

Development of Work and Organizational Psychology in Latvia

Riga Municipal Youth and Vocational Research Institute was established in 1925. It was a member of International Institute of Work Rationalization between 1929 and 1934. The International Bureau of Psychotechnological Information was located in Riga from 1926 to 1928. The Institute was concerned with preparation of job descriptions, administration of vocational aptitude tests, assessment of vocational interests, and study of physical and psychological conditions of job efficiency. More than 64 000 individuals were tested in the Institute until 1940. Soviet occupation in 1940 interrupted functioning of this Institute.

Development of applied psychology in Latvia as well as in the rest of USSR during Soviet occupation was practically stopped till 1956. From the beginning of Khrushchev's "thaw" period chances for such a development returned although in strictly ideological frames. In a certain way traditions of work psychology initialized in period before occupation were continued. Profession of psychologist in Latvia was officially recognized in the beginning of 70ties but it could be obtained as a university degree starting from 1989 (twenty years later than in Estonia, Lithuania and Russia). Due to these reasons in the psychological researches were initially done by psychophysicologists, medical doctors, later also sociologists. Impact of work conditions on work efficiency, opportunities for improvement of work procedures, problems of professional orientation was studied. First research on "management psychology" emerged at the end of 60ties and beginning of 70ties. Different leadership styles (mostly according to K. Levin leadership typology), psychological conditions for effective preparation of managers were studied in the context. The research work at the period of time was basically made by specialists with economical or technical education and at that time they had more practical than scientific meaning. The first USSR Symposium on social psychological problems of management was held in Riga in 1974. The event had a great significant as it facilitated further development of work and organizational psychology in Latvia and was one of the main contributing factors to the emergence of profession of "industrial psychologist". "Industrial psychologists" were primarily employed for "departments of scientific organization of work", not always having education in psychology. By then, graduates from Leningrad and Moscow Universities of psychology" just started to appear in Latvia.

At the end of 70ties and beginning of 80ties the core issues studied were labour turnover and recommendations for preventing it, researches of psychological climate and leadership style and recommendations for improvements of it. Sociologists graduated from University of Latvia unlike psychologists took active part in these researches. At that time the biggest industrial enterprises established their first offices of psychology. Mostly these offices were not initiative of management of the enterprise but direction from district communist party committees – to improve social-

psychological methods of management. Researches made by the offices were not permitted to be published and was treated as highly confidential information.

Gorbachov's "perestroika" in the second part of 80ties started a new stage in work and organizational psychology. New initiatives, such as manager's "elections" were initialized in frames of many organizations, which created a need for psychological assessments of candidates (before that the management of factory was choose by communist party committee). At that time mostly psychological tests were used for psychological assessment. Tests were not officially forbidden but neither were they supported. Number of psychologists in Latvia thanks to graduates from Russia universities was still growing. They actively took part in candidate selection, development and realization of training programs. Wider practical usage of intelligence and personality tests could be observed, new training methods such as – "business" games, psychological training were introduced.

After regaining independence of Latvia in 1991, big state enterprises ceased to exist, demand for psychological studies in organizations drastically dropped. Work of psychologists in organizations was limited to conducting seminars on psychological issues of work motivation and management as well as psychological counseling. By entrance of foreign companies in Latvia in the middle of 90ties demand for personnel selection started to arise gradually. More attention was given to different courses and seminars on some particular issues of organizational psychology. Initially they were led mostly by specialists from USA, Germany and Scandinavian countries but gradually Latvian psychologists also engaged in this process. In the middle of 90ties, by stabilization of transition to market economy, more serious interest in organizational psychology started to resurrect, especially as "management psychology" created in soviet times was absolutely inapplicable to free market economy. The term "organizational psychology" in Latvia was first officially mentioned in 1992 as the title for lecture course for the students of psychology at the University of Latvia. At that time the first working places for psychologists educated in Latvia were consulting companies.

Till the end of 90ties first year's students of psychology as well as historians, pedagogues, medical doctors and representatives from other professions often worked as organization consultants in psychological issues in Latvia. Employers had very little idea of what kind of help they can expect from the consultant-psychologist, what should be his professional knowledge and skills. Usage of unprofessional psychological tests was widely spread in personnel selection. Due to easy accessibility, tests were used by people without appropriate knowledge in the methods their usage and interpretation of results. Furthermore these tests were not adapted to Latvian conditions not even mentioning that usage of the tests in commercial purposes often was violation of copyrights of the test developers.

