

*Spotlight  
on  
Humanitarian  
Work  
Psychology*



**Lori Foster Thompson**  
North Carolina State  
University



**Alexander E. Gloss**  
North Carolina State  
University

Greetings *TIP* readers!

Welcome to another edition of the **Spotlight on Humanitarian Work Psychology** column. In this issue we take a step outside of the disciplinary boundaries of industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology to profile the emerging sub-discipline of national human resources development (NHRD). As you will see, NHRD is closely aligned with humanitarian work psychology (HWP) in its topical focus and history. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to explore NHRD with an accomplished pioneer in the field: Dr. John E. S. Lawrence. John is currently adjunct professor of the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University. With a doctorate in applied psychology, John has worked on human resources development projects with, among others, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the International Labour Organization, and a host of country governments including those of Azerbaijan, Albania, Yemen, Ukraine, Indonesia, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Vietnam. Late last year, John was invited to speak about NHRD at the Baku International Humanitarian Forum, a prominent venue for the discussion of the world's most pressing global issues (<http://www.bakuforum.org>). Last year's forum was opened by the president of Azerbaijan, addressed virtually by Russian President Vladimir Putin, and attended by numerous heads of state and Nobel laureates. Before diving into our interview with John, it is useful to discuss why HWP is related to NHRD and why developments in the field of NHRD are relevant to research and practice in I-O psychology.

## The Emergence of NHRD and Its Connection to I-O Psychology

NHRD is part of the larger field of human resources development (HRD). According to the Academy of Human Resource Development (<http://www.ahrd.org>), the field of HRD includes contributions from economics, education, management, sociology, and psychology; the field encompasses issues like training and workplace learning, career development, coaching, and organizational development. Despite HRD's typical individual and organizational levels of analysis, there have been increasingly common efforts to consider topics like training, career development, and broader livelihood development on national, and international, levels of analysis. This work has come to be known as NHRD, and it has grown in prominence within the overall field of HRD (Russ-Eft, Watkins, Marsick, Jacobs, & McClean, 2014).

In some ways, the origins of NHRD predate those of HRD as an academic field. For example, references have been made to the importance of nationwide human resources development in a number of resolutions of the United Nations dating back to the 1980s (e.g., United Nations, 1989). These resolutions emphasized the importance of everything from inspiring people to upgrade their knowledge and skills to coordinating nationwide efforts to enhancing job recruitment, retraining, job matching,

and on-the-job training for youth. Indeed for over 25 years, practitioners in the field of HRD have worked closely with national governments and international organizations to help develop human resources throughout various societies. For example, John Lawrence, whom we interview in this article, worked with the government of Swaziland in 1988 to develop human resources in that country's water and sanitation sectors (United States Agency for International Development, 1988). The report made numerous practical recommendations, including greater funding for specific educational and training programs and the development of improved job descriptions in critical occupations. Other examples of work and research in NHRD include recent analyses of human resources development in South Africa, India, and China (Alagaraja & Wang, 2012; Cunningham, Lynham, & Weatherly, 2006).

Because of salient societal needs, the greatest current focus within NHRD is on lower income countries and emerging economies like those mentioned above. However, it is important to note that HRD, and NHRD, have their roots within higher income countries like the United States. One of the earliest and most ambitious human resources development projects on a national scale in the U.S. was that designed from a national study (Drewes & Katz, 1975) and carried out by the National and State Occupational

Coordinating Committees (NOICC-SOICC) in the 1970s (Lawrence, 1990, 2013). These bodies were set up to regularly prepare and update labor-market and occupational information to assist career development, support educational program design, and meet employers' information and training needs.

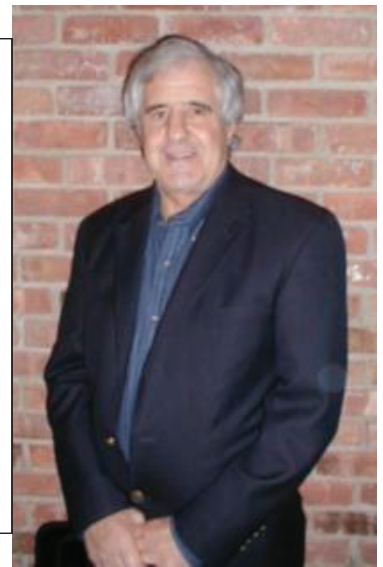
The United States has continued leadership in NHRD through the Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network (O\*NET), which replaced the Dictionary of Occupational Titles as an extensive source of information for a large number of occupations in the U.S. economy (over 900 occupations in 2013; National Center for O\*NET Development, 2014). O\*NET's mission is to "build a demand-driven workforce system by increasing the accessibility of workforce information" and more broadly to "meet the competitive labor demands of the worldwide economy by enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the workforce development and regulatory systems that assist workers and employers in meeting the challenges of global competition" (Tippins & Hilton, 2010, p. 6). In summary, the origins of NHRD lie in major projects in which I-O psychology has been intimately involved. In addition, O\*NET, for example, is not just an important development and innovation for work analysis, it is an effort to improve human resources on a national, if not international, scale (see below).

With these connections in mind, we proceed to our interview with Dr. John Lawrence to learn more about him, his work, and his views about how I-O psychology can help meet our world's greatest challenges.

## An Interview With Dr. John Lawrence

Dr. Lawrence recently presented to the 7th Annual Psychology Day at the United Nations.

A video of his, and of the entire Psychology Day proceedings can be found [here](#).



