Need theories

Lesson 6.1.1 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Need theories explain motivation as a drive to satisfy psychological or practical needs through work.

Maslow's hierarchy arranges five needs from physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualisation.

In workplaces, lower-level needs can connect to pay, rest and security, while higher-level needs can connect to teamwork, respect, achievement and personal growth.

Saeednia's research is useful because it tried to measure satisfaction of Maslow's basic needs with a structured scale rather than relying only on broad theory.

McClelland argued that workers can differ in need for achievement, need for affiliation and need for power.

Need theories are easy to apply to everyday work, but they can overgeneralise because motivation also depends on culture, job design, personal goals and situational constraints.

Need theories

Lesson 6.1.1 | Organisational psychology

Key terms

Need theory: An explanation of motivation based on needs that people try to satisfy.

Hierarchy of needs: Maslow's idea that needs can be arranged from basic survival needs to self-actualisation.

Physiological needs: Basic needs such as food, water, rest and physical survival.

Safety needs: Needs for security, stability and protection from harm.

Belonging needs: Needs for relationships, acceptance and group membership.

Esteem needs: Needs for respect, recognition and a sense of competence.

Self-actualisation: Developing one's potential and pursuing personal growth.

Need for achievement: McClelland's motive to succeed, meet standards and master challenging tasks.

Further detail and evidence

Maslow's five needs, from lower to higher: physiological (food/rest), safety (security/protection), love/belonging (relationships), esteem (respect/achievement), self-actualisation (realising potential). A relatively unmet need is proposed to motivate action; the strict order should be evaluated rather than assumed universal.

Need theories

Lesson 6.1.1 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Saeednia (2011) developed a measure of the hierarchy using child interviews to generate material and a larger child sample to examine the scale. Evidence of acceptable measurement properties is not proof that every adult employee must satisfy needs in a rigid order.

McClelland: need for achievement seeks challenging but attainable success and feedback; affiliation seeks acceptance and close relationships; power seeks influence. Personalised power serves the individual, while socialised power can serve organisational/group aims. People differ in the relative strength of these learned needs.

Applying the ideas

Secure employment may address safety, a supportive team belonging, and responsibility/skill development esteem or self-actualisation. An achievement-motivated worker may prefer clear feedback and moderate challenge; affiliation and power can predict different preferred roles. Do not equate every person's motivation with money.

Evaluation and connections

Need theories organise workplace practices but broad concepts can be difficult to operationalise. Multiple needs can operate together, and culture changes what is valued. A scale developed with children has limited direct validity for adult workplaces. Compare individual need patterns with situational opportunities to satisfy them.

Cognitive theories

Lesson 6.1.2 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Cognitive theories explain motivation through beliefs, expectations and decisions rather than only through needs or rewards.

Latham and Locke's goal-setting theory argues that clear, challenging goals can improve performance when workers are committed and receive useful feedback.

Goal-setting principles include clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback and task complexity.

SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound, so workers know exactly what success should look like.

Vroom's VIE theory explains motivation through expectancy, instrumentality and valence.

Cognitive theories are useful because they apply to everyday work planning, but they can be too rational if they ignore emotion, culture, habit or unequal access to rewards.

Cognitive theories

Lesson 6.1.2 | Organisational psychology

Key terms

Goal-setting theory: A theory that clear and challenging goals can improve motivation and performance.

Goal clarity: How specific and understandable a goal is.

Goal commitment: How strongly a worker accepts and wants to reach a goal.

Feedback: Information about progress or performance.

SMART goal: A goal that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

Expectancy: Belief that effort will lead to good performance.

Instrumentality: Belief that good performance will lead to a valued outcome.

Valence: How much a worker values the outcome or reward.

Further detail and evidence

Goal-setting principles: clarity makes the target understandable; challenge requires meaningful effort; commitment makes it personally accepted; feedback shows progress; task complexity requires suitable time, resources and subgoals. A difficult target without skills/support may reduce effectiveness.

Cognitive theories

Lesson 6.1.2 | Organisational psychology

Continued

SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. For example, completing an agreed number of accurately checked records by the end of a week specifies an outcome and deadline; "work harder" does not.

Vroom's VIE: expectancy is the belief that effort can produce the required performance; instrumentality is the belief that performance leads to an outcome; valence is the value of that outcome. Motivation depends on all three, often represented as a multiplicative relationship: one missing link can undermine effort.

Applying the ideas

An attractive bonus has high valence, but motivation can remain low if the worker lacks training (low expectancy) or believes rewards are allocated unfairly (low instrumentality). A useful response targets the weak link, rather than only increasing the bonus. Feedback can show whether performance is approaching a goal.

Evaluation and connections

Cognitive accounts recognise interpretation and agency. They can oversimplify if they treat all choices as calculated or assume one valued reward. Goals can narrow attention and encourage quantity at the expense of quality. Evaluate cultural values, task complexity, fairness, wellbeing and whether performance is under the worker's control.

Motivators at work

Lesson 6.1.3 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Extrinsic motivators come from outside the work itself, such as pay, bonuses, profit-sharing and performance-related pay.

Intrinsic motivators come from the work experience, such as interest, respect, recognition, empowerment and belonging.

Reward systems can increase effort when employees see them as fair, achievable and linked to valued outcomes.

Performance-related pay can focus behaviour on measurable targets, but it may reduce cooperation or intrinsic interest if workers feel controlled.

Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory argues that motivation is stronger when competence, autonomy and relatedness are supported.

Landry et al. can be used to examine motivational rewards through self-determination theory, especially whether rewards feel autonomy-supportive or controlling.

Key terms

Extrinsic motivator: A motivator that comes from outside the work itself, such as money or a bonus.

Intrinsic motivator: A motivator based on interest, satisfaction or meaning in the work itself.

Performance-related pay: Pay linked to measured performance or target achievement.

