

Industrial and organisational psychology internship completion: Enabling and thwarting factors



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Orientation: Completing an internship is a requirement for master's students in Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) to obtain professional registration with the Health Professions Council of South Africa. Students seem to experience a diverse range of factors enabling and thwarting them in their quest to complete their internship and gain the prerequisite practical knowledge and skills.

Research purpose: This study explored IOP interns' perceived experiences of the enabling factors and challenges encountered during the internship programme completion.

Motivation for the study: A better understanding of the lived experiences of IOP interns will assist organisations and supervising psychologists to create a supporting environment to optimise interns' development.

Research approach/design and method: A qualitative research approach was adopted and an open-ended question survey was conducted among ($N = 17$) IOP interns in South Africa. The data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Main findings: A lack of financial resources; programme approval, content and time; the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19); and balancing work, dissertation completion and personal life impact IOP interns negatively. Solid support networks and the power within the self are enabling factors.

Practical/managerial implications: The findings of this study provide a better understanding of the factors impacting the successful completion of an internship programme and help role-players to gain insight into how this strenuous journey can be improved to create a thriving internship environment supportive of optimal learning and growth for interns.

Contribution/value-add: This research highlights the need to revise the internship programme process cycle, including its content, timeframes and reformulating the role of role-players and interns.

Keywords: industrial and organisational psychology interns; internship programme; thematic analysis; survey questionnaire; qualitative research.

Introduction

The Master's Programme (Coursework) in Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) is highly structured, and its practical, simulated work-based experiential learning nature exposes students to the scope of practice components and services delivered by industrial psychologists. The focus is on preparing intern psychologists for internship training by creating experiential and collaborative learning opportunities and activities (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2022). The practical, simulated work-based experiential learning and continuous integrative formative and summative assessment of student learning help them to develop the competencies and attributes they need to successfully engage as prospective intern psychologists in their internship training (Health Professions Council of South Africa [HPCSA], 2019b).

Registration as an industrial psychologist with the Professional Board for Psychology of the HPCSA is dependent on the successful completion of the Master's Programme (Coursework) in IOP, a structured internship completed under the supervision of a senior industrial psychologist, and passing the HPCSA professional board examination (Coetzee & Oosthuizen, 2019, 2022; Department of Health, 2011). The qualifying practitioner will be able to render psychological services in a variety of workplace-related settings, focussing on the prevention, assessment, diagnosis, and intervention of human behavioural and work-related dysfunctions with a view to optimising and promoting behaviour in individuals, groups, and organisations in the African

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context (HPCSA, 2019b). Students who are not registered practitioners are prohibited to engage in any industrial psychological interventions, for example organisational wellness programmes, and to counsel employees experiencing wellness problems such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and/or acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) and burnout. They can also not be utilised by management to fully engage in community outreach and engagement projects. Finally, to remain registered, industrial psychologists must adhere to the rules regarding continuing professional development as stipulated by the HPCSA Professional Board for Psychology (Coetzee & Oosthuizen, 2019, 2022).

Considering the low completion rate observed for students succeeding in registering as an industrial psychologist with the HPCSA Professional Board for Psychology, it is deemed important to explore the enabling and thwarting factors students face when engaging with the internship phase. Recognising the voices of the IOP interns will enable all stakeholders involved in the internship process to better support the IOP intern, structure the internship process appropriately, and ultimately increase the number of successfully HPCSA registered industrial psychologists. Therefore, considering the above, this study was aimed at: (1) gaining a better understanding of the challenges IOP interns encountered during their internships, and (2) gaining insight into the enabling factors that empowered them to successfully complete their internship programmes.

Literature review

Internship programme in industrial and organisational psychology

Research has shown that internship programmes can be one of the most effective ways for students to increase their marketability and employability (Ali & Muhammed, 2018; Anjum, 2020; Gault et al., 2010; Hurst et al., 2014; Rothmann & Sisman, 2016; Vélez & Giner, 2015). The HPCSA and industry identify work-ready skills (Bowles et al., 2020) to meet standards for work-ready occupations. A supervised internship programme is available to IOP students at master's level. As a result of these competencies, individuals, groups, and organisations can discern, design, assess, and respond to human behaviour at work (HPCSA, 2019a).

An internship of the South African Professional Board for Psychology is full-time practical training in IOP for a period of at least 12 months. An internship allows intern psychologists to develop their attitudes, competencies, and skills for independent practice in various settings. Intern psychologists gain valuable experience through internships in real workplaces. It is essential for intern psychologists to master the following competency: (1) using the skills and knowledge they acquired through their academic training; (2) assessing the need for additional skills; (3) acquiring these skills under supervision; and (4) understanding the different types of workplaces where these skills can be used (HPCSA, 2019a).

