

CSEND DIALOGUE FORUM



Humanitarian Work Psychology: Emerging New Domain of Knowledge?

A Round Table and Book Launch

at

World Council of Churches, Geneva, 4th May 2012

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Summary of Discussions¹

18th May 2012

¹ Minutes were prepared by Caitlin McCarthy, CSEND and reviewed by the speakers.

Description and Objective of the Roundtable :

This is the first roundtable held in Geneva to discuss the topic of *Humanitarian Work Psychology* (HWP). Objective of this roundtable is to explore the relevance and scope of HWP and to launch the first publication with the same title (2012) in this domain.

This roundtable was held at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland on 4th May 2012.

Participants:

Rene Boeckli, M.A., Stress Management Advisor, Security and Crisis Management Unit,
International Committee of the Red Cross

Stuart Carr, Ph.D., Professor, Poverty Research Group, School of Psychology, Massey
University, Auckland, New Zealand

Hannele Haggman, M.Sc. Health Counselor, Human Resources Department, International
Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Jovan Kurbalija, Ph.D., Director, Diplo Foundation, Geneva

Mac MacLachlan, Ph.D., Professor, Centre for Global Health & School of Psychology, Trinity
College, University of Dublin

Norah Niland, M.A., Researcher, Centre on Conflict, Development and Peace building,
Graduate Institute of International Development Studies

Raymond Saner, Ph.D., Director, Diplomacy Dialogue, CSEND, Geneva

Cornelio Sommaruga, LL.D., Former President, International Committee of the Red Cross

Lichia Saner Yiu, Ed.D., President, Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development (CSEND)

1. Introductory Considerations

Dr. Lichia Saner-Yiu welcomed the presenters, discussants, and other members of the Geneva international community to the roundtable discussion regarding Humanitarian Work Psychology. She provided an introduction to the agenda for the session, in which participants would aim to validate the topic of HWP, trying to see if this domain of knowledge is new and what it contributes. Dr. Saner Yiu proceeded to introduce the three presenters for their opening remarks.

2. Main Meeting Report

2.1. Introducing the topic of Humanitarian Work Psychology: Origin and context of this new domain of knowledge of social psychology

Professor Stuart Carr began the introduction by explaining that although the book *Humanitarian Work Psychology* is an edited collection, it is owned by its contributors, who come from varying sectors and countries to deliver their unique perspectives. Professor Carr explained that the goal of the roundtable discussion is to delineate what is different and new about the field of HWP.

Poverty reduction work is often emphasized at the macro or micro level, yet the organizations that are essential in ensuring the success of this work are forgotten. Humanitarian work psychologists offer the strength of measurement, in that they can measure the personality,

ability, and corporate social responsibility of an organization. HWP also contributes to advocacy, in that it takes a different approach to advocate for underrepresented groups. Furthermore, HWP offers highly exploratory research, rather than the traditional research of evaluation or consultancy.

Professor Carr provided the example of ADD UP, a project that examined the common dual salary system in humanitarian organizations. A dual salary system exists when international humanitarian workers are paid higher wages than development workers from the country a mission is based in. ADD UP conducted the first systematic study of dual salary and what this system means to people on the ground working in aid. The HWP study used case examples of land locked, island, and transitional economy countries to assess the impact of the dual salary system. The sample was comprised of local workers that were just as well qualified as international workers, but received different pay. These local workers felt as though the dual salary system is unjust, demotivating, and a structure that promotes “brain drain” in developing nations. The HWPs concluded that this wage gap needs to be closed for the MDGs to be taken seriously. Furthermore, the ADD UP program provides a clear example of measurement, in the measurement of salary and demotivation, advocacy, in that the project was published, and research, as it established the dual salary system as an international issue.

Professor MacLachlan argued that he did not see the idea of humanitarian work psychology as a magic bullet, but believes it is an incremental improvement that adds to humanitarian work. He also emphasized the three tenets of HWP namely measurement, advocacy, and research that are vital to HWP. Professor MacLachlan stated that HWP offers a unique combination of strengths in assessing the problems that organizations tackle, and the problems that organizations create for themselves.

2.2. Scoping the boundary of HWP and definition

Professor Saner raised the question: what is the emerging field of HWP? Professor Saner provided two examples of what HWP can offer in the international system. First, he stated that HWP can contribute to conflict resolution, exemplified by the current tension in Colombia. In Colombia, FARC, ENL, and the Colombian army are paralyzing each other in a military stalemate, and in the process are keeping remote villages out of contact with humanitarian agencies like the ICRC. In this conflict situation, it is vital to understand how to communicate with these actors, the logistics of delivering food to villages, and how to negotiate and find a compromise that holds in order to sustain the system of food delivery. HWP can offer the necessary mindmap and competencies required to build alliances across political, social, and psychologic boundaries.