Profit-sharing: A reward system where employees receive part of the organisation's profit.

Recognition: Acknowledgement or praise for effort, skill or achievement.

Empowerment: Giving workers more control, responsibility or decision-making power.

Autonomy: Feeling able to choose and direct one's own actions.

Relatedness: Feeling connected, respected and included with other people.

Motivators at work

Lesson 6.1.3 | Organisational psychology

Further detail and evidence

Key study: Landry et al. (2019), Study 1, tested reward meaning: autonomy-supportive appreciation versus controlling performance pressure.

123 French-speaking Canadian university volunteers, mean age 23 and 60% women, were randomly assigned to supportive (65) or controlling (58) instructions.

Both offered a $10 coffee-shop gift card: wording changed meaning while amount stayed constant.

Participants attempted 25 four-letter anagrams in two minutes and completed validated scales of needs and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation.

Supportive wording produced greater need satisfaction, intrinsic motivation and performance, and less need frustration and extrinsic motivation.

Mean intrinsic-motivation scores were 5.31 versus 4.56, and composite performance scores (based on correct and incorrect responses, not percentage accuracy) of 0.76 versus 0.54, supportive versus controlling.

Extrinsic systems: basic pay provides income; a bonus is an additional reward; profit-sharing links rewards to organisational profit; performance-related pay links them to assessed output. Intrinsic motivation is satisfaction in the activity itself. Praise, respect, recognition, empowerment and belonging can support it, though an external reward is not automatically intrinsic.

Motivators at work

Lesson 6.1.3 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Self-determination theory: autonomy is a sense of choice/volition, competence is feeling effective, and relatedness is connection with others. The meaning and delivery of a reward can support or frustrate these needs. Cash need not always undermine intrinsic motivation.

Landry's designated Study 1 kept the reward value constant and manipulated need-supportive versus controlling presentation. It tested how the interpersonal context of a monetary reward related to needs, motivation and anagram performance, rather than simply comparing reward with no reward.

Applying the ideas

"Here is information recognising your contribution" may be experienced differently from "You must perform this way to deserve payment." The same reward amount can communicate appreciation or control. In Landry, distinguish a composite performance measure from a percentage-correct score.

Evaluation and connections

This supports self-determination theory: autonomy, competence and relatedness help explain rewards; money is not invariably harmful or beneficial.

Random allocation and standard tasks aid comparison; students, brief tasks and self-report limit workplace generalisation. Study 1 is required; Study 2 methodology is excluded in 2027.

Random allocation and constant reward value isolate presentation more clearly. A short student anagram task and coffee-card reward limit generalisation to salaries and long-term employment. Self-report need satisfaction is subjective, while task output adds behavioural evidence. Compare autonomy support with the practical need for clear standards and fair pay.

Traditional and modern theories of leadership

Lesson 6.2.1 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Universalist theories assume some leadership qualities or patterns can work across many situations.

Great person theories treat leadership as linked to special personal qualities, while charismatic leadership focuses on influence through vision, confidence and emotional appeal.

Transformational leaders try to inspire followers to go beyond routine performance by creating vision, intellectual challenge and commitment to shared goals.

Behavioural theories shift attention from who the leader is to what the leader does, such as structuring tasks or showing concern for people.

Ohio University and Michigan University explanations both studied leader behaviour, including task-focused and relationship-focused patterns.

Heifetz's adaptive leadership focuses on helping people face complex challenges, learn, share responsibility and adjust when old solutions are not enough.

Traditional and modern theories of leadership

Lesson 6.2.1 | Organisational psychology

Key terms

Universalist theory: A theory suggesting that some leadership qualities or behaviours work across many situations.

Great person theory: The idea that leaders have special personal qualities that set them apart.

Charismatic leader: A leader who influences others through personal appeal, confidence and vision.

Transformational leader: A leader who inspires change, commitment and higher levels of performance.

Behavioural theory: An explanation that focuses on what leaders do rather than fixed traits.

Task-focused behaviour: Leader behaviour aimed at organising work, goals and procedures.

Relationship-focused behaviour: Leader behaviour aimed at support, trust and concern for people.

Adaptive leadership: Leadership that helps people respond to complex challenges by learning and adjusting.

Further detail and evidence

Great person accounts emphasise exceptional personal qualities; charismatic leaders influence through vision and emotional appeal; transformational leaders develop commitment through inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration and a shared purpose. These approaches differ from explaining leadership entirely through a job title.

Traditional and modern theories of leadership

Lesson 6.2.1 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Ohio studies distinguish initiating structure (organising tasks/roles) and consideration (support/trust); these can both be high. Michigan studies contrast employee-centred and production-centred behaviour. Behavioural approaches suggest actions can be learned rather than only inherited.

Heifetz's six principles: get on the balcony (see the wider pattern); identify the adaptive challenge; regulate distress; maintain disciplined attention; give the work back to people; protect voices from below. Adaptive challenges require learning and value change, not merely an expert's existing technical solution.

Adaptive responsibilities include providing direction while exposing real challenges, regulating the pace, maintaining a workable setting, addressing conflict and encouraging learning. Protecting dissent helps the group hear information that established authority might suppress.

Applying the ideas

Installing familiar software can be a technical task; changing a team's habits and values around collaboration is adaptive. A leader can clarify the problem and regulate pressure while allowing employees to develop solutions. High consideration can coexist with clear task structure.

Evaluation and connections

Universal traits may overlook followers and context. Behavioural measures are more observable but ratings can reflect success after the event. Charisma may inspire or encourage uncritical dependence. Evaluate which approach predicts performance in a particular setting and whether evidence generalises across cultures.

Leadership style

Lesson 6.2.2 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Leadership style is the pattern of behaviour a leader uses when making decisions, giving direction and working with followers.

