

# Social unrest over unemployment. The psychologist's role in times of crisis

Translated by Roxana Mortan



Tough situations. Social instability in times of changes hardly can be seen turned into opportunities. The role of the psychologist can be more present than ever

Social unrest can be understood as a political situation in which people go on strike or behaving violently. Social unrest begins when citizens are dissatisfied with the rules, procedures and policies. There are many triggers for social unrest, including the economic downturn, which now permeates our society and brings situations of unemployment and financial crises. In this context a decrease sense of self-esteem in the population can be easily observed, which is linked to increased psychological and physical diseases.

One way or another, either more or less directly, each has suffered this social unrest: unemployed people who cannot find a job, employed persons living in the uncertainty of not knowing whether they will be fired, significantly increased workload, businesses that close or retirees who lose purchasing power. It is not unusual in this context that have arisen claim movements. In Spain the most important movement associated with social unrest is the 15-M. Bursting two years ago, the massive support from the society gave evidence of the discomfort present in millions of families and in the society. Being the protagonist of the social movement, it brought the proliferation of initiatives strengthen that the support in the cause. Certainly the movement is losing visibility, however those who participate in it increase their indignation and disappointed with the society in which they live.

In this atmosphere of recession, the unemployment rate is growing exorbitantly. Since 2007, between 30 and 35 million jobs have been lost (ILO, 2010). Many unemployed people have been out of work for over a year and have already lost hope of finding work. This leads many people to give up registrations in public employment offices, which explains the difference between the number of unemployed targeted by the State Public Service Employment and Labour Force Survey. These people have risk high and significant probability of demoralization, loss of self-esteem and mental health problems. Furthermore, young people are disproportionately affected by unemployment. The UN agency mentioned a large number of countries (more than 25) in which there is evidence of youthful discontent because of unemployment, even in countries with emerging economies. On the other hand, certain sectors of the population have internalized a sense of guilt for having lived beyond their possibilities. This sentiment is linked to the fear and lack of alternatives generated by the crisis, which ultimately leads to resignation.

We wanted to hear about the experiences of some of those directly affected by these dramatic changes. So, we decided to contact a small group of welfare recipients. We thought it was amazing how many have begun to internalize and tacitly accept a situation in which social benefits are their only means to survive. We could see in their speeches comments about the shame they feel to be dependent on social assistance, and regard themselves as "beggars". Among respondents "Addis" reflected on her experience: *"The government does not seem to realize that this is not a lifestyle for me ... So I feel a little finishing, sponge of society. Although for years I paid and worked, contributing to society. "*

The end result of this may be the appearance of factors such as psychogenic pain, internal conflicts and tension that prevents a person feel self-realized. It is therefore essential that psychologists and other professionals work together to alleviate this problem. The role of the psychologist provides support in many cases; this is also a reason of the significant increase in the number of visits to these specialists. These experts, beyond providing support, aim to help people grow individually and change the view of social problems, seeing them as something individual rather than as a phenomenon that concerns all of us.

## WOP psychology contributions to HR Management

### News and trends in Human Resources

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Economic downturn challenges current HR management, demanding for renewed practices and approaches in favor of a future “recovery” of the labor market. While a new model for HR remains open to several serious criticisms, HRM welcomes ICT and integrates social media more and more in Social HR. At the same time, ever-increasing complexities in the work system make companies seeking for specific expertise and competences by means of outsourcing, for example. Even compensation management might represent a good example of HR rearrangement, despite constraints on pay budgets.

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### Jobs-skills mismatch in economic downturn

Current unemployment in combination with economic downturn tends to cause jobs-skills mismatch and imbalances, especially in developed economies. As reported by the ILO, on the one hand many over-qualified workers are hired for jobs below their skills level, on the other new available positions require competences jobseekers usually don't have. Looking ahead to a recovery of the labor market, The CEDEFOP reports how difficult is to detect the best firm strategy for training mismatched workers, given the scarcity of data sources. Furthermore, governments' policies promoting lifelong learning and flexicurity seem to be incongruent with poor incentives to enterprises focusing on transferable rather than firm-specific skills.

