



## Article

# Applying Work and Organizational Psychology in the Field of Labor Relations: Exploratory Study in Trade Unions in the Basque Country

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**Abstract:** Historically, the relationship between work and organizational psychology and trade union organizations has been one of mutual indifference and neglect. The aim of this study is to explore whether trade union members' social representations of organizational psychology affect their organizations' engagement with this discipline, conditioning their ability to derive benefit from its findings. In a sample of 448 members of the four main trade unions of the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain, social representations of six concepts relating to Psychology or Trade Union Activity were explored using the free association technique. Forty-five categories were created and their frequency and percentages were calculated. In addition, the means of the categories shared by the representations of two different concepts were crossed and statistically tested. Although some associations were found between the representations of the two sets of concepts, most were non-significant. These results highlight that the structure of the representations of Psychology gives only a partial explanation for this lack of connection. The implications of the study and its limitations are discussed, and some recommendations for future research are proposed.

**Keywords:** work and organizational psychology; labor relations; trade union organizations; limitations; social representations; Basque Country



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## 1. Introduction

In the foundational texts of organizational psychology, Hugo Münsterberg and Walter Dill Scott recommended that psychologists should pay attention to the concerns of trade unions (Zickar and Gibby 2007). Ever since the earliest days of this discipline, and despite its supposed neutrality, organizational psychologists have often been portrayed as oblivious to these concerns—or even, since they tended to work in opposition to the trade unions, as servants of power (Baritz 1960; Bergman and Jean 2016; Brief 2000; Carriere 2020; Dubno 1957; Fullagar 1984; García-Ramos et al. 2013; Gordon and Burt 1981; Gordon and Nurick 1981; Huszczo et al. 1984; Lefkowitz 2003; Logan 2006; Lott 2014; McDonald and Bubna-Litic 2012; Rosen and Stagner 1980; Shostak 1964; Thiel 2019; Zickar 2001, 2004). In fact, it is generally agreed in the literature that the relationship between organizational psychology and the world of work and workers has been characterized by indifference and neglect (Bergman and Jean 2016; Carriere 2020; Lott 2014; Thiel 2019).

However, there are some exceptions to this rule (Ayers 1944; Bergman and Jean 2016; Hartley and Kelly 1986; Hartley and Stephenson 1992; Kornhauser 1947; Kornhauser et al. 1956; Martin and Sinclair 2001; Martínez-Iñigo et al. 2012; Redman and Snape 2005; Stagner 1948, 1956, 1981; Stinglhamber et al. 2013; Tetrick and Barling 1995), since certain specific problems such as members' commitment to their trade union and their participation have been approached quite profitably from the perspective of organizational psychology

(Chawla et al. 2018; Fullagar et al. 2004; Fuller and Hester 2001; Green and Auer 2013; Martínez-Iñigo et al. 2020; Sjöberg and Sverke 2001; Tetrick et al. 2007; Zacharewicz et al. 2016). Nonetheless, the overall impression is that there has been little connection between these two fields.

Given that work is a fundamental element in most people's lives, the lack of attention paid by psychology in general, and organizational psychology in particular, to the efforts made by unions to improve and strengthen the workplace is an omission that must be remedied (Lott 2014). This omission is even more striking if we take into account the fact that for other social sciences interested in the study of work, such as sociology or economics, union organizations are a major topic of study (Zickar 2004).

This lack of attention has had important consequences both for organizational psychology and for the unions: for example, the impoverishment of the analysis of labor relations, the loss of social relevance, and so on (Martínez-Iñigo et al. 2001). Numerous investigations have sought to establish why two apparently related disciplines, which would both be expected to benefit from mutual cooperation, have remained at such a distance from one another (Huszczko et al. 1984; Martínez-Iñigo et al. 2003; Rosen and Stagner 1980; Zickar 2004). Among the reasons proposed are the greater willingness of psychologists to work with management, or the negative attitudes among union organizations towards the application of psychology to the workplace. But, as several authors have pointed out (Lott 2014; Martínez-Iñigo et al. 2001), achieving greater cooperation would open up many opportunities both for the psychology of organizations and for trade unions.

