

An industrial psychology perspective of workplace counselling in the changing world of work



Authors:

Thapelo S. Moralo¹
Lené I. Graupner¹

Affiliations:

¹School of Industrial Psychology and Human Resource Management, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, WorkWell Research Unit, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Lené Graupner,
lene.jorgensen@nwu.ac.za

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Orientation: Regulations for the industrial psychology profession state that short-term counselling may be provided to employees in the workplace. It is therefore necessary to be equipped with the required skills to assist employees especially to cope in the changing world of work.

Research purpose: The general objective of this research study was to explore the role of industrial psychologists as workplace counsellors in the changing world of work.

Motivation for the study: In light of recent changes in the world due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), there seems to be a strong motivation to explore the importance of workplace counselling with regard to the changing nature of work.

Research approach/design and method: A qualitative descriptive research strategy was utilised, with homogeneous sampling of 22 industrial psychology practitioners ($n = 22$).

Main findings: The results showed that workplace counselling as an intervention provides the support employees need to adapt to changes in the workplace. Technological advances have a major impact on the manner in which people work, and therefore employees need the support to cope with these changes. Counselling from an industrial psychology practitioner could provide this type of support.

Practical/managerial implications: Industrial psychology practitioners in the role of counsellors in an organisation play a major part in helping employees with accepting and coping with the changes and challenges presented by the implications of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

Contribution/value-add: This study could contribute by providing organisations with valuable feedback on how to address challenges presented by the changing nature of work, specifically the importance of the role of workplace counselling provided by industrial psychology practitioners.

Keywords: new world of work; fourth industrial revolution; industrial psychology practitioner; workplace counselling; workplace changes.

Introduction

Organisations face a world of rapidly evolving technologies, including socio-economic, political and cultural changes (Fink & Elisabetta, 2019; Leonhard, 2021). The new world of work, as introduced by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), majorly contributed to these changes, thereby increasing the rate of digitisation and automation within organisations (Horváth & Szabó, 2019). The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has been referred to as the 'time machine to the future' (Hatfield & Scoble-Williams, 2021), resulting in the 4IR being implemented much faster than initially predicted (Javaid et al., 2020; Leonhard, 2021). Employees are left feeling anxious and frustrated by the fact that the digitalisation of their work could eventually lead to job losses (Leonhard, 2021; Mayer & Oosthuizen, 2020; Min et al., 2019). The implication is the accelerated change that will become more evident after the pandemic. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore the role of the industrial psychologist as workplace counsellor in the changing world of work. The following specific aims flow from the introduction:

- Explore the experiences of industrial psychologists as workplace counsellors in the changing world of work.
- Explore recommendations to assist employees in the changing world of work.

Literature review

Changing world of work

Employees have experienced the perceived danger of job loss and the concerns associated with this threat over the last few years (Stankevičiūtė, Staniškienė, & Ramanauskaitė, 2021). Nam (2019)

suggests that the nature of change of the world of work causes job insecurity for employees. This is further aggravated by the feeling that many jobs would not exist in the future anymore. The new world of work led to organisations adapting to technological advances by digitising and automating the business processes. Furthermore, organisations had to be open to change and had to be resilient to accept the benefits presented by the 4IR (Schiuma, 2017).

The 4IR commenced during the year 2000, focusing on, to name a few, the Internet, nanotechnology, the Internet of Things, big data, cloud computing and robotics (Xu, David, & Kim, 2018). The 4IR brought exciting new frontiers that opened up a new world for the workplace. This era also brought about applications and cloud computing that contributed to organisations' success and work being done more efficiently, such as applications for taxi services and takeaway meals (Wood, Graham, Lehdonvirta, & Hjorth, 2019). This revolution could threaten to replace humans and cognitive functioning (Prisecaru, 2016), which differs from previous revolutions that were aimed at assisting humans in functioning better by helping them to perform work activities efficiently (Larsson & Teigland, 2020). Xu et al. (2018) indicate that the 4IR could replace existing jobs with robotic automation in certain sectors, thereby providing faster, more efficient, faultless systems; for example, automated supermarkets led to taking the risk out of employees needing sick leave or salary increases. Technological advances are expanding at high speed and are not limited to a specific industry or sector (Lee, Wong, Intarakumnerd, & Limapornvanich, 2019). In the psychology profession, technological advances are reflected through the use of AI systems being used to make decisions regarding people's employment (Landers & Behrend, 2022). Psychologists could benefit from artificial intelligence, especially in the measurement of psychological traits and the prediction of human behaviour. Psychologists could furthermore equip society to meet the grand challenge of creating and managing valid, ethical and useful AI (Landers & Behrend, 2022).