Ten years ago there were only few professionally specialized organizational psychologists with related university degree. In 1996 specialization of organizational psychology was created in master program of psychology in University of Latvia, later it appeared in some other universities, too. Currently several hundreds of psychologists'

works in organizations in Latvia, at least fifty of them have a master degree in organizational psychology. Mostly standardized and adapted tests are used in personnel selection and researches, copyrights are observed. People with appropriate background and experience usually work with using tests as well as psychological trainings and other training methods.

Specialists in organizational psychology are prepared in University of Latvia and Riga Teachers, Training and Education Management Academy. In 1996 Master`s degree in organizational psychology was first introduced at the University of Latvia. Unfortunately it should be noted that organizational psychology is not included in the list of sub-sectors of science of psychology prepared by the Council of Science in Latvia. Latvian occupational classification is likely to be the only official document recognizing the profession of Industrial and Organizational psychologist. So, Latvia is one of few countries in the world and the only country in European Union where organizational psychology does not have the official status. This is indicative not of unfavorable attitude towards organizational psychology but of insufficient understanding of psychology as a science which is still dominant in Latvian society.

Research in organizational psychology is mostly practically oriented; there are some considerable researches made by students who obtained Master`s degrees in the university of Latvia. The current main topics of researches in organizational psychology in Latvia are the: job satisfaction (dependence of it from personality traits, organization type, status and personality values, locus of control, relation to work efficiency); organizational culture (differences in different types of organizations); “burn-out syndrome” at work; correspondence of personality and organization values; impact of personality traits on decision making; relation of leadership style to psychological climate; organizational and professional commitment (relation of it to personality traits, organization type, seniority, personality values, locus of control, compensation, job satisfaction); attribution errors in personnel selection; gender stereotypes of managers, significance of locus of control in work (differences among manager and employee locus of control, locus of control, “learned helplessness”).

However nowadays Latvian psychologists are mainly involved in practical work related to HR (Human Resources) issues (personnel selection, career planning, preparing job descriptions, developing remuneration system, trainings). Frequently performing these tasks does not ask for deep knowledge in organizational psychology and can be completed by economists, lawyers and representatives of other professionals.

In 2000 Latvian Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychologists (LSIOP) was created. Today LSIOP unites around 40 members – organizational psychologists with different professional background. Based on LSIOP statutes it has associative members (psychologists with Bachelor degree) and ordinary members (psychologists with Master degree). LSIOP main activities are workshops and annual conferences. Topics for LSIOP activities cover both HR and Organizational psychology fields. During the last two years two big conferences have been organized by LSIOP: Annual conference „*Person and Organization Fit: Theoretical aspects* in 2007:”, and Conference on „*Organizational effectiveness*” in 2008 (in cooperation with local

business newspaper “Dienas Bizness”). Several workshops and seminars on the following topics “*Employee rent,*” “*Psychological aspects of head hunting,*” “*Psychological support programs for employees,*” “*Employee motivation, Effective remuneration system,*” “*Knowledge management,*” “*Organizational efficiency model*” were held in 2007 and 2008. In nearest future LSIOP is planning to develop a small database (books, studies, articles) for its members as well as continue organizing seminars and conferences. Currently LSIOP in cooperation with educational and clinical psychologists actively participates in the development of Law of Psychologist’s Practice. LSIOP is member of Union of Latvian Psychologists and it also cooperates with Latvian Association of Personnel Management. In 2007 LSIOP joined EAWOP (European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology).

Few years ago gradual increase of Latvian economic, joining European Union, increase of professional psychologists in Latvia, understanding of importance of manager psychological competence allowed to hope that organizational psychology in Latvia will strengthen as an independent branch of science. Unfortunately today’s international economical downturn and local economical recession enforces to slow down with optimistic scenarios of development of organizational psychology.

By *Viesturs Renģe* (viesturs.renge@lu.lv) and ***Jānis Dzenis*** (janis.dzenis@lop.lv)

Latvia