



Division of  
Occupational Psychology

# Occupational Psychology

as a career option



What is Occupational  
Psychology?

Profiles from Occupational  
Psychologists about the  
work that they do

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The British  
Psychological Society

Promoting excellence in psychology

# What is Occupational Psychology?

## What is Occupational Psychology?

Occupational Psychology is the application of the science of psychology to work. Occupational psychologists use psychological theories and approaches to deliver tangible benefits by enhancing the effectiveness of organisations and developing the performance, motivation and wellbeing of people in the workplace.

## How do occupational psychologists use their skills?

Occupational psychologists develop, apply and evaluate a range of tools and interventions across many different areas of the workplace, including:

- **Psychological assessment:** Selecting and assessing employees using methods such as interviews, assessments centres, situational judgement tests, and personality questionnaires and cognitive ability tests. Profiling jobs and matching job requirements to future performance. Developing and choosing valid, reliable, fair and suitable selection procedures.
- **Learning, training and development:** Including training and employee development, the training cycle (identifying needs, transfer of learning to the job, evaluation); employability; talent and succession planning; innovation and creativity; occupational choice; career development; coaching, counselling and mentoring.
- **Wellbeing at work:** Measuring and promoting wellbeing in the workplace, including mental and physical health, work-life balance and resilience. Working in areas such as unemployment; retirement; occupational health; stress; bullying, harassment and conflict; and emotions in the workplace.
- **Work design, organisational change and development:** Including the design of jobs and work environments; people and technology; human factors and ergonomics; workplace safety and risk management; organisational effectiveness, productivity and performance; communications; organisational structure, culture and climate; organisational and individual change and development.
- **Leadership, motivation and engagement:** Including work motivation, performance appraisal and management; leadership; power, influence and negotiation; employee engagement and commitment; citizenship and positive behaviours; derailment and counterproductive behaviours; psychology of groups, teams and teamwork.

## What skills do you develop as an occupational psychologist?

Occupational psychologists are trained in specific tools and techniques for gathering, analysing and feeding back data in organisational contexts.

As a Registered Occupational Psychologist and Chartered Psychologist, you will have had training and developed your competence in the following areas:

- **Professional skills:** Including implementing ethical and legal standards, communication, project management and team work.
- **Research skills:** Including designing, conducting and analysing psychological research in numerous areas and using a range of advanced quantitative and qualitative methods.
- **Consultancy skills:** Including planning, evaluation, and analysing and understanding client needs, problems and priorities.
- **Training and presentation skills:** Including delivery of presentations, and knowledge of designing, delivering and evaluating training programmes.

Occupational psychologists work as **scientist-practitioners**. They apply psychological methods, concepts, models and theories derived from reproducible research findings; and use their experiences from applied practice to inform the research and development of new and existing psychological knowledge.

## Where do occupational psychologists work?

Occupational psychologists work with organisations and businesses of all sizes across the private, public and third sectors. You will find occupational psychologists working in government and public services, in leadership development centres and consultancies. They work alongside other professionals such as managers, HR, union representatives, training advisors and specialist staff within client organisations.

## How do you become an occupational psychologist?

Detailed information on the training route to becoming an occupational psychologist is available on the BPS Website and through the Health and Care Professions Council.

To become a Registered Occupational Psychologist and Chartered Psychologist, you currently need to complete a minimum of six years' training. This includes completing an undergraduate course that is accredited by the BPS and provides Graduate Basis for Chartership (GBC); completing a BPS-accredited Master's course in Occupational Psychology, and at least two years' supervised practice through the Society's doctoral-level qualification.

# Career profiles



## **Elaine Denniss**

Chartered Psychologist,  
Registered Occupational  
Psychologist

**The Careers Group,  
University of London**

## **Learning, training and development**

My work focuses on the area of career development, an extremely interesting and important area of occupational psychology and one which offers a great deal of job satisfaction.

Having developed an interest in this field through my work in coaching and other experience, I started working for The Careers Group, University of London, which provides products and services designed to help individuals achieve and maintain job satisfaction throughout their working lives. Currently based at University College London, my work is multifaceted and draws from several areas of Occupational Psychology. Most of my work is with undergraduate and postgraduate students, providing career education and career guidance, both on a 1-to-1 basis and in groups. This could involve anything from providing practical help with CVs, applications forms, interview/assessment centre preparation and career planning to working with individuals who have no idea what they want to do as a career. I also do work for the consultancy arm of The Careers Group, C2, which involves working with individuals at any stage of their career who may be looking to explore options open to them, change direction or transition into a new career.