The approval of an internship programme of 12 months (full time) by the HPCSA is required for the intern psychologist to start the internship as well as a signed written undertaking by an external industrial psychologist registered with the HPCSA stating that they will act as the intern psychologist's supervisor throughout the internship period. Supervising psychologists must have demonstrated competencies in the field and be registered with the HPCSA for at least 3 years. The training organisation must also sign a written undertaking (HPCSA, 2019a).

The academic department provides a written undertaking indicating that the intern psychologist will be accommodated during the internship period. Academic departments evaluate internship programmes in accordance with the requirements set by the Professional Board for Psychology (Form 218), and once the internship programme is approved by the internal industrial psychologist (supervisor), the academic departments provide written confirmation to the Professional Board for Psychology that they are willing to act as the collaborating supervisory university. The intern psychologist submits this form to the Professional Board for Psychology for approval (HPCSA, 2019a). The intern psychologist submits quarterly progress reports to the internal industrial psychologist (supervisor) after registering with the Professional Board for Psychology. The intern psychologist submits Form 27 PSY, which is signed off by the external industrial psychologist, the head of the training institution and the head of the supervising university after the intern psychologist has submitted all their quarterly reports. A primary function of the HPCSA is to regulate industrial psychologists' legal status as professionals. The HPCSA also regulates the approval or accreditation of internship programmes and ensures that professionals act ethically (Bleeker, 2011; Raubenheimer, 1982). The HPCSA (Form 218) requirements for industrial psychology internship programmes are summarised in Table 1.

The HPCSA has regulatory powers when it comes to the management of industrial psychology internships. A 12-month internship programme, conducted in collaboration with a supervising university, must be completed within 12 months (52 weeks) (HPCSA, 2019a). The programme must cover six specific fields within industrial psychology, and 10% of the time must be dedicated to ethical considerations. Furthermore, intern psychologists are required to write reports on the tasks they completed during the programme (Bleeker, 2011).

While the HPCSA provides guidelines and structure in terms of how internship programmes should be structured, accredited organisations can design internship programmes according to their needs (HPCSA, 2019a). According to DePuydt (1978), the supervisor is responsible for designing the internship programme before the internship begins. In addition to developing the intern's skills, the programme should be aimed at enhancing their professional and personal competence, including ethical behaviour (Bleeker, 2011; Collins et al., 2007; Hambrick et al., 2009; Jones, 2006).

TABLE 1: Requirements of an industrial and organisational psychology internship programme.

Hosting organisation	Accredited or approved independent institution
Duration	12 months full-time basis. The 12 months should consist of at least 52 weeks (40 h per week) spent working on the programme.
Requirements for internship undertaken at an independent institution	Compiled by the supervising industrial psychologist in collaboration with a department of IOP at a university.
Contents of the programme	It is a requirement that several fields should be covered during the programme, with a specific weighting assigned to it for the amount of time that interns should spend on each field in relation to the others. The fields that have to be covered are: career psychology (approximately 15%); organisational psychology (approximately 15%); personnel psychology (approximately 15%); testing and assessment (approximately 20%); elective (approximately 15%); Ethics (approximately 10%); professional development activities and research (approximately 5%); and leave (approximately 5%). Ethical considerations should be accounted for in each of the fields mentioned above. Separate time should be set aside to learn about ethics in general (such as attending workshops). Human immunodeficiency virus in the workplace should be covered at some point within one of the fields mentioned above.
Reports	Detailed descriptions of the activities should be provided in the form of reports (including reliability, validity, bias of tests and employment equity in South African settings for psychometrics). Include days allocated to the activities as well as the weighting of the percentage time spent on activities.
Test administration and assessment (for psychometrics)	Individual and group psychological tests have to be administered during the programme. Score and write reports on the experience of the administration of the tests. Participate in behavioural assessments. Research has to be conducted on test bias, fairness, validity and reliability of tests undertaken in South Africa. The psychological tests have to comply with the requirements for psychologically sound tests as prescribed by the HPCSA (see Forms 207 and 208).
Job analysis and competency design	Adhere to the <i>Employment Equity Act</i> by selecting on the basis of competency-based assessments and being involved in job analysis.
Reliability and validity	Use reliable, objective, relevant instruments and methodologies. Tools should be complemented by action research. Conduct studies to validate the samples on the tests, tools and techniques. Tests should be adapted in accordance with circumstances.

IOP, Industrial and Organisational Psychology; HPCSA, Health Professions Council of South Africa.

The Professional Board for Psychology registers intern psychologists (category: Industrial) under the guidelines of the HPCSA. Currently, employers and employees face a variety of psychological challenges within the new world of work (HPCSA, 2019a; Veldsman, 2020; Veldsman & Coetzee, 2022) that require psychologically-based human-behaviour-related services, which should be incorporated in the training of interns and their internship programmes.