Even though automation and online labour platforms provide employees with more autonomy and flexibility, Wood et al. (2019) indicate that these mechanisms could correspondingly lead to employees feeling isolated, working irregular hours and experiencing exhaustion. However, automation and digitalisation will increase the speed at which work activities are performed (Fink & Elisabetta, 2019). In South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa appointed a presidential task team on the 4IR with the mandate to assist and guide the government to address changes and take advantage of the changing world of work (The Presidency, 2019). The task team had to develop and review policies, strategies and action plans to enable South Africa to have a global competitive advantage (The Presidency, 2019). Subsequently, this could ensure economic growth and influence the well-being of employees.

In preparation, organisations should ensure that a multi-level intervention framework is implemented to facilitate employee

wellness during the process of change and growth in organisations (Giga, Cooper, & Faragher, 2003). An integrated framework, such as that applied by Jonker, Graupner and Rossouw (2020) in their study to address psychological trauma in the workplace, remains best suited to provide a comprehensive service for employees' recovery, as well as proactive support. Montano, Hoven and Siegrist (2014) indicate that workplace interventions on organisational level are believed to have more long-term impact on employee well-being than interventions targeting individual behaviours. The benefits of organisational-level interventions include providing policies to manage employee wellness as well as create awareness of support in the workplace (Giga et al., 2003; Jonker et al., 2020). Such interventions include those aimed at addressing psychological issues, and they have shown to reduce the negative impact associated with experiences regarding psychological problems such as stress (Paterson et al., 2021). Group-level interventions, such as resilience training programmes, could help to mitigate psychological issues (Giorgi et al., 2020). Improving employees' skills to show adequate resiliency and stress-management ability could prove to be beneficial to organisations (Giga et al., 2003; Jonker et al., 2020) when stressful situations are faced (such as the recent pandemic). Individual-level interventions focus on facilitating treatment and rehabilitation of distressed employees and typically include counselling services (Jonker et al., 2020).

The role of the industrial psychology practitioner in the new world of work

Industrial psychology aims to address work-related problems with the use of psychological models (HPCSA, 2019a; Schultz et al., 2020). Psychometric and other evaluations are employed by industrial psychologists to improve individual and group functioning (Van Zyl, Nel, Stander, & Rothmann, 2016). Individual, group and organisational-level interventions are presented to organisations to address work-related problems (Van Zyl et al., 2016). Industrial psychology practitioners can design and develop interventions to address poor performance within the work context (HPCSA, 2019a). In this regard, industrial psychologists serve dual roles, those of both scientist and practitioner (Strumpfer, 2007). As a scientist, the practitioner's role involves conducting scientific investigations aimed at finding solutions for work-related problems (Bergh, 2021; Van Vuuren, 2010). As a practitioner, the industrial psychologist could then utilise these solutions and apply them to provide help to distressed employees.

Counselling is used to assist employees to overcome stress and anxiety for brief periods of time whilst the employer can carry the cost (Lazar, Paul, & Alphonse, 2018). Workplace counselling enables employees to find their own solutions and could mean adopting attitudes of being lifelong learners in response to the 4IR (Ajila & Adetayo, 2013; Yang, 2019). Various approaches could be followed when providing workplace counselling, such as cognitive-behavioural

therapy (CBT), reality therapy and solution-focused therapy, existential therapy and person-centred therapy (Shoai, 2014). Workplace counselling should aim to address stress and negative emotions caused by the changing world of work (Mayer & Oosthuizen, 2020). This study aims to explore what the role of the industrial psychologist practitioner is in providing counselling to distressed individuals in the new world of work.

Research approach

Research design

A qualitative research approach was employed in order to explore the understanding of the participants of their experiences and the meanings they attach to their experiences and realities. A qualitative descriptive research strategy was followed to provide a description of the phenomenon being studied.

Sampling and research participants

The researcher used the iRegister from the website of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) to gain access to the list of registered intern psychologists and psychologists (industrial psychology practitioners) in the category of industrial psychology. These names were utilised to search on LinkedIn to invite practitioners to take part in the study. Practitioners in the industrial psychology profession working in different sectors in South Africa were approached.