Muczyk and Reimann describe leader behaviour using two dimensions: how much followers participate in decisions and how directive the leader is during implementation.

Their four styles are directive autocrat, permissive autocrat, directive democrat and permissive democrat.

Scouller's three levels separate public leadership with the whole group, private leadership with individuals or small groups and personal leadership based on the leader's own qualities and self-management.

Leadership style and gender research asks whether the same behaviour is judged differently when the leader is described as a woman or a man.

Cuadrado et al. can be used to discuss how stereotypes, experimental design and generalisability affect conclusions about gender and leadership.

Key terms

Leadership style: A leader's usual pattern of directing, involving and influencing followers.

Directive autocrat: A leader who makes decisions and gives strong direction during implementation.

Permissive autocrat: A leader who makes decisions but gives followers more freedom in carrying them out.

Directive democrat: A leader who involves followers in decisions but gives clear direction during implementation.

Leadership style

Lesson 6.2.2 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Permissive democrat: A leader who involves followers in decisions and gives freedom during implementation.

Public leadership: Scouller's level focused on leading the group as a whole.

Private leadership: Scouller's level focused on one-to-one or small-group leadership.

Gender stereotype: A generalised expectation about behaviour based on gender.

Further detail and evidence

Key study: Cuadrado et al. (2008) tested role congruity: whether leader gender and stereotyped style affect evaluations and help explain women's leadership underrepresentation.

136 Spanish psychology students, 53% women, were randomly allocated to four groups of 34.

A 2 × 2 experiment varied leader gender and masculine-stereotyped versus feminine-stereotyped style in a hospital-emergency-service narrative.

The masculine-stereotyped style was autocratic/task-oriented; the feminine-stereotyped style was democratic, relationship-oriented and individually considerate. These are manipulated stereotypes, not innate sex differences.

Participants rated competence, efficacy and traits. The feminine-stereotyped style received more favourable ratings regardless of leader gender.

There was no main effect of leader gender: the result did not simply confirm that equivalent female leaders were rated worse.

Muczyk/Reimann combine participation in decisions with direction during implementation. Directive autocrat: leader decides and closely directs. Permissive autocrat: leader decides but allows implementation freedom. Directive democrat: followers participate in decisions, then implementation is closely directed. Permissive democrat: participation and implementation freedom are both high.

Leadership style

Lesson 6.2.2 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Scouller: public leadership concerns the collective group, private leadership concerns one-to-one work with individuals, and personal leadership concerns the leader's own self-awareness, skills and psychological development. Personal leadership supports the other two; it is not merely private life.

Cuadrado's gender/style experiment uses role-congruity expectations as its context. Its finding favouring the relationship-oriented/democratic style across leader genders should be distinguished from the hypothesis that women would be penalised simply for holding leadership roles.

Applying the ideas

A team may help decide a project method while the manager closely monitors implementation: directive democracy. A manager can unilaterally choose a goal but leave an experienced team to decide how: permissive autocracy. Participation and follow-up are independent decisions.

Evaluation and connections

Random allocation and controlled narratives aid validity; reliable multi-item ratings aid consistency. A hypothetical scenario and student sample limit real-hiring generalisation.

Evaluate nature/nurture, individual/situational explanations and cultural differences. Fictional-leader ratings do not demonstrate actual managerial effectiveness.

Written scenarios isolate gender/style information but omit real interaction and consequences. Student competence ratings are not hiring decisions or productivity. The labels masculine/feminine refer to stereotypes manipulated in the study, not biological properties. No main gender effect does not show that discrimination never occurs in any workplace.

Leaders and followers

Lesson 6.2.3 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory measures how often leaders show five practical leadership behaviours.

The five practices are Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act and Encourage the Heart.

The LPI is a self-report or observer-report measure, so it is useful for feedback but can be affected by social desirability and rating bias.

Followership means the active role followers play in supporting, questioning or shaping what leaders and groups do.

Kelley describes followership using two dimensions: independent critical thinking and active engagement.

Kelley's five follower styles are effective followers, yes people, sheep, alienated followers and survivors.

Leaders and followers

Lesson 6.2.3 | Organisational psychology

Key terms

Leadership Practices Inventory: Kouzes and Posner's questionnaire for measuring five leadership practices.

Model the Way: Showing the values and standards that followers are expected to follow.

Inspire a Shared Vision: Communicating a clear future that others can believe in and work toward.

Challenge the Process: Looking for better ways to work and being willing to test change.

Enable Others to Act: Building trust, cooperation and confidence so others can contribute.

Encourage the Heart: Recognising effort and celebrating progress.

Followership: The way followers think, act and take responsibility in relation to leaders and group goals.

Active engagement: The extent to which followers participate, take initiative and put effort into group goals.

Leaders and followers

Lesson 6.2.3 | Organisational psychology

Further detail and evidence

LPI practices: Model the Way clarifies values and sets an example; Inspire a Shared Vision communicates an attractive future; Challenge the Process searches for improvements and learns from risks; Enable Others to Act builds trust/capability; Encourage the Heart recognises contributions and celebrates progress.

Followership is an active contribution to collective work, including appropriate support and challenge. Kelley's dimensions are independent critical thinking versus dependence, and active engagement versus passivity.

Five styles: effective followers are high on both dimensions; alienated followers think independently but engage little; yes people engage actively but depend on leaders' thinking; sheep are low on both; survivors/pragmatists occupy a cautious middle position. These describe patterns that can change with context.

Applying the ideas

An employee who identifies a problem, proposes evidence and helps implement a better solution shows both critical thinking and active engagement. Agreeing enthusiastically without evaluating a weak plan is closer to a yes-person pattern. Constructive challenge can support a leader rather than signify disloyalty.

Evaluation and connections

Self and observer LPI ratings enable structured feedback but can be shaped by social desirability, liking and unequal opportunities to observe. Check reliability and cultural meaning. Typologies simplify variation and can become stereotypes; use evidence across situations rather than permanently labelling a worker from one act.