Internship completion: Enabling and thwarting factors

The internship programme becomes a door through which interns are enabled to achieve their desire to make a meaningful contribution to society. In this regard, the internship programme motivates career-focussed postgraduate students with vocational and professional backgrounds towards professional registration and independent practice (Bates et al., 2019; Coetzee et al., 2022; Gill, 2020). To achieve their vocational ideals and professional goals within the context of a professional purpose, intern psychologists must be self-aware, self-confident and competent (Coetzee et al., 2022; Gill, 2020; Peeters et al., 2017). Besides acquiring occupational skills and practising their professional capabilities, intern

psychologists can also operationalise their professional purpose or calling through internships (Bisland et al., 2019; Gill, 2020). Several studies have found that having a strong sense of calling is positively correlated with self-efficacy, core self-evaluation, objective and perceived abilities, career success, employability, and professional competence (Chen et al., 2018; Dobrow & Heller, 2015; Guo et al., 2014; Lysova et al., 2018; Thompson & Bunderson, 2019). However, many enabling and thwarting factors seem to affect IOP interns' quest to complete their internship and gain professional registration with the HPCSA, and therefore require further exploration.

An enabling factor for industrial psychologists is to become employable through the completion of the internship programme (Coetzee et al., 2022). Drawing from the basic premises of the self-determination theory (SDT) of human behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Margaryan et al., 2022), intern psychologists must be intrinsically motivated and driven to practise independently as a member of the HPCSA, as well as offer behavioural consulting services to workplaces and society (Coetzee, 2019; Veldsman, 2020). Self-motivation, optimal psychological functioning, well-being and satisfaction of psychological needs, autonomy, relatedness, and competence are necessary conditions based on the SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For intern psychologists, competence, relatedness, and autonomy are intrinsic psychological needs that motivate them to pursue meaningful, purposeful activities, exercise their capacities autonomously (volitionally), and develop satisfying relationships with others (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci et al., 2017).

A further enabling factor is the intern psychologist's desire to have a positive impact on the world and to achieve valued outcomes within it, which is reflected in the effectivity motivational drive in the SDT (Coetzee et al., 2022; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Tang et al., 2021). In a social context or environment, people need to feel connected to each other and cared for by others as well as feel supported and cared for by others (Deci et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2021). To achieve self-determination, individuals must demonstrate congruence, integration and volition within their personal interests and aspirations (Deci et al., 2017).

In industrial psychology internship programmes, the aim is to enable intern psychologists to fulfil several psychological needs to achieve independence, feel competent and connect with others. Intern psychologists' desire to become employable professionals is related to their innate motivation (extrinsic and intrinsic). The SDT's concept of extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Tang et al., 2021) suggests that motivation for becoming an industrial psychologist is driven by the role's significance and value in the workplace (Coetzee & Engelbrecht, 2020; Shoенfelt et al., 2013). According to Tang et al. (2021), intrinsic motivation is the capacity to self-regulate and perform activities, roles and services with pleasure or satisfaction. A positive work environment, understanding the value and purpose of their

work, valuing intrinsic goals and feeling autonomous are all factors that influence the engagement and satisfaction of intern psychologists which can lead to optimal performance (Deci et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2021).

Quality guidance and mentorship from supervising industrial psychologists are regarded as an enabling factor for intern psychologists during their internship programmes. The support of the supervising industrial psychologist at the academic institution and the guiding role that the industrial psychologist in the training organisation performs cannot be overemphasised (Cross & Carbery, 2022). The equilibrium between the intern psychologist and the supervising industrial psychologists at the academic institution and the training organisation enhance this relationship. The cooperative nature of organisations supports intern psychologists to comply with the HPCSA requirements for internship programmes (Coetzee et al., 2019). The professionalism, adaptability, and compassion of supervising industrial psychologists enable intern psychologists to successfully navigate their internship programmes. High standards for performance set by supervising industrial psychologists from the commencement of the internship enable intern psychologists to maintain high standards throughout their internship. A further enabling factor is the role of professional societies such as the Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South Africa (SIOPSA) in placing intern psychologists in training organisations to complete their internships. It is a project that requires regular calibration in order to fine-tune it to be a fully-fledged efficient offering.

Organisations play an important role in ensuring an enabling environment for the intern. Organisations are responsible for providing intern psychologists with appropriate training (Avraamides, 2007; Oppong, 2022; Padmanabhanunni et al., 2022). Thus, training not aligned to the HPCSA requirements may hinder the intern's development. Also, transparent reports presenting an accurate, detailed reflection of the exposure interns received during the internship should be provided, as it is unethical to falsify the experience and competence gained (Hambrick et al., 2009). In addition, organisations should avoid creating false expectations for interns before the internship by promising opportunities for interns that they are not able to provide (Hambrick et al., 2009). For intern psychologists, another stumbling block is balancing their internship with their dissertation and family life. Furthermore, intern psychologists' limited income makes it difficult to support their families (Byrne et al., 2014; Morrison, 2022).