Homogeneous sampling (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016) was employed, with the following inclusion criteria: only registered industrial psychology practitioners (intern psychologist and/or industrial psychologist) with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), and participants had to be able to communicate in English. This study included 22 participants (17 women and five men) registered with the HPCSA under the category of industrial psychology. Most of the participants were between 23 and 41 years of age, 59% of the participants were registered as *industrial* and 41% were registered with the HPCSA as *intern psychologists* in the same category. To keep the participants' identities anonymous, the results reflect the participant's number (Participant 1 = P1) with his or her response.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were utilised to gather the data for the study. During the interviews, the researcher could explore issues that are unique to the interviewees' experiences. The interviews were conducted online using virtual platforms such as Zoom and MS Teams. During the study, lockdown levels were upheld due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore the participants were met online for the interviews. An interview guide was compiled to guide the researcher, including predetermined questions such as:

- How does your organisation involve you to provide workplace counselling?
- Do you regularly counsel employees who are influenced by the 4IR?
- In your opinion, how effective is the organisation you work for in assisting employees in the changing world of work?
- What recommendation can you make to assist employees with workplace counselling in the changing world of work?

Strategies to ensure data integrity

It is important to maintain the quality and trustworthiness of the data (Connelly, 2016). This was done by ensuring that the study measured what it set out to measure, by asking the questions in such a way that the participants report on their experiences (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Furthermore, all records were safely stored and the research process fully documented to ensure confirmability and dependability.

Data analysis

We used content analysis to analyse the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Firstly, the researcher read through the data to gain an understanding of the experiences of the practitioners. Next, initial codes from the data were identified. Common patterns were identified, as the coding enabled the researcher to simplify and categorise data. The researcher placed the data in categories guided by the objectives of the study and thereafter proceeded to identify themes. Related codes were grouped together to form a theme, patterns were verified and codes rewritten. In this process, new codes and/or themes and overlapping codes were deleted or combined to form one theme. Lastly, the final themes were presented in categories, themes and subthemes.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC). (No. NWU-0086- 20-A4). Protocols for ethical research were observed, such as obtaining informed consent from the participants, keeping data anonymous and confidential, and ensuring voluntary participation.

Findings

The results are presented in a collection of categories, themes and subthemes, substantiated by direct responses from the participants. Category 1 presents the results of how the participants (namely the industrial psychology practitioners) experienced the impact of the change as presented in the workplace and experienced during their counselling sessions. Secondly, the participants' experiences on how they supported the employees in the workplace during the changes are discussed.

The data in Table 1 showed that the participants indicated that an agile approach is preferred by organisations during change management. The participants specified that

TABLE 1: Category 1: Experiences from the industrial psychology practitioners of the approach followed by the organisation in the changing world of work.

