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Psychology and Work: an introduction

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Editor's Introduction

This series is a direct outcome of the opportunities and challenges created by the rapid expansion of higher and further education in the past decade.

The expansion involved changes in the structure of advanced education, through the CNAAs, the Polytechnics, the Regional Management Centres and the professional bodies which encouraged staff to develop new and experimental teaching. Substantial changes have taken place in the definition, scope and methodologies of the social, administrative and management sciences leading to modifications in the presentation of these subjects. Many new full-time students and staff have questioned traditional approaches and methods and have established more open discussion and debate on their courses. Demands for qualified manpower led to an expansion in part-time education and increased questioning by students in full-time jobs of the relevance of their studies.

Each of these developments has had a profound impact on the structure and content of courses and given fresh impetus to the discussion and modification of curricula and teaching methods in polytechnics, universities and colleges of further education. The editor and authors of the books in this series have made a deliberate attempt to respond to these changes.

The books set out to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date introduction to the ideas and methods of their subjects for specialist and non-specialist students in fields such as business and management studies, social science and administration. Their aim is to help students who have little or no previous knowledge of them to achieve a mastery of the scope and basic techniques of their subjects and to use them critically and with imagination for further study or for practical professional applications. They also seek to make some contribution to discussions of teaching and learning problems in their field.

Many introductory books present their subjects as a coherent body of knowledge of which the logic is self-evident and the concepts and methods clear to the careful reader. Students do not always find this so. Confronted as they are by a well-established discipline which has developed a particular method that may not bear any obvious relationship to the way in which they have been accustomed to think or to realities as they see them, students often have difficulty in comprehending the significance and detail of the forms of analysis it employs.

The editor and authors of the series felt that they should not take for granted the 'self-evident logic' of their subjects, but try to demonstrate to readers the ways in which their disciplines provide an effective framework for the analysis of problems in their field. When abstractions or concepts are introduced their functions and limitations are explained. Where methods or techniques are described the authors show why they take the form they do and the ways in which they may be used for particular tasks of analysis.

Students often criticise courses because their subjects or parts of them do not have any obvious, or immediate, practical applications. They may present what appear to be unnecessarily complicated ways of dealing with quite straightforward problems or, paradoxically, they may be regarded as oversimplifying or ignoring difficulties which are experienced in real situations. Systems of knowledge provide generalisations which are derived from a variety of abstractions and models. Some of these yield tools of description and analysis that have direct applications. Others suggest ways of looking at problems that, however fruitful, may have only limited or indirect applications.

The authors have tried to make clear the relevance of their subjects. Where concepts and methods have direct applications they show how, and under what circumstances, they can usefully be applied. Where they are of indirect use they show how a process of simplification may isolate and draw attention to the important characteristics of a complex problem, or how the study of complicated or abstract aspects of a problem may throw fresh light on it.

The authors have rejected a view, reflected in many basic textbooks, that students at an introductory level should concentrate on 'learning up' the information and techniques of their subjects and not be troubled with discussions of concepts and analytical method. This 'descriptive' approach, which divorces the study of techniques from that of conceptual and analytical structures, makes it more rather than less difficult for students to appreciate how a technique has developed, why it takes a particular form and how it functions. As a result students can spend a considerable time trying to understand, with limited success, a method of describing and presenting information or a method of analysis and fail to achieve any real facility in using it. The discussion of concepts and analytical method also acquaints a student with some of the difficulties and controversies surrounding the ideas and techniques he is studying. Without such knowledge he is unlikely to appreciate their limitations or establish any real ability to discriminate between alternative approaches and methods.

One of the more important aims of education is to develop a student's capacity to formulate and solve theoretical and practical problems. It is clear that few business and administrative problems are in practice separable into the neat categories represented by disciplines such as economics, accounting, law, sociology, psychology and computing. But most courses are based on combinations of studies in these and similar discrete disciplines which are rarely effectively integrated. It is recognised that the development of bodies of knowledge which provide rigorous rather than superficial integrative approaches will be a long and difficult task. The editor and authors of the books in this series are aware of this problem and within their limitations

have attempted to indicate points at which contributions from other disciplines are necessary to the analysis of the problems with which they are dealing. It is thus hoped that in the long run the series will make some contribution to the development of interdisciplinary approaches.

The problems outlined above are common in the teaching and learning of many subjects which, although emerging historically as systems for analysing and solving practical problems, have developed advanced methodologies and a logical order of presentation that may not bear an obvious relation to the practical problems with which they are supposed to be concerned.

