



ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Industrial-Organizational Psychology in Poland: Past and current trends¹

Laura DRYJANSKA²

University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw, Poland



Abstract. The history of Industrial-Organizational (I-O) Psychology in Poland can be divided to three periods: birth and early development, advancements under socialism, and current trends. We may conclude that I-O Psychology in Poland since its birth has had to face numerous diverse challenges over time, related to the geo-political transformations and socio-economic problems. Currently, it is a vibrant field of practice and research, enriched by the unique experiences of many professors who have been adopting it for decades, combined with the creativity of early career I-O psychologists.

Keywords: Industrial-Organizational Psychology; I-O Psychology in Poland.

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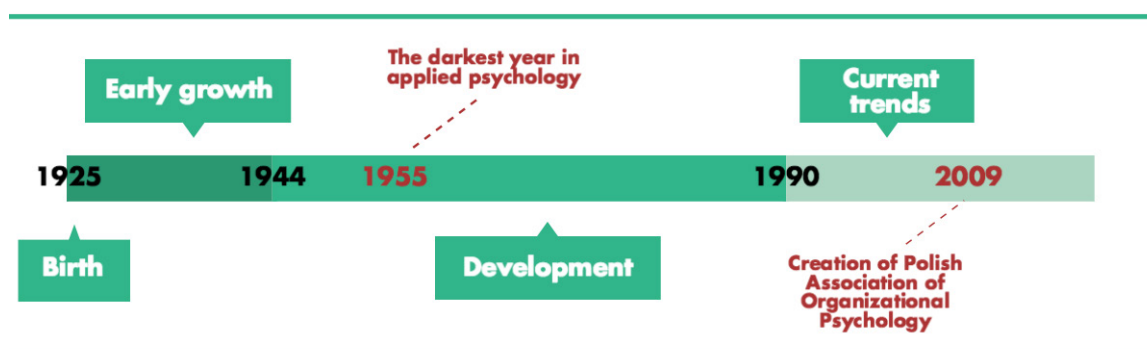


Figure 1. Timeline of I-O Psychology in Poland

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² **Author note.** Laura Dryjanska is a social psychologist graduated from Sapienza University of Rome (PhD in Social Representations and Communication). Currently, she teaches organizational psychology at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw, Poland.

Birth of I-O Psychology in Poland

We must remember that Poland was reborn in November 1918 and it faced a number of challenges and opportunities, with the rapid growth of industry and professional training. Indeed, the history of I-O Psychology in Poland dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century marked by the development of psycho-technical tests for workers. The first research concentrated on workers in lumber industry, followed by mining (Biegeleisen-Zelazowski, 1968). Thanks to testing it was possible to improve productivity and quality, which at that time was one of the main goals of researchers. In the 1920s the Association of Technicians (Stowarzyszenie Techników) in Warsaw with some of its branch offices has promoted the development of study centers dedicated to the scientific organization of work and psycho-techniques. The main exponents of this trend in Poland were Prof. Bronislaw Biegeleisen (also an engineer) and Prof. Edward Geisler. The first Polish Scientific Meeting of Organization of Work (Polski Zjazd Naukowy Organizacji Pracy) took place in 1924. These interdisciplinary events and activities laid ground for the birth of Polish I-O Psychology.

Leading scientists tend to agree that the year 1925 can be considered as the date of birth of I-O Psychology in Poland (Ratajczak, 1991). At that time, Józefa Joteyko with a number of colleagues has established the Polish Psycho-Technical Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Psychotechniczne). At the end of 1927 it began publishing a quarterly magazine "Psychotechnika", whose editorial board included such eminent psychologists as Błachowski and Witwicki, with cooperation of Baley. In 1925 two psycho-technical laboratories were established in Warsaw and one in Cracow. Shortly after that, similar institutes existed also in Lvov and Silesia Region; in 1930 the number totaled 18 (Ratajczak, 1991). Among the seminal Polish volumes in early I-O Psychology, we may mention Lectures in Psycho-Techniques ("Wykłady psychotechniki") by Porebski (1927).

