

The present and future of EAWOP

Interview with Annemarie Hiemstra, President of EAWOP

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About the interviewee

Dr Annemarie Hiemstra has been the President of the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) since January 2022. She is an Associate Professor in Work and Organizational Psychology at the Erasmus University, Rotterdam with corporate experience in personnel selection.

Annemarie is an expert in technology-mediated personnel assessment and selection. Throughout her career she has worked at the interface between science and practice and her work primarily centres around issues of fairness in selection procedures. With her research she wants to contribute to a more inclusive society in which every student and job seeker is seen and can therefore develop their talents. This is especially important for people with a migration background. These employees more often have a disadvantaged position on the labour market (e.g., higher unemployment rate, more often working below their own education level and on temporary contracts), which may be due to differences in human capital and discrimination. Thus, Annemarie's research focuses on understanding the conditions under which there is discrimination in the personnel selection phase. In particular, she investigates the (im)possibilities of technological applications, such as video-applications and machine learning-based algorithms, to reduce discrimination and bias in personnel decisions. She recently published several peer-reviewed articles on the increasing use of artificial intelligence in selection procedures and their potential to reduce bias and discrimination. In addition, as the educational director of the Psychology programme she is currently involved in research on the admission and development of students, particularly those from underrepresented groups, such as students with a migration background and first-generation students (i.e., students who are the first in their family to attend higher education).

She frequently publishes her work in peer-reviewed journals and serves on the Editorial Board of the European Journal of Psychological Assessment and the International Journal on Selection and Assessment. Her qualities as a researcher and teacher have been recognised through various research and education grants. For example, Annemarie recently received a grant with two colleagues from the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment for a series of laboratory studies into equal opportunities for diverse applicants in recruitment and selection. In addition, she was awarded a learning and innovation grant for a PhD project on the admission into higher education of diverse students, particularly those with a migration background and first-generation

students. Moreover, the successful collaboration with scientists and professionals from various disciplines was recently marked by an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership grant fund, for an interdisciplinary project on Big Data in Psychological Assessment. Since 2017, Annemarie has served as an Executive Committee (EC) member of the EAWOP, and she is also actively involved with the Dutch Psychological Association (NIP).

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The interview

Diana: *Annemarie, congratulations on your election as EAWOP President this year! Thank you for taking the time to talk to InPractice and share some of your experiences with our readers. In this interview, I would like to talk a little bit about your career path as a work and organizational (WO) psychologist and, of course, about your thoughts regarding the future of EAWOP and our field overall.*

First, I would be interested in hearing about how you became a WO psychologist.

Annemarie: When I was younger, I did not really know what I wanted to do with my career. While I was studying psychology, I wasn't even sure whether I wanted to be a WO psychologist or not. That all changed when I did my internship as a master's student in Vietnam. This experience taught me that work and organizational psychology (WOP) matters and can contribute uniquely to improving the work and lives of people. And that was the beginning of my journey into WOP.

After graduation, I had the opportunity to pursue a PhD, but at that point I was much more eager to start working and apply what I had learned in practice. In my first job, I ended up working for the TNO, the Netherlands Organization for applied scientific research whose mission is to enable business and government to apply knowledge. As you can see, I did not completely stray away from a scientific career, but rather ended up working for an applied research institute. At the TNO I worked on some interesting projects developing and providing team training for the Royal Netherlands Navy, the Armed Forces and some large corporations. I really enjoyed these projects and noticed that I was keeping in touch with the latest scientific insights and applying them in practice.

Later I became a registered WO psychologist with the NIP and started working for GITP, one of the largest Human Resource (HR) consultancy firms in The Netherlands. Here I

became fascinated with working with new technologies for recruitment and selection, especially as they relate to fairness in the selection process. One thing I started thinking about was that people have a basic need to be seen and heard and that this is essential in the selection and recruitment process. I started wondering about the ways in which using technology (such as video resume screenings) would help or hinder a fair selection process, especially when it comes to minorities, such as immigrants. This fascination with understanding the (im)possibilities offered by new technological developments in promoting a fair selection process and inclusiveness in organizations, led me to start a PhD with Marise Born, Eva Derous and Alec Serlie at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. Mind you, I was still working as a practitioner for four days a week and working on my PhD research for one day a week. I started realising that this is a perfect combination for me: I could do research that is practically relevant and still work as a practitioner.