Group development and decision-making

Lesson 6.3.1 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Tuckman and Jensen describe group development as forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning.

The stages help explain why new groups may begin politely, experience conflict, agree norms, work effectively and then separate after the task.

Belbin's nine team roles describe useful behaviour patterns that can help a team balance ideas, relationships and task completion.

The nine roles are Resource Investigator, Teamworker, Co-ordinator, Plant, Monitor Evaluator, Specialist, Shaper, Implementer and Completer Finisher.

Groupthink is faulty decision-making where pressure for agreement reduces criticism, alternatives and attention to warning signs.

Forsyth's cognitive limitations and errors include sins of commission, sins of omission and sins of imprecision, all of which can distort group decisions.

Key terms

Forming: The early stage when group members orient themselves and learn the task.

Storming: The stage where conflict, role disagreement or resistance may appear.

Norming: The stage where shared expectations and working patterns become clearer.

Performing: The stage where the group works more effectively toward its goals.

Group development and decision-making

Lesson 6.3.1 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Adjourning: The stage where the group finishes its task and separates.

Belbin team role: A useful pattern of behaviour a person can contribute to a team.

Groupthink: Poor group decision-making caused by pressure for agreement and lack of challenge.

Sin of omission: A Forsyth error where a group overlooks useful or relevant information.

Further detail and evidence

Development: forming establishes orientation; storming involves disagreement over roles/goals; norming develops shared expectations; performing coordinates effective work; adjourning concerns completion/separation. Groups may revisit stages after membership or task changes.

Belbin ideas roles: Plant generates creative solutions; Monitor Evaluator critically weighs options; Specialist supplies deep expertise. Action roles: Shaper drives progress; Implementer turns plans into practical work; Completer Finisher checks errors and deadlines. People roles: Co-ordinator clarifies goals/delegates; Teamworker supports cooperation; Resource Investigator explores external opportunities. One person may perform several roles.

Groupthink features include illusions of invulnerability/morality, collective rationalisation, stereotypes of outsiders, direct pressure on dissent, self-censorship, apparent unanimity and mindguards filtering warnings. Prevention includes impartial leadership, independent views, external review, a devil's advocate and reconsidering the decision.

Group development and decision-making

Lesson 6.3.1 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Forsyth commission errors actively use faulty judgement: belief perseverance retains discredited beliefs; sunk-cost thinking continues because of past investment; extra-evidentiary bias lets material that should be excluded influence judgement; hindsight makes an outcome seem predictable after it occurs.

Omission errors leave relevant information out: base-rate neglect ignores background frequencies; fundamental attribution error overemphasises dispositions over situations; confirmation bias fails to seek disconfirming evidence. Imprecision errors use rough shortcuts: availability relies on easy recall; conjunction error rates a combined event above a component; representativeness uses similarity instead of sound probability.

Applying the ideas

A team defending a failing project because it has already spent money shows sunk-cost thinking. Suppressing doubts to maintain unity illustrates groupthink. Independent preliminary judgements, diverse roles and a second review can reduce these pressures without guaranteeing a perfect decision.

Evaluation and connections

Stage and role models organise team practice but can oversimplify fluid groups. Role questionnaires may reflect self-image. Explain a particular decision error and how a proposed safeguard addresses it; merely listing more meetings does not show how evidence quality improves.

Individual and group performance

Lesson 6.3.2 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Social facilitation is when the presence of others changes individual performance, often improving simple or well-learned tasks but weakening complex or unfamiliar tasks.

Drive theory explains social facilitation by arguing that other people increase arousal, which strengthens the dominant response.

Evaluation apprehension explains performance change through concern about being judged rather than mere physical presence.

Social loafing is reduced individual effort when people work in a group and their own contribution is less identifiable.

Social impact theory helps explain loafing because responsibility can feel spread across more people as group size increases.

Research on culture and monitoring asks when group performance improves or declines in real workplaces, such as collectivist groups or employees under electronic observation.

Key terms

Social facilitation: A change in performance caused by the presence of others.

Drive theory: The idea that others increase arousal and strengthen a person's dominant response.

Dominant response: The response a person is most likely to give in that situation.

Evaluation apprehension: Concern about being judged by others.

Social loafing: Putting in less effort when working in a group than when working alone.

Social impact theory: The idea that social influence depends on factors such as strength, immediacy and number of people.

Collectivist culture: A culture where group goals and interdependence are usually emphasised.

Electronic performance monitoring: Using technology to observe, record or assess employee performance.

Individual and group performance

Lesson 6.3.2 | Organisational psychology

Further detail and evidence

Key study: Claypoole and Szalma (2019), Experiment 1, extended social-facilitation research to electronic monitoring during monotonous vigilance.

106 US university volunteers, 65 female and mean age about 20.6, entered electronic-presence or control conditions, 53 per group.

Participants monitored two-digit numbers and responded to critical signals. Electronic presence combined webcam and video-recorder monitoring; controls worked alone without them.

Correct detections, false alarms and response times were measured across a 24-minute task in four six-minute periods: performance data rather than self-rated concentration.

Monitored participants detected more signals (0.6906 versus 0.6038), made fewer false alarms and responded faster overall.

Vigilance still deteriorated with time: monitoring improved average performance rather than abolishing the vigilance decrement.

Social facilitation means performance changes in the presence of others, often improving simple/well-learned responses and impairing difficult/new ones. Drive theory proposes increased arousal strengthens the dominant response; evaluation apprehension emphasises concern about being judged.

Social loafing is reduced individual effort when contributions are pooled. Social impact theory considers how the influence of social sources is divided across targets: accountability can weaken as responsibility is spread. Identifiable contributions and meaningful shared goals can reduce loafing.

