

**Work and Organizational Psychology in Spain:  
Bonding and Bridging Social Capital Within the W&O Psychology Community**  
**José M. Peiró**  
**University of Valencia**

During the last 4 decades of the 20th century, Spain has transitioned to a democratic country and a modern society with important developments in economic, social, political, educational, and other domains. Spain became a member of the Economic European Community (currently the European Union) in 1986, and since then it has played a significant role in the development of Europe. The Spanish economy has experienced important developments, and companies have modernized, becoming more competitive in an increasingly global context. Meanwhile, the Spanish workforce has tremendously increased its human capital. Nowadays, about 40% of every cohort reaches university studies, with a large part of the active population well qualified for employment. Employer associations and unions play a critical role as social agents in a climate of social dialogue and “concertation.” On several occasions during the last few decades, these important social players have worked with the government, through tripartite negotiation and dialogue, to reach agreements on core issues that have contributed to Spain’s economic and social development. All of these changes have implications for I-O psychology, known as work and organizational (W&O) psychology in Spain.

**Psychology in the Country of Spain**

A clear understanding of W&O psychology in Spain requires some information about the broader discipline of psychology in this corner of the world. Psychology as an academic discipline, as a science, and as a profession has experienced tremendous developments in our country during the last 4 decades of the 20th century. It has achieved important visibility and recognition in the European and broader international scene. In 1968, graduate studies of psychology were established by law at the Complutense University of Madrid and at the University of Barcelona. These studies quickly spread, and today psychology (at a graduate and postgraduate level) is taught in about half of the 70 universities (approximately two thirds of which are public).

Nowadays, the university education system in Spain is undergoing important transformations, which are driven by the Bologna agreement (1999). This agreement set the strategic goal of achieving a more integrated higher education European system, which should be fully put in place by 2010. The goals driving this deep reform of the higher education systems in European countries include a common structure of university studies, a higher mobility of students and staff across countries, the quality enhancement of universities, and more transparent information about the diplomas granted. During the last decade, the Spanish Psychological Association (Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos, COP) has been involved, within the context of the European Federation of Psychology Associations, in the development of a European Certificate of Psychology. This certificate is intended to establish a quality benchmark of education and practice in psychology, thereby protecting the public and improving mobility for psychologists between countries in Europe (<http://www.europsy.eu.com/>).

In the professional arena, Spanish psychologists are associated with regional Colegios Oficiales de Psicólogos (COP), which are semi-public organizations created, by the parliament law in 1980 to protect the profession. Today, there are 23 Colegios (generally one per autonomous region of Spain), and all of them are integrated in the General Council of COPs ([www.cop.es](http://www.cop.es)). These Colegios integrate 46,413 psychologists working in different specialties and fields of practice.

### **The Development of Work and Organizational Psychology in Spain**

The discipline of W&O psychology in Spain has a long tradition. One important antecedent was the contribution made during the 16th century by Huarte de San Juan who in his work *Examen de Ingenios para las Ciencias* [*Examination of Talents for Sciences*] developed a differential psychology for career and vocational guidance. W&O psychology officially began in Spain during the first decades of the 20th century and was concentrated in the areas where industrialization was taking place (e.g., Madrid, Barcelona). Two Institutes of Vocational and Professional Guidance were created, one in Madrid under the leadership of Cesar de Madariaga and José Germain and the other in Barcelona, led by Emilio Mira y Lopez. In 1921 and 1930 the International Congress of Psychotechnics was held in Spain, demonstrating that the discipline and professional activity were established and internationally acknowledged. All of these developments, however, were truncated by the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). During the 1950s and 1960s, a progressive recovery of scientific psychology took place. In 1952, the Spanish Society of Psychology was founded and the *Revista de Psicología General y Aplicada* was launched by this Society. One year later, the creation of a postgraduate school of psychology in Madrid and Barcelona enabled the training of clinical, educational, and industrial psychologists who had obtained their bachelor's degrees in other disciplines. In 1968, the bachelor's degree (licenciatura) in psychology, as a university diploma, was created by the Ministry of Education; it was awarded after 5 years of study. Importantly, several W&O psychology courses were included in the curriculum.

### **Education and Training**

Nowadays, W&O psychology is taught at undergraduate and/or postgraduate levels in about 35 Spanish universities. It is also included in the curriculum of other university diplomas such as Business Administration and Industrial/Labor Relations. Currently there are more than 70 tenured professors or associate professors of W&O psychology in the universities. Moreover, research groups have been created and developed in more than 20 psychology departments at the most important Spanish universities. Recently a research institute, Institute of Organizational and Personnel Development and Quality of Working Life, was established at the University of Valencia with about 35 full-time researchers and about 15 PhD students.

W&O psychology is taught in graduate and/or specialized postgraduate programs at about 35 universities as well. Opportunities for doctoral studies are available in universities such as the Complutense and the Autonomous Universities of Madrid, the University of Barcelona, the Autonomous University of Barcelona, and the universities of Valencia, Sevilla, Santiago, Salamanca, La Laguna, Granada, and Universitat Jaume I (UJI) among others. Spain also participates in the international training of W&O psychologists. Currently, a consortium of five European universities from four different countries (Barcelona and Valencia from Spain, Bologna from Italy, Paris V from France, and Coimbra from Portugal) are running an International Master's Program on W&O psychology granted by the European Union as a

Master Erasmus Mundus ([www.uv.es/erasmuswop](http://www.uv.es/erasmuswop)). It should be noted that about 20 non-European students and about 4 scholars are accepted every year into this program.