There may be a thwarting factor in professional competence (Sturre et al., 2022). According to Johnson et al. (2008), not all intern psychologists who complete internship programmes can work independently. Consequently, Kitchener (1992) argues that supervisors and academic institutions should refrain from graduating those who could cause harm because of their incompetence or lack of ethical sensitivity (Kottke et al., 2014). Accordingly, it is suggested that interns who are not capable of performing the basic tasks of an industrial

psychologist should not be permitted to enter the field (Johnson et al., 2008). Malouf et al. (1983) state that supervisors should understand the level of knowledge that intern psychologists should possess before engaging them in activities.

The researchers gained additional insights through conducting this research among intern psychologists. The lack of a well-designed programme was cited as a major concern (Avraamides, 2007; Kottke et al., 2014). Examples of specific challenges were also provided: intern psychologists involved in unethical organisation-related activities; supervisory disagreements resulting in conflict (Avraamides, 2007); unsatisfactory working conditions (Girard, 1999); a lack of exposure because of poorly defined tasks (DePuydt, 1978); and conflict resolution challenges (Nelson & Friedlander, 2001) involving the relationship between intern psychologists, supervisors and other stakeholders (Lowman, 2022). Furthermore, the HPCSA's process and time to approve tailored programmes are major obstacles. An organisation cannot afford to wait 6 months for approval of a programme. It is also not possible for intern psychologists to apply 6 months in advance. In addition, universities are not able to adequately support the approval process for programmes.

As part of an internship, intern psychologists work closely with their supervisors on tasks that are normally associated with the hosting organisation's daily operations. Consequently, intern psychologists and their supervisors have a close relationship (Kramer & Slomine, 2022). In the study conducted by Brewer (1997), interns regarded the supervisor's role primarily as providing feedback, familiarising them with the organisation, providing support and exposing them to relevant learning opportunities to facilitate their growth. Kanye and Crous (2007) found that despite having a strong need for challenges and excitement (getting a high orientation), interns with high orientation preferred structure, guidance and feedback, even though these needs are not usually associated with this type of personality. As a result of these expectations, the supervisor-intern relationship might become a prominent aspect warranting focussed attention.

According to DePuydt (1978) and Gill (2020), intern psychologists expressed concern that supervisors did not regularly provide them with the support or constructive feedback they expected from their supervisors. In Girard's (1999) study, intern psychologists were concerned that their supervisors were not responding to their ideas and suggestions. Several supervisors complained that intern psychologists lacked knowledge and were troublesome (DePuydt, 1978). According to Nelson and Friedlander (2001), intern psychologists described inadequate supervision because of a lack of commitment from their supervisors, confusion because of multiple relationships with supervisors, and power struggles between supervisors that adversely affected their development. A relationship of trust is especially important, according to Kramer and Slomine (2022) and Nelson and Friedlander (2001). Warm, caring supervisors are perceived as more trustworthy. As a result of

trust in relationships, supervisors and intern psychologists can communicate more effectively (Lowman, 2022; Nelson & Friedlander, 2001), intern psychologists are more satisfied with their supervisors (Carless & Taylor, 2003; Gill, 2020), and learning takes place (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2022; Carless & Taylor, 2003). A lack of trust in a relationship based on ethics might be a thwarting factor.

Internship programmes may also be hindered by building multiple relationships with supervisors and other stakeholders such as project managers (Hambrick et al., 2009). In many cases, intern psychologists exploit their relationships with supervisors by expecting them to provide advice of a personal nature or by using the supervisor's expertise for reasons other than those stipulated in the training programme (Hambrick et al., 2009; Nelson & Friedlander, 2001). The expectations of one role may conflict with the expectations of another role within a relationship between a psychologist and a supervisor (Gottlieb, 1993). By assigning a project manager as the intern psychologist's mentor during the internship, Avraamides (2007) demonstrated a dual relationship that could lead to a conflict between roles. It is because of this reason that the intern psychologist would not have access to a mentor if there were issues between the intern psychologist and the project leader.

Considering the review of literature, and in many instances the lack of recent research, this study aims to build on previous research. The present study therefore focusses on gaining a better understanding of the challenges IOP interns encountered during their internships and gaining insight into the enabling factors that empowered them to successfully complete their internship programmes.