Diana: *This is a fascinating career trajectory that is rather uncommon in our field. Could you explain a little bit how you ended up navigating between these two worlds (the academic and practitioner one) and how you ended up in your current position?*

Annemarie: Indeed, it is rather uncommon and, of course, it brought both opportunities and challenges. For me, it was the perfect opportunity to combine research with practice. Working in the field enabled me to ask the ‘right’ questions and I could also apply my research insights in the field. But of course, there was a lot going on at the same time and I also had a young family. I was lucky to have a very supportive employer and to work with wonderful people. During this period, I realised that I was feeling more and more at home in academia, so I started taking on more academic responsibilities like teaching and supervising students. Slowly, the one ‘academic’ day became two, then three and finally, after finishing my PhD I started working full-time at the Erasmus University Rotterdam as an Assistant Professor.

Clearly, my path is not a typical one, but it worked out really well for me. I crafted myself a position that makes me really happy in academia and my practitioner experience enriches and informs a lot of the things I do, such as my research. For example, these days I am working on a number of projects assessing the fairness of technological solutions in the selection process. We know that the labour market is still plagued by social inequality with some social groups being discriminated against. In addition, over the past few years, there has been an explosion of data-driven selection methods based on artificial intelligence or machine learning algorithms which claim to provide more ‘objective’ ways to select candidates. Yet, there is little research into whether these

innovative technological solutions indeed increase fairness in the selection process or not. Gaining a better understanding of this is not only important from a scientific point of view, but it can help develop and implement practical technological solutions that increase the diversity of the labour force. And, of course, it can have policy implications when it comes to promoting more inclusive workplaces and the integration of socially disadvantaged groups in the labour force.

Diana: *Thank you for your candour! I will come back to some of the issues you touched upon a little bit later. For now, I would like to move on and talk a little bit about your involvement with the EAWOP. I know you have been involved with the EAWOP for quite some time in different roles. I would be very interested in hearing how you became involved with the EAWOP and how things have progressed over the years.*

Annemarie: My first experience with the EAWOP was as a congress participant in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. This was my first congress as a PhD student, and it felt like a warm bath. Everyone was so welcoming, and it felt like a real community that embraces you. Plus, after having worked in practice for so long, it was refreshing to be able to exchange ideas so freely with others. My next experience was as a participant in a Small Group Meeting (SGM) in 2010 on Selection and Assessment in Europe. That is, of course, a very different format, but the sense of community is there even more strongly. I still remember that SGM, because those few days with a small group of like-minded colleagues were a powerful experience. It is amazing how easy it is to speak to everyone and how intense and deep the conversations about research can get. This experience made me realise the strength of this format: people get to actually know each other and develop future collaborations. And I think that these SGMs are particularly fruitful for young academics in helping them develop their ideas and build their networks. This inspired me to organise an SGM on Applicant Behaviour with two colleagues – Marise Born and Janneke Oostrom – a few years later. It was a very successful meeting that resulted in a number of interesting collaborations and a network that is still active (www.eneser.eu).

In 2017, there was a call for new EAWOP Executive Committee (EC) members, and I decided to stand for election. I was elected in Dublin and first, I was in charge of the SGM grant programme and communications. Then in 2019 in Turin I became General Secretary, which is a much more central role with more responsibility. It has been a privilege to be part of EAWOP for many years now and to serve as an EC member for the past four years

To me, EAWOP is all about connection. You get to work with a great group of people who are all passionate about WOP. And it is such an enriching experience: you get to meet so many WO psychologists from different countries and to learn about how WOP is organised and practiced across Europe. And, of course, there is the added bonus that you get to visit different European countries and sample different cuisines. In 2021 I was asked to stand for President, since Frederik Anseel's term was ending. It was a very big honour to be asked to be the face of our community and to move it forward. Of course, I did have some doubts, but I saw it as a great opportunity and decided to go for it.

Diana: *And you won in the January General Assembly with a large majority. Again, congratulations! This brings us into my next question. I am wondering about what your vision for the future of EAWOP looks like. These are challenging times in the world and for our profession.*

Annemarie: I am honoured to be given the opportunity to continue my activities for EAWOP as incoming president. I am very grateful for the trust that the EC has given by nominating me and by the EAWOP community for electing me.

