

Psychologist in the firm: what prospects? Reflections alongside an empirical research.

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1. The complexity of the present scenario and psychology

The current market situation exposes people more and more to complex scenarios, to sudden unpredictable changes, to rhythms that are too fast to keep up with. It is the world that is changing and with it the working environments, resources, and people's lives.

The great upheavals are due as we know to the whole set of phenomena linked to globalization which, as well as opening new opportunities, has threatened the equilibrium of society and of individuals. Along with market globalization, which is connected with the impact of the fast-growing Asian economies, other great changes have been caused by the exponential growth of new technologies that have made any form of exchange, of economic transaction, and of work in general, increasingly immaterial and intangible.

The new technologies thus impact on and significantly modify communication processes, determining new languages, new codes, new modes of human interaction, but also new rules that cannot be compared to those of the past.

Linked to the development of technology and to market competitiveness, we witness the evolving mission of firms attempting to offer customers services that are more customized in order to maximize the value of the firm rather than to produce more and maximize profits.

The firm is becoming an increasingly open system, which interacts constantly with the various *stakeholders* in order to re-adapt and change its function to suit their needs. The scenario is therefore complex and, at the same time, uncertain and difficult to decipher; the process of change is so pervasive that it does not represent a passing moment, but a stable characteristic of the context with which to come to terms.

Firms therefore find themselves facing from all sides a variety of new wide-ranging situations that generate contradictions and paradoxes which in turn have inevitable repercussions on people. A new era - the effect of progress - is opening for them, richer and more varied than in the past, which imposes different modes of being in organizations, of regarding work, of managing one's anxieties, and of conceiving one's life plan.

To give a few examples.

First, the continuous change of organizational structures (sudden mergers with those who were previously competitors, the entry of new shareholders, "stripping" of internal functions which are sold or turned over to outsourcing), makes the distinction between firm and outside world more and more unclear, generating a highly unstable atmosphere that cannot be reconciled with the equally pressing need to promote and strengthen the identity of the firm.

Second, the flexibility of the labour market, shown both in the continuous transfer of people from one firm to another and from one sector to another, and in the increasingly casual nature of contracts, complicates the possibility of establishing one's membership of an organization, as well as of planning one's medium to long-term professional development. Paradoxically, now more than ever the great talking points are the development of resources and of strategies to retain talents, the enhancement of the value of loyalty and sense of belonging to the firm.

Third, the evolution towards the creation of increasingly flat organizations and of increasingly fuzzy roles exists alongside the growing gap between wage levels. In fact, while the number of hierarchical levels is diminishing, and people's skills and discretionality are increasing, paradoxically, wage inequality is growing, running the risk of generating in people a sense of

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lack of equality. Moreover, the fact that responsibilities are less and less clearly defined, together with role discretionality, accentuate the needs for non-specialist, transversal skills.

Fourth, the push by firms towards team work and the integration of people from different jobs, organizational cultures, localities and even countries, and at the same time the extremely strong competition that exists among employees, also connected to the casual nature of positions and to the very limited promotion prospects, generates disorientation in relations with others, with colleagues being regarded ambivalently as friends one moment and enemies the next. This all involves the need to create different modes of reciprocal integration, or managing and solving conflicts, which invites us to think about new forms of living together.

Fifth, the attention to the future shown by firms as the driving force both for business and for their own survival is in contrast with the fact that resources are increasingly swallowed up by what is contingent, fast, and indispensable right now. The importance of looking forward is well known, of anticipating possible future scenarios in which to project work and opportunities; but equally clear is the need to allocate one's resources properly so as to deal with the "here and now" and to cope with everyday mishaps and emergencies.

Sixth, technological innovation, pervasive and rapid in its continuous development, at times sought not for its actual benefits but as an end in itself ("innovate for the sake of innovating"), along with the stress of adapting to innovation, constantly brings established procedures into question, making it difficult to fully exploit all their potential.

And lastly, the dilemma of the transiency or solidity of organizational culture, so fundamental and so ephemeral at the same time. The current redefinition of values, designed to enhance innovation, hybridization, speed, wedded to the dynamism and flexibility of organizational processes, is causing profound transformations in the cultural systems of organizations, to the extent of bringing into question the very concept of organizational culture, at least in the sense it has had up to now. If the culture represents the slowly accreted "glue" that holds together the organization and guarantees its stability and uniqueness, today (when faced with mergers, continual takeovers, migrations from one firm to another, sudden changes in social relations, different ways of communicating...) it is seriously threatened and compromised. While organizational culture, meaning the element capable of giving solidity and continuity over time, is on the one hand "pushed to the limit", on the other it paradoxically still represents the element capable of safeguarding the organizational identity and of projecting it into the future, guaranteeing its survival.