Research design

Research approach and strategy

This study followed a qualitative research approach in a specific academic case setting: a master's programme in IOP, and more specifically the internship programme which forms part of the master's programme. In agreement with grounded theory (Khan, 2014), an inductive approach was applied during which data were collected through the following two research questions: (1) What challenges did you encounter while completing your internship programme? (2) What factors enabled you to successfully complete the internship programme? These open-ended questions allowed insight into the IOP interns' subjective and unique experiences. The interpretive research paradigm informed the research strategy enabling the collection of qualitative data which provided a holistic view and informative insight into the world of the IOP intern (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Züll, 2016).

Research method

Research setting

This study was situated among South African-based IOP master's students at 17 different organisations, spread among many industries, of which 11 (64%) had already completed

their internship and 6 (36%) were in the process of completing their internship. Among the participants, 1 (6%) had already passed the HPCSA board examination, and 16 (94%) were yet to pass it.

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

The research participants were selected from among the cohort of 2020–2021 master's IOP interns at an academic institution. Participation was voluntary for the participants who met the inclusion criteria of having completed their coursework year of the master's programme. The participants were also required to have completed or be close to completing their internship programme.

Research participants and sampling methods

The participants were purposively selected (Salkind, 2019) from among the cohort of 2020–2021 master's IOP interns ($N = 33$) of a case academic institution. A response rate of 51.51% was acquired, resulting in a sample of 17 participants. This is deemed adequate in accordance with qualitative data collection standards (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, data saturation was confirmed: (1) after three researchers independently analysed the data, and (2) after a process of re-analysis. The sample constituted interns from the African ($n = 9$; 53%), Indian ($n = 3$; 18%) and white ($n = 5$; 29%) population groups, and consisted mainly of female interns ($n = 13$; 77%) and some male interns ($n = 4$; 23%), with a mean sample age of 36 years (standard deviation [SD] = 7.09). All the participants had HPCSA approved internships among many organisations in South Africa. This included 88% ($n = 15$) of the interns who were in employment, one participant who was self-employed and one participant who was unemployed. The participants were required to complete the survey through which the data were collected anonymously.

Data collection and data recording

The potential participants were invited to participate in the proposed study by means of an email invitation sent by the internship coordinator who had insight into whether the participants complied with the inclusion criteria. The internship coordinator was independent from the potential participants, which enabled voluntary participation. In the invitation to participate, the potential participants received a URL link to access the open-ended online survey questionnaire and complete it anonymously, as all the responses were automatically transferred to a group-based Excel data spreadsheet.

Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity

Trustworthiness was ensured through careful consideration of the principles of credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Therefore, a detailed account of the research design and process have been provided, all three researchers analysed the data and applied data triangulation, and verbatim quotations substantiate the findings. Data integrity was further ensured by keeping detailed record of the data coding and labelling process for the emergence of themes (Salkind, 2019).

Data analysis and reporting

The researchers reviewed and re-reviewed the participants' qualitative responses, and this enabled the emergence of themes. The six-step thematic analysis process described by Creswell and Creswell (2017) was followed. This included: (1) cleaning the data; (2) reading through all the data to get a sense of the information; (3) coding by labelling and identifying common themes in the data; (4 and 5) linking established relationships and interpreting the meaning of themes; and (6) validating the accuracy of the information to establish trustworthiness.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was received by the tertiary institution's Research Ethics Review Committee (ERC Reference #2021_CREC_018[FA]). Participation was voluntary and the participants were required to give informed consent prior to completing the survey (Salkind, 2019). Anonymity, privacy and confidentiality were ensured, as the participants' responses were automatically transferred by the system to a group-based Excel data spreadsheet.

Results

The findings are reported in terms of each research aim: (1) to explain the challenges IOP interns encountered while completing their internship programme; and (2) to explain the factors that helped the IOP interns to successfully complete their internship programme. Within each aim, the findings will be presented by means of the most important influences identified and analysed from the data and supported by verbatim quotations.

Research Aim 1: Thwarting factors challenging the completion of the internship programme

Data on the thwarting factors which challenge the successful completion of the IOP internship programme bore four predominant factors: (1) financial resources; (2) internship programme approval, content and completion; (3) the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic; and (4) balance between work, dissertation and personal life.

Of the 17 participants, only 1 participant noted experiencing 'no(ne)' (Participant 3, Employed, Age 29) challenges during the completion of the internship programme. However, among the other 16 participants, six predominant factors were noted.