Theme	Subtheme	Response
Change management	Agile approach	'...looking on multiskilling, looking at change management and change agile within organisations...' (P2, Female) '...how are the employees doing? How are they coping? Not following an umbrella approach in terms of change management but what works for the one and what does not work for the other...' (P8, Female)
	Creative adjustments	'...organisations can do a lot more in looking at ways of creating new jobs and more opportunities for employees who might be at risk in terms of the 4IR.' (P13, Male) '...reimagine processes, and their own competitiveness...' (P16, Female)
	Not prepared for change	'...organisations are not preparing ...do not know how to prepare for the 4IR.' (P11, Female) '...companies have not done enough in terms of assisting employees in adjusting to the 4IR...' (P12, Male)
	Agile leadership	'...with change agile that is coming in, it is going to depend on the leadership in the company, if you are looking at how the organisation is supporting employees it is going to depend on the leadership and the culture within that organisation.' (P2, Female) '...it also depends on who is in the driver's seat in terms of leaderships. If the leadership themselves are not struggling with 4IR, they must see it as a need to help employees adjust...' (P17, Female)
	Planning for change	'...companies are actually thinking about it, you know there is learning and development that is being introduced to support people...' (P14, Female) '...how will the organisation be planning for and even acting and implementing strategy towards the 4IR...' (P15, Female)
Planning for change	Resources	'...I think the resource to assist in adapting to the new technology is there, but employees have to make time for that assistance, time to learn new things... But if the need arise that I cannot do my job without it and assistance is available, that is on the technical level...' (P3, Female) '...I do not think we realised then that we have more employees who cannot afford to work from home than those who can work from home, even those who can work from home they still need equipment (laptop, chairs, printers etc.)' (P7, Female)
	New skills	'...nurses have this stigma of not wanting to learn the skills of computer literacy, this makes it so difficult to successfully implement things such as succession planning and onboarding for instance.' (P1, Female) '...the organisations are investing a lot in communication when introducing 4IR initiatives... in the beginning of this initiatives you would see employees attending but as the course advanced people dropped out...' (P22, Female)
	Redundant positions	'One of the biggest things that exist is job security which in reality does not exist, but people have this believe in job security. The fact that I have a permanent contract of employment that acquaint job security. Now when you have this technological advancement it threatens this job security... what happens to the guy who was working behind a till at Macdonald's. This means that they do not have a job, it brings a lot of insecurity to people and challenging us to think of new careers and new skills that will be required in the new era. Primarily is about job security, obviously these changes (e.g. retrenchment/job loss; reskilling and restructuring) might be stressful and traumatizing to the employees.' (P9, Female) 'It is transition work, into the new age of work in which a lot of what we do (living, working, communication etc.) is done digitally, autonomously through machines and computer related software. The transition and the fourth industrial revolution are something that will have tremendous effect on the world of work overall and it will cause a change in the way we interact and engage with others. In some instances, have knock-on-effect on some of the jobs we have and serve as a force to create new jobs that we are not aware of currently.' (P5, Female)

organisations tend to focus more on profits and less on supporting staff members, as reiterated by Participant 11, indicating that 'organisations seem mostly worried about if they make profit (money) or not. I do not think that the 4IR is on their minds.' The participants further reported that specific support to employees to adapt to changes should be provided by attending to leadership and culture in organisations.

In the second theme, as can be seen in Table 1, the results showed that there is a preference to implement a strategic approach during change management by organisations. The participants indicated that when planning, organisations tend to adopt the umbrella approach and does not consider that the 4IR does not have an equal impact on everyone.

The participants indicated that employers are not necessarily focusing enough on equipping employees with skills for machine-learning. The results also showed that, in some cases, employees were reluctant to learn new skills, especially older employees, as stated by Participant 2:

'I think it makes work at faster pace, technology definitely puts pressure on the employees because is the emphasis to learn new systems, new technology, new social media almost on a weekly and monthly basis. There is a lot of change coming in, with change put a lot of stress on employees and it can also cause burnout. So that is a very relevant risk, especially when you have the older generation that are not so change agile, they may struggle with new technology coming in.'

The results further showed that organisations need to plan for positions that might become redundant due to technological advances, addressing job insecurity in this regard.

The results from Table 2 show the experiences of the participants on how the employers implemented change management and how this had an impact on the employees. Furthermore, the results show the manner in which the industrial psychology practitioners supported the employees in a changing world of work. Two themes emerged from the data: counselling and preparing future employees. The results showed that the participants provide support to managers to assist them to manage employees with psychological challenges. Counselling is provided for mental health issues such as traumatic incidents, stress, burnout and workplace adjustments. Basic counselling techniques coupled with coaching skills are mainly used to support employees to navigate through changes. Secondly, the data showed that career counselling is provided to employees to help them prepare for the changes in future jobs. Moreover, career counselling conversations and informal conversations take place between the participants and potential employees and students. Possible study options are discussed to prepare the individual for future work during these conversations.

From Table 3, the results show that the participants pointed out that organisations need to provide psychological support to their employees to assist them in adjusting to

TABLE 2: Category 2: The support industrial psychology practitioners provide to employees in the changing world of work.