Links: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/jobs/9817885/Economic-downturn-has-made-jobs-skills-mismatch-worse-says-ILO.html>

[http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5521\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5521_en.pdf)

### A new model for HR

In the traditional HR model, the role of HR business partner implicated a series of responsibilities concerning talent management functions like sourcing, hiring, staffing, training, leadership, diversity, engagement and compensation. J. Bersin, principal and founder of Bersin by Deloitte, analyses reasons why this role didn't work and reflects on a new operating model for HR. The research on High-Impact HR organizations carried out 8 interesting suggestions: 1) distribute authority and expertise among each business unit; 2) create “networks of expertise” by relocating senior talent professionals; 3) invest time and money building the skills of the HR team; 4) keep a clear HR strategy to facilitate the choice of the proper operating model; 5) integrate talent management teams; 6) turn HR technology from a “system of record” to a “system of engagement”; 7) manage a talent analytics maturity model; 8) promote a senior executive-driven governance process, that allows senior business leaders to directly see and impact HR, L&D, and talent investments, throughout the company.

Link: <http://www.bersin.com/blog/post/2013/02/Should-we-Distribute-HR-Into-the-Business.aspx>

## **Social HR**

As organizations are integrating social media in HR practices, five trends emerge: 1) the use of gamification for typically non-game activities, like marketing, learning and development; 2) the death of the resume in selection process; 3) the increasing importance of Klout score; 4) the need for improving your personal branding ability; 5) the practice of scanning social networks to identify proper candidates, even unbeknownst to them. The ever-growing tendency to value candidates' acquaintances and profiles on social networks at the same level of their knowledge, leads to wonder which is going to prevail between the knowledge economy and the social economy.

Link: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jeannemeister/2013/01/03/2013-the-year-of-social-hr/>

## **Payroll outsourcing**

Leaving payroll management to a third party payroll company can be a smart strategy to save time and money, ensure quality work and reduce risks. Despite enterprises could prefer to maintain control over wage information and payroll data in order to handle last-minutes changes, payroll outsourcing results more cost-effective than in-house processing. Indeed, the expertise of service providers prevents from mistakes and legal complexities, besides procuring tax guarantee benefits. In U.S.A., three categories of payroll service companies are acknowledged: payroll service providers (PSPs), reporting agents (RAs) and professional employer organizations (PEOs).

Links: <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/47340>

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/stephendunn/2011/08/16/tips-for-payroll-outsourcing/>

## **Pay differentiation**

Survey among 124 UK organizations, on the practice of varying pay awards. Main drives for pay differentiation tend to be individual performance, market alignment, internal consistency, key skills and potential. In spite of constraints on pay budgets due to current economy, an increasing tendency to reward high performance is found. Chris Charman, a director and reward practice leader at Towers Watson, highlights the usefulness to have reward and talent functions "joined-up in their approach", especially while dealing with scarce resources.

Link: <http://www.hrmagazine.co.uk/hro/news/1076835/exclusive-pay-rises-performers>

## HUMANITARIAN WORK PSYCHOLOGY: The “other side” of HR

*Interviewers: Roxana Mortan and Melissa Cotillas*



*Stuart C. Carr is Professor of Psychology in the Industrial and Organizational Psychology Program at Massey University (New Zealand), holding a PhD in Psychology of Social Change. Professor Carr coordinates the Poverty Research Group, an international network focused on interdisciplinary approaches to reducing poverty. Stuart helped to set up the Global Task Force on Humanitarian Work Psychology and the first Global Special Issue on Psychology and Poverty Reduction, involving nine major international journals. His books include ‘Psychology of aid’, ‘Psychology and the developing world’, ‘Globalization and culture at work’, ‘Poverty and psychology’, ‘The Aid triangle’, ‘The Psychology of Global Mobility’ and most recently, ‘Anti-poverty psychology’.*

### **1. Can you please describe what HWP is? Which are its main objectives?**

Humanitarian work psychology is an emerging field, with an emerging definition. My own understanding at present is that it focuses on “people management” in aid and development work (humanitarian work | psychology), for instance helping aid workers, both expatriate and host national, to prevent culture shock and benefit from cross-cultural diversity; and on enabling “decent work,” namely work that meets people’s expectations about dignity, safety and opportunity at work, regardless of profession, sector or trade (humanitarian | work psychology).