The uncertainty and competitiveness of the market, the complexity of the environment, the tensions and paradoxes of organizations are all elements of a single scenario that in various ways and at various levels affects people, bringing new challenges for organizations in general, but above all for the management of the people working in them.

The focus on human resources has become a universal slogan in the world of organizations and it is obvious to all that it is the people and their skills/knowledge that are a firm's real wealth.

People and the collectivity as a whole make up the essential link for successfully implementing changes and transformations. People and the collectivity are at the receiving end of processes of change, but at the same time they are the ones who can act to transform their environment, making it more suited to their requirements, more satisfying and more successful.

So in concrete terms what are organizations doing to support their people in negotiating these hurdles, these paradoxes?

What are they doing to reduce the widespread sense of disorientation?

How are they encouraging their people to act in a proactive manner?

In such a scenario, where there is close scrutiny of organizational dynamics and where people are seen as the true capital, the psychological disciplines are starting to gain more and more relevance as a reference point, not so much, or not only, on the technical side (eg tool applications), but more for their potential capacity to provide organizations with support in several management areas:

At the individual level: by helping to develop capacities that enable situations of change and uncertainty to be handled as opportunities; by facilitating the recognition of individual strengths so as to gain them adequate valorization and at the same time by identifying strategies to promote the improvement of weak points; by providing tools for an effective management of different sources of stress, believed until very recently to be the cause of exclusively individual distress, but today considered important in their fallout at the more general level of organization and production.

At the working group level: by encouraging the identification of new modes of cooperation between and within working groups; by integrating cultural and individual differences; by becoming aware of the resources present in the group; by promoting interdependency and a leadership that supports this process;

At the organization level: by suggesting strategies to identify, strengthen and retain talents; by supporting the firm in coping with transitions; by valorizing communication processes; by drawing attention to a greater integration between structure and culture, above all for the even imperceptible implications that changes in structure hold for the culture; by working to reinforce the bond between productivity, satisfaction and well-being - certainly more intermeshed and interrelated than in the past – for the success of the organization; by fostering the strengthening and sharing of basic values so as to facilitate processes of cohesion and sense of belonging to the organization, of valorization of differences and, last but not least, for the survival of the organization itself.

These brief remarks point to the significance that psychology can assume concerning concrete issues linked to people's self-actualization at work, while keeping the success of the organization in mind. This is a new orientation, different from the undoubtedly more common image of psychology linked to distress, malaise, and the problems of the single individual.

But how well-known is all this? To what extent are psychological competences recognized as having a role in satisfying these "needs", experienced explicitly or less explicitly? Which of the aspects presented above are attributed to the possible use of psychological competences in people management?

The research we are presenting sets out to contribute to and explore these questions and to trigger reflection on how to reconcile the developments of a growing discipline and its social image with the real problems facing the working world today.

2. Why this research?

A great deal of research has already investigated the image of psychology, although almost all of it has focused on the perception on the part of psychologists themselves or psychology students (Bosio, 2005; Sarchielli & Fraccaroli, 2003); far less research has been devoted to other sectors of the population, hypothetical clients of the psychological intervention (Bosio 2005; Carli & Salvatore, 2001).

In particular, and in line with our study, it seems of interest to draw attention to the research by Carli and Salvatore (2001) on the social image of the psychologist, carried out in Lazio¹. It identifies a strong association with the helping or treating relationship in the areas of psychotherapy. Less common, but present, is the vision of the psychologist as a "useful" professional figure with a specific competence that can "implement the productive function of social systems" (Carli & Salvatore, 2001, p. 63). According to the authors, psychology cannot be an "a-historical and a-contextual" discipline, but must ask itself about the "function and service it can offer its clients" (Carli & Salvatore, 2001, p. 9), about its usefulness in terms of evolving contexts, orienting its practice so as to be able to respond competently to the problems or its real and potential clients.

The study that we carried out intends to follow this line, by asking those who work directly in human resources management how their activity is changing and then what distinctive characteristics it is now desirable to possess, with particular attention to the expectations

¹ Latium, Italian region.

regarding psychological skills and the usefulness they are acknowledged to have in responding to concrete problems.