For this cooperation to flourish, organizational psychology must be able to demonstrate its usefulness to the union members. Any attempt to do so should start with a rigorous analysis of the origin and maintenance of the distance between the two. This analysis constitutes the first step for the subsequent design of actions that allow a rapprochement. In fact, over the years, many voices have called for the creation of a genuine "organizational psychology for trade unions" (Carriere 2020), but for the moment no such entity has emerged.

Early studies (Martínez-Iñigo et al. 2001, 2003) found that trade union members' social representations of organizational psychology constituted a barrier that prevented their organizations from benefiting from the knowledge, methods, and techniques of the discipline. Hence, the aim of our research is to explore whether this situation continues to prevail today. Other actors in labor relations, such as managers and employers, have found the application of organizational psychology to be especially fruitful. In this sense, a core question might be whether or not psychology can turn out to be equally useful for trade unionists.

In the present study of a sample of workers from the four main unions in the Basque Country, we analyze the social representations (Moscovici 1986) of psychology in the workplace, the representations of the activity of trade unions, and the relationship between the two. The theory of social representations can be considered a psychosocial framework of concepts and ideas for the study of psychosocial phenomena in modern societies. According to this theory, psychosocial phenomena and processes can only be properly understood if they are seen as embedded in historical, cultural, and macro-social conditions (Moscovici and Faucheux 1972). Moscovici himself defines social representations as a system of values, ideas, and practices with a double function. First, to establish an order that enables individuals to orient themselves and to control the social world in which they live; second, to facilitate communication among the members of a community by providing them with a code to name and classify the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history (Moscovici 1973).

Several authors (Ibáñez 1988; Valencia and Echevarría 2012) have proposed that social representations guide the position that an individual takes vis-à-vis the represented object and determine their behaviors towards it; if so, exploring a group's social representations of a scientific discipline is of particular interest in the study of the group's behavior (De Paolis 1990; González 1993).

Taking as a reference the study by [Martínez-Iñigo et al. \(2001\)](#) and following the recommendations set out there, this research takes into account two aspects: the proximity between the social representations of psychology and trade union activity, and the structure of the representation of psychology in the workplace. Regarding the first point, our starting hypothesis is that there will be very little connection between the two representations. In what concerns the second point, revolving around the structure of the representation of psychology—attitudes, information, and field ([Moscovici 1986](#))—we expected that, by looking at how this structure might condition and narrow the availability of representations, it could contribute to explain the discipline's distance from the world of the trade unions.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Participants

The study participants comprised 448 members of the four main trade unions of the Basque Autonomous Community. At present, these four unions share 90.1% of the union delegates in the territory. A total of 46% ( $n = 204$ ) of the sample belonged to Eusko Langileen Elkartasuna (ELA), 24.2% ( $n = 107$ ) to Langile Abertzaleen Batzordea (LAB), 3.4% ( $n = 15$ ) to Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), and 26.4% ( $n = 117$ ) to the Union General de Trabajadores (UGT). Most of the workers were union delegates or representatives (40.9%;  $n = 191$ ), followed by shop-floor workers (24.3%;  $n = 152$ ), middle managers (13.8%;  $n = 61$ ), executive committee staff (8.1%;  $n = 36$ ), and others (2.9%;  $n = 13$ ). Just over half (51%) had been working in the union organization for more than 10 years. Regarding the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample, males accounted for 47.6% and females 51.7% and the mean age was 44.1 years ( $SD = 9.8$ ); with regard to socioeconomic status, 57.8% defined themselves as middle class, 23.3% lower middle class, 4.3% lower class, and 3.4% upper middle class (11.3% did not specify their social class). Almost a third (31.8%) had completed university studies, 17.8% had master's degrees, 16% vocational training, and the rest were distributed evenly between primary education, high school, and intermediate level vocational training graduates. Most defined themselves as left-wing (71.8%), 14.7% as extreme left, 7.4% as center left, and 0.7% as center. The remaining 5.4% did not specify their political ideology.