Individual and group performance

Lesson 6.3.2 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Earley (1993) compared individual, in-group and out-group performance in different cultural contexts. Collectivist participants performed especially well with an in-group; individualists showed reduced performance in group conditions relative to alone. Group membership matters alongside cultural orientation; do not equate nationality with every individual's beliefs.

Claypoole and Szalma's designated Experiment 1 tested electronic monitoring during sustained attention. The combined webcam/recording condition improved detection and other performance indices relative to being alone, while vigilance still declined over time. Monitoring is therefore not a guarantee of constant perfect concentration.

Applying the ideas

A practised task may benefit from evaluation-related arousal, while a novice may make more errors under scrutiny. A group output hiding individual effort can encourage loafing. Monitoring a single person's vigilance is different from testing effort in a pooled group task.

Evaluation and connections

The conclusion supports electronic social presence as an influence on attention. Standardised measurement aids reliability, but a brief student laboratory task may not generalise to workplaces.

Evaluate apprehension about evaluation, privacy and consent, and individual/situational influences. Experiment 1 is required; Experiment 2 methodology is excluded in 2027.

Experimental monitoring offers control, but a short student task differs from real employment, incentives and privacy expectations. Between-culture comparisons need equivalent tasks and attention to within-culture differences. Evaluate benefits alongside stress, trust, consent and whether quality is being measured as well as output.

Conflict at work

Lesson 6.3.3 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Workplace conflict can happen within a person, between individuals, within a group or between groups.

Organisational causes of conflict include unclear roles, scarce resources, workload pressure and incompatible goals.

Interpersonal causes include personality clashes, communication problems, perceived unfairness and damaged trust.

Thomas-Kilmann describes five conflict-handling modes: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding and accommodating.

No conflict-handling mode is always best; the usefulness depends on urgency, relationship needs, power and the importance of the issue.

Einarsen describes workplace bullying as repeated negative acts that can escalate from aggression to bullying, stigmatisation and serious harm.

Conflict at work

Lesson 6.3.3 | Organisational psychology

Key terms

Intra-individual conflict: Conflict within one person, such as incompatible work demands or values.

Inter-individual conflict: Conflict between two or more individuals.

Intra-group conflict: Conflict within the same team or work group.

Inter-group conflict: Conflict between different teams, departments or groups.

Competing: A conflict mode high in assertiveness and low in cooperativeness.

Collaborating: A conflict mode high in assertiveness and cooperativeness, aiming for a win-win solution.

Accommodating: A conflict mode where one side gives way to preserve the relationship or satisfy the other side.

Workplace bullying: Repeated negative behaviour at work where the target struggles to defend themselves.

Further detail and evidence

Conflict levels: intra-individual is within a person (competing goals); inter-individual is between people; intra-group is within one group; inter-group is between groups. Causes include scarce resources, incompatible goals, role ambiguity, interdependence, perceived unfairness and communication problems.

Conflict at work

Lesson 6.3.3 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Thomas-Kilmann combines assertiveness with cooperation: competing is high assertiveness/low cooperation; collaborating is high on both; accommodating is low assertiveness/high cooperation; avoiding is low on both; compromising seeks a middle ground. No mode is universally best for every urgency and relationship.

Bullying is repeated negative treatment over time where a target has difficulty defending themselves. Einarsen (1999) distinguishes dispute-related escalation from predatory targeting. Work-related acts undermine tasks; person-related acts include ridicule, exclusion and threats.

The described escalation runs from aggressive behaviours to bullying, stigmatisation and severe trauma. Causes can involve leadership, poor psychosocial conditions, power and interpersonal processes. The review draws together research rather than reporting one newly randomised bullying experiment.

Applying the ideas

Two departments competing for one budget illustrate inter-group conflict. Working jointly to redesign resource use is collaboration; splitting the budget midway is compromise. Persistent targeted exclusion with unequal power differs from a single ordinary disagreement between equal colleagues.

Evaluation and connections

Sensitive research relies on confidential accounts and clear definitions. Retrospective reports cannot establish every causal sequence. Explaining contextual risks does not justify mistreatment or imply the target caused it. Use both individual and organisational evidence; avoid treating a conflict-handling questionnaire as a complete account of power.

Physical work conditions

Lesson 6.4.1 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Physical work conditions include features such as lighting, noise, temperature, space, privacy and office layout.

Work conditions can affect productivity directly by making tasks easier or harder, and indirectly by changing comfort, stress or motivation.

The Hawthorne effect describes behaviour changing because workers know they are being observed or given special attention.

Open-plan offices may increase contact and visibility, but they can also reduce privacy, increase noise and make concentration harder.

Oldham and Brass studied employee reactions to moving into an open-plan office, making the topic useful for discussing questionnaires, longitudinal change and real workplace application.

Key terms

Physical work conditions: Environmental features of a workplace that can affect behaviour and performance.

Productivity: The amount or quality of work produced over a period of time.

Physical work conditions

Lesson 6.4.1 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Hawthorne effect: A change in behaviour caused by being observed or receiving special attention.

Open-plan office: An office layout with few or no interior walls separating workers.

Privacy: The degree to which workers can control access to themselves, their work and conversations.

Noise distraction: Unwanted sound that can interrupt attention or reduce comfort.

Quasi-experiment: A study where the researcher uses naturally occurring groups or changes rather than full random allocation.

Longitudinal study: Research that collects data from the same people or setting over time.

Further detail and evidence

Physical influences include lighting, noise, temperature, ventilation, seating, privacy and layout. Assess accuracy, speed, fatigue and wellbeing rather than assuming that higher output captures all benefits. Task demands can change which conditions are helpful.

The Hawthorne effect is the proposed change in behaviour associated with observation or special attention. Kompier (2006) critically reviewed the original evidence and rejected the simple textbook story as inadequately supported: methodological weaknesses and changes in pay, conditions and organisation complicate attribution.

