive culture of openness in regard to mental health in particular, and to employee health and wellness in general."

SACAP's three-year, BAppSocSci degree with majors in both Psychology and Human Resource Management is a unique opportunity for aspiring HR practitioners to be specifically educated for the 21st-century workplace. The fully accredited degree is offered at SACAP's Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria campuses, as well as online.

In line with SACAP's educational philosophy, places for the BAppSocSci are limited to ensure an intimate learning environment for students with close contact with professional educators who are also industry experts. The educational experience includes a three-month work-based learning component and mentoring so that graduates are well prepared to enter the workforce.

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