### 2.2. Instruments

Based on the social representation theory ([Moscovici 1986](#)), the information was collected using the free association technique. This is a popular method for recalling social representations because it allows for rank and importance frequency analysis ([Dany et al. 2015](#)). It enables access to the latent dimensions that structure the semantic universe of the object being studied, according to [Abric \(2003\)](#), and it reveals traces from collective memory ([Flament and Rouquette 2003](#)). This technique works as a stimulus that comes spontaneously to the participant's mind and allows for the individual expression of thoughts, images, or words. Thus, something new can be created, which the researcher can later process, direct, and turn useful for the analysis ([Abric 2003](#)). Participants were presented with six terms: Psychology, Work and Organizational Psychology, Human Resource Management, Labor Relations, Trade Union Action, and Social Dialogue. The first three terms (Psychology, Psychology of Organizations, and Human Resource Management) are related to the field of Psychology and cover a continuum that goes from the general framework of the discipline (Psychology) to more specific context-related applications (Human Resource Management). The remaining three terms are directly related to the world of the trade unions, ordered from the least to the most general (Labor Relations, Trade Union Action, and Social Dialogue).

### 2.3. Procedure

Before the data collection stage, the coordinators of each trade union organization were contacted and informed of the objectives of the study. After obtaining their approval, the evaluation protocol was sent to all the workers of each union via these coordinators. In

order to resolve possible doubts, the e-mail address of the main investigator was provided. All the participants were informed of the objectives of the study and participated voluntarily through an electronic survey. The information was gathered anonymously via an electronic survey created and distributed by the union coordinators via the online platform Survio. The role played by the union coordinators was merely that of facilitating our access to a network of potential participants by sharing our Survio questionnaire link with the community of people affiliated with the unions. Therefore, we can claim that they had no further involvement in the collection procedure since the Survio system sent the answered questionnaires to us directly, without the mediation of trade union coordinators. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee for Research with Human Beings of the University of the Basque Country, after which the data were collected in accordance with the committee's guidelines and the data protection law.

### 3. Results

The six terms evaluated through free association were subjected to a systematic and objective content analysis of their manifest semantic meanings in the pronounced themes. The results were read and coded in order to identify semantic approximations between them, and we grouped semantic meanings into the smallest number of categories possible. We followed the rules of homogeneity (grouping only semantically coherent contents), exhaustivity (going in depth through the entire text, by using everything rather than only a part), and exclusivity (ensuring that a specific piece of content cannot be grouped into two different categories). Additionally, we also paid attention to objectivity—we collaborated among peer researchers and checked if different codifiers drew similar conclusions—and to whether our codes were pertinent and adequate or not—if they were adapted to our content, hypothesis, and objectives. Further, we created units of codification and registration even if some of the semantic contents that we adopted had already been described as categories in a previous study of representations of psychology in trade unions (Martínez-Iñigo et al. 2001), while others were inferred and agreed upon by the three authors over the course of a series of meetings. Unlike Martínez-Iñigo et al. (2001), we had to work more with phrases, or what Berelson (1952) described as themes seen as a statement about a subject, than with individual words, even if we are aware that the latter can provide more linguistic precision. This was due to the sample we obtained in which participants generally responded with longer sentences. In this sense, we decided to use all the categories observed in the data in order to be exhaustive, even if some of the elements did not seem to be pertinent for our objectives. Table 1 presents descriptions of each of the categories identified through content analysis. We bore in mind several rules to infer our categories (Bardin 2011): mutual exclusion, internal homogeneity, pertinence (adaptation to our data and theoretical approach), objectivity, and fidelity (once the variables were defined, and an index was created, various codifiers worked separately with the same material, and they codified the data in the same way).

**Table 1.** Descriptions of the categories identified through Free Association.

Category/Theme	Description
1. Analyzing	Emphasis on the work of the expert: asking questions, processing data, and seeking answers that allow the understanding of a phenomenon.
2. Assembly	Explicit references to the union, what it stands for, its ideology and its forms of mobilization, and strategies for exerting influence.
3. Help	Positive perception of a service that a specialist or professional offers, emphasizing its benign function.
4. Science	A method or technique that enjoys scientific legitimacy.
5. Communication	Interpersonal interactions without conflict. Communication in its most basic and simple sense.