Physical work conditions

Lesson 6.4.1 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Oldham and Brass (1979) followed a real move from conventional offices to open-plan space. Satisfaction and internal motivation decreased after the move. The naturally occurring comparison had practical relevance, but office design was not randomly assigned to otherwise identical workers.

Open plan can improve visibility and ease of contact, while increasing distraction, noise and privacy loss. Individual concentration and collaborative work can demand different spaces. Flexible access to quiet and shared areas is a testable application rather than proof of one ideal layout.

Applying the ideas

If productivity rises during a lighting trial, consider altered incentives, supervision, task learning and staff changes before attributing the increase to being observed. For a relocation study, measure employees before and after and use a comparable group where possible.

Evaluation and connections

Longitudinal questionnaires can track change but repeated responses, expectations and attrition affect interpretation. Objective output and qualitative comments complement ratings. Kompier's critique does not prove that observation can never affect behaviour; it challenges the evidence for the classic causal story.

Temporal conditions of work environments

Lesson 6.4.2 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Temporal work conditions are features of when people work, including shift timing, rotation speed, on-call demands and flexible start or finish times.

Shiftwork can disrupt circadian rhythms, sleep quality and alertness, especially when work happens at night or schedules keep changing.

Rapid rotation changes shifts frequently, while slow rotation keeps workers on one shift pattern for longer before changing.

On-call work can create uncertainty and stress because workers must be ready to work even when they are not actively on duty.

Flexitime gives workers some control over start and finish times, which may improve autonomy and work-life balance.

Gold et al. found that rotating-shift nurses reported more sleep disruption and sleepiness-related accidents or errors than nurses working day or evening shifts.

Temporal conditions of work environments

Lesson 6.4.2 | Organisational psychology

Key terms

Temporal work conditions: Workplace conditions related to the timing and scheduling of work.

Shiftwork: Work scheduled outside a single standard daytime pattern.

Rapid rotation: A shift system where workers change shift type frequently.

Slow rotation: A shift system where workers stay on one shift type for a longer period before changing.

On-call work: A schedule where workers must be available to work if called in.

Flexitime: A system where workers have some choice over start and finish times.

Circadian rhythm: The body's roughly 24-hour sleep-wake and alertness cycle.

Sleepiness-related accident: An accident or error linked to tiredness or reduced alertness.

Further detail and evidence

Rapid rotation changes shifts after short runs, such as several days; slow rotation retains one shift for longer, such as weeks. On-call work requires availability when needed and may interrupt rest. Flexitime permits some choice over start/end times around agreed requirements/core hours.

Temporal conditions of work environments

Lesson 6.4.2 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Shift patterns can disrupt circadian rhythms, sleep length/quality, meals, family routines and recovery. Daytime sleep may be shortened by light, noise and social obligations. A person can adapt partly without eliminating every fatigue risk.

Gold et al. (1992) used a cross-sectional questionnaire with hospital nurses to relate schedules to sleepiness and accidents/near misses. Rotating workers reported more sleep disruption and sleepiness-related problems than fixed day/evening workers. Self-report associations do not show that schedule alone caused each accident.

Applying the ideas

A worker alternating day and night duties has different adjustment demands from someone on a stable day schedule. On-call interruption can reduce recovery even when total scheduled hours look modest. Flexitime may support preferences but cannot remove all staffing constraints.

Evaluation and connections

Questionnaires efficiently collect schedules and rare incidents, but recall and reluctance to report errors threaten validity. Nurses working different schedules may differ in age, responsibilities and health. Compare shift duration, rotation, recovery time and workload. Individual preference matters alongside the organisation's design.

Health and safety

Lesson 6.4.3 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Workplace accidents can be linked to human error, system design or a combination of both.

Human errors include omissions, commissions, sequencing errors and timing errors, each describing a different way an action can go wrong.

Operator-machine systems can create accidents when controls or displays are confusing, poorly placed or easy to misread.

A token economy reduces accidents by rewarding safe behaviour, such as accident-free work, useful safety suggestions or actions that prevent harm.

Fox et al.'s mining study showed that a well-managed token economy can reduce lost-time injuries and days lost from work.

Swat's monitoring study shows why organisations should record accidents, minor injuries and risk events instead of waiting for major accidents to happen.

Key terms

Human error: A mistake by a worker that contributes to an accident or near miss.

Error of omission: Failing to do a required action.

Error of commission: Doing the wrong action or carrying out an action incorrectly.

Sequencing error: Doing the right actions in the wrong order.

Timing error: Doing an action too early, too late or for the wrong length of time.

Operator-machine system: The interaction between a worker, a machine, its controls and its displays.

Token economy: A reward system where tokens are earned for desired behaviour and exchanged for rewards.

Risk event: A minor incident or warning sign that reveals a possible accident risk.

Health and safety

Lesson 6.4.3 | Organisational psychology

Further detail and evidence

Key study: Swat (1997) sought a practical risk-event recording system to identify causes and prevent accidents, rather than waiting for major injuries.

The initial stage of a three-year project examined four Polish plants: foundry, machinery, meat processing and furniture, employing 2,964 workers.

Records of 83 accidents from 1993 were analysed for frequency, severity and direct/indirect causes. Additional monitoring examined minor meat-processing-plant injuries in 1994.

At least 45.8% of accidents involved breaches of basic housekeeping principles; the additional study indicated that 95% of incidents went unreported.

Recommendations were to classify accident circumstances/types, record minor/first-aid injuries and include housekeeping in safety monitoring.

Repeated small incidents and poor housekeeping can reveal problems before serious accidents occur.

Human errors: omission leaves out an action; commission performs an incorrect action; sequencing performs correct steps in the wrong order; timing performs an action too early/late. Classification depends on the intended procedure and context.