Because of the varied nature of the work, I am able to apply many of the skills I have acquired through my training as an occupational psychologist as well as the theoretical knowledge acquired from my MSc. For example, designing and delivering workshops draws on training theory, and careers guidance draws on personality and careers theories and knowledge of different coaching models. Having an understanding of assessment and selection methods is also useful in this role, particularly when helping prepare individuals for interviews and assessment centres.

## **Learning, training and development Leadership, motivation and engagement**

The main focus of my practice involves working with individuals and teams to support them in becoming more successful and effective in delivering organisational objectives in ways that are positive and supportive of the well being of individuals. These services are more commonly known by the popular terms of personal coaching, business coaching, executive coaching and team coaching and are applied in a wide range of organisations from central and local government bodies through to all types of businesses in the private sector.

The key focus of the specialist psychological services I provide in this area is to support both individual and organisational success. This broad professional agenda is the same whether I am working with someone who is underperforming to support them in becoming more effective or whether the service is focused on high potentials, executive clients or teams who are already performing well and seeking to take their successes to a new level. There is a wealth of specialist research from the domain of occupational psychology which focuses on key areas such as personal goal attainment, performance, innovation, creativity and well being in the workplace that informs and underpins my work as a professional psychologist in this area.

Working closely with HR practitioners, leaders and coaches who are not psychologists, I also provide training and supervision as well as coaching to support others in applying psychological principles appropriately and effectively within either their work roles or professional coaching practice. This work is positive, challenging, personally rewarding and professionally exciting.



**Pauline Willis**

Chartered Psychologist,  
Chartered Scientist, Registered  
Occupational Psychologist

**Lauriate Ltd**

# Career profiles



## **Nadia Nagamootoo**

Chartered Psychologist,  
Registered Occupational  
Psychologist

## **London Borough of Lambeth**

### **Learning, training and development**

I am the Learning & Development Manager for the Housing, Regeneration & Environment Department in Lambeth Council. Broadly speaking, this means I have to analyse the training needs of approximately 800 people across a diverse range of backgrounds, levels and skills, identify the best way to close the skills/knowledge gap, implement a solution and evaluate the outcome... all within budget!

My role has a lot of scope for creativity as I have to continuously think of new ways to engage staff in learning, such as using forum theatre, introducing a Learning At Work Day, and designing e-learning courses.

I also have a very analytical and strategic role as I need to ensure that the training offered is aligned with our departmental and organisational priorities so that spend can be justified.

But I would say that the largest part of my role is communicating and influencing - gaining buy-in from our Executive Board by emphasising the return on investment in training, encouraging managers to allow their staff to participate in learning and follow-up after the course to help evaluate outcomes, and engaging staff to think about their development and take ownership of it.

**Wellbeing at work**  
**Motivation, leadership and engagement**  
**Learning, training and development**

An occupational psychologist's work covers many aspects of occupational psychology. When I was a practitioner-in-training at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), I had the privilege to experience organisational change, human resource management and employee satisfaction/employee wellbeing, amongst other areas. After eight years with DWP, I left to join the private sector and to experience the cut and thrust of commercial life. It was here that I saw the harsh reality of conflict in the workplace.

The concept of the psychological contract is critical to understanding employee relations and motivation. People go to work expecting to be managed by competent managers; they expect their contribution to the business to be recognised and valued; they expect to be treated with respect and to have equal access to resources, opportunities, information and management time. Toxic workplaces fail to deliver these critical ingredients.

I now run a consultancy that works specifically with companies in conflict. My interventions are focused around cultural change, training and coaching. I also mediate in situations where there is interpersonal conflict or an employment dispute.

Conflict resolution is a challenging environment to work in. However, any downsides are off-set by the rewards of being able to help protect both the organisation and its employees from the psychological, physiological and economic costs of conflict.



**Kisane Prutton**

Chartered Psychologist,  
Chartered Scientist &  
Registered Occupational  
Psychologist

**Prutton Partnership**

# Career profiles



## **Richard Scaife**

Chartered Psychologist,  
Registered Occupational  
Psychologist

## **The Keil Centre**

### **Organisational design, change and development**

The design of work environments is concerned with the application of human factors guidelines and practices to the design of workspaces and the working environment. It aims to ensure efficient and reliable operation of equipment in a safe and comfortable working environment by taking into account human capabilities and limitations.

As an example of our work, we reviewed the ergonomic design of a control room that was being upgraded to include new desks, lighting, computer displays and communications systems. The project involved assessments of the lighting, noise levels, alarm systems, furniture (in terms of usability and comfort for a range of personnel) and lines of communication and provided guidance to the design team on ensuring that human capabilities were taken into account.

