

EDITORIAL

I-O Psychology in Romania: A Profession Dedicated to Assessment

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In Romania, psychological assessment and industrial-organizational psychology have an interwoven history. The interplay between the two domains continues to shape science and practice of our profession. In this editorial, we dive into the history of psychological assessment and its connection with I-O psychology and take note of the potential future opportunities and pitfalls.

The “Psychotechnical” Age

Following a similar trend to that of other European countries, psychology was introduced in Romania by Eduard Gruber, one of Wundt’s students. During the early days, the practice of psychological science boiled down to various forms of psychological and psychotechnical assessments, assessments usually conducted in experimental psychology labs. During the early 1900s, The Romanian Ministry of Labor solicited the establishment of such laboratories in order to determine whether personnel working in various industries were “fit for work” from a psychophysiological standpoint. Naturally, the activities in these laboratories consisted mostly of administering and interpreting psychotechnical assessments. Basically, the practice of psychology during the respective period consisted of administering and interpreting *psychotechnical* assessments. Various industrial organizations, such as Bucharest Tram Society or the Aeronautical

Medical Center solicited such incipient forms of psychological assessment in order to determine whether their prospective employees are psycho-physiologically “fit for work”. Alongside the psycho-physiological assessments, the psychologist operating within these laboratories used translated versions for renowned measures, such as the Army Alpha.

The earliest publications reflected the deep connection between psychological assessment and the practice of I-O psychology. In 1931 the first scientific journal of psychology, the Romanian Journal of Experimental and Applied Psychology, was published under the supervision of Constantin Radulescu Motru. In 1937 the first issue of Psychotechnics Journal, an outlet dedicated to disseminating knowledge on the development and use of various psycho-physiological assessments in Romanian psychotechnical laboratories. Moreover, some of the first academic handbooks were dedicated to the domain of psychological assessment: *Selecting Capacities and Professional Orientation* by Ștefănescu-Goangă, in 1928 and *Tests for Measuring Mental Functions* authored by Ștefănescu-Goangă and Roșca, in 1935.

The “Industrial” Age

The installment of a communist regime in Romania, in the aftermath of World War II brought about significant changes to our

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profession. In line with the communistic *zeiggeist* private enterprises and private ownership were demised. To quickly shape the country and its society according to the New Man ideals, a particularly brutal purge of the Romanian Intelligentsia unfolded during the first decade of communistic rule. The leading figures of our profession, such as Nicolae Mărgineanu or Florian Ștefanescu Goangă were imprisoned, bringing the development of the psychological science to an abrupt halt. In the decades that followed, the communist regime instated a series of bans, limiting the freedom to travel and imposing censorship on publications, effectively severing the ties between Romanian psychologists and scholars from Western Europe or the US. The oppression against our profession peaked during the late '70s when based on the make-believe pretext of psychologists getting involved in the dangerous practice of meditation, the communist regime decided to outlaw psychology as an independent academic discipline. Thus, in less than two decades the scintillating development psychology was not only halted, but the entire profession was now outlawed. This way, the regime that upheld full equality of all members of society, managed to formally abolish the single academic discipline focusing on the understanding and measuring of individual differences. Or did it!?

One of the priorities of the communist regime was to transform the country's agricultural economy into an industrial one. The mammoth industrial plants had to be manned with personnel having extensive experience in agriculture rather than in manipulating complex industrial equipment or handling various production processes within such organizations. Psychological assessments were still needed! This way, although the profession had been disbanded, psychologists continued to administer various tests and inventories, they continued to assess personnel with the aim of preventing work accidents and establishing fitness for work. During an unusual 5-weeks visit in Romania, during 1986, Frank Landy noted that most of the psychological practice consisted in

administering measures for personnel selection (Landy, 1986). Moreover, he noted that Romanian psychologists were conducting typical validity research and employing a wide range of psychometric assessments: cognitive abilities (e.g., Raven's APM, mechanical, deductive, numerical or spatial reasoning), personality (e.g., California Psychological Inventory).

Current status

The three decades of state-imposed censorship, isolation and abuse against the profession did not result in a *de facto* dissolution of psychology. Psychology's endurance as a profession was possible mainly because one psychological assessment proved to be an essential contribution to society. This way, Romanian psychologists developed extensive expertise in developing or translating psychometric assessments. Romanian psychologists relied heavily on the practice of using tests to ground various recommendations and opinions.

After the fall of the communist regime, psychology was reinstated, and a long process of reconstruction began. Psychological assessment with a particularly strong focus on personnel selection is still one of the main pillars of Romanian psychology, both in the practitioners' and academic realms. Psychological assessments are legally solicited for a wide range of contexts: obtaining the driving license, obtaining the permit to carry firearms, or for various lines of work (e.g., industry or transportation). There are four independent well established test publishers, some focusing on adapting and localizing flagship psychological measures and others focusing on test development. In the realm of I-O psychology, major players in the domain of psychological assessments have been active in Romania since the late 2000s. The Romanian Board of Psychologists methodological commission approved over 30 different translated or locally developed psychometric assessments. During the past 10 years Romanian researchers were involved in leading international organizations, such as the International Test Commission. There are

currently three Romanian psychologists sitting on the European Journal of Psychological Assessment's editorial board, one of them being Editor in Chief.

What lies ahead

That is not to say that currently, Romanian I-O psychology and psychological assessment in particular does not have its fair share of unresolved issues and challenges.

#1: I-O Psychology practitioners are under-represented. The most preeminent and single Romanian I-O psychological association has less than 200 active members while the Romanian Psychologists Board issued several thousands practice licenses for psychologists specializing in work, organizational and services psychology. Most of the practitioners of I-O psychology are not part of an organization who could represent their interests.

#2: There is a methodological disarray in respect to the way in which the legally required psychological assessments are being conducted: psychologists using obsolete measures of concentrated attention as part of the psychological assessment for granting the permit to own firearms is not a rare sight. Furthermore, there are no rigorous standards, best practice documents or guidelines that regulate or at least provide a clear set of

directions about how various legally required assessments should be conducted.

#3: There is a lack of publications or other media outlets who could provide news, updates, reports and other type of non-commercial information dedicated to the fundamental practice and science of I-O psychology. Thus, our profession lacks an important communication channel amongst its members as well as a forum for sharing best practices or for discussing about the current or future trends. This further deepens the academic-practitioner gap.

#4: Romanian psychologists, I-O psychologists included, are not involved in any formal government relations, public policy or advocacy initiatives, and, as a consequence psychologists' expertise in the broader area of I-O psychology or in psychological assessment is not harvested by public authorities or policy makers.

#5: There are no professional structures involved in media relations. Consequently, the interest or the common points of view of I-O psychologists and/or experts in psychological assessment seldom get sent across, into the mainstream media. Consequently, our profession is not represented by voices that could share insights, news, updates or, conversely, take a strong position in respect to various issues where psychologists could and should have a saying.