Theme	Subtheme	Responses
Counselling	Supporting managers	'...helping managers address conflict, which arises between them and their direct reports...' (P9, Female) '...line manager changes the process, and the way they do their work and responding to the need of the employees.' (P12, Female)
	Burnout and stress	'...stress management and burnout...' (P15, Female) '...work pressure and stress of not coping with information overload' (P6, Female)
	Basic counselling and coaching	'...doing counselling, coaching online and face-to-face.' (P5, Female) '...COVID-19, literally offering short-term counselling and coaching, following the positive psychology approach...' (P22, Female)
	Mental health issues	'...decrease in performance, ...anxiety, depression as such may lead to me referring to the appropriate mental health practitioner for further support... Psychological safety, toxic leadership...workplace bullying...' (P15, Female) '...goal-oriented counselling, low self-esteem and challenges that need to be overcome ...emotional issues.' (P16, Female)
	Traumatic incidents	'...traumatic incident at home and/or breaking at home.' (P2, Female) '...trauma debriefing...' (P9, Female)
	Work alterations	'...offering both individual and group counselling sessions for helping employees to adjust to the change/s and improve their work experience...' (P10, Female) '...more counselling happening at that stage because of what they are experiencing in this new workspace and just needing support...' (P15, Female)
	Preparing future employees	Career counselling
Informal counselling		'One part imbedded type or informal type of counselling and I do get sometime referral from employees within the organisation...' (P3, Female) '...I am offering counselling informally and my office is open for the employees if and when they need someone to talk with (counselling).' (P7, Female)

changes. This should further include psychological-related education to ensure that awareness is created regarding mental health issues which may result from the changes. Organisations need to take responsibility to identify employees' needs and they need to implement interventions for these needs. The results show that employers should assist their employees with transitioning to the new world of work. This can be done by identifying and addressing development needs. Employees should take responsibility and ownership by asking for help when they struggle to cope with the changes. They also need to actively participate in the change interventions provided by the organisations.

The results indicate that the support the participants facilitated to address the changing world of work includes basic counselling and skills development. In their experience as workplace counsellors, the participants recommended that employers provide basic counselling interventions to assist employees in their adjustment to changes. Furthermore, the participants recommended that management should play a key role in creating awareness of the type of support the organisation offers to assist employees to cope with the changes. Organisations should play a more active role in helping individuals adjust to work and life. A recommendation was made to expand face-to-face counselling to a virtual platform. Training and development initiatives in an organisation should be directed towards helping the employee master new skills to adjust to the changes brought about by the 4IR. Coaching learning opportunities should be provided to support employees to up-skill in order to navigate the changes.

The results referred to the importance of providing reactive workplace counselling to address psychological problems, such as those that might be caused by change in the workplace.

The participants indicated that counselling as a reactive intervention allows employees to seek support to solve problems and address issues. Distressed employees should be allowed to seek counselling, whilst support groups can assist employees to work through the challenges and changes presented by the new world of work.

Discussion

From the results, it seems that the participants perceive that employers mostly are not prepared for the changing world of work. The participants indicated that in their opinion, when addressing the settings of the 4IR, an agile approach is regarded as an effective change management method. Lekhanya (2019) reports that most South Africans consider the 4IR to be a problematic concept that they do not understand. In a report from the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2018), South African employees do not seem to have sufficient digital and critical thinking skills to function in the 4IR era. Deloitte (2020) reports that executives globally and leaders from the public sector are mainly concerned with profit-making. Similarly, findings from our study showed that companies are mainly focused on making a profit and not so much on assisting employees with their fears and uncertainties in adjusting to this new era. In their report, Deloitte (2020) indicates that some organisations are not so much interested in transformational change, but more about the profit and triple bottom line.

The participants in this study felt that management in organisations should focus on planning and developing strategies to face the changing world of work. Nam (2019) states that organisations should plan proactively to adjust adequately to the changes presented by the 4IR. The results further showed that culture and leadership in organisations play a vital role to support employees in adjusting to

TABLE 3: Category 3: Recommendations to assist employees in the new world of work.

