Greetings TIP readers, and welcome to the July edition of the Spotlight column. The summer vacation season has officially arrived and whether you’re heading for the mountains or traveling to the coast, chances are you’re wondering how to fill those long hours on the road. Tired of license plate bingo? Has the Handbook of I-O Psychology on tape suddenly lost its luster? Are you desperately searching for a way to avoid singing “Ninety-Nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall” with your family for the umpteenth time? If you answered “yes” to the preceding questions, this column is for you! The following pages provide everything you need to know to engage your travel companions in a lively discussion about the evolution of I-O psychology in Romania.

In fact, you won’t want to miss this thought-provoking glimpse of Romanian I-O, regardless of whether you find yourself in search of highway conversation. The following article describes the state of I-O psychology in a country that has undergone a great deal of change in the past 18 years. The challenges our Romanian colleagues have encountered along the way are described and discussed. Many of these challenges involve things we have the luxury of taking for granted, that is, obstacles that U.S. I-O psychologists rarely have to grapple with. Read on for details.

Industrial-Organizational Psychology in Romania

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Romania, a full member of the European Union since January 1, 2007, is located in southeastern Europe and has a population of around 22 million

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people. This is not the first article on I-O psychology in Romania published in *TIP*. Landy (1986) and Pitariu (1992) have also published accounts of psychology and I-O psychology in Romania.

Both these accounts were given shortly before and after the Romanian revolution (1989), which was an important turning point in the modern history of the country. A lot has happened in Romanian psychology and I-O psychology since 1992. The purpose of this article is to present the current status and some future directions in Romanian I-O psychology.

In his account of Romanian I-O psychology, Landy (1986) remarked that, even though there were quite a few psychologists active in the industrial environment, and even though their opinions were carrying some weight with the management, “their problem was that they were working with a body of knowledge that was 20+ years out of date” (Landy, 1986, p. 25).

This was in part due to the general communist ban on traveling, international contacts, and personal freedom. But in part it was also due to the fact that Romanian psychology was dismantled as an academic discipline in 1976 and succeeded to survive for the following years only housed in departments of education and philosophy. Through the efforts of a small group of Romanian psychologists (most of them being I-O psychologists) that included the late Prof. Dr. Alexandru Rosca, Prof. Dr. Ioan Radu, the late Prof. Dr. Mielu Zlate, and Prof. Dr. Horia Pitariu, psychological research continued to be published in *Revista de psihologie* (Journal of Psychology). Only the Romanian revolution in 1989 brought forth the prerequisites for psychology to again become the vigorous discipline it was from the early 1920s until 1976. For more on the history of psychology in Romania, the interested reader can see Iliescu et al. (2007), Landy (1986), and Pitariu (1992).

I-O psychology is a well established area of psychology in Romania. Most academic programs in psychology also teach courses in work, industrial, and organizational psychology. Also, most academic programs in psychology offer undergraduate specializations in I-O. This specialization is also acknowledged by the Psychological Commission, which is a regulating and certifying professional body of psychologists in Romania. Professional psychological practice, according to the Commission, can be done in Romania today in one of three areas: therapy/clinical psychology, school/vocational psychology, and I-O psychology.

In recent years, several important volumes have been published in the domain of I-O psychology. The first is a human resources management book written by a leading I-O psychologist (Pitariu, 1993), which won a Romanian Academy of Sciences award. Several years later, the *Handbook of Work*
and Organizational Psychology (Bogathy, 2004) emerged. Finally, a two-volume Treatise of Organizational and Managerial Psychology was written by the late professor Mielu Zlate (2006) and published last year.

Education

Psychology departments with a strong emphasis in I-O are those from Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, University of Bucharest, and West University in Timisoara. Until 2007, psychology was studied in 4-year academic programs that could be followed by a 2- or 3-semester master’s degree. Both the undergraduate and the graduate courses provide specialization; thus, an undergraduate specialized in I-O psychology has all the professional rights of a fully trained psychologist.

Most practicing Romanian psychologists have undergraduate degrees in psychology with specializations in I-O. As Landy (1986) noted, “in contrast to an American undergraduate, these individuals have taken 75-80% of their course work in psychology…as a result, they would have much the same training as a master’s degree student in the U.S.” (p. 25).

This focus on undergraduate education is definitely undergoing change since Romania joined the European Union. In the future, psychology will be taught in 3-year undergraduate programs, followed by a specialized 2-year master’s program. In order to practice psychology, one will also need a certification from the Romanian Psychological Commission (Colegiul Psihologilor din Romania, www.copsi.ro).

Main Areas of Interest

Landy (1986) remarked that “by far, the most significant area for research and practice is that of personnel psychology” (p. 23), and a few years later Pitariu (1992) stated that “our methods are antiquated…we must integrate our psychological interventions in the scientific context of modern I-O psychology” (p. 32). Today Romanian I-O psychology is up-to date, at least with the focus of modern I-O knowledge. What still lags dozens of years behind is the vigor of research and the international impact of this research. One possible explanation may be the relatively difficult access to the latest journals and articles in the field due to their high costs.