**Table 1.** *Cont.*

Category/Theme	Description
6. Conduct	Observing the way people behave and act.
7. Conflict	Disagreements, fights, and intergroup tensions.
8. People management	Aspects related to the management of personnel, which range from administrative issues such as selection-hiring processes, salaries, vacancies, retirements, etc., to socialization, career plans, adequacy of employees' roles and job characteristics.
9. Illness	Dysfunctional aspects, without referring to help, treatment, or improvement.
10. Professional competence	The professional's way of acting as a series of tasks and stages, emphasizing the work they perform or the training they may have had. It establishes the expert's legitimacy.
11. Manipulation	Distrust towards possible hidden intentions, deception, lack of seriousness or scruples, stressing the superficial and artificial nature of the action.
12. Improvement	Positive changes related to well-being and quality of life. In general, it indicates a change for the better or benefit in something specific.
13. Mind	Mental processes and operations and ways of reasoning of people.
14. Necessary	Useful and positive character of the proposal, emphasizing that sometimes it can respond to a need, but maintaining a general tone without mentioning concrete or specific details, or what it can be addressed for.
15. Negotiation	Effort to find a solution to conflicts through negotiation and/or mediation processes, focusing on the constructive side of the process.
16. Oppression	Employees as victims: focus on the verification of the negative effect of this oppression.
17. Organization	Structure of the company and the work process: way of working in the company, strategies, concrete actions to complete the tasks, work environment where these operations are described, without evaluating their performance levels.
18. Personality	Individual attributes, in accordance with the idea that what is most important in psychology is the study of individual subjectivity.
19. Claiming rights	Obtaining, defending or expanding rights that allow the satisfaction of diverse needs.
20. Performance	Importance of the quantitative objectives of profitability and results obtained, according to an apparently rational logic of cost-benefit.
21. Pessimism	Specific dysfunctions of the system reflecting doubts and a certain discomfort that carries the possibility of failure within the company or the workplace.
22. Solidarity	Harmonious relationships between co-workers, highlighting cohesion and complicity among equals.
23. Union	The relationship existing between workers and the entity or type of organization (company or union) in which they work, need for union between workers and the organization, or the benefits of this situation described as harmony or "social peace" (between workers and organization in the company or union).
24. Control	Rules to follow, safety issues, protocol and obligations within the company or union.
25. Human beings	Remembering that individuals within organizations are not just employees or workers but are also human beings.
26. Remote	Something removed from the world of the participant, or is too difficult to be assimilated and achieved.
27. Motivation	Individual motivational factors that allow or enhance performance.
28. Interest	Positivity in the face of a novel proposal that allows us to imagine new possibilities that have not yet been specified or clearly seen.
29. Diversity	Different ways of acting and points of view, but without conflict or divergence.
30. Skills	Individual skills that would be useful in everyday work.
31. Unexplored	Something already known and valid, but little or poorly used.

**Table 1.** *Cont.*

Category/Theme	Description
32. My goal	Each individual has their own goals, interests and priorities, without worrying whether the company takes them into account or not.
33. Collective	Larger social entities, as well as class and social movements that affect the way people act and are. Emphasis on the social, cultural, and collective.
34. Emotions	Emotional states or reactions of people in the company or union.
35. No response	Unanswered.
36. Self-development	Improvement depends on the individual developing their own self-knowledge.
37. Work team	Groups of people who work together to solve challenges in the workplace and/or union.
38. Counterweight	The union itself is explicitly mentioned as a decisive factor for social change, as an alternative, solution, resource; its strengths and positive attributes are highlighted.
39. Ethics	Moral values generally recognized and presented as a characteristic of the union.
40. Leadership	Who makes decisions and how decisions are made, group representation roles, who leads, and traits typically attributed to leaders (e.g., charisma).
41. Capital	The other (e.g., the boss, the employer) represented as a class in itself, including the idea of a dominant and antagonistic class that has the power to impose its criteria and interests.
42. Selfishness	Discourses against individual mobility that build a dichotomy between a group solidarity to which they would aspire and an environment of competition of all against all.
43. Skepticism	The proposals are not convincing; they elicit distrust, and are criticized and devalued, without going into details.
44. Participation	Importance of an environment that allows everyone to make proposals and take part in decisions.
45. Public administration	Institutional and administrative entities located outside the business world, but which influence decisions regarding the distribution of economic aid that is negotiated between trade union and business representatives.