The main objectives in humanitarian work psychology practice is to improve human relations and organizational efficiency in aid work (doing good well); and improving people’s quality of life in the workplace and in the community. In short, humanitarian work psychology is about “making a difference.” Some concrete examples of making a difference would be helping to reduce poverty; aiding recovery from natural or manmade disasters; enabling enterprise development and job creation; and replacing “austerity” (which used to be called “Structural Adjustment in the 1980s) with prosperity.

<http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/learning/departments/school-of-psychology/research/poverty/princubate/princubate-projects.cfm>).

## **2. What is the role and potential contributions WOP Psychologists can have in HWP?**

The WOP program, through the kind and strong support of Coordinator Professor Jose María Peiró, has been very supportive of Humanitarian work psychology. The WOP student experience of course is inherently international; cross-disciplinary; focused on collaboration, cultural competency and making a difference through professionalism and professional ethics. These are all qualities and competencies that are perfectly suited to the challenges - and opportunities for change and improvement - that humanitarian work psychology presents. An even newer development in the field, and again where WOP psychologists are well-positioned and qualified to help make a difference, is “New Diplomacies” (Saner & Yiu, 2012). These diplomacies are human skills at managing relations and projects *between* organizations; at inter-organizational psychology. Exemplar domains of practice would include for instance multi-organizational joint ventures, and multi-sector aid projects. As Professors Saner and Yiu point out in their review of new diplomacy activities, humanitarian work psychologists have been involved in negotiating the inclusion of decent work in national government plans for poverty reduction, and working alongside the International Labor Organization to help foster its own Decent Work Agenda. (for some more practical examples, <http://www.siop.org/WhitePapers/White%20Paper%20Series%2020122013HumanitarianWorkPsychology.pdf>).

## **3. What are the main challenges a WOP psychologist would face in this area? How could they be faced?**

On an everyday practical and professional level, , an obvious potential challenge is finding a job, with a livable wage. Newly graduating practitioners will be eager to enter the workforce and the for-profit sector is likely to offer a competitive income and benefits package. However it is possible to find HR Jobs that work with social responsibility programs; or even manage a private practice alongside consulting to and for NGOs services, for instance in recruitment and selection and retention. Yet you might be able to find some HR work that includes corporate social responsibility programs, including for example local workforce development

and healthcare (Osicki, 2010). Some practitioners also manage to blend their private practice with providing consultancy services, on a part-time basis, to NGOs, for example in recruitment and selection. Others may find “pro bono,” volunteer work more rewarding and practicable (Atkins & Thompson, 2012).

There are diverse challenges a WOP psychologist might face in developing skills for humanitarian work practice, but they are not really any different from working in the for-profit sector. For example there are professional networks in humanitarian work psychology, designed in part to help find work, and continue with professional development, e.g., GOHWP (Global Organization for Humanitarian Work Psychology)

(<http://gohwp.org/forum/viewtopic.php?t=2314&p=2393>).

#### **4. What “added value” does HWP bring to companies?**

Capital can take many forms, from financial to human and social. The added value that humanitarian work psychology brings to companies is an overt and explicit focus on decent work for employees, which includes not just aid workers but all employees in all industries, from the garment sector to mining-and-minerals; fair-trade farming to safety and sustainability at sea. Humanitarian work psychology can make direct contributions to poverty reduction by helping to raise employee wages in low income settings

(<http://www.peopleinaid.org/interactive/Posts/1844>).

Let us not forget as well that companies need to grow, and humanitarian work psychology has a major role to continue playing in the development of enterprise and opportunity for talented and motivated entrepreneurs, and their employees (Klinger, Khwaje, & del Carpio, 2013).

