

# Humanitarian Work Psychology

Stuart C. Carr, Malcolm MacLachlan and Adrian Furnham, Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, ISBN 978-0-230-27545-4  
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*Humanitarian Work Psychology* details the evolution of a new specialty area within the field of Industrial and Organisational (I-O) Psychology that promotes humanitarianism and social advocacy on a global scale. Recognising that organisations, perhaps even more than countries, have the capacity to advance humanitarian goals and improve the lives of vulnerable populations, this volume makes the case that I-O psychologists are particularly well-suited to lead this charge. While there is much to guide this specialty's endeavours from within the field of I-O, this body of knowledge must be properly adapted to the unique humanitarian concerns faced in non-Western, developing countries and conditions.

As this is a newly conceptualised specialty, it was necessary to build an organising structure that outlined the vision, mission, values, and competencies of the specialty while also providing guiding principles for research and practice in the area. To accomplish this, the editors brought together a group of internationally renowned thought leaders, researchers, and practitioners to lay the cornerstone for this new specialty, plot its future and highlight the strategic and tactical requirements for long-term success.

*Humanitarian Work Psychology* is organised into three sections: Conceptual Foundations, Applications and Building Capacity.

## The Evolution of a Field

One of the central issues confronted in the Conceptual Foundations section of the book, and then played out in rich contextual detail throughout the Application and Building Capacity sections, is that in order for humanitarian work psychology (HWP) to progress into a mature specialty, it must not only retain the best of what the I-O field has to offer, it must also broaden its competency requirements and transform its values structure. While I-O offers the research base, scientific rigour and practitioner expertise to tackle some of the most complex issues facing global organisations, achieving results in the humanitarian domain requires proficiency and openness to new research methods, practice techniques and multi-stakeholder in-

teractions. The Conceptual Foundations chapters address the need for this evolution by examining the 'hits and misses' of I-O psychology in this sector and then lay the groundwork for a new set of ethics, values and competencies.

Reichman and Berry (Chapter 2: The Evolution of Industrial and Organisational Psychology) provide an insightful history of I-O psychology and present the case that the I-O field's theories and scientific advances should be leveraged in the service of one of the most intransigent challenges facing the world today, the reduction of poverty. While the authors concede that the field has 'missed the mark' in certain instances (e.g., dealing with labour unions) and advanced somewhat haltingly to the table on humanitarian issues, there are significant signs of progress in this area, particularly in the area of corporate social responsibility and promoting the wellbeing of the employee. Reichman and Berry outline how evolving I-O skill sets and scientific evidence can serve as a framework for impacting a variety of humanitarian issues. Their conclusions are reinforced throughout the book as demonstrated by the examples below. The key caveat, however, is that I-O expertise must be adapted to cultural context and local conditions. This requires that researchers and practitioners develop cultural competence in order to meaningfully leverage their expertise.

## Developing Cultural Competence

Tumwebaze and MacLachlan (Chapter 7: Motivating the Teacher Workforce in Uganda) outline a number of issues related to teacher retention, motivation, pay, and performance that are impacting Uganda's quality of education and ultimately its national development and poverty reduction. These issues fall squarely within the domain and expertise of the I-O psychologist. Tumwebaze and MacLachlan explain that in order to be effective in translating this expertise, it is essential that the work psychologist understand the cultural and contextual factors at play and that an exploration of Western psychology constructs would be necessary as part of this effort. Cultural sensitivity and competence is described as a

fundamental characteristic for an HWP practitioner's success in this specialty.

Ng, Chan and Hui (Chapter 10: Personnel Psychology for Disaster Response and Recovery), outline the recruitment, selection and training needs associated with addressing disaster response and recovery efforts. It is their contention as well that I-O psychology has a multitude of theories, research, and tools that can be readily adapted to this context. They note that there are no standard — or commonly accepted — methods for selecting disaster relief workers. As such, the authors assembled a list of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) for frontline aid workers and leaders in disaster relief. While future work is needed to confirm the predictive power of these KSAOs, this is another example of how I-O expertise can be leveraged within a humanitarian context. The authors also note that it is critical to consider local communities and conditions when designing tools for this purpose, reinforcing the need for cultural competence among humanitarian work psychologists (HWPs).

McWha, Carr and MacLachlan (Chapter 4: Facilitating the Process of Globally Distributed Development-Focused Research Teams) further illustrate that research and practice on an international stage must be adapted to non-Western, developing countries. Discussed in the context of facilitating globally distributed teams, the authors offer highly practical guidance for the development of cultural competence, which is to follow the five principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005). These principles were developed as a process for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and focus on: ownership, alignment, harmonisation, results orientation, and accountability. The authors adapted and combined these principles with established research on team building and organisational justice to not only accomplish a major cross-cultural undertaking and the first large-scale project grounded in HWP (Project ADD-UP), they were also able to formulate best practices guidelines for HWP project management. The Paris Declaration principles represent an outstanding framework to operationalise cultural competence for work psychologists.