Unsurprisingly, World War Two has abruptly interrupted the growth of the young discipline. Many I-O psychologists were killed. In the occupied Poland there was not much room for the involvement of scientists, the institutes were forced to close. However, a few psycho-technical laboratories in Warsaw managed to function in a limited way even during the war.

I-O Psychology in Polish People's Republic

The development of I-O Psychology after World War Two took place in a geo-political setting where there was no private property (all industry, universities and businesses were owned and run by the State) and high degree of control of all citizens. During this period of the Polish People's Republic, initially the authorities all throughout the country hindered the development of applied psychology. The centralized government therefore has ensured a very hostile climate for I-O Psychology, not allocating funds nor promoting its development and closing the few remaining centers. The idea of workers' skills assessment and profiling was not in line with the dominant Soviet ideology that every person is suitable for any kind of work, according to a model that involved submission of scientific research to Marxist philosophy and the teachings of Pavlov (Materska, 1996). However, two institutes in Silesia, established in 1945 and 1947 and headed by Okón and Śpiewak, respectively, managed to survive.

The situation has changed after 1955 (known as the darkest year for Polish applied psychology), when the climate for the science of psychology improved. In the 1960s, centers of I-O Psychology have been introduced alongside large factories, mines, and ironworks. Moreover, the first four Polish universities that started teaching psychology, soon afterwards have also established majors in I-O Psychology:

- 1962 — University of Warsaw;
- 1964 — Jagiellonian University in Cracow;
- 1968 — Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań;
- 1972 — University of Silesia.

Among major national influences for the theoretical development of I–O Psychology in the Polish People’s Republic we can name the schema of work analysis based on the theory of action of Tomaszewski (1962) and practical expectations in the sphere of work (Ratajczak, 2010). His students and colleagues have further advanced the discipline: among others, Pietrasiński (1971) formulated his own concept of work psychology, Dobrzyński (1973) concentrated on management, Gliszczyńska (1971) investigated motivational situation and later used the cognitive model, and Ratajczak (1979) stressed the relevance of the concept of “organization” in the discipline prior considered mainly as “psychology of work”³.

Moreover, during the period of the Polish People’s Republic, Okón has led significant research project in the field of workplace safety and engineering psychology at the Central Institute for Labour Protection in Warsaw, which resulted in a collective monograph titled “Industrial Psychology”, published together with other prominent authors, such as Ratajczak (1971).

Aside from books, the main national publication outlets for I–O psychologists at that time were the following scientific journals: Polish Psychological Bulletin, Przegląd Psychologiczny (Psychological Review), and Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics.

The geo-political situation, marked by a strong control of communication, has tried to restrain I–O psychologists from Poland in the development of stable contacts with their colleagues in other countries. The Soviet Union “dominated the scene and fulfilled the role of scientific center where many psychologists received their doctoral training and attended scientific meetings. Even when bilateral contacts were established, as between the Polish and Czech work psychologists in the late 1980s, Russians had to be present as well” (Roe, 1995, p. 293). However, the researchers in Poland have found some ways of maintaining contacts with North American I–O Psychology, for example thanks to the Fulbright scholarships. Another vehicle of freedom, unique to Poland among other satellite countries of the Soviet Union, was the Church that in 1918 founded the Catholic University of Lublin, which since 1951 offers a major in psychology, including courses in I–O Psychology.

Already in the decade 1979—1989, Polish scientists have been researching the ongoing socio-economic transformation period, innovation, and leadership, in line with North American I–O Psychology tenets. To a large extent, Polish science was also present in the West and matched the standards of other countries. For example, the schema of work analysis of Tomaszewski (1978, 1981) published in a scientific monograph in the Federal Republic of Germany, became the basis for many research projects in Germany, the Netherlands, and possibly also in France.