The mission of EAWOP is more important and relevant than ever before. For over 30 years now, we have been connecting WO psychologists from across Europe to contribute to meaningful and decent work, to improve management and organizations. It is such a thrill, and comfort too in these times, to know that there are psychologists across Europe who are aiming for this, to improve work and working conditions. There are 'professional soulmates' from over 27 European countries. This matters, especially now that there is a war in one of our member states, in Ukraine.

EAWOP really matters to me personally and to our field. The core of EAWOP's mission has remained the same: connecting WO psychologists and promoting the application of WOP. And I am very much looking forward to contributing towards this mission. To put things in perspective: EAWOP has grown substantially since it was founded. With growth, of course, we faced new challenges, such as how to manage growth that is sustainable while also staying true to our core, which is all about community and connection. But a lot has changed over the past two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the blink of an eye, our focus shifted from sustainable growth to crisis management. Face-to-face activities were no longer possible and the implications for our activities were tremendous. For example, we first had to postpone the May 2021 Congress in Glasgow to January 2022. Unfortunately, due to travel restrictions, we were forced to cancel the Congress entirely and this was a big disappointment to us all. We had 1400 delegates who had signed up to attend and present, so I am sure that it wasn't only us who were disappointed.

So yes, these are difficult times for us all. Right now, EAWOP has to recover from this, and I feel that it is my job to create stability and to ensure that EAWOP is future-proof. This idea also carries over into the theme of the next EAWOP Congress in 2023, to be held in Katowice, Poland, 24-27 May (<https://www.eawop2023.org>), which is “*The future is now: The changing world of work.*”

Diana: *Indeed, the cancellation of Glasgow was a big blow to us all and I am very much looking forward to seeing everyone again in person in Katowice. That being said, the last two years have not been all doom and gloom. I get the impression that we have an active and engaged community and that the pandemic has not exactly stopped us in our tracks. Perhaps you can tell us a little bit more about what has happened over the past two years and how you are planning to capitalise on these changes to make the EAWOP future-proof.*

Annemarie: Yes, it is indeed not all doom and gloom. I am happy to see that our community is resilient. After the cancellation of the Glasgow Congress, members organized EAWOP Ninja mini-conferences to share research and insights. And luckily some of the contributions are still accessible via the legacy website (<http://www.eawop.org/legacy-of-eawop-2022-glasgow-conference>). Also, our journals and activities are thriving, SGMs and the WorkLab have continued to be organised as online or hybrid events and we are currently busy organising our next Congress.

I think in terms of the future, our focus should really be on how we can increase our broader societal impact and maintain our member base. The core of EAWOP is its members and we need to engage them and show them the value that EAWOP provides.

In this respect, I am very proud of the launch of the EAWOP Impact Incubator (<https://www.eawopimpact.org/about-eawopii>). The Impact Incubator (II) really resulted from discussions in the General Assembly about how we can increase our broader impact. It is the mission of the II to engage, inform, and influence policymakers and policy-making across Europe on the basis of evidence and insights generated by WOP research and practice. This initiative is very dear to me because all of our aims converge here: translating evidence-based WOP insights into usable resources for policymakers and practitioners. So far, they have had several successful events with practitioners and policymakers (e.g., on living wages, good youth employment, decent work).

These are the types of initiatives that help us as an association move forward and become more visible and impactful within society. They connect academics with practitioners and policymakers and help spread evidence-based practice. Of course, it is not easy, and we

depend on our members and local constituents to facilitate these types of connections. EAWOP's effectiveness really depends on close relationships with our constituents and on close personal relationships.

Diana: *You have touched here upon a very important point: that impact can only be achieved via our members. If we look at the EAWOP membership, we seem to have more academic than practitioner members. I also know that there has been a lot of focus within the EAWOP, especially recently, on facilitating a better integration between science and practice. Could you share some ideas on how we can facilitate more cross-pollination and collaboration between academics and practitioners?*

Annemarie: The facilitation of discourse between scientists and practitioners has been one of the core aims of EAWOP since its founding. We have indeed, perhaps managed to attract more academic members than practitioners, but we are working very hard at increasing our reach. Clearly the II is one such recent initiative. But we do have numerous others and are planning more initiatives in the future.