Theme	Subtheme	Response
Proactive interventions	Create awareness	'...advertise the counselling interventions offered by the organisation...' (P20, Female) '...create a level of awareness about counselling intervention offered within the organisation and the impact of the 4IR on their well-being...' (P18, Female)
	Psychosocial education	'...proactive training programmes to employees to inform them what exactly the 4IR is and positive and negative impact it may have on them as employees and to inform that the counselling services are available...' (P4, Female) '...organisation should form workshops that address questions like what the fourth industrial revolution is, how does it look like to the organisation/s, highlighting the impact of the fourth industrial revolution to the employees and to their respective organisations. Following this workshop schedule individual counselling sessions, addressing the emotional impact/anxieties caused by the realities of fourth industrial revolutions...' (P20, Female)
	Identify needs	'...implement proper process to identify why the change needs to take place and what exactly is the change that needs to take place...' (P1, Female) '...understand the needs of the employees...' (P7, Female)
	Take ownership	'...culture that employees should take care of their own psychological well-being, they need ownership of that... Also, they need to know that they should take care of their own well-being...' (P3, Female) '...employees should be active, do not sit back and wait for the organisation to counsel you to give you information to help you navigate this difficult situation...' (P13, Female)
Basic counselling	Helping	'...counselling can help people to voice their experiences regarding to 4IR) and also moving forward to generating alternatives on how to adapt and to come to a solution of not getting stuck and helping them to know what different options there are of doing a job. But also, to help employees know what unique skill sets they will apply in different work situations.' (P3, Female) '...we can start by listening and understanding what employees are struggling with...' (P17, Female)
	Supervisor support	'...senior management create the level of awareness for all the employees, to note that there are available options should they struggle with anything related to the 4IR in terms of their workplace... Management should be seen as more promoting counselling and support employees.' (P18, Female) 'Getting the leaders/top management involved, the employees need to know that the employer is there to support them...' (P22, Female)
	Work and life adjustments	'...providing them with enough time, assistance and training to learn the new system' (P2, Female) '... sometimes people live in a system, be it a family system or community system, sometimes the 4IR may have a big impact on the partner, or a father or is having an impact on the family. We need to be able to help the individual to deal with changes in the structures that they live in. Helping employees through counselling to feel better about change.'
	Virtual counselling	'...Open up counselling globally and into online platforms. Once we pick up success story we focus on continuous improvement.' (P12, Female) '...the counselling session should not be limited to face-to-face but should also be offered virtually...' (P9, Female)
Skills development	Coaching	'To provide coaching sessions to employees regarding 4IR on a group level...' (P1, Female) '...Teaching people to trust their inner wisdom...' (P11, Female)
	Learning	'...upskilling themselves for the skill required for the future. That the employer is providing counselling to help them navigate these times...' (P22, Male) '...and providing them with the right tools (training and learning opportunities, emotional support through counselling, and career counselling).' (P14, Female)
Reactive interventions	Seek counselling	'...for me counselling is a reactive intervention, so in other words you give counselling when there is an existing problem...' (P4, Female) '...Given all the changes that have happened, people need to accept some counselling or upskilling or guidance and that if they need help, they should come forward and seek assistance...' (P6, Female)
	Support groups	'...Facilitated sessions, in the space where they are facilitated by IOP...' (P15, Female) '...to provide them with further support one-on-one and do counselling groups...' (P4, Female)

changes. Giorgi et al. (2020) emphasise that leadership and job support, working time reduction, smarter working and promoting safe practices appear to be linked to improved performance and well-being. The results showed that organisations are functioning in an environment characterised by increasing competition and continued changes that require employees to regularly adjust and adapt to changes. Xu et al. (2018) state that changes in the workplace due to technological advances or digitalisation often take place at an accelerated speed and impact people significantly, which cannot be ignored. The results from this study indicate that leadership in organisations influence the preparedness of employees for changes. Metwally, Ruiz-Palomino, Metwally and Gartzia (2019) also found that leadership often influences the readiness of employees for the changing world of work. Leadership in organisations should ensure that a culture of effectiveness and transparent communication are maintained with employees (Li, Sun, Tao, & Lee, 2021). Xu et al. (2018) also state that attention should be given to the fact that technological changes should not further inequalities in organisations.

From the results, it is clear that organisations found it challenging to provide interventions aimed at helping employees to adapt to changes stemming from the new world of work. Nankervis, Connell, Cameron, Montague and Prikshat (2021) found that employees are mainly disinterested in the interventions provided by organisations to assist them through changes because they are actually against the changes brought about by the changing world of work. Ramraj and Amolo (2021) state that, within a 4IR context, it is important for organisations to implement wellness interventions. In the experience of the participants in this study, they felt that organisations should focus more on wellness interventions because distressed and anxious employees are not sufficiently supported, especially to master work-life balance. In this regard, it is important that organisations should not only provide reactive interventions, but that the full spectrum of the intervention approach on individual, group and organisational levels should also be addressed (Giga et al., 2003). According to Egan (2013), a counsellor should proactively facilitate psychological strategies in clients to ensure continued mental health in the future. In a recent study, Van Lill and Van Lill

(2022) report that a model such as acceptance and commitment therapy interventions could be adopted to proactively strengthen psychological flexibility in clients to safeguard them against anxiety and depression in the future, which could be applied as a proactive intervention.