Beyond the university degree, important education and training activities for continuous professional development are also available. Such opportunities are offered by the Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos in every region and also by a number of psychology departments at the universities.

Even today, the Spanish continue to play a key role in the establishment of education and training guidelines for W&O psychologists. Some Spanish professors have taken an active part in the development of the ENOP reference model and minimal standards for the European curriculum in W&O psychology ([www.ucm.es/info/Psyap/enop/](http://www.ucm.es/info/Psyap/enop/)). This frame of reference has been widely adopted by Spanish universities to design postgraduate curricula in W&O psychology. More recently, two Spanish professors have also participated in the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) Taskforce to develop the standards for a European Advanced Certificate of Work and Organizational Psychology recently submitted to the EAWOP executive committee.

### **Research and Publications**

During the last 2 decades, an important increase of research activities and outcomes has taken place, with several indicators suggesting advancement in knowledge production. In particular, the number of PhD dissertations, the articles published in scientific international journals, the number of projects founded by national and European research agencies, and also the number of contracts between research groups and industry or other organizations indicate clear positive progress and quite an important increase.

W&O research in Spain is published in a number of scientific and professional journals. In 1985, the COP created the *Revista de Psicología del Trabajo y de las Organizaciones* and also other more general journals (which include but are not limited to W&O psychology articles) such as *Psicothema*, *Apuntes de Psicología* or *Psychology in Spain*—a free access electronic journal that offers in English a select set of papers published in the Spanish journals ([www.psychologyinspain.com/](http://www.psychologyinspain.com/)). Other scientific journals that include W&O psychology articles are published by Spanish scientific associations and by several universities. Among them are the *Revista de Psicología Social Aplicada*, *Revista de Psicología Social*, *Revista de Psicología General y Aplicada*, and *Ansiedad y Estrés*. Recently, a special issue on W&O psychology research carried out in Spanish universities was published in an outlet called *Papeles del Psicólogo* ([www.papelesdelpsicologo.es/](http://www.papelesdelpsicologo.es/)).

Various journals, and also books published in Spanish, are widely distributed in Iberoamerican countries. Furthermore, the Spanish COP offers an electronic index of psychological research—PSICODOC—covering most of the psychological literature published in Spanish (<http://psicodoc.copmadrid.org/psicodoc.htm>). Finally, the Ministry of Education produces a citation database for social science journals published also in the Spanish language—INRECS (<http://ec3.ugr.es/in-recs/>).

### **Professional Practice**

Professional practice is well established all over Spain. Currently, more than 1,500 psychologists work in companies, mainly in HRM departments or as consultants in organizational or HRM consultancy firms. W&O psychology has widely expanded, with W&O psychologists specializing in a variety of domains including marketing, town and region development, occupational health, management, and so on. The work of these professionals has spread out from industry to service organizations and from private to public

organizations and administration. W&O practitioners also serve in many other types of organizations such as social economy (e.g., cooperatives), the military and nonprofit organizations and foundations. Moreover, a number of practitioners work in the public employment services, as well as in private temporary employment agencies, unions, and employer associations.

### **Organizations and Congresses**

Just as I-O psychology in the U.S. is guided by organizations such as APA, APS, and SIOP, W&O psychology in Spain is organized within the Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos (COP) and has a coordination board at the national council of COPs. The COP is a founding constituent member of EAWOP ([www.eawop.org](http://www.eawop.org)) and has also been very actively represented in other international associations such as the International Association of Applied Psychology (<http://www.iaapsy.org/division1>).

Congresses (i.e., conferences) provide an important avenue for Spanish W&O psychologists to meet, network, and share knowledge. COP has been active in promoting national W&O psychology congresses in Spain. In several instances, congresses have been organized in cooperation with Iberoamerican associations of psychology. In addition, university departments of social psychology organize biannually the National Congress of Social Psychology, which is very well attended by W&O psychologists (a significant part of the program is devoted to W&O topics).

Altogether, Spanish W&O psychologists have been known to take an active part in international congresses, not the least of which is the European Congress of Work and Organizational Psychology organized by EAWOP. In fact, the 6th EAWOP congress was held in Alicante (Spain) in 1993, and in 2009 the 14th congress will be held in Santiago de Compostela ([www.eawop2009.org](http://www.eawop2009.org)). The Iberoamerican Congress of Psychology is also organized every 2 years by the Iberoamerican Federation of Psychology Associations. The next one will take place in Lima in July of 2008 (<http://www.congresofiapperu.com/>). Finally, the International Congress of Applied Psychology is also well attended by Spanish W&O psychologists, especially since 1994 when it was held in Madrid.

### **Summary and Invitation**

In sum, during the recent decades, W&O psychology in Spain has experienced important developments in research, education, and professional practice. These developments are leading to a more intense collaboration with colleagues from other European countries, from Iberoamerica, and from many other parts of the world. Fortunately, this trend toward international exposure and collaboration shows no sign of abating. As indicated above, the 14th European Congress of Work and Organizational Psychology will be held in Santiago de Compostela in May of 2009. This is a great opportunity to meet colleagues not only from Europe but from all over the world. The Spanish W&O psychologists warmly invite *TIP* readers to come and profit from this very promising scientific, professional, and academic but also social and cultural event. We look forward to meeting you there.