Cultural competence was cited by the majority of the authors in the Applications and Building Capacity sections of the book as a key consideration and developmental area for I-O psychologists hoping to have an impact and effectively overcome challenges associated with economic, political and cultural diversity. Burt (Chapter 14: The Importance of Trust to the Funding of Humanitarian Work) and Baguma and Furnham (Chapter 15: Attributions for and the Perceived Effects of Poverty in East Africa: A Study from Uganda) also provide a thought-provoking exploration of the role that cultural competence (embodied by the Paris Declaration principles) plays for driving trust and accountability at the organisational level.

## **Beyond Cultural Competence**

Saner and Yiu (Chapter 6: The New Diplomacies and Humanitarian Work Psychology) envision an ambitiously broad and significant role for humanitarian work psychology to the extent that its professionals can acquire and fine tune a set of diplomatic skills that are needed to advance the humanitarian agenda on the world stage. The authors contend that in order to effect large-scale social change in international humanitarian and development work, work psychologists must be able to effectively manage and ensure alignment between large numbers of different stakeholders (e.g., government ministries, NGOs, business organisations, multilateral organisations). This obviously extends beyond just cultural competence. Proficiency at this level requires the combination of a diplomatic mindset and competencies along with I-O and organisational development expertise. The authors also recommend that HWPs be familiar with the 'New Diplomacies', which refer to a set of techniques for addressing transformative change across multiple stakeholders and which can be applied to generate solutions to long-term humanitarian and development issues. Saner and Yiu present two highly informative case studies to demonstrate how the New Diplomacies can be successfully applied in the context of the International Labor Organization's decent work agenda and aid for trade. By becoming a 'development diplomat', Saner and Yiu believe that HWPs can help drive political, economic and social policies associated with their long-term agendas.

The application of diplomatic skills and the ability to leverage the New Diplomacies are clearly not something that can be learned overnight. In fact, Saner suggests in Chapter 9 that I-O psychologists interested in international work should strive to build a broadened knowledge base including continuing education in fields such as political science, international relations, international law and also gaining experience in large-system change which is multi-stakeholder, multi-institutional and international (see Chapter 9, pp. 204–205).

## **Confronting Fundamental Values**

Lefkowitz (Chapter 5: From Humanitarian to Humanistic Work Psychology: The Morality of Business) concedes the usefulness of leveraging existing I-O research to the humanitarian domain, but argues forcefully for a broadened perspective on the role of HWP that incorporates socially conscious and employee-centred values at its core. He advocates an expanded vision of work psychology that addresses not only organisational but community and societal consequences. By shifting the profession's value orientation to a more humanistic model, HWP will be better positioned to drive positive societal change. The author's expanded model provides a moral and normative compass from which scientists and practitioners can orient their work. A well-illustrated example of Lefkowitz's model in action is reflected in Schein's chapter (Chapter

**Table 1**

HWP: Demand and Supply

Category	Demand	Supply
Community	The power/resource differential between donor countries and host countries presents unique challenges for work dynamics	Conduct research on effective management techniques and cross-cultural collaboration in low-resource countries
Institutional	Need to improve management of natural disasters and climate change	Convert rigorous, empirical I-O research into practices that will increase organisational and community capacity to effectively respond to disasters and climate change (e.g., selection and training of aid workers)
Organisational	Enable capacity for psychometric tests to analyse entrepreneurship in developed and developing countries	Implement automated screening tools to allow banks to predict outcomes like business performance and loan repayment behavior
Occupational	Develop work environments that are rewarding enough to retain, and pull back health workers who have left home	Analysis and development of selection, development, and engagement strategies

11: Women, Work and Poverty: Reflections on Research for Social Change) where she describes the use of social advocacy research to promote social change. Schein demonstrates through two field studies that research with a humanistic agenda is absolutely necessary for meaningful change. The particular research tools that she employed (experiential idea generation, compassion in context and research for change) were specifically designed to improve work and life conditions for women and influence change at the policy level.

Schein acknowledges that advocacy research clearly involves a paradigm shift from the traditional 'values-free' research designs. However, this approach aligns well with HWP's pro-social agenda and Lefkowitz's call for a more broadly conceived humanistic agenda for work psychology.