Firstly, consider the factor of *financial resources*. In addition to it not being:

'Easy to get access to an internship.' (Participant 2, Unemployed, Age 39)

Programme, participants noted how they had income-related concerns; they indicated:

'The stipend is too little.' (Participant 2, Unemployed, Age 39)

And they found the remuneration associated with an internship position to be:

'Limited income.' (Participant 1, Intern, Age 40)

Secondly, most of the participants shared concerns about the *internship programme approval, content, and completion*. Many participants shared their frustration with the process of getting an internship programme approved. One participant noted how the timeframe of the HPCSA created a huge barrier:

'HPCSA. The time to approve tailored programmes and the process is a massive barrier.' (Participant 1, Intern I, Age 39)

Another participant voiced frustration over the complete lack of communication:

'I am still awaiting an update on when the next HPCSA closing date is for a resubmission of the proposal.' (Participant 16, Employed, Age 45)

While participants seemed to appreciate professional bodies such as SIOPSA's attempt to intervene and assist in getting internships and internship programmes approved, there were still work to be done to improve its effectiveness. They also seemed to plead for more effective support from authoritative stakeholders such as the HPCSA, the tertiary institution, and SIOPSA. Participants further seemed to experience a disconnect regarding processes and procedures to be followed when submitting an internship programme for approval:

'I am pleased with SIOPSA's attempt at an intervention – but realise that this is a pilot project that would require regular calibration to fine-tune it to be a fully-fledged efficient offering.' (Participant 16, Employed, Age 45)

'There seems to be a disjoint amongst [*the HEI*], HPCSA and SIOPSA in terms of a common understanding of the documents that are required for submission, the timeframes that one can be expected to be communicated a response by.' (Participant 16, Employed, Age 45)

Two participants highlighted the supporting role of tertiary institutions and how they lacked in providing the necessary guidance:

'The guidance to complete the proposal for the internship is lacking from [*the HEI*]' and 'I also found universities, not only [*the HEI*] but I include [*the HEI*], do not give adequate support in terms of getting programmes approved.' (Participant 16, Employed, Age 45)

Not receiving adequate support and guidance from the tertiary institution, a participant notes:

'I have not completed as yet. However, the guidance from [*the HEI*] has not been there.' (Participant 12, Employed, Age 51)

And particularly having a supportive secondary supervisor:

'Difficult secondary supervisor.' (Participant 9, Intern, Age 35)

There seemed to be two significant barriers to the interns' ability to successfully complete their internships.

The impact on organisations was alluded to, as a participant highlighted the negative impact of the timeframe and delays in getting internships approved not only affected them but also organisations because:

'Organisations can't afford to wait six months for a programme to be approved.' and '... many interns can't apply for approval six months ahead of time.' (Participant 11, Intern, Age 39)

Furthermore, the content of the internship programme and the time allowed within which to complete the internship seemed to create great unease among the participants. Concerns emanated from organisations not being able to give interns sufficient exposure to certain outcomes as outlined in the approved internship programme, resulting in them having to amend certain parts of the programme, which seems to cause some anxiety about whether they would still comply with the HPCSA prescriptions:

'I completed my internship during COVID-19 lockdown, which resulted in amending exposure activities in the various domains.' (Participant 17, Employed, Age 36)

'In addition, the stress to obtain the hours set out in the internship can be challenging, especially when the organisation cannot provide a certain portion.' (Participant 8, Intern, Age 29)

'My organisation is very strong in some areas, and I managed to very good exposure and many hours, but then in other areas it was very difficult.' (Participant 4, Employed, Age 30)

Another cause of anxiety was expressed by a participant as:

'My organisation also won't allow me to complete my internship full time. I was expected to carry out my normal day to day job and find time in between to carry out my internship.' (Participant 4, Employed, Age 30)

This anxiety can be ascribed to the fact that the HPCSA requires interns to complete their 1-year internship full time.

Thirdly, as could be expected, the *COVID-19 pandemic* impacted interns' ability to complete their internship programmes with ease and without unnecessary delay. One participant just stated:

'COVID-19!' (Participant 5, Employed, Age 30)

Another participant elaborated a little more: 'Obviously COVID-19 also had an impact on the quality of exposure.' (Participant 8, Intern, Age 29), while another participant emphasised another barrier resulting in the inability to complete the internship programme within the initially planned timeframe:

'... given the pandemic, it was difficult to get practical exposure, which made me delay my programme.' (Participant 10, Employed, Age 30)

Fourthly, and finally, an important factor emerging from the data was *balance between work, dissertation and personal life*. Most participants expressed their struggle to retain a balance between their internship work demands, having to complete their dissertation the same year, and attending to and maintaining a flourishing personal life:

'Balancing work, completing my dissertation and personal [family] life was definitely a challenge.' (Participant 6, Employed, Age 36)

'Balancing internship work and dissertation.' (Participant 7, Employed, Age 49)

'Trying to balance my work, internship and research.' (Participant 10, Employed, Age 30)

In conclusion, one participant displayed great insight into the importance of taking the internship seriously by stating the burden they carried because of the obligation they felt they had towards themselves, the organisation and positioning the field of IOP accurately in business. Even though this is sought-after insight because it provides evidence of growth and employability readiness, it also showed the burden was somewhat overwhelming:

'It is your responsibility to really make yourself employable and prove that you are of value and am able to bring value to the organisation, as most employers do not know exactly what an IO psychologist really does. Thus, there is a great opportunity to provide input and thus can at times be overwhelming.' (Participant 8, Intern, Age 29)

Research Aim 2: Enabling factors supporting the successful completion of the internship programme

In contrast to the many thwarting factors noted above, only two enabling factors emerged that seemed to provide IOP interns with essential support to successfully complete their internship programmes. These were support networks and the power within the self.