Table 2 presents the frequencies (in percentages) of the categories mentioned by the participants in relation to each of the six concepts evaluated through free association: Psychology, Work and Organizational Psychology, Human Resource Management, Labor Relations, Trade Union Action, and Social Dialogue.

**Table 2.** Percentages for each category in each of the concepts evaluated through free association.

	Psych.	WOP	HRM	LR	TUA	SD
1. Analyzing	23.4%	14.2%	1.6%	2%	1.1%	2.7%
2. Assembly		1.3%	0.2%	6.5%	26.1%	15.6%
3. Help	12.3%	4.7%	1.3%	2%	5.3%	1.3%
4. Science	15.6%	5.6%	–	0.4%	–	–
5. Communication	13.8%	20.7%	9.3%	27.8%	4.9%	19.6%
6. Conduct	20.5%	13.6%	0.2%	1.5%	3.3%	0.7%
7. Conflict	–	1.6%	2.4%	11.9%	27.8%	7.4%
8. People management	2.7%	8.4%	38.3%	13.1%	2.9%	1.1%
9. Illness	3.1%	1.8%	–	–	–	–
10. Professional competence	22.5%	20.3%	3.5%	1.3%	1.1%	0.4%
11. Manipulation	1.6%	1.6%	4.9%	1.3%	0.2%	27.1%

Table 2. Cont.

	Psych.	WOP	HRM	LR	TUA	SD
12. Improvement	11.2%	10.8%	6.2%	6.4%	17.4%	6.7%
13. Mind	35%	10.9%	0.9%	0.7%	0.4%	1.3%
14. Necessary	10.4%	9.1%	6.9%	7.8%	19.6%	9.1%
15. Negotiation	0.7%	3.1%	2.9%	14.7%	13.2%	38.6%
16. Oppression	0.4%	2%	12.7%	9.4%	2.2%	11.8%
17. Organization	1.6%	51.7%	43.9%	36.1%	38.5%	13.1%
18. Personality	5.1%	1.3%	0.4%	0.2%	0.2%	–
19. Claiming rights	0.4%	1.6%	2.4%	8.7%	38.2%	8.9%
20. Performance	0.2%	3.2%	17.3%	4%	4%	1.7%
21. Pessimism	3.3%	2.5%	6.7%	6.9%	3.8%	8.3%
22. Solidarity	0.4%	2.2%	0.9%	7.5%	4.7%	–
23. Union	–	3.5%	1.3%	11.8%	5.6%	5.8%
24. Control	3.1%	4.5%	8.3%	9.1%	3.7%	3.2%
25. Human beings	22.1%	12.7%	23%	6.2%	2.5%	1.1%
26. Remote	2%	4.4%	1.5%	1.3%		1.3%
27. Motivation	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	0.4%	1.8%	0.4%
28. Interest	1.1%	2%	0.2%	0.9%	1.1%	2.7%
29. Diversity	0.4%	0.2%	0.2%	0.4%	0.2%	1.6%
30. Skills	4.2%	2.7%	3.4%	1.1%	2%	0.4%
31. Unexplored	1.1%	3.3%	2.6%	1.3%	1.3%	3.1%
32. My goal	1.1%	0.4%	0.2%	0.4%	–	16.1%
33. Collective	5.5%	11.2%	12.7%	23.6%	35.3%	–
34. Emotions	11.4%	3.1%	0.9%	0.7%	0.7%	–
35. No response	0.7%	–	–	0.2%	–	–
36. Self-development	4.5%	0.4%	–	–	–	–
37. Work team	0.7%	7.8%	4.9%	3.5%	2%	–
38. Counterweight	0.9%	0.4%	0.4%	0.9%	13.6%	2.2%
39. Ethics	0.4%	0.7%	0.9%	0.4%	3.3%	1.1%
40. Leadership	0.4%	2.5%	3.3%	3.1%	2.6%	5.5%
41. Capital	0.4%	5.1%	9.2%	17.8%	2.7%	16.3%
42. Selfishness	0.4%	0.7%	3.5%	1.8%	0.2%	0.2%
43. Skepticism	0.6%	1.1%	0.9%	0.9%	0.2%	9.3%
44. Participation	–	1.1%	0.4%	1.3%	1.3%	3.6%
45. Public administration	0.2%	–	0.4%	1.6%	0.4%	22.3%