Main areas of interest for I-O psychologists are marked by a huge difference both in focus and in approach between academic programs and real-life practice. Academic programs are quite up to date with the standards of knowledge at an international level. The focus in academic I-O programs is on “hot” topics, including methodological issues, personality, job stress, workplace safety, health outcomes, performance management, quality of working life, affectivity and emotions in the workplace, leadership and teamwork, diversity in the workplace, culture, climate, and workplace values. This
contrasts with the U.S. where there seems to be a stronger emphasis on things like selection and training.

Practitioners rarely focus on conceptually complicated issues or on research but mostly use turn-key instruments that bring fast results. Most of their work is dedicated to performance-related issues like recruitment, selection, training, and performance evaluation. Also, I-O psychologists rarely reach top levels in consulting firms but are most of the time dedicated to technical issues.

Most I-O psychologists work in consulting businesses in the human resources area, where their expertise is heavily challenged by specialists from the managerial sciences, even in those areas where psychologists have traditionally had the upper hand. This challenge is encouraged by the current legal framework, in which activities like job analysis or psychological testing procedures are not mandatory in order to ensure fairness, equal opportunities, or safety in the workplace. Under these circumstances, real competencies in technical and supporting areas that provide important prerequisites for the HR process are not sought after—and nonpsychologists often have the upper hand.

**Romanian Association for Industrial and Organizational Psychology**

Founded in 1998, the Romanian Association for Industrial and Organizational Psychology—APIO (www.apio.ro)—is the forum for work and I-O psychology research and practice. APIO currently has around 200 members, a small number of whom are academics. Most are former students who have joined the association while still studying and have remained members as practitioners. Although the proportion of academics to practitioners is 1:8, the most active members of APIO are still the academics. The current president of APIO is Professor Dr. Horia D. Pitariu.

APIO’s objectives, as indicated in the founding statement, are (a) to support research in I-O psychology; (b) to support professional development actions in this field; (c) to support the valuation of the professional competencies of APIO members, in an environment where I-O psychologists are still underrated; and (d) to protect the profession of I-O psychology.

APIO organizes an annual 3-day conference where academics and practitioners meet for presentations and workshops. Each conference brings together around 50 members of APIO, has 5–7 symposia, 3–4 workshops, and 2–3 poster sessions. Previous guest speakers include Gerrit van der Veer, Dongo Rémi Kouabenan, and John Raven. The 2007 conference took place in Cluj-Napoca between May 10–12.

Since 2004, APIO also publishes its own journal: *Psihologia Resurselor Umane (The Psychology of Human Resources)*, a PsycInfo abstracted journal that includes research and commentaries from both academicians and practitioners. The journal’s editor is Dr. Horia D. Pitariu. Several prominent I-O psychologists and business researchers have published in *PRU*, including Timothy A. Judge, Frank J. Landy, Edward E. Levine, and Paul E. Spector.
What Lies Ahead?

As discussed next, there are three areas of research where Romanian I-O psychologists can play an important role:

I. Educational and occupational selection

The admission process for most of the Romanian universities involves either the analysis of a short biographical file or a formal knowledge-based exam. There is virtually no research that examines the validity of the selection process. There is a great need for validation studies and perhaps developing standardized tests for educational selection at undergraduate and graduate levels.

In the personnel selection arena, there is a lot of work to be done, especially in the public sector. Most of the personnel selection in public organizations involves unstructured interviews, knowledge-based exams (most of them testing the legal knowledge of the applicants). There is virtually zero evidence on the utility and validity of selection practices currently used.

II. Stopping the “brain drain”

Due to the economic conditions, Romania has a huge worker migration problem. Unofficial estimates indicate that there are around 2.5 million Romanians working abroad, which is more than 10% of the total population. The problem will likely accelerate now that Romania has joined the European Union and free migration of the workforce is a fact. I-O psychologists can be involved in understanding the reasons behind workers’ migration and developing strategies to attract the working force to return to Romania.

III. Making an impact on the international scene

Romanian psychology in general has had little impact on the international scene (David et al., 2002). So far, most of the Romanian I-O research is either part of large cross-cultural projects (e.g., Spector et al., 2001) or involves psychometric analyses of scales and questionnaires developed in Western countries using Romanian samples (e.g., Ispas & Rossi, 2007; Pitariu & Iliescu, 2004). We need more emic (indigenous) approaches, developing scales and questionnaires that take into account cultural differences, and research on relevant issues to Romanian society that can also make a contribution to the literature (e.g., reasons for migration, illegal workers, and corruption).

The current situation of Romanian I-O psychology can be compared with a convalescence after a long and painful crisis. But the doctors are certainly optimistic about the future of the patient. The legal framework for the I-O profession stands in place, both academics and practitioners have made a vengeful comeback in the last 3–5 years, and there is yet no telling where this
extremely positive evolution will stop. The field of I-O psychology seems to be heading in the right direction, towards a generation of scientist–practitioners with great professional skills. We are sure that only good things will be heard in the future about Romanian I-O psychology in the international arena.

Concluding Editorial

So there you have it—an enlightening overview of Romanian I-O psychology and the transformations it has undergone. As you can see, our colleagues have encountered some unique challenges and opportunities in their efforts to study organizational science and contribute to the well-being of the Romanian workforce. Recent trends show positive change, and the foreseeable future looks bright as the science and practice of I-O psychology continue to advance in this important area of the world.

References