#### **5. How can Humanitarian Work Psychology help in covering the needs of companies?**

Corporate social responsibility is not going away from consumers’ minds. As the global and local environment continues to degrade, and the premium mounts on building consumer trust and confidence, businesses are going to have to pay serious

attention to doing well by doing more good in the community; and by acting in a socially and environmentally responsible manner (Aguinis, 2011). Companies need humanitarian work psychology to help them understand the human factors, like trust and confidence, involved in building genuine rapport with society (Carr, 2013).

A key example of where companies need psychological services just as much as aid organizations do is in paying decent wages. Many companies still operate the remuneration system of “dual salaries,” where local experts are paid much less than their expatriate colleagues, who often come from a higher-income economy. This often happens for instance in the mining sector. Yet the research evidence is now mounting that dual salaries are a form of “economic apartheid,” which cause perceptions of injustice, hamper teamwork, exacerbate culture shock, increase turnover, inhibit teamwork, reduce workforce capacity, and de-motivate employee performance at work (Economic and Social Research Council, 2010). Companies do not need such negatives if they are to themselves prosper.

#### **6. How can business companies measure the ROI when joining or creating a project in humanitarian work psychology?**

Corporate social responsibility programs have been evaluated empirically, and the evidence suggests that they do increase retention, morale, company reputation and profits (Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003).

<http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/learning/departments/school-of-psychology/research/poverty/princubate/princubate-projects.cfm>).

Communities nowadays are often extremely diverse, for example through immigration, and this presents both challenges and opportunities for HR practice. On the one hand, we know that more diverse groups are often more creative and innovative, yet we also know that people sometimes resist difference in recruitment, selection and work appraisal (access and treatment biases, respectively). Humanitarian work psychology can be applied to help reduce access and treatment bias, for example through structured selection, raising awareness about implicit biases against skilled immigrants, and designing fair workplace



performance systems (Carr, 2013). These all bring returns on investments, not only in terms of economic but also social capital .

## **7. How do you see the future for and of Humanitarian Psychology in organizations?**

Humanitarian work psychology as we have seen is a relatively new field and probably most companies have not heard too much about it. However Humanitarian organizations are becoming aware, for example the red Cross/Crescent recently designated “humanitarian work psychology” as their “book of the month” ( <http://intercrossblog.icrc.org/blog/book-month-humanitarian-work-psychology>). This connection was made following a roundtable meeting between humanitarian work psychologists and the Red Cross/Crscent, in Geneva (<http://www.csend.org/conferences/csend-dialogue-forum/item/312-humanitarian-work-psychology>). The point of the story is that reaching out can make a difference, whether it is to non-profit or for-profit organizations.

Most importantly perhaps, the future will be determined by talented, motivated and above all ethical professionals like WOP graduates. Evidence-based practice will not be enough. We need to have evidence-based *advocacy*, for worker and community rights, and opportunities. For example what is next being determined is how and when corporate Social responsibility programs actually benefit the *community* – which is a new frontier for research and practice in humanitarian work psychology Advocacy like that will require partnerships, for example between researchers and practitioners, not just in humanitarian work psychology but also across disciplines and professions. One thing that the current crisis has perhaps taught us all is that humanitarian issues know no borders, and that the time for a humanitarian work psychology is more than ever before, today; now; and here, wherever in the world ‘here’ may be (<http://www.siop.org/WhitePapers/White%20Paper%20Series%2020122013HumanitarianWorkPsychology.pdf>).

Kia kaha, tatou!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A New Zealand Māori phrase meaning, “Be strong, valued friends and colleagues!”

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## Master WOP-P News

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Make a change – make a difference: It's the people in this master who share their experience, knowledge, skills, cultural backgrounds, personalities: with an unending will to develop and grow together. This master gives us the platform, the opportunity, and resources to do so. It's us – students and professors – who have to take action. We did new things we have never tried before; things we wanted to learn for the future or just because we have had the chance to discover and explore them. I am sure our generation made a change for the WOP-P Master. And I am convinced we will make a difference in our personal and professional life in the future.