The Third Republic and I–O Psychology

Since 1990, after Poland’s liberation and the establishment of the democratic Third Republic, the country has had to face numerous economic challenges. The transition from the model of low wages and full employment to the new system has brought some positive effects for society at large, such as an abundance of products at the stores, the liquidation of lines and thus more comfort. On the other hand, negative consequences for population included spread of poverty, wealth inequalities, high unemployment, feelings of social insecurity, etc. (Borkowska & Kulpinska, 2013). The population experienced the initial period of violent changes in the work system as a kind of

³ Until today, in Poland we tend to refer to I–O Psychology as Psychology of Work.

shock. The privatization, accompanied by the conviction of the necessity to implement rapid and broadly planned changes in order to ensure the proper permanence of the new system, took place at numerous workplaces. Under these circumstances, a very important stage in the introduction of organizational transformations was neglected — the preparation of society prior to change (Balawajder & Popiołek, 1996). Naturally, I–O Psychology had to address the societal problems, re-inventing itself in the new socio-economic scenario. In fact, unemployment has become one of the main research questions for Polish scientists at the time, along with the emerging entrepreneurship and other issues that reflected the recent changes.

Among numerous worthy I–O psychologists in Poland, it is a delicate task to identify some key persons and main trends. Therefore, we choose to rely on the information provided by the Polish Association of Organizational Psychology (PAOP) that enlists some major research lines summed up in Table 1 and 2. PAOP was established in 2009 and ever since led by Professor of Work and Organizational Psychology Barbara Kożusznik from the University of Silesia in Katowice, with Professor Stanislaw Witkowski from the University of Wrocław as Vice President.

Table 1. Key persons in I–O Psychology in Poland according PAOP

Key person	Born–died	Institution	Specialty
Stefan Baley	1885–1952	University of Warsaw	Psycho-Techniques
Stefan Błachowski	1889–1962	University of Poznan	Career choice
Marian Dobrzyński	1942–n/a	University of Warsaw	Globalization
Xymena Gliszczyńska	1920–2004	University of Warsaw	Motivation
Józefa Joteyko	1866–1928	Maria Grzegorzewska University (former PIPS)	Physiology of work
Czesław S. Nosal	1942–n/a	University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Wrocław	Cognitive psychology of work
Jan Marcin Okoń	1906–1972	Central Institute of Work Protection (CIOP)	Safety at work
Zbigniew Pietrasiniński	1924–2010	University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw	Creativity and innovation at work
Eugenjusz Jan Porębski	1889–1960	Institute of Propagation of (Practical) Knowledge about Industry	Psycho-Techniques
Zofia Ratajczak	1937–n/a	University of Silesia	Organizations
Florian Śpiewak	1909–1984	Department of Medicine and Work Psychology of the Coal Institute	Workplace risks
Jan F. Terelak	1942–n/a	John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin	Work-related stress, postmodernity
Tadeusz Tomaszewski	1910–2000	Polish Academy of Sciences	Theory of action at work
Władysław Witwicki	1878–1948	University of Lvov	Emotions at work

To catch a glimpse of the most recent focus in Polish I–O Psychology, we may turn to a current scientific event. On May 19–20, 2016, the second meeting of PAOP took place at the Universities of Social Sciences and Humanities in Sopot; the main thematic areas discussed included:

- worker’s wellbeing emotions at work;
- worker’s health, stress, family-work balance;
- entrepreneurship, self-employment, labor market, forms of employment;
- organizational behavior, change and organizational development, organizational culture and climate;
- leadership and management, teams and project groups;
- recruitment and selection, HR management.

Table 2. Current research trends in I–O Psychology in Poland according PAOP

Current research trend	Main exponents
Career in the context of globalization, consulting careers	Bańka (2006); Rożnowski (2009)
Social and economic changes in the macro scale and their psychological consequences	Biela (2006); Zaleski (2006)
Psychology of risk and threats at work (risk perception, organizational pathologies)	Goszczyńska (1997); Studenski (2004)
Stress at work, postmodernity and workplace	Terelak (2008; 2011)
Psychology of creativity, change, and innovation	Strykowska (2002); Kożusznik (2010); Nęcka (1989); Mesjasz & Zaleski (2006)
Entrepreneurship and positive psychology	Łaguna (2010)
Cognitive psychology and strategic thinking of managers	Nosal (1993)
New forms of employment, problems of unemployment	Ratajczak (2007)
Leadership, management of teams of employees	Witkowski (2000); Kożusznik (2005)

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