System errors involve operator-machine design: confusing controls, incompatible mappings, poor labels, hard-to-read displays and inadequate feedback can invite mistakes. A display communicates information; a control changes the system. Training is useful but does not excuse a preventable design hazard.

Health and safety

Lesson 6.4.3 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Fox et al. (1987) used exchangeable trading-stamp tokens for safety-related outcomes and preventative actions in mines, with reductions in injuries/lost time and costs sustained over years. Rewarding low incident numbers requires safeguards against concealment.

Swat recorded accidents and additional minor/risk events in four industrial plants. The study identifies housekeeping/procedure problems and major underreporting. Monitoring reveals hazards and patterns; an observational record does not establish that monitoring itself caused fewer accidents.

Applying the ideas

Failing to check a guard is omission; selecting the wrong switch is commission; starting a machine before securing the guard is a sequence error; responding too late to an alarm is timing. Similar switches can make an apparent personal error partly a system-design problem.

Evaluation and connections

Industrial records support application, but underreporting threatens validity and plants differ in risk. This was not experimental proof that a monitoring system reduced accidents.

Evaluate objective/subjective evidence, longitudinal methods, situational explanations and generalisations from findings.

Near-miss reporting can identify risks before severe harm. Consistent definitions and accessible confidential reporting improve data quality. Official accident numbers may look objective while missing unreported events. Compare exposure-adjusted patterns and workplace differences rather than blaming one worker from a raw count.

Theories of job satisfaction

Lesson 6.5.1 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Job satisfaction is a worker's positive evaluation of their job, shaped by the work itself, conditions, rewards and opportunities.

Herzberg's two-factor theory separates hygiene factors, which prevent dissatisfaction, from motivators, which increase satisfaction.

Hygiene factors include pay, supervision, company policy and working conditions; improving them may reduce complaints without creating strong motivation.

Motivators include achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement and meaningful work.

Hackman and Oldham argue that job characteristics affect satisfaction through psychological states such as meaningfulness, responsibility and knowledge of results.

Job design techniques change the structure of work: enrichment adds responsibility, rotation moves workers between roles and enlargement adds more tasks at a similar level.

Theories of job satisfaction

Lesson 6.5.1 | Organisational psychology

Key terms

Job satisfaction: A positive attitude or feeling about one's job.

Hygiene factor: A job feature that can prevent dissatisfaction when adequate but does not necessarily motivate by itself.

Motivator: A job feature that can increase satisfaction and motivation.

Job characteristics model: Hackman and Oldham's theory linking job design to psychological states and work outcomes.

Skill variety: The degree to which a job uses different skills and activities.

Autonomy: The amount of control a worker has over how they complete the job.

Job enrichment: Redesigning work to add responsibility, challenge and decision-making.

Job rotation: Moving workers between different tasks or roles over time.

Further detail and evidence

Herzberg separates hygiene factors preventing dissatisfaction from motivators increasing satisfaction. Fair pay, conditions and policy are hygiene; achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement and the work itself are motivators. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction are treated as partly distinct dimensions.

Theories of job satisfaction

Continued

Hackman/Oldham: skill variety, task identity and task significance support experienced meaningfulness; autonomy supports experienced responsibility; feedback supports knowledge of results. Together these psychological states are proposed to improve intrinsic motivation and satisfaction, subject to individual/contextual differences.

Enlargement adds tasks at a similar responsibility level (horizontal change). Enrichment adds autonomy/responsibility and more meaningful control (vertical change). Rotation moves a worker among tasks/roles. Belias and Sklikas (2013) review these job-design approaches and their potential benefits/limitations; this is a literature review rather than one controlled intervention.

Applying the ideas

Adding several repetitive duties enlarges a job without necessarily enriching it. Allowing an employee to plan a complete piece of work, check results and make relevant decisions can add identity, autonomy and feedback. Rotation can reduce monotony while requiring training and safe transitions.

Evaluation and connections

Theories give actionable predictions but self-report and retrospective explanations may reflect bias. A challenging enriched role may suit one worker and overload another. More autonomy is useful only with resources and authority. Compare satisfaction with performance, turnover and wellbeing instead of assuming all outcomes move together.

Measuring job satisfaction

Lesson 6.5.2 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Job satisfaction can be measured with rating scales and questionnaires that ask workers to report how they feel about specific parts of their job.

The Job Descriptive Index measures satisfaction as separate facets rather than one vague overall feeling.

The JDI focuses on work itself, pay, promotion opportunities, supervision and co-workers.

Walton's Quality of Working Life model is broader than job satisfaction because it considers pay, safety, growth, rights, work-life balance and social value.

Psychometrics matters because a useful job-satisfaction measure should be reliable, valid and sensitive enough to detect meaningful differences.

Questionnaires can produce comparable quantitative data, but they may miss individual reasons unless open questions or interviews are also used.

Key terms

Rating scale: A fixed response scale used to show the strength of a person's attitude or judgement.

Questionnaire: A set of written or online questions used to collect self-report data.

Job Descriptive Index: A job-satisfaction questionnaire that measures satisfaction with several job facets.

Facet measure: A measure that breaks a broad attitude into separate parts.

Quality of Working Life: A broader evaluation of how work affects employees' wellbeing and life at work.

Measuring job satisfaction

Lesson 6.5.2 | Organisational psychology

Continued

Psychometrics: The study of how well psychological tests and scales measure what they claim to measure.

Reliability: The consistency of a measure across items, time or raters.

Validity: The extent to which a measure actually measures the intended concept.

Constitutionalism at work: Protection of employee rights, fair procedures, privacy and expression.

Further detail and evidence

Walton's quality of working life (QWL) includes eight conditions and evaluation of them, extending beyond enjoyment of immediate tasks.

The eight conditions are: adequate/fair compensation; safe/healthy working conditions; opportunity to use/develop human capacities; continued growth/security; social integration; constitutionalism; work and total life space; social relevance of work.

