
Interview with Hoon-Seok Choi¹

by Annamaria Di Fabio²

1. **As President of the Korean Psychological Association, what challenges do you recognize for Korean applied psychology from your valuable point of view?**

Applied psychology holds immense potential to shape a better future for our communities, and reflecting on our challenges is vital for progress. From my perspective as President of the Korean Psychological Association, I recognize several pressing challenges that Korean applied psychology must address to advance in both academic and practical domains.

First, much of applied psychology still relies heavily on Western-based models, and Korean applied psychology must move beyond simply importing Western psychological models. While universal principles do exist, effective application (especially in clinical, counseling, and organizational settings) requires deep contextualization that reflects the core values, interpersonal norms, and collective dynamics that characterize Korean society. Lack of cultural understanding in theory-building and practices can lead to misdiagnosis, ineffective intervention, or even unintended harm. A critical task ahead is to foster indigenous theory-building and culturally attuned practices.

Second, Korean society is undergoing extremely rapid shifts such as digital transformation, demographic shifts due to low birth rate and population aging, a mental health crisis among the youth and the elderly, an intensely competitive educational environment, and intense workplace pressure. These rapid social changes demand timely and evidence-

¹ President, Korean Psychological Association (KPA). Full Professor of Social Psychology, Sungkyunkwan University, Seoul, Korea.

² Full Professor of Work and Organizational Psychology, and Psychology of Sustainability and Sustainable Development, University of Florence, Italy. Board of Directors of the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP).

based psychological interventions that balance innovation with enduring traditional social structures.

Finally, Korean applied psychology must build stronger bridges between academic research and real-world applications by continually advocating for the essential role of applied psychology in public policy, healthcare systems, corporate strategy, and social justice. Psychologists must collaborate more actively with policymakers, educators, healthcare professionals, and industries to ensure that psychological insights have a real social impact. To facilitate these critical activities, we must establish robust licensure systems and professional standards to ensure ethical and competent practice across all applied domains.

2. In relation to Korean applied psychology, which areas are particularly promising and also interested in increasing exchanges with European and Western countries in your valuable experience?

I recognize the following areas as especially promising for international collaboration, where our unique social context can offer novel insights. Also, these areas are rapidly growing fields that resonate globally. Combining the Western individual-centered approach with Eastern relational and community-oriented perspectives to create more holistic models of human behavior and well-being will be mutually enriching.

Organizational psychology and workplace well-being: Korean organizations are known for their distinct, often hierarchical and intense, work culture. There is immense interest in integrating Western expertise in positive organizational psychology, leadership development, and stress management with an understanding of our unique interpersonal and group dynamics (e.g., *jeong*, collectivist harmony). This exchange can enrich global models of workplace well-being, thereby contributing to creating more resilient, productive, and humane workplaces globally.

Digital and on-line behavior: As one of the world's most technologically advanced and connected societies, Korea is a living laboratory for the psychological impact of technology. Areas like gaming, online social dynamics, and the psy-

chological effects of AI and VR on social behavior offer rich ground for collaborative research and shared policy development with Western partners. In addition, Korea's advances in technology provide a strong foundation for developing digital interventions and AI-based mental health tools.

Cross-cultural counseling and clinical psychology: Given increasing globalization and multiculturalism, developing culturally-sensitive diagnostic and treatment methods is crucial. Korea's experience in adapting psychological interventions to collectivist frameworks can inform global efforts to reduce stigma and improve access to care. At the same time, gaining insights from diverse international approaches, specifically in addressing stigma and improving accessibility to mental health services, will be greatly beneficial for Korean applied psychology.

3. **Next year we will have an important world scientific event in Italy about applied psychology: the ICAP 2026 Florence, the International Conference of Applied Psychology, which will take place in Florence from July 21 to 25. Among the scholars invited we also recognize your valued attendance. Could you offer some comments about the importance of working together, with increased cooperation between Eastern and Western countries as well as from the North and the South in order to build progress and a better, balanced future and well-being for our communities?**

The ICAP 2026 in Florence will be a monumental event and a vital opportunity for the world community of psychologists to gather, share, and co-create new directions for applied psychology. In Florence, the convergence of diverse perspectives will be the catalyst for the next generation of applied psychological science, one that is equipped to build progress and well-being for all our communities. Applied psychology's mission is to solve real-world problems, and the most pressing problems today are inherently global and interconnected. In today's interconnected world, no country can face the challenges of mental health, pandemics, inequality, technological disruptions, or the environmental crisis alone. Simply put, contributing to achieving balanced

global well-being is one of the most critical missions of applied psychology. By integrating diverse cultural insights and scientific methods during the ICAP 2026, researchers and practitioners will be able to develop psychological knowledge that is both universally valid and locally relevant. In addition, commitment to global cooperation at ICAP 2026 will allow us to develop a unified ethical framework that respects cultural variations, ensuring our science is truly pluralistic and serves humanity's common good.

4. What suggestions could you offer to applied psychologists in Korea as well as to applied psychologists around the world in order to address the new challenges that surround us demanding committed contributions to applied psychological science?

Applied psychologists today face a rapidly evolving landscape. To address the new and complex challenges demanding committed contributions, I offer the following suggestions to applied psychologists.

First, maintain a strong scientific foundation. Our interventions must remain evidence-based and ethically grounded.

Second, embrace transdisciplinarity and foster interdisciplinary collaboration. Many of today's problems are *psychological* only in part; they require cooperation with fields such as data science, public policy, education, engineering, economics, and climate scientists, just to name a few.

Third, embrace cultural sensitivity and global solidarity. Psychology must serve humanity as a whole, not any single group or ideology. By listening to diverse voices and working together across borders, we can help shape a more humane and sustainable future. Fourth, focus on prevention and promotion, not just pathology. The future of applied psychology lies in proactive well-being promotion and prevention programs at community, organizational, and policy levels. We must build societal resilience and foster environments where individuals and communities flourish in harmonious ways.

Lastly, become technology-fluent. AI, VR, and digital platforms are new behavioral ecosystems. They are not

just tools, but new contexts for human behavior. We must be at the forefront of investigating their ethical use, understanding their psychological effects, and integrating them responsibly into practice.

Annamaria Di Fabio