

The current status of work and organizational psychologists in Romania

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Motivation

During the past few years, Romanian psychology has gone through many changes and its evolution is basically a positive one. However, we sometimes feel that, although things evolve, they do so too slowly. We would like to see fewer amateurs and we want this to happen fast. Sometimes, we are not really convinced that evolution actually occurs. We still see dilettants practicing – moreover sometimes we feel that their numbers are growing. Still a very small number of psychologists attend to science – for example, we can say that the largest professional associations in Romanian psychology are not those providing science, but those providing others advantages, like the oh-so-evil but oh-so-coveted Copsi credits.

In any informal discussion with other psychologist, regardless their field of activity, we inevitably hear frustration. That we work for too little money, that competition is unfair, that other professions infringe on our field, that our own colleagues are poorly trained, that tests are too expensive, that training is even more expensive, that universities did not prepare us for real life, that we are lead by people with only their own interests on their mind, that society doesn't appreciate us at our true value, that authorities who should defend us actually press us ... and we could continue.

I regard with concern these attitudes – even more so because I often have them myself. On one hand, because I feel unwell when in the middle of such widespread negative emotions. On the other hand, because as a result of my professional specialization (I/O Psychology) I would like to see in my profession expressions of wellbeing, involvement and performance: I would like to see enthusiasm, vigour, positive emotions and psychologists with positive self-image, proud of what they are, who want to create – winners.

Okay, Okay, you will say – this is just the way Romanians are. We always complain about everything. Well, to probe reality and to assess the way a Romanian psychologist specialized in work and organizational psychology (WOP) thinks, lives and works in 2012-2013, the Association of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (APIO) has run a study at the end of 2012. This survey is a professional approach that provides a more objective perspective on how a larger number of participants view reality. It is, if you want, a review of the psychological practice in the field of work and organizational psychology and we believe that it is more than welcome.

The data collection process for the APIO survey on the current state of WOP in Romania took place between September and November 2012. The total number of valid entries is $N=812$ psychologists active in the field of work and organizational psychology, exclusively or in combination with other activities. Data collection was done online ($N=214$) and by face-to-face questionnaires ($N=598$). The actual questionnaire was complemented by a number of 21 telephone and face to face interviews, run with some of those psychologists who at questionnaire completion had said that they would be available for such an interview.

We will quickly review some of the findings of this study and we will try to share some of our thoughts about where we are and the place where we probably should aspire to be.

Before anything, however, a mention: *this study aims to be as objective and free from partisanship image as possible, of how the psychologist work in this field in Romania today.* However, we wish to draw attention that like any other study of this kind, this one is also imperfect. Despite the large volume of the sample and its balanced composition in terms of geographical origin of participants, its limits are

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given by the voluntary nature of participation, by the fact that no method of sampling has been applied and by the fact that the data were self-reported by the participants. The study itself is absolutely free from any blame to individuals or institutions. Its interpretation is something else: it belongs to you and we hope that each one of you will draw important conclusions from the data.

Participants. The study was run on $N = 812$ psychologists, active non-exclusively in the field of work and organizational psychology. A number of 169 (21%) are male and 643 (79%) are female. The minimum age is 22 and the maximum age is 62 years, with a mean age of $M = 35.98$ ($SD = 8.78$). Work experience in the field of work and organizational psychology, as stated by the participants, is between 0 and 35 years ($M = 5.99$, $SD = 5.29$).

Relationship with the Board of Psychology (Copsi). Of the participants 289 (36%) are not registered in the Board of Psychology (Copsi) and among these only one third intend to take this certification in the future. Therefore, we have in Romania an important segment of psychologists active in WOP, who are not registered in the Board. A percentage of 22% out of all participants are registered with the Board and practice under supervision, 27% practice autonomously, and 6% are registered as supervisors.

Of the 523 participants who are registered with the Board, 51% have not paid and do not pay their yearly dues on time. Almost all those interviewed in the qualitative follow-up phase have said that they will no longer pay any of these fees. However, most if not all of these participants were involved in the past in the activities of the Board. A percentage of 41% of all the participants attended the local elections of the representatives in the area where they practice while 21% state that they were electors in at least one of the two past occasions at the National Convention in Bucharest. Given this context, we believe that we see a pronounced tendency to decrease involvement with the activities of the Board of Psychology (Copsi).

The degree of satisfaction regarding the activity of the Board is extremely low. Only 3% of the participants declare that they are very satisfied by the Board. A percentage of 49% state that they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. The activity of the Board's Committee for Work and Organizational Psychology is assessed with a very slightly

more positive trend, but still extremely negative – only 3% declare that they are very satisfied by the activity of this committee, while 40% declare that they are unsatisfied or very unsatisfied.

The simple majority of psychologists who participated in this study (57%) believe that for the next elections we need radical changes in the Board, in people and strategy. Only 11% of the participants consider that we need continuity in both people and strategy. The remaining participants lean toward some form of change in either people or strategy. Those points of view seem to be convergent with the decreasing desire for involvement and the low degree of satisfaction noted above.