HR functions make up the specific context where one notices most clearly the contradictions and paradoxes mentioned above. They in fact represent a function that is freeing itself from a role mainly oriented towards administrative and legal matters, to shift towards all the activities related to how people live in the organization, to processes of assessment and of promotion of potential, to strategies for retaining talents and for motivating staff resources, but also to change management and organizational check-ups.

The general purpose of our research therefore concerns the analysis of the context and of the skills required by human resources managers, with particular reference to psychological competences.

3. The sample and the procedure

The data was collected through 89 structured interviews with 22 Human Resources Managers and 67 of their staff belonging to 22 firms, mainly multinationals, in different sectors (pharmaceuticals, insurance and finance, automobiles, retailing, transport, tourism, services...) situated mainly in central Italy. This was a sample "of convenience"

The subjects were contacted thanks to the support of the "Associazione Italiana per la Direzione del Personale" (AIDP – "Italian Association of Personnel Management"), which identified the members willing to participate. Other managers were contacted by some of the neo-graduates of the Faculty of Psychology 2 at "La Sapienza" University in Rome².

Table 1 in the Appendix shows the summary of the subjects interviewed and the position held. Table 2 shows the educational qualifications of the interviewees. As can be seen, 15.7% of the interviewees (or 14 people) are psychology graduates, two of whom hold the position of Manager of Human Resources/Personnel.

Table 1

Position of the people interviewed	n
Staff Manager	9
Human Resources Manager	11
Managing Director	1
Head of Staff and Tenders	1
Head of Training, Recruitment, Assessment and Development *	36
Head of Recruitment, Organization, Budget and Reporting	1
Head of Communications	1
Specialist in Resource Development	1
Clerk in Staff recruitment, training, assessment and development*	18
Clerk in Labour laws and union relations	1
Clerk in Communications	1
Not specified	8
Total	89

*In these categories, given the variety of titles found in the different contexts, all those who perform only one of the activities listed have been included.

² The interviews were carried out by graduates in occupational psychology and by members of AIDP "Gruppo Giovani del Lazio", previously trained for the role of interviewers.

Table 2

Interviewers academic qualifications	%
Law degree	19,1
Political Science degree	7,8
Economics degree	14,6
Psychology degree	15,7
Sociology degree	4,5
Education degree	3,4
Arts and Philosophy degree	6,7
Other degrees (engineering, I.T., agricultural science)	4,5
School leaving certificate	13,5
No answer	10,2

4. The tool

A structured interview was carried out, lasting approximately one hour, the interview with the human resources managers being different from that of their staff, chosen in a sample.

In the interview the following 5 key questions were asked:

What are the main activities you perform in your present position?

What skills do you believe are indispensable to perform your job in your firm?

What degrees do your staff members hold?

In your opinion, what contribution can an occupational and organizational psychologist make to your firm?

In your opinion, what competences must the occupational and organizational psychologist possess?

The material that emerged was analysed and classified in specific categories through cross-checking by three expert judges.

5. Results

In this section only the results related to the responses to the 5 key questions listed above will be examined, in keeping with the aim of the paper.

1. The first general aspect to underline concerns the activities performed by HR Management, which, it emerges, are very numerous and spread over many sectors. These range from more traditional administrative functions, such as managing the wage policy, contracts and staff costs, through to coordinating processes of assessment of performance and of potential, staff promotion, and internal mobility. A large role is also played by organizing training and staff development programmes, as well as activities of recruiting and of internal marketing (monitoring the satisfaction and the working environment of the firm). Another task of HR Management is trade union relations, and in some cases, also safety on the job and firm organization, with special reference to the re-definition of roles and organizational functions. Of growing importance is the strategic role played by HR functions in the line, especially in promoting change management programmes and in introducing

policies with strategic business objectives. It was found that many HR managers carry out international activities, coordinating a geographical area (for example the Mediterranean area or the whole of Europe) and interfacing with Headquarters. This is obviously specific to the multinational context, but it is also true that the general trend is to manage human resources with policies that are increasingly established at the centre, rather than locally, as was usual in the past.