In his second example, Professor Saner demonstrated how HWP can be effective in supporting the implementation of a “decent work” agenda and by achieving sustainable humanitarian and development work. HWP can help to enable government agencies in achieving sustainable economic development through collaborating across sectors and hierarchical structures. Furthermore, HWP can facilitate development beyond the diagnosis of the problem, as it can help organizations understand politics in order to break in and create sustainable change.

In the opinion of Dr. Saner, he views HWP as a composite of different competencies. First, HWP practitioners should have sector specific know-how, e.g. with regard to health, education, food, water, etc. Additionally, a HWP practitioner should be competent in individual

psychology, in that he/she can take care of victims who have survived humanitarian crises. Simultaneously, the HWP expert should be knowledgeable of group psychology and sociology, economics and management. HWP as a new domain of competence offers a holistic and at the same time specific know-how which helps humanitarian experts face and manage conflict resolution and economic development.

2.3. Discussant's Remarks

2.3.1. Chapter 10: Personnel psychology for disaster response and recovery by Eddie Chi Wy NG, Sally CHANG, and Harry HUT

Remarks by Ms. Hannele Haggman, M.Sc., Health Counselor, Human Resources Department, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

In regards to the four competencies of HWP, Ms. Haggman is primarily concerned with staff health issues. In Chapter 10, there were discussions that people needed training in order to work in humanitarian aid. As the idea of humanitarian work has shifted from temporary to more professional interventions, she believes that training is essential to prevent staff stress. Ms. Haggman stressed that organizations should employ different ways of teaching coping methods to staff, such as having hands-on training and field schools in developing countries in order to prepare them for the difficulties in humanitarian work. She also stated that emphasis should be placed on psychological preparedness, and that organizations should have counselors in the field to help staff. Before the staff starts working, they should understand what the organization can offer in regards to stress management, ranging from coping with security issues or team management problems. Not only is it important that the delegates are trained, she stressed the importance of the selection of delegates, stating that it was important that organizations are mindful of who is recruited and deployed for particular disaster and humanitarian situations and that it is equally important to train the local staff to help them prepare for cooperation with expatriate staff.

2.3.2. Chapter 5: From humanitarian to humanistic work psychology: The morality of business by Joel LEFKOWITZ

Remarks by Ms. Norah Niland, M.A., Researcher, Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding, Graduate Institute of International Development Studies

Ms. Niland began by describing that she ended up as a humanitarian worker by accident, starting from her work on the Thailand/Cambodian border in 1986. She worked by helping refugees through establishing community support services in order to help alleviate the social problems that existed within the closed refugee camps. Ms. Niland gave a personal anecdote about a conversation with a psychologist while she was in the field, who said that aid workers need as much psychological help as refugees did. She placed a strong emphasis on the professionalization of humanitarian work, noting that humanitarian workers must maintain their commitment to humanitarian values even as their organizations grow in size facing increasingly complex situations in the field.

Ms. Niland did assert, however, that with growing complexity there is a greater chance of core values becoming “institutional orphans”. She gave the example of working in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime, where institutional support mechanisms were not easily available which put lives of aid workers in danger however the humanitarian workers were able to

maintain their values because of strong group cohesion. In contrast, Afghanistan during 2002 and 2008 was a different environment. With the increase in international actors causing fragmentation in the field, made it difficult to adhere to core values. Overall, she stressed that the unique essence of humanitarian work is being a life saver, and should be recognized as such. Ms. Niland expressed doubt whether humanitarian values can be shared by actors like profit oriented businesses that might endanger humanitarian values due to the profit oriented behaviour.

2.3.3. Chapter 6: The New Diplomacies and Humanitarian Work Psychology by Raymond SANER & Lichia YIU

Remarks by Dr. Jovan Kurbalija, Director, Diplo Foundation

Dr. Kurbalija believes it is essential to have discussions between professionals and academics in different fields regarding humanitarian diplomacy, not only to simply discuss but also to develop frameworks for implementation. When investigating humanitarian diplomacy, he stressed that he is not focusing on Diplomacy with a large “D”, referring to the traditional, bureaucratic diplomacy; rather that he is referring to diplomacy with a small “d”, which refers to diplomatic action on the ground as a means to solve conflict in modern society. At a macro level, humanitarian diplomacy is coming into focus at the right time. He argued that the idea of diplomacy does not have a good public image, with its image of elitism, black limousines and villas. However, he said humanitarian diplomacy can be successful if discrepancy between the image and reality can be closed.