Many students are attracted to the study of psychology, perhaps because they already have considerable experience of human behaviour and that studies in the discipline will increase their knowledge of their own and others' motivations and actions. It is therefore surprising how frequently the subject presents students with unexpected difficulties. This may be due to the fact that psychology employs sophisticated forms of analyses and technical language to interpret phenomena and situations that are part of everyday human experience and which are normally understood and discussed in simple 'lay-man' terminology. The transition from the one to the other can prove extremely difficult and sometimes irrelevant. Psychology is also a field in which there is a multiplicity of differing and sometimes conflicting explanations for what may appear to be either obvious or objectively testable behaviour. The authors of this text have sought to show what is agreed and what is a matter of dispute in behavioural analysis and to what extent common-sense ideas are reinforced or questioned by experimental evidence. They have also set the discussion of the psychology of work within the framework of general psychological theory so that the student who successfully completes the text will have not only a thorough grasp of the practical applications of psychology to fields in which he is interested but also a firm understanding of their general theoretical background for further professional study.

The editor and authors of the books in this series are conscious of their limitations in attempting to implement their ideas in writing and teaching and do not suppose that their presentation will solve students' learning problems. They do not ignore the critical importance of motivation and sustained and disciplined study as factors in effective learning. But they felt that if subjects were presented in a way that made their form and justification explicit rather than implicit this would aid teaching and learning.

In seeking to achieve their aims the books in the series have been subjected to a great deal of critical scrutiny. Each is written by more than one author. This has enabled authors to combine a comparison of views with a considerable, and sometimes uncomfortable, degree of mutual criticism. The editor and authors have all, in recent years, had considerable experience of designing and teaching new CNAA honours degree, diploma or professional courses. Their manuscripts have been discussed with colleagues in education and the professions and have been tested in classes with students.

My thanks as editor are owed to the authors who responded to my request to write the books in the form that I have outlined. This has involved them in an extremely demanding process. The fact that we shared some basic assumptions about education and learning was of great help. The editors and

staff of Macmillan with whom we have worked have showed great patience and could not have done more in difficult circumstances to encourage the series. My thanks are also due to George Brosan, Maurice Peston and Bruce May, who through many discussions have significantly influenced my educational ideas, and to my wife Diane, who has kept a discerning eye on my activities and the progress of the series.

February 1976

ALAN HALE

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Preface

This is a book about psychology in which the authors have attempted, wherever possible, to discuss its relevance to the world of work. There are many texts available which give a good introduction to either basic general psychology or occupational (industrial) psychology. Perhaps the most noticeable characteristic of these two types of text is the small amount of overlap in subject-matter. In particular, we feel that neither of these introductions is particularly appropriate for the student of business and administration who wishes to know the relevance of psychology to his subject-matter. If he is presented merely with general psychology, he is left with the very difficult task of deducing for himself its relevance to the work situation. As his knowledge of psychology at this stage can only be an introductory one, this task, we feel, is too demanding. On the other hand, if he is presented merely with occupational psychology, his lack of appreciation of basic psychological theory and methodology is likely to impair his ability to use the techniques and methods wisely. We feel that basic psychology has more relevance to work than the content of most texts on industrial psychology would suggest. Thus in the present text we shall consider both general psychology and industrial psychology, but treat them in such a way as to try to overcome the objections raised above. We would like the reader of this book to glean from it an insight into the way psychologists approach problems in the world of work. In order to achieve this objective, we have divided the book into a number of parts. Each part comprises chapters of both general and occupational psychology. We have chosen to do this rather than divide the book into two sections, one on general and the other on occupational psychology, in order to illustrate more clearly the relationship between them. This caused problems because it was very difficult to decide which areas of basic psychology to put with which areas of occupational psychology. Many concepts such as those of 'motivation' and 'perception' are clearly relevant to a number of different areas. Certainly groupings other than the one we have chosen could have been equally logical.

The book, *in toto*, therefore constitutes an introduction to psychology and work. However, by reading selectively, it is also possible to use it for two other purposes: either as an introduction to general psychology; or as an introduction to occupational psychology. None the less, we do feel that it is best read

from the point of view from which it was originally conceived as an introduction to psychology and work.

We should like to thank Alan Hale for his helpful advice on the manuscript, and those of our colleagues, friends and students who have commented on various parts of the text. Not least we must thank our long-suffering wives and families, of whom we have seen rather less than we would have liked while writing this book. Finally, we would like to thank Mrs Janet Saunders and Mrs Betty Lansdell for their very rapid and efficient typing of the manuscript.

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S. POPPLETON

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