Note. Psycho = Psychology; WOP = Work and Organizational Psychology; HRM = Human Resource Management; LR = Labor Relations; TUA. = Trade Union Action; SD = Social Dialogue.

In order to test our starting hypothesis, that is, the existence of a poor connection between the representations of Psychology and Trade Union Action, the frequencies of the categories of each of the concepts related to the two representations were crossed, through Chi-square tests with continuity correction, in contingency tables. To do so, each of these categories was dichotomized (1 = presence; 0 = absence).

In relation to the concept of Psychology, certain variables were found to be interdependent. First, significant relationships were found between the social representation of Psychology and Labor Relations, since both were perceived as Necessary in similar proportions ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 25.722, p < 0.001$ ). Second, albeit to a lesser extent, there were significant relationships between the social representations of these two variables, since they were represented as Control ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 4.366, p > 0.05$ ), Emotions ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 4.464, p < 0.05$ ), and Performance ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 5.495, p < 0.01$ ). Regarding the relationships between the social representations of Psychology and Trade Union Action, significant associations were observed in the categories Necessary ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 35.105, p < 0.001$ ), Professional Competence ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 6.521, p < 0.01$ ), and Behavior ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 4.943, p < 0.05$ ). As for the relationships between the representations of Psychology and Social Dialogue, our analyses showed significant associations in the categories Necessary ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 7.727, p < 0.01$ ), Control ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 10.361, p < 0.001$ ), and Human Beings ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 6.740, p < 0.01$ ).

Secondly, there were some significant relationships between Work and Organizational Psychology and the concepts associated with trade unions. Between Work and Organizational Psychology and Labor Relations, for instance, relationships in the following categories stood out: Communication ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 6.154, p < 0.01$ ); Conflict ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 9.932, p < 0.01$ ); Necessary ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 10.459, p < 0.001$ ); Organization ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 60.752, p < 0.001$ ); Collective ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 7.332, p < 0.01$ ); Counterweight ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 13.194, p < 0.001$ ); Capital ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 22.009, p < 0.001$ ); Performance ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 19.201, p < 0.001$ ); and Participation ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 31.434, p < 0.001$ ).

The following significant associations were found between Work and Organizational Psychology and Trade Union Action: Communication ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 7.072, p < 0.01$ ); Necessary ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 35.497, p < 0.001$ ); Negotiation ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 4.549, p < 0.05$ ); Oppression ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 8.769, p < 0.01$ ); Organization ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 10.201, p < 0.001$ ); Collective ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 16.324, p < 0.001$ ); Skills ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 6.894, p < 0.01$ ); and Work Team ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 22.697, p < 0.001$ ).

The comparison of Work and Organizational Psychology and Social Dialogue identified the following significant relationships: Conflict ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 8.375, p < 0.01$ ); Necessary ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 14.703, p < 0.001$ ); Organization ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 17.465, p < 0.001$ ); Claiming rights ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 6.275, p < 0.01$ ); Collective ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 6.974, p < 0.01$ ); Remote ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 6.013, p < 0.01$ ); Motivation ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 8.512, p < 0.01$ ); and Skills ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 40.308, p < 0.001$ ).