The first factor, *support networks*, highlight the important role of a strong support network consisting of various role-players during the internship journey of an intern. Such networks seemed to reinforce the intern's capacity and enlarged their base of exposure.

Participants referred to the support of the academic supervisor and the supervising psychologist at the internship organisation and how they, together, played a dual role in guiding and supporting the intern. The participants referred to supervisory characteristics such as being supportive, being adaptable and compassionate while ensuring quality, and being professional in their conduct. This is evident in the following participants' voices:

'Guidance from primary and secondary supervisor helped a lot' (Participant 1, Intern, Age 40)

a) Supportive and great academic supervisor and supervising psychologist (the roles that they played was more than words can describe). There was a great match between myself, the academic supervisor and supervising psychologist.

b) Commitment, perseverance, dedication and willingness to learn under supervision.' (Participant 3, Employed, Age 29)

'My supervisors were professional, adaptable and compassionate as I was navigating an internship during a pandemic. My supervisors set a high standard for performance from the beginning of the internship, which was maintained throughout the internship.' (Participant 17, Employed, Age 36)

'My support system and high-quality guidance from my internship supervisor.' (Participant 6, Employed, Age 36)

'Support from supervisor.' (Participant 7, Employed, Age 49)

'I had a fantastic supervisor who also works within the mining industry and was extremely helpful.' (Participant 8, Intern, Age 29)

'Supervisor coaching and guidance ... Support from university supervisor.' (Participant 10, Employed, Age 30)

'Received sufficient guidance from [the HEI] and Company internship supervisors.' (Participant 14, Employed, Age 34)

In addition to the support offered by the supervising psychologist in the organisation, some participants alluded to the value of having the support of the organisation in accommodating the required standards of the internship programme, especially the line managers and colleagues:

'Quality guidance and mentorship from my supervisor and manager.' (Participant 5, Employed, Age 30)

'A large organisation to do my internship at, and an understanding line manager then allowed me to get involved in spaces outside of my normal function.' (Participant 4, Employed, Age 30)

'The organisation I work for was also very accommodating to my requirements set out in my internship.' (Participant 8, Intern, Age 29)

'Support from my colleagues.' (Participant 10, Employed, Age 30)

One participant also shared how the:

'Best assistance has come from networking with other interns.' (Participant 11, Intern, Age 39)

What is quite interesting, and noteworthy, is that family and friends were not mentioned once as role-players within the support network of interns.

The last enabling factor that supports interns in successfully completing their internship programme was described as the *power within the self*. One participant noted the importance of:

'Taking ownership on my side.' (Participant 10, Employed, Age 30)

Another participant also referred to taking ownership and noted:

'To make up for time lost. I continued with the internship two months after the period had been completed.' (Participant 13, Intern, Age 34)

Emphasising the power situated within oneself, a participant shared how remaining:

'... positive and proactive, not waiting for someone to go out there and making things happen.' (Participant 9, Intern, Age 35)

Ensured success. Lastly, a participant became aware of the power of previous work experience and how, through its embeddedness in the self:

'The HR work experience [obtained] in the organisation.' (Participant 14, Employed, Age 34)

Became an enabling power leading to the successful completion of the internship programme.

Discussion

Outline of results and practical implications

This study explored IOP interns' perceived experiences of the factors they encountered which either enabled or challenged them during the completion of their internship programmes. The findings of the study predominantly highlighted two enabling factors (having a support network and the power within the self) which seemed to empower interns towards the successful completion of their internship programme.

Being supported by supervisors, managers, colleagues, and fellow interns was emphasised by most of the participants, and many researchers concur with this (Kramer & Slomine, 2022; Lowman, 2022; Schumann et al., 2019; Tang et al., 2021). Such a solid support network includes quality supervision, a supportive learning environment, additional time for consultation or mentoring or coaching when needed, and adapting generic programmes to accommodate specific organisational and individual needs (Kehoe et al., 2016; Lavallée et al., 2021; Ohr et al., 2014) and help navigate the intern through challenges while still meeting the HPCSA criteria. Also, the triad relationship between the intern, academic institution and training organisation is a core strength of quality support (Coetzee et al., 2019; Cross & Carbery, 2022). It is very interesting that none of the interns referred to the support of family and friends. This is thought-provoking, as Ren et al. (2021) highlight the significant role social relations play as determinants in employees' ability to learn and succeed, yet it did not emerge as one of the enabling factors within the support network theme. A possible explanation is that the participants experienced a sense of distance, divide or a lack of insight into their world as interns as social relations did not have first-hand experience into the reality of their world as interns.