For another project we inputted into the design and development of a suit of new armoured vehicles for second line ground force operations. The vehicles were to be used for mine clearance, ground excavation and for building bridges. Given that army personnel may spend up to 72 hours within the vehicle at any one time it was essential to ensure the habitability as well as the operability and safety of the work environment. The project also included the design of the command and control panels, armoury interfaces and driving controls. The design was assessed using 3D computer modelling and a user evaluation using a full scale mock up.

## Organisational design, change and development

Human Factors is a discipline concerned with how people work effectively and safely. It considers a person's environmental, organisational, job, and individual characteristics. These factors affect behaviour and it is part of my job to analyse these and put forward recommendations for change to improve human performance. As a Human Factors consultant I work predominantly in high hazard and safety critical industries, such as power stations.



### **Rachel Cummings**

Chartered Psychologist &  
Registered Occupational  
Psychologist

**AMEC**

There are a number of key areas that Human Factors consultants consider including staffing requirements, personnel (competency, training etc.) and human factors engineering which includes workplace design and layout, equipment design, operating and maintenance requirements.

One of the areas we consider as part of human factors engineering is human-machine interaction (HMI), where we look at the interaction between humans and technical system components. We assess the usability and functionality of a system, such as a computer or workstation, to ensure that the design supports ease of use for the operator. This means that the system must be designed in a way that supports operator behaviour and does not compromise safety. For my analysis I may review the interface, complete interviews with operators, and work through operating procedures to identify any potential issues that could lead to human error. For example, I may look at the use of colour, how the information is presented both in terms of the use of language and its position on the interface, how much information is being presented and if this could lead to confusion for the operator. From that analysis the consequence of errors are assessed and then appropriate recommendations provided to improve the system for the user and in terms of safety.

# Career profiles



**Richard A. MacKinnon**  
Chartered Psychologist &  
Registered Occupational  
Psychologist

## Talent Q

### **Psychological assessment Learning, training and development Organisational design, change and development**

As a consultant with Talent Q, my focus is on helping my clients with the challenges of talent management. This includes assessment for recruitment, individual and team development, facilitation of organisational change and succession planning. My clients come from a range of backgrounds including government, banking, transport and utilities, but all have similar needs: how to find the best people for the job and how to ensure they develop as employees after joining the organisation.

The use of valid, reliable and objective assessment methodologies means that clients, their employees and those aspiring to join the organisation are treated fairly and ethically, allowing me to provide useful feedback on individuals' strengths, working preferences and abilities. This helps ensure candidates are placed in roles that best match their profile and that organisations can align talent against operational and strategic requirements.

I focus on the entire talent lifecycle of the employee - from their entry to the organisation as a new recruit, through ongoing development and change, to eventual exit to another role elsewhere. This joined-up approach to talent management means that psychological data is used to its fullest potential, and provides organisations with an holistic overview of the talent sitting among their employees.

# Find out more

## BPS Careers Portal

The British Psychological Society offers guidance and interactive tools for you to find out more about the different areas of psychology including training routes, pay and work experience.

To explore your next steps, visit: [www.bps.org.uk/careers](http://www.bps.org.uk/careers).

## Join the Society

Joining the Society is an important part of becoming a psychologist and we offer a number of memberships for students and trainees.

Being a member of the Society provides recognition of professional status and reflects your aspiration to represent the highest possible professional standards. We offer a number of benefits to our members, including subscription to *The Psychologist* magazine. More information is available at [www.bps.org.uk/join](http://www.bps.org.uk/join).

## Division of Occupational Psychology (DOP)

The DOP promotes the professional interests of occupational psychologists. We provide training, advice and events to support our members, and aim to develop psychology as a profession and as a body of knowledge and skills.

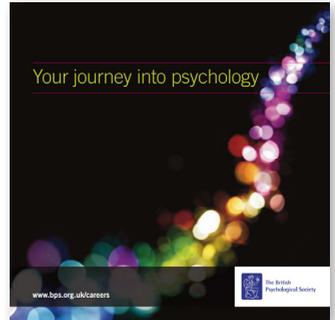
Students are able to join the Division at the same time as applying for membership of the Society. Find out more about the DOP at [www.bps.org.uk/dop](http://www.bps.org.uk/dop).

## Further information

If you would like more information on careers in psychology and postgraduate study, call our careers information line or email:

t: +44 (0)116 252 9534

e: [careers@bpshelpdesk.org.uk](mailto:careers@bpshelpdesk.org.uk)



*Your journey into psychology,*  
the BPS' careers guide



*The Psychologist,*  
the BPS' monthly magazine



Networking at the  
DOP Annual Conference