2. Concerning the skills that are indispensable for the various HR positions (table 3), the first element that emerges is the “mixture” of competences, knowledge, experience, personal skills and characteristics, in which each interviewee highlights some elements rather than others. There seems to be no clear reference to a shared language and in particular the word “competence”, though extremely common in the sector, proves to have a variety of different meanings. With such heterogeneous material, the responses were classified into personal traits, capacities, competences, knowledge and experience, though the specific expressions used by the interviewees were followed faithfully. Table 3 shows verbatim some of the responses mentioned, grouped into classes; examining it reveals the variety and the lack of similarity of the aspects mentioned. As can be seen from the table, equal importance (23% of the answers) is placed on personality traits and management competences, which concern quite general aspects of coordination and which do not appear to be peculiar to HR rather than to other functions in the firm. Less important, but still with a certain significance, seem to be skills in relating, technical competences on specific processes of the job, and economic knowledge (each with 11% of the responses).

Table 3

What skills do you feel are indispensable to perform your role in your firm?	%
Personal traits <i>leadership, flexibility, determination, stress tolerance, self-control, good self-knowledge, managerial courage, humility, tolerance, innovation, consistency</i>	23
Relational abilities <i>Ability to be assertive, ability to inspire trust, communication skills, negotiating skills, intermediation skills, ability to be a good communicator and a good diplomat</i>	11
Technical skills in Human Resources processes <i>Constructing assessment systems, organizational analysis, training, systems of personnel management, change management, mobility systems, organizational development</i>	11
Management skills <i>Planning skill, budget management, resource coordination, programme management, coordination of internal processes, project management</i>	23
Economic and financial skills	11
Knowledge and experience of the organization	9
Legal knowledge	7
English and Computer skills	5

3. As far as the number of psychologists holding positions is concerned, it emerges that only 5,4 per cent of the people working in the HR positions examined in the research are psychologists, while as table 4 shows, the most common qualifications are law and economics degrees.

Table 4

Types of degrees among your management?	%
Law degree	23,6
Political Science degree	2,4
Economics degree	23,6
Psychology degree	5,4
Sociology/Communication degree	4,2
Arts and Philosophy degree	3,0
Engineering degree	1,2
Other degrees	6,3
School leaving certificates	30,3

4. Concerning the perception of the contribution that the psychologist can give to an organization's goals (table 5), the interviewees responded mainly by identifying the areas in which the psychologist intervenes. 34% of the responses identify the psychologist's activity in the area of relational support, while 33% of the responses refer to more specific activities such as recruitment, evaluation and personal development. This data is linked to the widespread social image of psychology which is perceived as a discipline strongly oriented towards helping and supporting the individual in difficulty, but at the same time shows the discipline's growing bond with specific professional activities such as the assessment of people using specialist techniques and tools.

Though to a lesser extent, there appear the areas of training, analysis of the working environment and culture, and the observation of organizational behaviour. However quite a high percentage of responses do not identify any contribution made by the psychologist (13%).

Table 5

In your opinion, what contribution can an occupational and organizational psychologist give your firm?	%
Relational and individual support <i>In activities with employees, recovering subjectivity, giving relational support, understanding others' needs better would help to solve human problems, dealing with individual problems ...</i>	34
Recruitment, assessment and personal development <i>In implementing more scientific methodologies, using psychodiagnostic tools, use of tests, sophisticated testing and assessment</i>	33
Training <i>Training for assessment, training, handling training processes</i>	13
No contribution <i>It is not necessary, all that is needed is individual predisposition, hard work and motivation, I don't know, I'm totally sceptical, the skills are already present in other figures, there's no space ...</i>	13
Analysis of the working environment and the organizational culture <i>s/he understands the culture better, provides support for management in cases of change</i>	5
Observation of organizing behaviour	2

5. As regards the perception of distinctive psychological competences, various categories are used in which there is a mixture of traits, knowledge, abilities and experiences, creating a diversified, heterogeneous set of responses. Table 6 shows some examples of the responses in each category, here too with the expressions used by the interviewees.