The power within the self (i.e. the intern), aligned with the SDT of human behaviour, can be a potential enabler (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Margaryan et al., 2022). Intrinsic motivation to complete the internship by taking ownership results in optimal psychological functioning, autonomy and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Veldsman, 2020). Therefore, the intern should engage in meaningful and purposeful activities, demonstrating congruence and aligning the requirements of the internship programme with their personal aspirations, even amid adversity common in the post-pandemic digital-era internship work setting (Du Plessis & Thomas, 2021).

The findings of the study furthermore highlighted four prime thwarting factors that seemingly create discomfort in the quest to successfully complete their internship programmes. These are: (1) financial resources; (2) internship programme approval, content and completion; (3) COVID-19; and (4) balance between work, dissertation and personal life, all of which hinders the successful completion of their internship programme.

Generally, the findings suggest that in addition to struggling to find an internship position, interns have financial worries

because of insufficient remuneration. Master's students often come from diverse employment contexts, job levels and salary levels, which makes moving into an intern position challenging considering the significant adjustment in especially their level of income and their ability to subsequently pay study fees, support themselves and relatives (Byrne et al., 2014; Morrison, 2022).

The findings of the study emphasise the struggle to move into an internship position earning less money, get internship programmes approved, meet the content requirements and complete it within 1 year. This necessitates a re-evaluation of the remuneration of interns suitable to meet all their financial obligations, and the guidelines, timeframes and support needed to get an internship programme approved timeously by the HPCSA, SIOPSA, and tertiary institutions. Also, the negative impact on business should be considered, as organisations cannot wait as long for interns to perform their roles. The findings also show a need to better align HPCSA requirements with organisational strategy when structuring the internship programme, which is a longstanding concern (Avraamides, 2007; Kottke et al., 2014; Oppong, 2022; Padmanabhanunni et al., 2022).

Finally, in some cases, the practicality of having to resign from a stable, more senior, better paying position to do an internship is questioned. Strain on interns is evident, as many interns retain their positions while simultaneously completing their internship programme in the same organisation, resulting in interns being expected to still attend to their normal day-to-day duties while putting in extra time to fulfil the internship role, as the HPCSA requires a full-time 1-year internship. This results in unsatisfactory working conditions because of the enormous pressure and having to work inhumane hours (Girard, 1999). When structuring internship programmes, consideration should also be given to the post-pandemic digital-era work setting, enabling interns to develop digital dexterity, resilience and adaptability to work effectively in hybrid and virtual workplaces (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022; Stark, 2021). This should also enable interns to find a balance between their intern work, dissertation completion, and personal life. Interns experience many psychological stressors while completing their internship, which necessitates the need for balance and which can be attended to in policy development and a re-evaluation of HPCSA and organisational requirements (Du Plessis & Thomas, 2021; Nielsen et al., 2020; Van Bavel et al., 2020). Interns can use the principles of the boundary theory to create segments between their work, dissertation and personal life, enabling them to navigate between the three more efficiently (Koch & Binnewies, 2015; Ren et al., 2021).

Limitations and recommendations

Generalisation of the findings to other tertiary institutions may not be appropriate and it is therefore recommended that the findings of this study be interpreted in the context of the cohort of IOP interns within the case institution. Obtaining the views of a larger group of interns, as well as other stakeholders such as supervisors, the HPCSA and

organisations, might provide more evidence better informing the structuring of internship programmes and supervision guidelines. Adopting multiple data collection methods such as interviews or focus groups with the survey questionnaire, could also potentially yield richer data. Future research can also focus on how internships consider the new post-pandemic digital-era work setting, making internship programmes viable in hybrid and virtual workplaces.

Conclusion

The findings of this study contribute to the extension of knowledge pertaining to enabling and thwarting factors IOP interns face while completing their internship programmes. This knowledge allows for a better understanding of the practical implications of these factors and enables recommendations for improving the experience of the internship journey for interns, supervisors, organisations, and stakeholders such as the HPCSA, tertiary institutions, and SIOPSA.

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Authors' contributions

A.v.N., R.M.O. and M.C. conceptualised the study and developed the methodology. They also contributed to formal analysis, investigation, writing – original draft, visualisation, project administration, and writing – review and editing.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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