

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY: FRIENDS IN NEED

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The working life of an academic has been conceived as an interplay of equally important roles, namely teacher, researcher and public intellectual. Strong academia is thought to be one where there is meaningful engagement of all three purposes and domains (Star, 2004). Being an organisational psychologist by profession and a resident academic within the Department of Psychology I get personally interested in how different organisations function in order to reach their aims and objectives. Furthermore, it is also very positively intriguing for me to see people succeed in their work-life endeavours and in their career progression. Moreover, I feel enriched and better able to offer a good service to my students when the knowledge I impart is filled with the experiences which I bring back from what I learn within my community practice. Such are the reasons for my heavy involvement in performing outreach because I believe that my knowledge as an academic and scholar within our University is undoubtedly enriched and better passed on to students.

As Director of the University of Malta Cottonera Resource Centre, my main role is to meet stakeholders in this region of our Islands. The remit of the Centre is that of providing courses and services to people in the area bringing them closer to education and to better life opportunities. The Centre offers courses in 3D printing and robotics as well as Ordinary Level MATSEC revision courses in various subjects. Also, very popular is the Xjenza Manija Summer School for children aged 8 to 12. Furthermore, we offer counselling and legal advisory services through students under supervision in collaboration with the Department of Counselling and the Faculty of Laws at the University of Malta. The centre is also working on opening a regional library which will be an annex of the University of Malta Main library and will eventually also offer Career Advisory Services in collaboration with the Centre for Labour Studies also within the University of Malta. We are also embarking on new projects in order to involve youth and make them comfortable with our learning environment. At the moment, we are working on a project which will combine Artificial Intelligence with Emotional Intelligence where a series of 10 lectures will be held for youth wishing to explore this area. Financial Literacy is also an area of exploration at the Centre where we have carried out workshops with young children and published research on our findings in this area.

In 2018, a new Authority regulating the quality of Social Care Standards was launched by the present government. My role as chair of the board of this Authority is to provide direction and to oversee the operations which are mainly addressed at the continuous improvement of care services for our elderly citizens, persons with a disability and children who make use of residential homes. The greatest challenge faced by the Authority still yet in its infancy is the Covid-19 situation and the quick restrictions put in place in order to safeguard all clients making use of residential homes. Within this authority, I am also involved in the Research Advisory Group where the Authority has commissioned the Faculty for Social Wellbeing at the University of Malta to carry out research on Local Adoption Barriers.

Another contribution I give is that of technical member of the Senior Appointments Advisory Committee within the Office of the Prime Minister. This Committee is responsible for recruiting all individuals interested in government top level positions. My role here is that of an Organisational Psychologist where I administer and

interpret a set psychometric test. I have also been involved in adjustments to the psychometric test which is administered so that it is better suited to the remit of the committee.

The final contribution that I currently give and which I will mention for the purposes of this article is linked to my most recent appointment which is that of Chair of the Malta Psychology Profession Board. The board is constituted by Chapter 471 of the Laws of Malta namely the Psychology Profession Act. Mainly, the Malta Psychology Profession Board is responsible for vetting applications by those individuals who want to work as psychologists in Malta. Other functions that we perform are those of monitoring the Continuous Professional Development of psychologists, giving guidance on professional development at all levels within the field and collaboration with stakeholders on various matters including employment roles of psychology graduates, psychology practitioners and psychologists operating within the public service.

Community engagement should be at the heart and soul of what academics do in their daily lives. Research should inform practice and our practice in the community should lead us to ask questions answerable by research studies. As academics it is also our role to think about the best possible research designs which will be addressed towards giving us the best answers to our queries on best practice in community engagement. Furthermore, it is our duty to enable our students to think critically and to prepare them for the real world of work most particularly in course programmes where the possibility for work-based learning is limited. In framing the intended skills and attributes of graduates, universities need to be engaged in a process that requires an understanding of the future workplace into which graduates will emerge and the skills that employment in that workplace will require (Langworthy & Turner, 2003). This can only be achieved by our continuous involvement as academics in the community enabling us to present multiple, real-life scenarios in our classes for our students to reflect upon. This involvement in community engagement is also intended to pave the way for future psychologists to be employed within both private and public sectors with solid knowledge about evidence-based practice.

#### References:

- Langworthy, A., & Turner, T. (2003). Learning for the workplace and beyond: the challenge of university-community engagement. Conference Paper. Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australia. Accessed on 25/4/2020: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.202.4795&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
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