Table 6

In your opinion, what skills must an occupational and organizational psychologist possess?	%
Personal traits <i>Authority, leadership, common sense, impartiality, objectivity, thoroughness, interpersonal sensitivity, professionalism, empathy, flexibility, timing, self confidence, rationality</i>	18
Relational skills <i>Ability to convince, capacity for team work, ability to listen, capacity for involvement, mediating skills, ability to understand others, communication skills, counselling skills, ability to relate, negotiating skills</i>	23
Specialist competences <i>tied exclusively to the use of diagnostic tools, construction of questionnaires, interview techniques, assessment methods, skills analysis, tools for interpreting situations in firms, training and learning technology, needs analysis, counselling methodology, assessment of others</i>	17
Specialist knowledge <i>Theory of personality, occupational and organizational psychology for firms</i>	10
Other knowledge <i>I.T., statistics, workplace regulations, basic economics, methods of payment, trade union relations, scientific background, international knowledge, knowledge of the working world.</i>	9
Organizational skills <i>Interpretation and analysis of the context, interpretation of group and organization dynamics, analysis of the impact of motivation on people, processes of change on people, process consulting</i>	8
Knowledge/experience of the organization <i>Knowing the situation in firms, business experience, needs to have had practical experience in firms getting his/her hands dirty, understanding that s/he works in business (no health-centre methods)</i>	8
Other skills <i>Ability to analyse and to synthesize, ability to analyse mental processes, problem-solving ability, ability to plan work</i>	6
Don't know	1

In particular the Managers tend to attach more importance to personality traits, but also in the words of their staff there is reference to personal traits, making up 18% of the responses altogether. More specifically, while some traits reported seem important and to be wished for in a great many company positions (like leadership and authority for any head, or flexibility for anyone doing a relatively unstructured job), others seem more typical of the psychologist, mentioning specific aspects of his activity (as in the case of the impartiality and objectivity indispensable for those who have to assess people).

Elements perceived as particularly relevant to the psychologist are relational skills (23% of the responses), in line with what emerged from the previous question in terms of relational support. These does not seem typical of the specific activity of the occupational psychologist in that they are connected to general aspects such as the ability to persuade, to listen, to work in groups, to mediate, to communicate, to negotiate...).

Considerable weight is given, in the overall picture of data available, to specialist competences (17%) in the use of psychological methodologies and tools in the activity of assessment, recruitment and training (such as *assessment centre* procedures, diagnostic

questionnaires, interview techniques, etc...), which shows the growing awareness of the wealth the psychologist can bring to the organization by means of techniques that are applicable in a series of activities and processes.

Less important, but still present (8%), is another group of competences that we call "organizational competences" (Carli, 2002)³, i.e. the specific skills of the psychologist that are not directly connected to tools and techniques, but entail a broader intervention on the context, in process logic (these competences include, for instance, reading the context, managing change, group dynamics, the impact of motivation, etc...).

6% of the responses mention other less specific cognitive faculties like the capacity of analysis and synthesis, of problem-solving and of organizing work.

Lastly there is knowledge of psychology, but also knowledge of the situation in firms, workplace regulations, economics, languages and computer skills.

6. Psychology in the firm: is it of any use?

While the scenario presented in the introduction underlines the importance of using psychological categories in present-day working contexts, the research results reveal a situation that is still heterogeneous. In fact, they identify areas where the demand for psychology is obvious and strong and then others where it seems necessary to make a more detailed explanation both of what is offered and of the social recognition of the value of the discipline.

One aspect that emerged from the research, and that attracted our attention, concerns the use of the term 'competence': in fact the connotations of this word are extremely varied, both when referring to positions in HR management, and to occupational psychology. When talking about competences, and in spite of the widespread use of the term, it seems to be difficult to use common conceptual categories to constitute a cultural repertoire shared by the "insiders".

To be more explicit, we believe that personality traits are categories that are conceptually different from the mass of knowledge possessed, just as the capacities one has due to motivational inclinations are different, but in fact all these aspects are called, with no distinction, 'competences'. This means that there is difficulty in exchange and dialogue between professional psychologists, unreconcilable perspectives and approaches which in turn can affect choices, programmes, orientations and therefore consistent results.

The second important aspect concerns the centrality assumed by the relational component in the psychological competences. Though it is important for a profession in close contact with a variety of interlocutors, it does not seem to us to be the distinctive element in the psychologist's professionalism. It is clear that relational aspects, such as for instance assertiveness, the capacity to persuade, or empathy, are undoubtedly positive if possessed by a psychologist, but are they not equally important for a salesman or a team leader? While for a salesman they seem to be closely tied to the organizational goals (the assertive, empathetic salesman, capable of persuading, will certainly sell more), the connection seems less clear in the case of a psychologist who is recruiting or training staff: will an empathetic, convincing recruiter manage to choose the best people for that role/context? Or might this inclination not finish up being an end in itself, if not downright counterproductive? An empathetic trainer, oriented to listening, may well be facilitated in managing a class and in

³ On this, Carli distinguishes between "technical professional skill: the capacity to provide technically appropriate responses to the problem posed by the client" and "organizational skills: the capacity to analyse the client's demand and to apply technical skill in the client's problem, for this purpose considering the necessary connections between the problem and the organizational context in which the client operates" (Carli, 2002, p. 37).

being interpersonally agreeable, but can this ensure a process of learning or of change in people?