The findings further showed that the (individual) interventions that industrial psychology practitioners are comfortable to implement to support employees are mostly basic counselling and skills development. Typical issues addressed by the counsellors using these skills include mental health issues, stress, traumatic incidents, work adjustment and managing stress. However, what is clear from the findings is that although it seems that employees need more support in terms of counselling, the participants did not necessarily volunteer specialised counselling interventions. In this regard, much has been published about the preparedness of industrial psychologists for workplace counselling (Barkhuizen, Jorgensen, & Brink, 2014; Du Plessis & Thomas, 2021; Van Lill & Van Lill, 2022). It is important that industrial psychologists equip themselves with suitable skills to address the wide range of mental health issues that result in the workplace with suitable models and frameworks, as stated in Form 218 (HPCSA, 2019b).

Our findings show that, from an industrial psychology perspective, the participants felt that they prepared employees for their future work by providing career counselling as well as through informal conversational interventions. Career counselling seems very suitable to assist employees to plan for future work, especially because the number of jobs that would be lost is less than the number of new jobs that would be created through automation (World Economic Forum, 2016). A career counsellor, whilst assisting an individual in making a career decision, also facilitates a process of self-discovery and a process of crafting a new career (Savickas, 2005). Our findings showed that the participants were comfortable with supporting employees by means of career counselling models and theories in their attempt to craft their new paths.

The second objective of the study focused on exploring recommendations of the industrial psychology practitioners to assist employees in the changing world of work. The participants presented several recommendations to assist employees in the new world of work. Proactive interventions were the main suggestion from the participants as an effective means to assist employees in the changing world of work. Organisations should create awareness of the available support interventions to address mental problems proactively (Bajorek & Bevan, 2020). However, it might be advantageous for organisations to differentiate between the types of skills employees might need. Technological changes might warrant learning skills that could be addressed through career counselling, whilst the 'soft skills' or emotional problems brought about by change could best be addressed through workplace counselling. It remains the employer's responsibility, though, to identify the employees' needs and implement interventions relevant to address these needs

(Deloitte, 2020). The employee does, however, also need to take ownership of his or her own personal development to transition to the new world of work (Gwata, 2019).

The results highlight the need for reactive interventions to allow employees to recuperate and to address problems and challenges that they may experience as organisations continue implementing the changes. In accordance with our findings, Brown (2019) states that workplace counselling assists individuals to cope with challenges and difficulties in order to restore them to efficiency. It is therefore important that industrial psychologists should focus on equipping themselves with the appropriate counselling model suitable for the particular workplace. Recent publications (Bergh, 2021; Jorgensen-Graupner & Van Zyl, 2019; Minjoo, Mpofu, Brock, Millington, & Athanasou, 2014; Van Lill & Van Lill, 2022; Van Zyl et al., 2016) show models, frameworks and approaches developed specifically for the industrial psychology profession providing focused skills in terms of workplace counselling. It is then likely that the industrial psychology practitioner would feel more equipped to assist employees, especially to cope in the changing world of work.

Limitations and recommendations

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, online platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams were used. This required the participants to have stable internet connectivity and computer skills such as the ability to use online teleconferencing applications, which was not initially a requirement. Some participants who did not have stable internet connectivity and/or did not possess online teleconferencing skills had to be excluded.

Organisations could implement the recommendations of this study by facilitating support to employees from an industrial psychology perspective. Industrial psychologists could use the findings by positioning themselves as people developers, change agents, consultants, ethics managers and workplace counsellors in order to provide support in the changing world of work.

Conclusion

Workplace counselling is an important intervention to use in facilitating support to employees in the changing world of work. Industrial psychology practitioners are well positioned and trained to perform this function in organisations and could be utilised more effectively. It is possible that the transition to the new world could be made more manageable when industrial psychologists are fully trained for the purpose and involved in the process.

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Authors' contributions

T.S.M. conducted this study as part of his master's studies, was responsible for the data collection, data analysis, interpretation and writing of the thesis. L.I.G. is a professor and main supervisor of the study. She was responsible for conceptualising the study, data analysis and interpretation and assisting with writing up of the article for publication purposes.

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Data availability

All the data are available from the authors. The data are in Excel spreadsheets and password protected. A link can be sent to access the data on google drive.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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