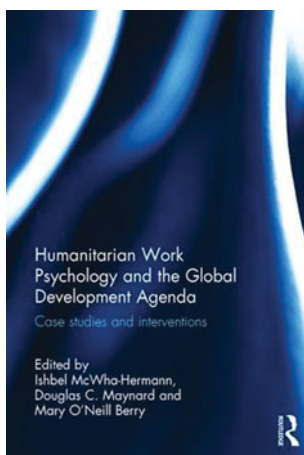


## BOOK REVIEW



# Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda: Case Studies and Interventions

**Ishbel McWha-Hermann, Douglas C. Maynard and Mary O'Neill Berry (eds)\***

**Book review by Ashley J. Hoffman**, North Carolina State University, and **Drew B. Mallory**, Purdue University

⋮⋮⋮⋮⋮

Entrenched in human resources, leadership development and Fortune 500 selection systems, industrial and organizational (I-O) psychology is the study of human psychology in the workplace. I-O psychologists employ an empirical approach to selection, training and performance management in order to improve the profitability and overall success of organizations. I-O psychology has not classically been known for a focus on the humanitarian pursuits and organizations of the world. However, recent years have seen the growth of humanitarian work psychology (HWP) as a subfield of I-O, focused on translating research and application of traditional I-O principles to improving human welfare. With this increased interest in the ability and responsibility of I-O psychologists to contribute to the “greater good” has come a strong call for more information and research on effective methods of transferring I-O across humanitarian contexts. This book is among a growing number of publications taking steps to address the poverty of concrete scholarly literature addressing HWP concerns, but is unique in its approach to and organization of the subject matter. The book is broadly targeted to researchers and practitioners who work within the social sciences (e.g., psychology,

\* Published by Routledge, London, 2016.

sociology, anthropology), economics or international development fields, as well as professionals who are involved with the United Nations (UN). Uniquely, the volume uses the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of global aspirations to reduce poverty and improve human well-being, as a thematic matrix into which the chapters and examples are funnelled. By using case examples and thoughtful treatises against this backdrop, the book seeks to address how organizations and the way they work can impact global development in both small- and large-scale operations.

In line with the current enthusiasm within work psychology for applying science for the betterment of humanity (versus corporations), the book seeks to recount the work of organizations and individuals that have contributed to the research and practice of HWP while documenting how these specific contributions have furthered both the field of I-O psychology and the UN's goals related to poverty reduction, social justice and equality. For example, a large project was undertaken by researchers affiliated with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, whereby the authors used traditional I-O psychology principles and research related to goal-setting to improve the motivation and performance of front-line health workers in rural India. This project not only contributed to I-O psychology's understanding of the viability of goal-setting theory in a developing setting, but also improved the distribution of maternal and youth health care.<sup>1</sup> Collectively, the book makes a compelling case that it is possible to both conduct research toward this purpose and make a measurable impact through targeted interventions.

For the practitioner, or for the applied management or psychological scholar, the text is rife with practical applications of a wide spread of completed and ongoing projects. Yet the volume is also packed with descriptive processes that aid and development workers use during the implementation of initiatives, and poignant meditations on the state of the field, the responsibility of I-O psychology in contributing to the greater good, and how the MDGs will dovetail into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As this book is a collection of research and practice from a variety of professions and interests, the contributors come from different backgrounds, with aid and development workers and practitioners writing alongside traditional I-O psychology scientists. With the authors' welcome menagerie of scholastic and professional backgrounds comes also a colourful showcase of practices in a variety of countries and communities. This addresses the oft-repeated cry to avoid a WEIRD-centric (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic) narrative, particularly in both psychology and the aid and development sector. This assortment is balanced against the contributions of many well-known figures in HWP and the work of many interesting and recognizable organizations. Of note, IBM's projects in Nigeria,<sup>2</sup> the more mainstream processes

- 1 Rustin Meyer, Ruth Kanfer and Carla Burrus, "Improving Motivation and Performance among Frontline Healthcare Workers in Rural India: The Role of Team-Based Goals and Incentives", in *Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda*.
- 2 Mathian Osiki, "Leadership Development via Humanitarian Work: IBM's Efforts in Nigeria", in *Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda*.

employed in corporate sustainability and the UN's Global Compact partnerships,<sup>3</sup> and the variety of "calls to action"<sup>4,5</sup> all combine into an informative and compelling piece about the state of HWP, the gaps in research and practice, and the roles that need to be created or filled moving forward, such as additional research in developing contexts and the increased relevance of a strong ethical base.