For example, the EAWOP WorkLab (<http://www.eawop.org/past-worklabs>) has been going strong for ten years now. It has built a community by bringing together leading-edge academics with expert practitioners to explore different topics and innovations in practice. Also, at the 2019 Congress in Turin we dedicated a whole day of the programme to spurring collaborations between science and practice and we will continue this tradition at the 2023 Congress in Katowice. That being said, we do need to strengthen our collaborations with local psychological associations (our constituents) to increase our reach, especially among practitioners. We have over 30 national associations that are a member of EAWOP. These associations often represent many practitioners, and the active involvement of these constituents can help. Many of these practitioners work locally and in their local language. For this reason, a set of policy papers of the II has been translated by some of our members, for instance in the Romanian language. I feel that this is essential for us as an association to increase our relevance and to facilitate exchange and discussion.

We have also introduced other practitioner-oriented initiatives such as a grant programme (<http://eawop.org/practitioner-initiatives>). EAWOP desires academic-practitioner cooperation on topics that emerge in the field of practice. We are strongly encouraging practitioners to apply for these types of grants aimed at facilitating the enhancement and dissemination of WOP knowledge, the development of new professional competencies and the strengthening of existing ones.

All these events bring connections and insights that matter, inspire, and improve our work as practitioners and scientists. Still, I feel that EAWOP could be more effective, and I therefore would like to invite our members to share ideas and initiatives, please contact me or the EC any time.

Diana: *I was also wondering about a related topic that ties into the theme of the 2023 Congress as well as into what we were just discussing. What do you see as the core challenges for WOP as a profession and what role can EAWOP play in overcoming some of these challenges? For instance, how can WOP stay and/or become more relevant in the future of work?*

Annemarie: A lot of great work is done in WOP, but too often it stays within our own field. I am a strong proponent of interdisciplinary approaches to increase our reach and relevance as a science. For instance, we have witnessed an increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in personnel selection over the past few years. As WO psychologists, we should be more involved in projects that involve the use of AI in the workplace. In this respect, I have been involved in a project together with academics and practitioners from psychology and computer sciences to evaluate and improve the development and application of automated assessment, such as algorithms based on machine learning, for recruitment and selection (see also König et al., 2020; Liem et al., 2018).

Also, the theme of our next Congress in Katowice reflects this idea that, we as a community need to be at the forefront when it comes to understanding and shaping what the future world of work will look like. We want the Congress to be a call for action in collectively finding a way to answer these questions: “*Where is our voice? What must we say? How should we say it?*”. Together, we can make this happen. Furthermore, to be effective and relevant we need to reach out and make sure that WOP has a seat at the table, for instance with policymakers. This is why the II is so important and dear to me.

Diana: *Earlier on we had discussed your own career trajectory and I was fascinated to hear about your path – which is not the norm these days. If you think about careers in WOP, what advice would you give to your younger self?*

Annemarie: The first thing I would tell myself is: *Don't worry about a thing! Everything is going to be OK!* You do not have to constrain yourself to a ‘linear’ path just because everyone else tells you to do so. Dare to find out what you enjoy doing and what gives you meaning. Then you can craft your own path.

Also, as I mentioned before, at some point, I was juggling pursuing a PhD, working and taking care of a young family. These were difficult times, but I was lucky to have a very supportive partner as well as a supportive employer. GTP provided me the opportunity and freedom to pursue my PhD and combine all these roles. So, it worked out for me. I am sometimes asked how I managed to combine all of this and what advice I would give to women. I think that we are all part of a society that facilitates gendered roles, such as by considering women as the primary caregiver and men as career oriented. Women and men who do not adhere to these norms are penalised, for instance by being considered less competent or cold. We are all part of this system and I think that men are just as much stuck sometimes in these social norms as women are. Therefore, I would like to encourage both men and women to strive for more balance in the workplace and at home. It's not just the women who need advice and need to be 'fixed' to have a successful career. For instance, men can be important allies to women at work, by actively advocating for them in decision making processes. Furthermore, men can contribute to a better work-family balance by taking on caregiving tasks at home. I believe that by creating more equality, both men and women can make choices based on their strengths and interests and thrive and experience meaning in the various roles that we have in life.

Diana: *Thank you so much Annemarie! It was a pleasure talking to you and I appreciate that you took the time to share some of your thoughts.*

Annemarie: Likewise. It was a pleasure.

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