Constitutionalism concerns rights, fair treatment, privacy and opportunity to express views. Work and total life space concerns balance with family and non-work life.

Social integration concerns belonging/supportive relationships; social relevance concerns organisational responsibility and the value of work to society.

QWL evaluation uses questionnaire/rating-scale items covering these conditions. Examine each domain: a high overall average can conceal unsafe work or unfair treatment.

The 2027 syllabus names a QWL evaluation scale but does not prescribe one question count or universal cut-off. State the response scale and scoring for the version used.

Measuring job satisfaction

Lesson 6.5.2 | Organisational psychology

Continued

JDI facets are the work itself, pay, promotion, supervision and co-workers. Descriptor responses indicate satisfaction with each facet; versions/scoring rules must be identified. A separate overall satisfaction measure is not interchangeable with the facet profile.

Walton's eight conditions broaden the focus: compensation; safe/healthy conditions; use/development of capacities; growth/security; social integration; constitutional rights; work-life balance; social relevance. Distinguish fair treatment/voice from belonging and from the organisation's social responsibility.

A QWL evaluation scale turns conditions into clearly worded items with response anchors and a scoring scheme. A researcher should explain the version and whether scores are domain-specific or combined. Confidential collection matters because employment relationships can influence candour.

Applying the ideas

A worker can enjoy colleagues while being dissatisfied with promotion. Two equal overall QWL averages may conceal opposite safety and work-life profiles. Report facet/domain scores before recommending a change, then use interviews to understand particular problems.

Evaluation and connections

Evaluate self-report bias, confidentiality, reliability and cultural validity; distinguish broad QWL assessment from the JDI's narrower satisfaction facets.

Test-retest checks stability when conditions should be unchanged; internal consistency examines related items; construct validity asks whether the intended facet is measured. High reliability does not guarantee truthful responding. Translation, cultural expectations and fear of employer access affect validity. Change after an intervention may represent real improvement rather than unreliability.

Attitudes to work

Lesson 6.5.3 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Attitudes to work can affect behaviour such as attendance, effort, loyalty and deliberate harm to the organisation.

Workplace sabotage is intentional employee behaviour that damages production, profit, property, reputation or smooth running.

Giacalone and Rosenfeld studied how unionised factory workers judged reasons for sabotage and methods such as slowdowns, destructiveness, dishonesty and causing chaos.

Absenteeism can be voluntary, when a worker chooses not to attend, or involuntary, when illness or unavoidable events prevent attendance.

Blau and Boal link absence and turnover risk to job involvement and organisational commitment rather than job satisfaction alone.

Their model groups workers as institutional stars, lone wolves, corporate citizens or apathetics, depending on whether involvement and commitment are high or low.

Key terms

Workplace sabotage: Intentional employee behaviour that harms the organisation or disrupts work.

Slowdown: A sabotage method where employees deliberately reduce the pace or amount of work.

Destructiveness: A sabotage method involving damage to property, products or equipment.

Dishonesty: A sabotage method involving lying, theft, fraud or deliberate deception.

Absenteeism: Failure to attend scheduled work.

Voluntary absence: Absence that happens because the worker chooses not to attend.

Job involvement: How strongly a person identifies with and invests effort in their job tasks.

Organisational commitment: How strongly a person feels attached or loyal to the organisation.

Attitudes to work

Lesson 6.5.3 | Organisational psychology

Further detail and evidence

Key study: Giacalone and Rosenfeld (1987) asked whether accepting more sabotage reasons predicts judging sabotage methods more justifiable.

A volunteer sample of 38 unionised labourers came from one north-eastern US electrical factory.

A former employee helped construct questionnaires covering 29 methods in four categories - slowdowns, destruction, dishonesty and chaos - and 11 sabotage reasons.

Workers anonymously rated methods and reasons on seven-point justifiability scales; management could not access responses. Attitudes were measured, not actual sabotage rates.

High acceptors of reasons justified slowdowns, destruction and chaos more than low acceptors; dishonesty did not show the same significant difference.

Blau/Boal distinguish job involvement (identification with the job) from organisational commitment (identification with and attachment to the employer). High involvement/high commitment gives institutional stars; high involvement/low commitment gives lone wolves; low involvement/high commitment gives corporate citizens; low both gives apathetics.

Absence can be organisationally excused or unexcused, and frequency differs from total duration. Meanings include medical (uncontrollable health/family demands), career-enhancing (furthering job/career goals), normative (following accepted group patterns), and calculative (allocating time in an exchange with the employer). The same absence count can hide different reasons.

Giacalone and Rosenfeld measure workers' justifications for sabotage. Slowdown, destruction, dishonesty and chaos are categories of methods; accepting a reason and carrying out a harmful act are different. The reported association cannot establish that justification caused sabotage.

Attitudes to work

Lesson 6.5.3 | Organisational psychology

Applying the ideas

An employee strongly attached to a profession may be willing to move employers: involvement can be high while organisational commitment is lower. Absence for illness is not automatically low motivation. Identify contextual evidence and reasons before applying a commitment category.

Evaluation and connections

This supports justification as a way of making harmful behaviour seem acceptable; the association does not establish that endorsing reasons causes sabotage.

Anonymity and familiar examples may improve candour; fear of disclosure, self-report, small volunteer sampling and one factory restrict validity/generalisation.

Evaluate individual/situational explanations, reductionism, idiographic/nomothetic approaches and confidentiality in sensitive workplace research.

Anonymous self-reports encourage candour on sensitive attitudes but cannot verify every act. One factory and a small volunteer sample limit generalisation. A conceptual taxonomy predicts patterns rather than diagnosing an individual from attendance alone. Workplace fairness and power can matter alongside personal attitudes; preserve confidentiality when reporting results.