
IN MEMORIAM



Boris Petz
(1919 – 2005)

Boris Petz, Professor Emeritus at the University of Zagreb, passed away on April 15, 2005, at the age of 86. A prominent Croatian psychologist, he was a distinguished scholar whose curiosity about how people manage in the world of work helped to establish the field of work and organizational psychology in Croatia.

Born in Bjelovar in 1919, Boris Petz grew up in Zagreb where he attended elementary and high school, and also completed his university studies. A student of philosophy and psychology, he also studied South Slavic languages and literature, and graduated from the University of Zagreb in 1943. He received his PhD in psychology from the University of Zagreb in 1945, after successfully defending his doctoral thesis entitled *Influence of heredity and environment on some human abilities*.

Following graduation, he became involved in career counseling at the Vocational Guidance Service in Zagreb where he worked as a career psychologist from 1944 to 1948. In 1948 he joined the Institute of Work Hygiene in Zagreb (later the Institute for Medical Research) to work as a research fellow primarily in the area of psycho-physiological investigations of work and fatigue. In 1956 he received a grant from the World Health Organization for a ten-month stay at the London University College, where he worked with the Industrial Psychology Research Group. In 1958 he became an honorary docent at the School of Medicine

of the University of Zagreb after defending his habilitation thesis entitled *Impact of age and family responsibility on the number and duration of work absences*. In 1960 he was elected an assistant professor of work psychology at the Department of Psychology of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and spent the remainder of his career there as a professor. He rose to the rank of associate professor in 1962, and to full professor in 1968. He founded the Chair of Work Psychology and Ergonomics, directed the W/O psychology program, and for several years served as the Head of the Department of Psychology. In 1968/1970 he was elected to the office of the deputy Dean, and in 1971/1972 to that of the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. After his retirement in 1991, the University of Zagreb granted him the emeritus status.

Boris Petz's research interests were multiple and varied. His principal research contributions were in the area of psycho-physiological investigations of work and fatigue often in collaboration with Zoran Bujas. His research in this area included: evaluations of the procedures for early detection of fatigue at work; explorations of fatigue mechanisms; investigations of various modalities of active rest; physical exercise and its impact on human pulse, transfer of training effects, as well as examination of the effects of pharmacological, physiological and psychological stimulators. This program of "hard" research using experimental design and

combined psychological and psycho-physiological methods produced a series of important findings that were recognized by the international community. He was also known for his contributions to studying industrial and traffic accidents, statistical analyses of absenteeism, and for his pioneering work in Croatia on psycho-social aspects of work, including peoples' attitudes and motivation for working. Finally, he also conducted research related to statistical problems and psychometric issues.

Boris Petz was productive scholar, author of more than 150 publications. Many of his publications are original scientific papers presenting the results of his own research. Others are professional papers that he wrote in various journals to help professionals of different specialties to understand the human side of work. The content of these papers includes: issues of vocational guidance, employee selection, selection and training of disabled persons, ageing and its effects on work capacity, motivation of employees, human relations, effects of punishment in traffic education, psychology of the seller, psychological aspects of human engineering, psychosocial aspects of automation, etc. In his writings he was deeply committed to the mission of enhancing the well-being of people at work through both the fitting the people to their work and *vice versa*. He also wrote a series of books: *Am I capable for an aviator? Introduction to psychology of aviation* (1944); *Basic Statistical Methods* (1964); *Psychology in Economic Propaganda* (1974), *Basic Statistical Methods for Nonmathematicians* (1981), *Selected Chapters in Basic Psychometrics* (1981), *Psychology of Work* (1987), and *Introduction to Psychology* (2001). He also co-authored two dictionaries: *Psychological Dictionary* (1992) *Statistical Dictionary* (1998). His books attracted a wide audience and many of them enjoyed multiple editions.

In parallel with his researching and writing, Prof. Petz was devoted to teaching, coaching, mentoring, and developing students. He taught undergraduate and graduate courses in work psychology, organizational psychology, general psychology, statistics and psychometrics, and consumer behavior. For the most of the time he was devoted to his students at the psychology department. He exposed hundreds of them to the basic concepts of work psychology and also

served as mentor for many of them who later became recognized applied psychologists and human resource specialists. He also taught students at other departments and faculties in Croatia (e.g. at universities in Rijeka and Osijek), other countries of former Yugoslavia (e.g., universities in Belgrade, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, and Skopje), and abroad (e.g., Louisiana State University in the US, and the University in Thessalonica, Greece).

Professor Petz was a fellow associate of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and a full member of the Croatian Medical Academy. He was also active in professional psychology organizations. He was the first secretary of the Croatian Division of the former Yugoslav Psychological Association, the secretary general of the International Congress of Applied Psychology held in Ljubljana in 1964, and over a ten-year period was an active member of the European Network of Organizational Psychology (ENOP). In recognition of his contributions, the Croatian Psychological Association in 1988 granted him the Lifetime Achievement in Psychology Award.

Boris Petz was active and productive long after his formal retirement. The last two years of his life he spent in preparing the new, enlarged edition of the *Psychological Dictionary* – a recently published masterpiece that he edited and wrote with a small group of his colleagues from the psychology department in Zagreb. This rigorous and rich account of psychological concepts provides a brilliant finale to Boris Petz's lifework. Unfortunately, he missed seeing its publication.

I had the privilege to work with Boris for over 30 years, first as his assistant and later as his colleague. As a professor and chair he provided invaluable leadership and vision, and as a colleague and friend he provided constant support and encouragement. During many years of our collaboration, I never heard him raise his voice. He was a patient and gentle person, devoid of pettiness, envy, and greed. I am certain that all his colleagues and students will remember him for his integrity, wisdom, and kindness. He was a true gentleman!

Branimir Šverko