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In September 2011, a new era has begun with a new WOP-P generation graduating this summer in 2013: WOP-P has offered an English track for the first time, a joint diploma of all European member universities of the consortium has initiated its first step, students have now the opportunity to make an exchange with partner universities in Canada and in Brazil; additionally, an alumni network has been founded, students are partners – and both students and teaching staff continue taking an active role in designing and redesigning an excellent platform for learning.

### **Language = Challenge and Opportunity**

It was a tough way the University of Valencia chose with the decision of offering the master program in English only: Staff studied hard for improving their English speaking skills, teaching and learning materials had to be translated, recruitment methods had to be adjusted. It was worth the change since the diversity of students which could be reached now enriched the learning experience greatly, not only because of different educational backgrounds but mainly because of a new level cultural variety. Important is to emphasize the opportunity that is given now to students from all over the world where they did not have the resources to study a language of any of the participating partners of the consortium. Working together as partners, students and professors could make it work together: New learning approaches have been tried and approved. Students design and conduct and evaluate in teams workshops of two to eight hours for the others, business consulting projects are simulated, leadership trainings and complete simulated selection procedures are created and implemented.

### **New Initiatives**

Based on the first years' experience, second year students have set up a short time- and stress-management workshop in order to prepare the next generation for their role. Without the master's platform this mutual learning event could have never taken place. Teaching and coordinating staff are open for students' suggestions and take extra efforts to provide them with as much resources as available.

### **Joint Diploma**

Another goal has been achieved by the leading coordinators, which has only been possible by their endurance: This year the joint diploma has begun its first stage before being finally approved. In the near future, the WOP-P master's quality will be

recognized by all countries. Thus, the entry of graduates into the job market in all of the four countries will be facilitated in the future, no matter where they have studied. Higher mobility is an employee's asset which is – no need to emphasize – crucial in today's world labor market. The beginning of the joint diploma is a first step to open the borders for graduates of the European WOP-P master to all four European countries: Spain, Portugal, Italy, and France.

### **Global Partnerships**

This spring, students of the second year have had the chance to spend their internship in Brazil or Canada. Thanks to the social and professional network of professors of the consortium and the good reputation of the program, the University of Brazilia and the University of Guelph have been the first universities outside of Europe to participate in the exchange program as partners of the Consortium. Students can take part in projects in which up-to-date academic knowledge is directly applied to business challenges, guided by experienced professors.

### **WOP-P Alumni Network**

One graduate of 2012 has taken the initiative to create a network of WOP-P alumni. The aim of this network is to stay professionally connected beyond studies and borders. Once students have graduated they are invited to join this professional network. Beside virtual exchange about professional news, job opportunities, and participation in educational events, yearly in-person-conferences are planned for the following years. The organization will be in hand of alumni only, though support has already been presented by the master's coordinating staff. The launching of the network has taken place at the platform of the VI Winter School in Gandía, where all this year's graduates have been sharing a very intensive learning experience together. The benefits of the network will grow with every generation and link WOP-Alumni all over the world together – making it a better one – making a difference.

## SIOP 28th Annual Conference - 2013

SIOP's 28th annual conference was a remarkable event to showcase the Impact that we I-O psychologists make on the world, and to give us all an opportunity to learn and connect so we can continue to increase that impact in the future.

This year took place in Houston. The Conference offered symposia, practitioner forums, panel presentations, posters, and other sessions that featured a wide range of workplace issues. As the culminating event for SIOP members, the annual conference provided an outstanding experience once again this year, with presentations focusing on every aspect of industrial-organizational psychology.

Andy Ross (WOP Student University of Valencia), Justine Massu (WOP Student Université Paris V-René Descartes) and David Plesnik (WOP Student Università di Bologna) had the opportunity of taking part in this exceptional event. You will find their testimonials in the following links:

### Collaborators:

- **Monthly topic:** Alexander Lamig and Gebeyehu Begasha. Coauthor: Melissa Cotillas. Translated by: Roxana Mortan.
- **HR News:** Matilda Vignola
- **Interview:** Roxana Mortan and Melissa Cotillas.
- **WOP News:** Nele Hemker. Translated by: Carolina Mejía

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