Finally, the contingency tables comparing Human Resource Management and Trade Union Action showed several significant relationships. Specifically, relationships were found between Human Resource Management and Labor Relations in the following categories: Improvement ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 8.556, p < 0.01$ ); Necessary ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 59.054, p < 0.001$ ); Negotiation ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 8.105, p < 0.01$ ); Oppression ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 8.967, p < 0.01$ ); Organization ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 20.113, p < 0.001$ ); Human Being ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 17.671, p < 0.001$ ); Collective ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 5.474, p < 0.01$ ); Unexplored ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 35.462, p < 0.001$ ); and Work Team ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 10.226, p < 0.001$ ). Comparing the concepts of Human Resource Management and Trade Union Action, similar trends were found only in: Necessary ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 33.818, p < 0.001$ ); Organization ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 26.424, p < 0.001$ ); Pessimism ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 5.458, p < 0.01$ ); Human Beings ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 4.646, p < 0.05$ ); and Collective ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 9.519, p < 0.01$ ). Finally, significant relationships between Human Resource Management and Social Dialogue were found in the following: Manipulation ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 5.038, p < 0.01$ ); Improvement ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 8.012, p < 0.01$ ); Necessary ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 47.393, p < 0.001$ ); Oppression ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 6.386, p < 0.01$ ); Organization ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 14.860, p < 0.001$ ); Claiming rights ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 7.266, p < 0.01$ ); Human Beings ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 6.311, p < 0.01$ ); Collective ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 5.989, p < 0.01$ ); Ethics ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 4.739, p < 0.05$ ); and Selfishness ( $\chi^2(1, 448) = 6.273, p < 0.01$ ).

In the rest of the categories, the Chi-square tests in the contingency tables indicate very limited relationships between the representations of Psychology and its related concepts (Work and Organizational Psychology and Human Resource Management) and the

concepts associated with Trade Unions (Labor Relations, Trade Union Action, and Social Dialogue). Therefore, these results confirm the existence of a weak connection between the two representations. As for the reason for this low level of connection, analyzing the structure of the representation of Psychology and its applications, only Human Resource Management elicited negative attitudes, being linked to Oppression and Control (Table 2). In other words, these data do not reflect a particularly negative assessment of Psychology or Work and Organizational Psychology, since both are perceived as Necessary and as sources of Improvement with rates close to those recorded for Trade Union Action. Regarding information, there is a clear identification of Psychology with scientific study (i.e., with Mind, Analyzing, Professional Competence, Conduct, and Science). The identification is more with the general scientific field and less with the clinical field, given the scarce association with Personality and Illness. This scientific component is maintained in the case of Work and Organizational Psychology, albeit with less intensity, while it practically disappears in relation to Human Resource Management.

Lastly, regarding the ordering and hierarchy of the components of the representation of Psychology, the field is dominated by the analytical/scientific component (i.e., Mind, Behavior, Professional Competence, Analyzing, and Science).

#### 4. Discussion

This study explores whether trade union members' social representations of organizational psychology still undermine their organizations' ability to engage in this discipline and benefit from its insights. The results suggest that the connection between the social representations of Psychology in the workplace and of Trade Union Action is very limited, since the information used to construct these representations includes few common elements which might indicate spaces of overlap between the two fields. The results coincide with those of the earlier study by [Martínez-Iñigo et al. \(2001\)](#). In the last two decades, however, there has been a certain rapprochement. Elsewhere during this period, psychology has expanded into new and diverse fields such as marketing, sports, business, and politics; perhaps this diversification has produced a break with the traditional stereotype of the psychologist as a practitioner devoted exclusively to mental problems ([Ordóñez 2018](#)).