Current work and career plans. About half of the psychologists active in WOP are employed in various companies, based on a contract for an indefinite period (57%). The overwhelming majority of those who are not members of the Board, are part of this category. Therefore, the Board failed to capture their interest or to establish a role for itself in the perception of psychologists active as Human Resources specialists in companies.

Most of those employed work in private companies (66%) – the time when the State was the largest employer of psychologists in our field seems to have passed. However, 23% of those employed work in budgetary institutions, among these we may mention the fact that the defense and public order system stands out.

Just over a quarter (28%) of the participants are entrepreneurs (self-employed), but they prefer to work through self-owned companies (SRL), and only 6% work through a psychological practice established according to the rules of the Board.

The way WOP psychologists come to be employed is unusual when compared with the typical approach, which says that in order to get a job one would need to send out resumes or act through a placement agency. In order to have a job, the greatest percentage of those who participated in the present survey (28%) have opened up their own businesses and another 15% said they were contacted by the current employer. A percentage of 12% contacted their employer, 4% were placed by private placement companies and not even a psychologist in our sample found employment through public placement agencies (ex: AJOFM).

Over 36% of the participants say that they have no clear career plan outlined for the next few years.

Participants who have given this response are in their great majority psychologists working autonomously, progressing somehow inertial, without a clearly formulated purpose, or beginners (supervised psychologists) who are not convinced that this profession can provide a career.

Nearly two-thirds (61%) of the participants say they are proud or very proud of their profession as a psychologist. A percentage of 18% of the participants consider they are unsatisfied by the professional choice made when they chose WOP as a profession. The overwhelming majority of them are young professionals who do not see any perspectives in this area. A percentage of 33% of the respondents intend to change their professional field in the future, mainly in other areas of psychology, but 15% of them will leave the profession completely.

Work and income. About one quarter of the respondents (25%) work exclusively in the area of work and organizational psychology with 40 or more hours per week. Almost half of the participants (49%) are active in this area less than 20 hours per week (30% even less than 10 hours). Other fields where they are active are, in descending order, psychological counseling (14%), clinical psychology (13%) or traffic psychology (11%). The domain in which they practice most actively apart from WOP is completely outside of psychology: 32% of the work of these psychologists has nothing to do with psychology.

Most of the work of psychologists specialised in WOP is occupied by psychological assessment; on average about 58% (consolidated index) of the work is assigned to assessment and the remaining 42% to psychological intervention. In assessment, 60% of participating psychologists mainly use quantitative methods and 40% use predominantly qualitative methods.

The average net income for this sample is 2413 RON per month. About one tenth (9%) of the participants earn less than 500 RON per month and almost a quarter (23%) earn less than 1000 RON per month. This is absolutely critical and is only partly counterbalanced by the tenth (11%) of the participants who earn over 4500 RON per month (i.e. over 1000

Euro). Only about 38% of this income ($SD = 36$) is earned by the respondents exclusively from their activity in WOP.

It seems that most of these psychologists gain contracts through recommendations and through direct contact with potential clients (39%). Basically, the competencies related to advertising, marketing and sales are acknowledged as weaknesses by psychologists specialised in WOP, which is why few actually have any personal promotion strategy and are limited to tactical behavior. However, work well done and their relationship with former clients (relationships which are kept alive by 60% of respondents) are able to ensure a base of loyal customers who use their services constantly (63%).

Education. A small number of participants have graduated before 1989 (5%). About 15% of them are graduates of the first five classes from after 1989 and 66% of the participants have graduated during the past 10 years.

Although the numbers of graduates from psychology programmes in private universities are higher than those typical for public universities, it seems that the graduates of private universities are not so active in the profession for which they were trained. In our sample, 67% of the participants have graduated from a state university.

A percentage of 26% only have university studies, 67.1% have graduated or are currently in a master programme and 5.4% of the participants have doctoral studies, completed or ongoing. This shows an interest for „formal academic” training and for achieving a higher level of certification.

Psychologists active in WOP do not exhibit much interest for continuous professional development. Most of them are kept up to date with changes in their professional field by the following methods: 66% get the news from discussions with colleagues, 87% by visiting websites and 73% from various newsletters they receive. Only 3% go frequently to scientific conferences and only 5% read, even once in a while, scientific journals. In principle 61.5% say they don't read scientific journals and only 6% read more than five such magazines a year.

When they consult different sources of information (magazines, books, professional websites) the majority (81%) focuses on sources from Romania.

For most of those psychologists working under supervision, continuous training means being supervised. For those who are not directly pressured towards continuous training any longer, the main form of training is going to workshops, and this is followed by auditioning conferences, and only after that by presenting at conferences. The proportion between these three activities is 45:33:20. In other words, psychologists prefer to attend workshops or look at other people presenting, rather than creating such presentations themselves.

The number of hours assigned to continuous development after graduation is between 0 and 6000 with an average of 445 ($SD = 753$). In the past 12 months, this number is placed between 0 and 1500 hours ($M = 132$, $SD = 237$). The number is nearly three times higher in psychologists practicing under supervision than for the rest of the participants and is less than a tenth in those participants who are also supervisors. In other words, the average supervisor has dedicated during the past year fewer than 15 hours for his professional development.