Dr. Kurbalija argued that although diplomacy is not an ethically superior way of solving conflict, it is necessary because of increasing interdependence of our societies. Interdependence, in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, puts diplomacy at a level that is exceedingly important in solving conflict in modern society. He further asserted that diplomacy is not just an academic discussion and that diplomacy needs to be public, giving the example of ACTA in Europe. The public was frustrated that ACTA negotiators worked behind closed doors at the OECD without involvement of the public with regard to internet censorship. When the agreement went public, NGOs violently objected and negotiations were thus torpedoed. Mr. Kurbalija called for fundamental changes that bring together the internet and the demand for new values. In humanitarian work, he argued, there are too many models and systems that suppress the human instinct to act. Diplomacy is an art that works from the bottom-up, and he stated that with new humanitarian diplomacy, there is a need to revisit the core values of society.

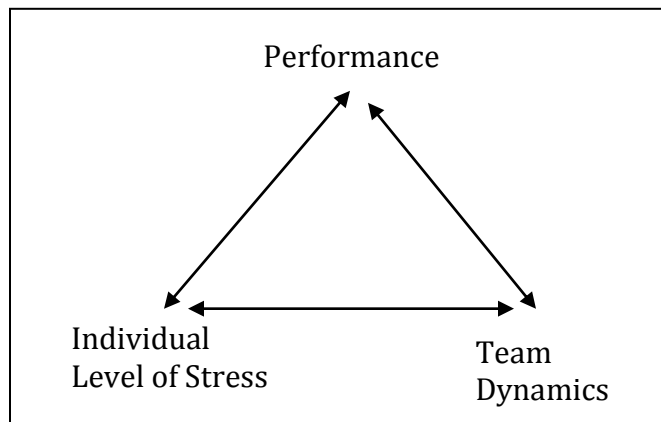
Mr. Kurbalija then specifically discussed humanitarian diplomacy in the IFRC, and highlighted three tensions in the system. The first tension exists between Diplomacy and bottom-up diplomacy, in that bottom-up diplomacy aims for compromise, which Diplomacy does not appreciate and considers less heroic. The second tension exists between values and pragmatism. The last tension is the challenge of interprofessional communication, in that people within different fields of knowledge and competencies do not assign the same meaning to the same words. The way in which issues are framed is important, and people within the same field are able to relate because of similar framing, but professionals in the same country working in different fields would find it extremely difficult.

3. Open Discussion

3.1. Mr. Rene Boeckli, Stress Management Advisor, Security and Crisis Management Unit, International Committee of the Red Cross

Mr. Boeckli began by stressing the importance evidence based research on stress, as stated earlier by Prof. MacLachlan. It is in his experience that he meets people coming back from the field, where people saw and heard torture victims and testimonies, but that said the most stressful part about field work was their relationships with bosses and peers. Those statements made Mr. Boeckli indicate how poor the support system for staff is in humanitarian work. As a comparison, a reference is social workers, who are exposed to 10% of the terrible things that humanitarian workers see, but who have a support system that is ten times as comprehensive and effective. Part of the problem is that humanitarian workers go to the field to help others, but not to talk about themselves. Most feel uncomfortable talking about their small problems when they are faced with people who have suffered through much more awful experiences.

Mr. Boeckli presented an illustration of his point of views as follows:



He argued that when individual ICRC delegates are stressed, they cannot perform well and have a negative direct influence on team dynamics. In such a moment humanitarian work psychology can offer something because they would focus exclusively on the individual in that movement, a place where clinical PTSD treatment is insufficient. He said that there is a need to link team dynamics and individual performance, because the individual is conditioned by the team and the team is influenced by the individual. Although there is some peer support within teams to diffuse stress, it is informal, and could be strengthened through organizational structures. Poor performance is extremely demotivating to the team and the individual, but field teams are altered so frequently that team dynamics and performance are unpredictable.

3.2. Cornelio Sommaruga, Former President, International Committee of the Red Cross

When Dr. Sommaruga was president of the ICRC, he had to work far away from delegations even though he made an effort to be in the field and to understand the situation confronting the delegates. He expressed a deep interest in the idea of dual salaries, and the tension that exists between humanitarian workers and development workers. Such duality was prevalent during his presidency. This tension created psychological problems, as delegation employees were

demotivated by these discrepancies. He commended the ICRC in having recently put in place a homogenous salary system.