In our view one can talk about relational competences as being distinctive and peculiar to the occupational psychologist, if one is referring to skills in interpreting the relationship, in understanding the emotions it arouses, in identifying the dynamics generated within a context to be traced back to the expected result. They are therefore not an end in themselves but become a tool which, with techniques, enable the “professional product” to be delivered. By the psychologist’s professional product, we mean a visible, shared outcome that can respond to an organizational need, and which at the same time can be tested and monitored, since the client must be able to perceive and declare the usefulness of what is done by the psychologist and the solution to the specific problem posed.

In the case for instance of a recruitment interview, the psychologist’s relational competence does not only lie in creating a positive context of welcoming and listening, but in being able to use what happens in the relationship to identify the candidate’s characteristics, motivation, and modes of relating, to then relate them to the context in which the candidate will have to work.

The research also shows that the psychologist is recognized as having specific specialist competences, in particular in the domain of recruitment and assessment of people and analysis of the working environment. This enables us to state that today there is greater awareness than in the past of the specific technical contribution the psychologist can give in investigating individual traits and perceptions of the organizational context and in the use of techniques to facilitate learning, areas which up to now in Italy have been largely the responsibility of other figures.

This aspect is in line with the development of the discipline from the legislative point of view; Law n. 170/03, in fact, classifies some activities that can be defined as “psychological techniques” (such as the use of tests and other standardized tools for the analysis of behaviour, of cognitive processes, opinions and attitudes, needs and motivations, social interaction, etc.) and, following the Platé sentence of 2003, it has been established that psychological profiles (of recruitment or assessment) are typical acts of the psychology profession (Falasca, 2006).

In our view however the psychologist’s competence cannot be reduced exclusively to the use of techniques; in themselves the latter do not establish a strong professionalism if they are applied in a compartmentalized way and if they are not supported by research ensuring its validity. Technical skills, valued and recognised as being distinctive of occupational psychology, require a scientifically-based theoretical frame of reference to guide their use, and at the same time they need to be part of a process of broader intervention, of interpretation of the context and the organizational dynamics in which they are applied. We insist on the importance of models of reference, insofar as they make it possible to work in an informed and professional manner, so that the logic guiding the action does not remain implicit, personal or improvised. This is a particularly crucial element since we work in an area in which the professional’s subjectivity constitutes a very important element in orienting the way of working; this should not be eliminated but carefully monitored and checked. In order to be deciphered and understood, human behaviour, interpersonal relations and also group and organizational dynamics, cannot disregard an element of subjectivity. What the psychologist can do is to refer to scientific models and techniques, use strategies to minimize the risk of error and constantly check his performance.

It emerges that it is indispensable to integrate the performance of the job with knowledge from other professional domains; in fact, the occupational psychologist is expected to have transversal skills, to be malleable and flexible, thus identifying a profession that is also capable of interacting with other professional figures and of enriching his/her specifically professional baggage with other competences required by the context.

These considerations, and what emerges from the research, seem to leave unsolved the crucial issue, which links what was underlined at the outset, and what guided us in our research, with what we actually found in the expectations of the people interviewed.

The areas of management of uncertainty and contradiction; consolidation of the sense of belonging; interpretation of organizational processes, the changes affecting them and therefore the management of the outcomes; the promotion of integration and the fostering of well-being in the firm, are admittedly connected to psychological categories, but in fact remain unexplored and do not enter into the psychological competence that is recognized.

We are referring here to that group of psychological competences, present but still not particularly clear and visible, possessed by HR managers and staff, which we have called "organizational skills" and which fit into what was said in our introduction about the analysis of the present-day working context.

The area of psychological intervention that is closely tied to the scenario outlined in the introduction is still under-explored and little known, and this is the domain where in our view the discipline has the potential to make a more mature contribution which would be more useful to modern organizations.

This is the real challenge that psychology must set itself today in the occupational and organizational field.

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