Continuous professional education is the greatest burden for young psychologists. Participants at this survey declare that since graduating their last form of education, they have spent a total average of 8163 RON ($SD = 11464$ RON) for these activities. For the past 12 months the average is 3431 RON ($SD = 8267$). Only for 9.6% of the participants is the employer bearing the full costs associated with these activities; for 18% of them the costs are beared by both sides, but nearly 70% of the psychologists have to pay these costs themselves.

For those psychologists working under supervision, satisfaction with the competence of their supervisor prevails. A number of 34% assessed the competence of their supervisor as very good. At the same time, the total percentage of those satisfied or very satisfied, i.e 50.4%, hardly reaches the majority criterion. At the same time, there are 18% who are unsatisfied or very unsatisfied by the competence of their supervisor. Supervisor involvement is assessed slightly worse and 20% of participants are unsatisfied or very unsatisfied by the involvement of their supervisor.

On average, those who have to take supervision, take a total of 4 hours of

supervision per month ($SD = 9$). The average cost per supervisory meeting is 118 RON ($SD = 49$). On average a person under supervision spends 493 RON a month just for supervision.

Self-reported competency. Only 2% of the participants consider themselves very competent in their work and only 3% consider to be extremely incompetent. However, most are not placed on the average, but 59% are, if not very good, at least „good” and competent for a wide range of activities which they do.

A percentage of 65% of the participants know about the competencies developed by APIO for the Board's WOP committee, which shows that they are up to date with professional criteria. However, 35% of the participants in the study have never heard of this list - half of them are supervisors and a significant part supervised.

Self-assessment of their own competencies by this list shows high scores for competencies such as „Assessment of individuals” (73%) or „Providing verbal feedback” (71%) and relatively low scores for competencies such as „Product design”. For the secondary competencies, a relatively strong point seems to be „Professional relationships”(67%) and weak points seem to be „Sales and Marketing” (46%) or „Research and Development” (51%).

With regard to their own competence in comparison with existing norms and standards, compliance with national standards is much better assessed than compliance with international standards. Only 3% of the participants consider themselves to be fully compliant with international requirements for the WOP domain.

Conclusions

These data show a few pleasant things and a whole many worrisome things.

The Good... Let's start with the good. We have at this moment in Romania mostly graduates of the new generation („after the Revolution”), most of them graduates of public educational institutions, who have followed at least one additional MA programme. It's not so bad, right?

(Of course, as a secondary conclusion, we can comment about the lack of efficiency of private educational institutions, not necessarily in terms of competence, but at least in terms of

insertion of their graduates in the labor market.)

Most psychologists specialized in WOP work in private companies and a significant percentage hold shares in the company where they work – these are probably small companies or private practices in psychology. Only a small number of psychologists are working in private practices in psychology, registered after the precepts of Copsi. A too small number of psychologists have that entrepreneurial spirit that would be expected from a liberal profession – the majority are satisfied with the status of an employee. Well, yes, it starts to be not so positive.

The Bad... Most psychologists specialized in WOP have a very low income. The average income, although small, is still significantly placed above the average net income for the Romanian economy, as reported for 2012 by the National Institute for Statistics. Psychologists from smaller cities earn radically less than psychologists from large cities or from Bucharest. We see a major lack of professional competence in areas which could help psychologists to earn better, for example Sales and marketing, Business management, etc. And obviously no training in these fields is acknowledged and credited by the Board of Psychology (Copsi).

As if this low income is not enough, we also see an extremely high financial pressure caused by the regulations of the Board of Psychology (Copsi). The need to accumulate a number of credits is particularly a pressure for younger members of the profession, i.e. exactly those who earn the least. For over 80% of the psychologists who participated in this study the training needed for passing to professional autonomy costs more per month than their monthly income.

And the Ugly... Psychologists, especially young ones, have become a captive consumer for... psychologists, particularly for those who have managed to place themselves in a positive relationship with Copsi. In interviews the respondents gave us examples of supervisors who no longer earn their income practicing, but only supervising. Unfortunately, a part of this pressure is only formal. A part of those who provide training only mime that they develop the competence of those trained. Trainings are expensive, classrooms are filled, the money comes in. But of course that hearing a presentation or attending a workshop without being actively involved does not increase the competency of a young psychologists. The criterion for receiving credits has become "hours spent", not an increment in knowledge or competencies. And too few such workshops are completed with an examination or a review of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired in those few hours, no matter how informal such a review would be. We believe for all these reasons that this system, as it is now, with pressure put on a single category, with a relatively small number of people who take advantage of a captive audience, without the regulator to protect or compensate somehow the effort of this audience, is a mistake and should be corrected.

I am convinced that this survey will be an objective base for various policies in the coming years. I am convinced that such proposals could come from all of us. Probably during the 13th Edition of the National Conference of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, which will take place in Brasov at the end of April we will have the opportunity to discuss some of the steps which we have to take, to be true to our responsibility for all psychologists specialized in WOP in Romania.