Although training has always been an important component of humanitarian work, he noted that what was missing during his presidency was the psychological training. He commented on Afghanistan, as he was also confronted with Afghanistan in time of Taliban, stating that the ICRC achieved a lot to be able to work and connect with the Taliban. He highlighted that the ICRC fought against discrimination against women in hospitals and had great success in eliminating these issues.

Dr. Sommaruga stated that humanitarian diplomacy in the ICRC was one of his major activities, not in directly solving conflicts but in constantly convincing leaders to respect international humanitarian law and to take care of victims. He gave the example of Chechnya where 6 ICRC staff was assassinated in total disrespect of the Geneva Convention. As a consequence, he convened all Ambassadors responsible for humanitarian matters stationed in Geneva to come to the ICRC and to listen to his call of countries' obligations to respect and implement the Geneva conventions. He asserted that he worked in indirect support of the work in the field through humanitarian diplomacy. Lastly, he argued that security is something to be dealt with at all levels, from the field to the head office.

3.3. Response: Prof. Mac MacLachlan, Centre for Global Health & School of Psychology, Trinity College, University of Dublin

When Prof. MacLachlan asked humanitarian workers to rank the top stressors in their work, they consistently pointed to other workers, whether within their own organization or from outside, as their main source of stress. In the field, worker adrenaline is so high because they feel compelled to do good work. Thus, when they see other workers doing something slightly different, it is very difficult and frustrating, and problems in the field are often exacerbated by team relations.

Prof. MacLachlan noted that he is enthusiastic about the creation of a Museum of Diplomacy, an idea offered by Dr. Kurbalija, in order to examine what was done and how it was done. He thinks it is extremely vital to study the diplomatic processes that helped solve serious situations.

3.4. Response: Prof. Stuart Carr, Poverty Research Group, School of Psychology, Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand

Prof. Carr noticed that the discussants were talking about interorganizational relationships, but that it was in reference to the organization with a small "o"; thus concerning the workers in the field who keep humanitarian values on the table. He then referred to the diagram by Mr. Boeckli, stating that often team climate is also used to describe team dynamic. He argued that organizational dynamics are important because then people can focus on dealing with the large conflicts rather than small hassles. Prof. Carr then mentioned when he worked in N. Australia, humanitarian workers were constantly flying in and flying out. One indigenous person noted that although the workers received predeparture training, the indigenous communities received no prearrival training to understand how to interact with workers.

3.5 Response: Prof. Raymond Saner, Diplomacy Dialogue, Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development

Professor Saner stated that when he worked at the ICRC, the idea of preparing locals to receive delegates would have been revolutionary. In traditional humanitarian work, people go in as humanitarian workers to fix something, but the idea that local people could be community partners was then unthinkable. He then argued that a strong team dynamic is needed to be linked to competent leadership, making it important to prepare leaders to facilitate good team relations.

Prof. Saner pondered whether there is an emerging field that integrates humanitarian work with development studies. Humanitarian work aims to help victims and provide assistance, but understanding the specific development context would make humanitarian work more dynamic and comprehensive. He also agreed that there is a need to provide support for a larger sense of values that is inherently a part of humanitarian work. These values are often underestimated and forgotten, but they need to be reemphasized because it underlines and supports work that is done in the field.

However, Prof. Saner said this reemphasis needs to be top-down, but often leaders are embarrassed to talk about values when today the emphasis is on management and structure, which have superseded the core of humanitarian work. Humanitarian workers are now asked to focus on performance objectives and effectiveness which at times divert attention from focusing on the essential of humanitarian work which is to be of help to others in need.

Prof. Saner also said it was worthwhile to look further into interprofessional training in order to enhance and strengthen humanitarian work diplomacy. He concluded by saying that humanitarian work psychology is not a single silo specialized field, and that many different academic and professional disciplines can be used to improve humanitarian work.

4. Conclusion

Prof. Saner Yiu concluded that HWP as an emerging domain of study is of high relevance for humanitarian workers. While it covers many diverse topics, humanistic value is at its core, as well as its interdisciplinary knowledge base.

She raised the following concluding question: How can the core values of HWP and humanitarian work be sustained under situations of work stress and competing institutional demands? What can be done to prevent situations when core values are being relegated to the status of “institutional orphans”?

When humanitarian values are lost, humanitarian workers won't be able to stay in touch with their own humanity, nor be able to exercise their humanity which is the base for trust, compassion and empathy. One should not forget that the number one principle and value in the Red Cross Movement are its humanitarian values. How to better prepare and support the humanitarian workers in the field should be a topic for further study by the organizations active in the humanitarian field. HWP could offer guidance in this regard.