Along these lines, it seems that the structure of the representation of psychology only partially explains its lack of connection with trade union activities. Regarding attitudes, their identification is straightforward since the linguistic categories contain a meaning which is recognized as positive or negative by social consensus ([Araya 2002](#)). In this regard, clearly negative attitudes surface mainly in the case of Human Resource Management—not, for example, in the cases of Psychology and Organizations and Work Psychology. It is very likely that the engagement of psychologists over the last two decades in new areas outside mental illness is helping to eradicate some of the prejudices regarding the discipline in the general population and, therefore, among trade union members as well. All this indicates a present state of the matter characterized by more ambivalent representations of organizational psychology than negative ones. That said, our results could be read in the light of the context of the historical conflict of interest between personnel or human resource departments and unions that remains present today; as long as the application of psychology is associated with these departments, its assessment continues to be negative.

Regarding information, there is a strong identification of Psychology with scientific study, and hardly any association with the clinical setting. In addition, it seems that trade unionists' social representations of Psychology are strongly conditioned by the manifestations closest to their activities, and that, as Psychology approaches the workplace (i.e., in Human Resources Management), its assessment is more negative and its association with objectives or interests defined by respondents as unrelated to union activity increases. Any other type of information would be difficult to justify bearing in mind the historical absence of psychologists within union organizations ([Carriere 2020](#)). Moreover, the shift in human resources management, which has been called "psychologization" ([Godard 2013](#)),

was a turning point towards an individualization of employment relationships in a different way from the desirable one according to the trade unions that are collective actors.

As far as the field of representation is concerned, it seems that it is indeed structured around the image of the psychologist as an objective and rigorous scientist, engaged in the analysis of behavior and the mind. This suggests that the activity of psychology is located far from the social and political aspects that characterize trade union activity, and that, given the workers' task of finding meaning in what they do and in achieving a positive "work-life fit", psychology is perceived as distant and alien (Lott 2014; Rose 2004).

Therefore, despite the changes in relation to the stereotype of psychology in the last two decades, union members still do not establish a clear association between the discipline and union activities. The structure of the representation of Psychology explains this lack of connection, albeit only in part. Attitudes express the most affective and resistant element of representations (Araya 2002). In this case, attitudes towards Psychology and its applications are positive, except in the case of Human Resource Management.

In our view, the here-surveyed trade union members' social representations of Psychology no longer constitute a significant obstacle to the application of the knowledge and techniques of Work and Organizational Psychology and to the activities of the trade unions in the Basque Country. Meanwhile, the implementation of participatory management models in Basque companies, promoted and disseminated by the Basque Government, might hopefully generate a particularly favorable context for organizational psychologists to be able to offer their services to trade unions, although these participatory models particularly favor the type of direct participation promulgated by management over the indirect participation advocated by the unions.

The study is not without limitations. The first is due to the imbalance of the sample, given that the four trade union organizations were very unevenly represented, which nonetheless corresponds to their size and influence in the territory. The second limitation, due to the pandemic, was the impossibility of carrying out group interviews to contrast the information obtained through the free association technique. Therefore, future studies should compare the results recorded with the information obtained through other techniques such as group interviews or standardized scales.

## 5. Conclusions

The results obtained show that the conditions are in place for a rapprochement between organizational psychology and trade unions in the Basque Country. As stated in the Manifesto for the future of work and organizational psychology:

"We need to create the space in our field to have open and critical debates around our research as well as its goals and its impact on society. The practical relevance of work and organizational psychology is often interpreted as the relevance of our research for various stakeholders, which usually include corporate shareholders, top-management, HR practitioners, line-staff managers and consultants. Instead, we suggest that practical relevance of work and organizational psychology implies benefits for society and individuals, which requires engaging in dialogue with decision-makers and societal actors who have a say on the conditions of work and employment in organizations, such as policy makers, civil society and trade unions" (Bal et al. 2019, p. 296).

Overall, our study constitutes an important contribution to promoting the emergence of a genuine organizational psychology in the trade union context, thus universalizing this branch of the discipline and enhancing its prestige in work and organizational psychology. It is to be hoped that organizational psychologists will now gradually increase their engagement with trade unions and design and implement interventions able to demonstrate the potential value of their discipline in this particular setting, as some are already doing (Martínez-Iñigo et al. 2020; Le et al. 2021).

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