While many similar compendia include a redundant opening chapter, the editors' introduction makes for hearty and essential reading. They provide a strong overview of the MDGs, as well as the burgeoning area of HWP. In addition, readers are offered a tour through the format of the book, split into articles addressing practical applications, specific processes, and reflections and projections, each related to the MDGs. The quick overviews of each chapter and the helpful categorizing visuals that filter the chapters according to UN objective are both helpful inclusions. Similarly, the book's conclusion is not to be missed – it's a poignant piece that leaves the reader feeling a renewed sense of responsibility to "push the boundaries of our discipline" and "move both toward a more psychological approach to international development and humanitarian aid, as well as the more humanitarian treatment of all people in the workplace".<sup>6</sup>

The book is then delineated into three main portions. First, the editors identify those chapters that attend to the application of HWP to the resolution of the MDGs. These chapters largely focus on previous initiatives that have used HWP functionally in order to address tangible issues on the ground. These chapters read as a kind of guidebook of "lessons learned" from experienced practitioners. The second portion of the book highlights the processes and empirical considerations to which one should attend when designing and implementing development work. These research-oriented chapters detail the individual and organizational level predictors and outcomes that may direct the impact and success of aid and development efforts. Finally, the third section of the book emphasizes the role that HWP should take outside of the yoke of the MDGs, particularly delving into the ethical considerations that I-O psychologists at large should examine, how individual contributors can contribute to the global development agenda, and the importance of continued momentum with the advent of the SDGs.

The global community continues to increase in interconnection and access to information. For example, sustainability, once considered a buzzword, has broadened from its original natural environmental conceptualization to encompass the sustainability of corporations within the legal, ethical and social environments in which they exist. It is thus crucial that professional fields such as

3 Sean Cruze, "Organizational Change to Advance Corporate Sustainability: Achieving Greater Societal Impact through Partnerships", in *Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda*.

4 Telma Viale, "Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Millennium Development Goals: Where Do I Begin?", in *Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda*.

5 Joel Lefkowitz, "The Maturation of a Profession: A Work Psychology for the New Millennium", in *Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda*.

6 Mary O'Neill Berry, Ishbel McWha-Hermann and Douglas C. Maynard, "Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Millennium Development Goals: Taking Stock and Looking Forward", in *Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda*.

I-O psychology also adapt to this change in order to remain relevant to organizations, both domestically and abroad, to speak meaningfully to the true needs of corporations, and to design change management strategies to bring companies and their employees smoothly into the global community. This book admirably highlights the work that has been done to this point, but it also serves as a subtle reminder that the field of psychology (and the area of HWP specifically) has a great deal of research and work to do in order to truly understand and significantly impact the aid and development field. This is evident in some of the idiosyncratic textual and methodological oddities that appear, such as contradictory statistics, contextual holes and omitted final outcomes. Indeed, the most potentially impactful section of the book, which covers empirical studies,<sup>7</sup> has only a few studies that explicitly identify the MDGs affected by the research, and little space has been given by the editors or authors to disclosing how the research outcomes added to the goals' progress or changed practices. Another somewhat overlooked area is the overall language and tone of the book, which will read familiarly to scholars but will undoubtedly seem alien at times to UN and other aid officials, who have called for the field to adapt its presentation to suit the needs of the broader international development community.<sup>8</sup> To address this gap in application, the Society for Industrial-Organizational Psychology has formed an advisory committee, responding to requests from the UN to consult on matters related to the UN Economic and Social Council and engage with the Psychology Coalition at the UN.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, far from a deep criticism of the book, we see these misses as honest portrayals of the field at large and welcome reminders of areas for collective improvement.

As mentioned above, there has been a significant dearth of publications related to the subject of HWP, mostly due to the novelty of the topic. There are two quite notable exceptions, however: *Humanitarian Work Psychology*<sup>10</sup> and *Using Industrial-Organizational Psychology for the Greater Good: Helping Those Who Help Others*.<sup>11</sup> Like the present volume, these books are exceptional pieces; though not necessarily required pre-reading, they provide a deep overview of HWP and the role that psychologists can (and should) play in contributing to the betterment of society. *Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda* is just one in what promises to be a great number of books devoted to highlighting and promoting the work that professionals in the psychology field are doing to further the international development community's

7 Part II, "Process Considerations in Applying Humanitarian Work Psychology to the Millennium Development Goals", in *Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda*.

8 Drew B. Mallory *et al.*, "News from the SIOP-United Nations Team", *The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, Vol. 52, No. 1, 2014.

9 "SIOP and the United Nations", available at [www.siop.org/Prosocial/UN.aspx](http://www.siop.org/Prosocial/UN.aspx) (accessed in August 2016).

10 Stuart C. Carr, Malcolm MacLachlan and Adrian Furnham (eds), *Humanitarian Work Psychology*, Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2012.

11 Julie Olson-Buchanan, Laura L. Koppes Bryan and Lori Foster Thompson (eds), *Using Industrial-Organizational Psychology for the Greater Good: Helping Those Who Help Others*, Routledge, London, 2013.

work and the new SDGs. It is imperative that psychology continues to publish empirical and theoretical research that speaks to the importance and relevance of the social sciences in solving local and global issues and improving human welfare, without sacrificing the methods and rigour endemic to the field. Professor or practitioner, tyro or old-timer, let this book be a launching point for an improved understanding and appreciation of the nexus between the psychological sciences and the world.