### The Law of Supply and Demand

Carr (2007) previously provided an insightful framework for mapping the core competencies of the I-O discipline against the challenges faced by organisations tackling the MDGs. Other researchers (Berry, Reichman, Klobas, MacLachlan, Hui, & Carr, 2009; Thompson, 2009) have also described the viable role that organisational psychologists can play in global poverty reduction. Carr expands on this work in two superbly integrated chapters (Chapter 8: Quo Vadis Interviews in Practice — Demand; and Chapter 9: Quo Vadis Interviews in Practice — Supply) to further flesh out how I-O psychologists can apply their discipline to addressing significant humanitarian demands. He accomplishes this task through a series of interviews with leading researchers and practitioners and has organised their responses into six categories, along a continuum from broad political to individual. The information contained in these two chapters is insightful, detailed and dovetails nicely with other chapters in the volume. A few highlights from these two chapters are presented in Table 1.

The interviews contained within these chapters and the work reported in this volume provide a comprehensive collection of demands within the humanitarian sector that are accompanied by ideas for 'supplying' solutions to meet

these demands. This work and these interviews should be continued and expanded to further flesh out areas where the skills and expertise of work psychologists can be applied. This will be essential for educating and engaging a new generation of I-O psychologists who represent the future of this specialty.

Other areas of competence ('supply') that were identified throughout this volume include:

- gender and diversity research and program development
- talent selection and development
- corporate social responsibility research and initiatives
- entrepreneurship (enterprise development)
- occupational health and safety
- teams and team leadership
- performance management
- research design
- compensation and pay equity analyses; program evaluation and the development of key outcome metrics.

### Leveraging Technological Innovation

Rapid advancements in computer technology and the explosive growth of the Internet over the past decade have led to a significant shift in the way talent solutions are designed and delivered. This phenomenal growth has been primarily facilitated by a dramatic increase in the speed, stability, and number of Internet connections around the world. It stands to reason that new technologies could be leveraged in the service of humanitarian goals.

Atkins and Thompson (Chapter 12: Online Volunteers and SmartAid) describe an ingenious technological application of I-O practice to enhance the talent solutions applied to disaster, poverty relief, and general humanitarian initiatives. Their program, still under development, is termed 'SmartAid'. SmartAid is a web-based system designed for selecting and training online volunteers for aid project teams. By matching the talent profiles needed by aid agencies with volunteers possessing the required talent dimensions, a shortlist of candidates can be established that are compatible with the targeted projects. Training

can then be tailored as needed, based upon any developmental gaps identified through the online assessment. Importantly, the vision for this tool is to extend the application beyond person-job fit to person-job-recipient fit, so that the needs of the local communities receiving aid are taken into account. Ultimately, the tool will be extended to cover job analysis, performance management, adaptive testing (which could assess cultural knowledge and competence), realistic job previews, matching projects to people, creating blended teams, training and development, and volunteer career progression. As the authors note, this is simply the application of solid I-O practice to solving how aid agencies engage volunteers. While the SmartAid program is still in development, it holds incredible promise for raising the standards associated with volunteerism and ensuring that talent management process is standardised, yet adapted to local needs.

Although Internet access and usage are rapidly becoming more widespread, it is not yet universal and, in fact, there are some important demographic differences in access that have implications for the deployment of web-based systems. Gloss, Glavey and Godbout (Chapter 13: Building Digital Bridges: The Digital Divide and Humanitarian Work Psychology's Online Networks) argue that technology can be a double-edged sword if the 'digital divide' excludes the intended recipients of humanitarian efforts. The digital divide is a term that is used to describe the gap between those individuals who have access to various telecommunications technologies and those who do not. The authors note that HWP's increasingly leverage online resources to set their agenda, solicit volunteers, and accomplish their mission and that care should be taken to involve individuals, organisations and communities from lower-income settings when setting up online communities and other development activities. The authors provide a series of recommendations for bridging the digital divide that adhere to the Paris Declaration — which prioritises voice and participation. The point is to not exacerbate cultural biases in the international development system through applications that are designed to make it more effective.

### Quo Vadis

*Humanitarian Work Psychology* set out to serve as a springboard and provide the foundation for a newly conceptual-

ized specialty. It handily succeeded. This volume illustrates how the science and practice of I-O psychology can be extended into a bona fide specialty area that concerns itself with breaking the cycle of poverty, creating sustainable livelihoods, empowering at-risk individuals, and translating a humanitarian, equal-rights agenda into actionable development strategies.

While the authors believe that capacity building and the internalisation of an evolved values structure will propel the HWP specialty forward, this volume also presents numerous examples of work that is currently having a significant humanitarian impact. This aligns with the distinction that the editors make regarding two branches of HWP effort: (1) a psychology of humanitarian work; and (2) a work psychology that is humanitarian. The former involves a more immediate application of I-O work to humanitarian agencies and workers, while the latter requires work psychology to drive a humanitarian agenda across all of its activities. HWP as a specialty will no doubt evolve towards this ideal, as many professionals cited in this volume already have. In the meantime, the research, practice, and learning discussed in this volume will surely serve to advance the field's impact and support HWP's ambitious agenda.

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