Sure, validating personnel selection systems for a living can be fun. But imagine how much more fun this might be if you had the opportunity to celebrate those extra-large validity coefficients with a local chianti, some authentic spaghetti alla carbonara, or a quick jaunt to the Sistine Chapel. Culture, cuisine, statistical significance…it’s the stuff that I-O dreams are made of! If you’ve always fantasized about whiling away the hours writing SAS code while overlooking the Grand Canal of Venice, then this article is for you! This issue’s spotlight shines on I-O psychology, past and present, in Italy. Read on for an informative account of the evolution of I-O in Italy, along with details about how our Italian counterparts go about meeting, networking, and disseminating knowledge within and outside the borders of their country.

Industrial-Organizational Psychology in Italy

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The Italian population of about 60 million people lives in a territory of 301,000 km² (approximately 116,000 square miles in size). During the past 10 years, the number of service organizations, especially in the northern area of the country, has grown dramatically. Market competition has improved, opening to a worldwide network, and thus fostering mergers and joint ventures. This change in Italy’s economy has had a major impact on HR management practices in the private as well as in the public sector. The latter, in particular, has become interested in the organizational, structural, and cultural changes that will drive a client-oriented approach. This in turn has led to new streams of research, in private sector and public administration, on system efficiency, monitoring outcome measurements, manager performance assessment systems, and goal setting (Locke & Latham, 1990) and attainment rather than merely task completion. This is the environment in which I-O psy-

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1 As always, your comments and suggestions regarding this column are most welcome. Please feel free to e-mail me: lfthompson@ncsu.edu.
chology in the country of Italy operates. It is worth noting that in Italy, consistent with the European trend, I-O psychology is labeled work psychology.

I-O psychology in Italy has a history going back more than 100 years. The University of Bologna is proud of the fact that it is the oldest university in the world, established in 1088. However, the first study on I-O psychology was actually conducted at the University of Modena by M. L. Patrizi in 1889 (Avallone, 1994). Patrizi laid the foundation for experimental psychology methods to be applied to real-work settings. Half a century later, Agostino Gemelli (1878–1959) became well known for his research in psychotechnics (i.e., the practical or technological application of psychology), and his major book was published in 1944, *Psicotecnica applicata all’industria* (Psychotechnics Applied to Industry; Gemelli, 1944). Thus, it was that both Patrizi and Gemelli played major roles in the development of I-O psychology in Italy.

**Education and Employment**

Education within our discipline has evolved quite a bit during the past few decades. A significant event came in 1971, when the Universities of Rome and Padua instituted the “Laurea degree in Psychology” (somewhat equivalent to a master’s degree in psychology). This was the first time in Italy’s history that students could graduate with the word “psychology” included in their degree. It was not until the 1990s that the first work psychology course was offered.

Today, there are approximately 80 professors and researchers in work psychology in Italy. This is double the number since 2000. These scholars work in 22 universities and four PhD programs specifically related to I-O. The international exchange of graduate students in these PhD programs is strongly encouraged. The four I-O programs are flourishing as they provide training in personnel selection, performance management, training and development, and employee motivation.

To stay connected, the I-O academic community meets annually. Discipline-related issues, ways to advance the training of graduate students, and interventions for organizational settings are discussed. These meetings usually occur once year, and the venues are the different Italian universities.

Overall, the scientific community of work psychology is concerned with enhancing the integration of theory, methodology, and practice. Our well-grounded tradition in clinical psychology has influenced organizational intervention, providing an approach that relies on the analysis of interpersonal networks, and emotional flow and labor in various work contexts. Over the years, we have become increasingly sensitive to European directives, including fostering student exchange programs.

Most Italian psychologists have a 5-year college degree and attend 1 further year of professional training, specific to I-O psychology, after graduation. Beyond that, 3 additional years of education are required to obtain a
PhD in I-O, though most people do not choose this path. Those who do earn PhDs in I-O typically work in the academy or take research positions in public or private institutions.

In Italy, a graduated student in I-O psychology has a greater chance of finding a job than peers with a degree in clinical psychology. Compared to clinical psychology positions, I-O positions are relatively new within organizations (I-O positions were traditionally held by other professionals). Psychologists are in great demand in our large organizations, especially multinational ones, for their expertise in personnel selection (testing, interviews) as well as training, coaching, assessment, and development.

Psychologists who practice in industry as outside consultants must be licensed in Italy. Law n. 170/03 specifies activities that are defined as “psychological techniques.” These include the use of tests and other standardized tools for the analysis of behavior, cognitive processes, opinions, attitudes, needs and motivations, and social interaction. Following the “Platè Sentence” of 2003, it has been established that psychological profiles for recruitment and assessment are also considered to be typical acts of the psychology profession.

**Networking and Organizing**

Networking opportunities within our discipline have increased as the field has grown. In 1961 the Associazione Italiana di Psicologia del Lavoro-APIL (Association for Italian Psychology of Work) was founded. Enzo Spaltro (who was the first full professor of I-O psychology in the postwar Italian University) served as its first president. Meanwhile, the Società Italiana di Psicologia—SIPS (Italian Society of Psychology; www.sips.it), founded in 1911, opened its first division in I-O psychology in 1976. The Società Italiana di Psicologia del Lavoro e Organizzazione—SIPLO (Italian Society of Psychology of Work and Organization; www.siplo.org) was formed in the 1990s. SIPLO is a founding member of the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP).

The Italian “Ordine degli Psicologi” (Professional Association; www.psy.it) is active in creating a network for all Italian psychologists. The Ordine degli Psicologi is a member of the European Federation of Psychologists Association and was established in 1990. It has approximately 57,000 members, 14% of whom are I-O psychologists. The Ordine degli Psicologi is active in organizing seminars, workshops, and conferences to facilitate interdisciplinary approaches to organizational issues. It also establishes professional guidelines for ethical practices of those who operate in the professional field. Importantly, there is a growing awareness on the part of the public of the specific contributions of psychologists in investigating individual traits and in the use of techniques to facilitate learning—areas that up to now in Italy have largely been the responsibility of professions other than psychology.
Knowledge Dissemination

Professional and scholarly communication in Italy occurs through several independent journals and testing editors. The *Bollettino di Psicologia Applicata* (*Bulletin of Applied Psychology*) includes empirical articles as well as information on tests and instruments for psychological assessment and consultancy. *Risorsa Uomo* (*Human Resource*) primarily includes papers mainly related to I-O psychology. Similar to that which is published in *TIP*, the *Giornale Italiano di Psicologia* (*Italian Journal of Psychology*) is published quarterly. It provides an overview of literature reviews and empirical findings published in Italy. It is intended primarily for an academic audience. The editor Giunti, Organizzazioni Speciali, is the major Italian test dealer. He provides scientifically based tools for psychological assessment that have a theoretical frame of reference to guide their use. Many of them are translated and validated from different countries. Others have been created primarily for the Italian context.

Overall, participation in international conferences, scientific communities, editorial boards, and refereeing for journals enable Italian I-O psychologists to share scientific advances. Bridge collaborations for conjoint research projects with academics in other countries are strongly encouraged as well. To this end, Italian psychologists are active in EAWOP, which provides an excellent forum for networking and knowledge dissemination internationally.

Concluding Editorial

So, there you have it—everything you need to know about I-O psychology in Italy should you ever decide it’s time to pack your bags and cross-validate your findings in a place known for its natural beauty, exquisite art, and rich cultural heritage. As suggested on the preceding pages, Italian I-O has come a long way within a relatively short period of time. Clearly, this is an exciting time for our profession in Italy, a country that continues to promote the advancement of work psychology within and across its national borders.

References

