

Robert Roe

Citation for published version (APA):

Zijlstra, F., Maria Peiro, J., & Grote, G. (2016). Robert Roe: Amsterdam, 1944-Leipzig, 2016. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 25(5), 613-614.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2016.1167040>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2016

DOI:

[10.1080/1359432X.2016.1167040](https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2016.1167040)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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α Amsterdam, 1944 - Ω Leipzig, 2016

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To cite this article: Fred Zijlstra, José María Peiró & Gudela Grote (2016) Robert Roe, European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 25:5, 613-614, DOI: [10.1080/1359432X.2016.1167040](https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2016.1167040)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2016.1167040>



Published online: 11 Apr 2016.



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OBITUARY

Robert Roe

α Amsterdam, 1944 - Ω Leipzig, 2016

On Monday February 22, Robert Roe, prof. em. passed away, in a hospital in Leipzig, exactly one year after he was informed about his illness—in the city he and his wife Marika had chosen to live in because of the omnipresence of Bach’s music.

During his life, Robert was an academic “*pur sang*”: he was driven by curiosity and always had ideas and topics that should be looked into. In his own research, he covered the main themes of the Work and Organizational Psychology field. His PhD was on the topic of authoritarian personality, and from that he moved into personnel selection, and later focusing on topics like quality of work, motivation, technology and work, and work pressure. More recently, his focus was on the role of “time” in theories and constructs relating to peoples’ working life. All these topics demonstrate that Robert was not only interested in developing theoretical insight, but that there always was a practical angle in his work: how can theory be used to change our world.

During his career, Robert worked at several universities in the Netherlands, and after his retirement from Maastricht University in 2009, he held positions at various universities in other countries. His most recent position (2013–2014) was the “Leibniz Chair” at the University of Leipzig, where Wilhelm Wundt’s laboratory is by many regarded as the starting point for European psychology. In November 2015, Robert was awarded a Doctorate Honoris Causa by the University of Valencia.

Robert was very instrumental in bringing scientists from many countries together. He was one of the initiators of the European Network of Work and Organizational Psychology Professors in 1980 aiming to promote the cooperation among the W&O psychology professors in Europe. He initiated a series of conferences that later became the biannual European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) conference, and was one of the founders of the EAWOP, and became the founding President (1991). During this period, he undertook many travels across Europe as an ambassador for W&O psychology trying to bridge the gap between East and West. His success can be measured by the number of nationalities represented in EAWOP. More recently, Robert was President of the European Federation of Psychological Associations, a position he held

until August 2015. During his presidency, Robert particularly focused on trying to connect with politicians in order to make psychology heard and relevant for society. He also tried to improve the image and reputation of psychology advocating psychology vis-à-vis European policy makers at the EU level.

Robert Roe has made an enormous contribution to the development of the European Certificate in Psychology (Europsy) with the aim of contributing to the quality assurance of psychological services and of mobility of professionals in Europe. Robert also spent a great deal of effort on improving international relations in his fields of research. He has initiated, organized, and shaped collaborative projects (often involving junior researchers and PhD students) with emphasis on delivering output. He has helped building bridges between the United States and Europe, and between European countries. Moreover, he has articulated European roots, dimensions and practices in psychology, and made efforts to enhance the identity of European psychology.

He published more than 100 articles in scientific journals and about 80 book chapters and 30 books as author or editor. His highly significant contributions to psychology have been acknowledged with several awards such as the EAWOP Life Time Achievement Award, the Fellowship of the International Association of Applied Psychology, the Fellowship of the Maastricht Research School of Economics of Technology and Organization, and the Special Award for Contributions to EAWOP. He has been Visiting Professor at the Universities of Trento, Michigan, Valencia, British Columbia, Johannesburg, Sophia, and at the Technical University of Berlin. He also was General Director of the Netherlands Aeromedical Institute and Associate Director of Studies of the l’Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales de Paris. The work that Robert Roe has undertaken during his career can be characterized as original and innovative, due to the broad scope and integrative approach. By scoping issues broadly he identified gaps in previous research. His preference for integrative approaches, combining different perspectives, has helped to shed new light on known problems and identified new solutions.

One of the most important characteristics of his work has been his interest in constantly crossing borders in several respects: multilevel (individual-societal, individual-group, group-organization) multi-moment (trajectories of behavioural phenomena over time), multinational (international with strong emphasis on exchange and collaboration), multilingual (recognition of linguistic influences on theories, importance of using other languages than English), and multidisciplinary (psychology, engineering, sociology, law, economics, business, aviation). During his fruitful and intense life, Robert initiated many projects and organized numerous events across disciplines, language borders, and countries. One of his last tasks was leading a major investigation into the state of work organization research in Sweden, commissioned by one of the Swedish scientific funding agencies. He pursued this project with enormous energy and was a major inspiration for the members of the international project team, guiding them towards helping to create the basis for a possible “new Swedish model” of work organization research and practice.

Another feature of Robert’s work has been his strong emphasis on conceptual rigour and on the use of appropriate methodologies, recently in particular with respect to differential and temporal approaches. He eschewed and criticized the notion of applied psychology as contrasted with basic research where the former would imply externally valid but less rigorous research and the latter the study of narrowly defined and abstract phenomena in the laboratory. In his view, complex phenomena as occurring in real-life contexts require both basic and applied

research, this being a great challenge for psychology. Besides, Robert Roe has introduced the methodology of design (from engineering) into psychological practice, which has been seminal for the education of psychologists.

Robert’s life was work, for which he did not have enough time. Being very involved in his work did not stop him, though, from enjoying life beyond work, for instance, being an ardent lover of classical music. He was a teacher and a source of inspiration to many; his intellect and ideas were unstoppable, his brain never rested. Together with his good sense of humour and his optimistic, very rational way of thinking, he was able to change things for W&O psychology in Europe in major ways. Due to these unique qualities, Robert will always have a special place in the hearts and minds of many people across Europe and in the history of European Work and Organizational Psychology.

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