### ***How did you become involved in national human resources development?***

I was introduced to exploration as a profession from childhood. Raised in the remote moors of the Yorkshire Dales in England during the Second World War and its aftermath, I learned resourcefulness as a family necessity. Exposed fortunately to a broad education first as a violin scholar at Oundle School, then (rather differently) as a young officer/instructor at the UK Royal Marines Commando School, then Oxford University and Outward Bound, I emerged with a strong

sense of dependency on requisite skill sets for a wide variety of unexpected circumstances. I realized how important it was to be constructively comfortable with uncertainty and how little our education systems helped foster these kinds of resourceful competencies for each person. After subsequent experience in international (personal and scientific) exploratory expeditions across all seven continents, my commitment hardened toward engaging in public policy on human resources development (with an emphasis on the “s” in resources, acknowledging variability across the human dimension), first within the U.S. from the late 1960s and then increasingly in all world regions. In an article written shortly after I joined the UN (Lawrence, 1992) I laid out an intersectoral approach to HRD which became a blueprint for subsequent UN Secretary-General's reports on HRD at national levels.

***What do you see as the greatest challenge to global human resources development?***

There are so many, but if I had to choose one, high on the list would be handling and managing uncertainty. This uncertainty is a result of many global developments: from increasingly rapid technological change to the quickly evolving globalized economy. This uncertainty has created major disruptions to the world of work. Consider that over 621 million young people sit idle—neither in school,

training, nor paid employment (World Bank, 2013). In addition to problems with employment, two pillars of human resource development—education and health—are currently in global disarray. Despite gains in some areas, threats to a healthy population and workforce remain dire, especially for pregnant mothers and for infants. For example, one in four children around the world show signs of stunted growth due largely to poor nutrition, 6.9 million children under the age of 5 died in 2011, mostly from preventable diseases like measles, and only half of pregnant women in lower income countries receive the recommended amount of antenatal care (United Nations, 2013). In addition, globally, 123 million youth (ages 15–24) lack basic reading and writing skills (United Nations, 2013). Without health and education, hopes of developing human resources to function effectively in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy remain dimmed.

***What is the role of I-O psychology in meeting global challenges to human resource development?***

To answer this question, it might be helpful to briefly review the ways in which the international economic and development community seeks to promote growth, prosperity, and human well-being. Often the crucial question is how to ensure productive and decent employment for an entire population. International development experts—often from the field of economics—look back to the past for



solutions, in economic models and diagnostics, for how to drive global growth and development. They place a tremendous amount of attention on the “demand” side of the economic growth and employment equation. That is, when an economy stumbles and/or unemployment rises, they look to ways in which we can increase the demand for workers. However, “demand” is only half the equation. Human resources development practitioners, including I-O psychologists, engage with the “supply” side by addressing such topics as education, training, vocational guidance, and the development of occupational information. In the United States and around the world, inefficiencies and disruptions to the labor market (e.g., limited awareness of available jobs and insufficient education and training) lead to road blocks that limit people’s ability to engage productively in the economy and to derive the benefits of meaningful and decent work.

While economists and labor-force “mechanics” are indeed necessary to tweak policy and to use institutional mechanisms to spur economic growth and to help connect people with meaningful work, we also need “explorers” to look for answers in new spaces, and to anticipate where new problems are coming from. I have worked on projects around the world, from Central America to Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. I have seen that the best “supply-side” workforce development solutions account for

the unique attributes of workers on a local scale, they operate across economic and social sectors, and they are closely connected to private sector employers. I-O psychologists with their focus on individual differences and subjects like training and vocational guidance in the workplace are well suited not only to become the “explorers” we need to develop innovative solutions to local, national, and international human resources development but also to help facilitate and encourage new young “explorers” in all walks of life. These solutions would include ways that individuals, companies, nongovernmental organizations, and local/national governments can best connect people with, and prepare people for, meaningful and decent work. The development of O\*NET is a great example of such a solution. O\*NET’s information has been utilized by a variety of stakeholders—from the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank to small businesses. Indeed, it has even been adopted in whole or in part by other countries for workforce development purposes (e.g., European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2013). This sort of information and coordination can serve as workforce development “radar” able to guide individuals, companies, regions, and countries through the rapidly changing world of work and the global economy.

I-O psychologists can also assist local and global workforce development by

researching ways to enable human *resourcefulness* and by expanding their analytical domains to include relationships between work and the rest of an individual's livelihood constructs (social networks, parenting etc.). In many ways, promotion of human resourcefulness across these domains is the key to human resources development. Indeed, it is a personal appreciation of the importance of human resourcefulness that drew me to the field. Human resourcefulness can be defined as individual and collective human capacities for resilience, initiative, and ingenuity in response to livelihood opportunities and challenges (Lawrence, 2013). Human resourcefulness has been mentioned by the United Nations Secretary-General as a key global priority (United Nations, 1995). Already, I-O psychologists have paid a great deal of attention to various individual differences that relate to human resourcefulness. Consider the research into adaptive performance (“the proficiency with which employees self-manage novel work experiences”; Schmitt, Cortina, Ingerick, & Wiechmann, 2003) or core self-evaluation (individuals’ fundamental appraisals of themselves and their capabilities across a number of life domains; Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003). Continued research into the ways in which organizations, educational institutions, governments, and others can work to cultivate and promote human resourcefulness across a person’s lifetime—from student

to career changer and beyond—would fit neatly into I-O psychology’s existing lines of research and would meet a salient need within the global human resources development community. The importance of such work is hard to underestimate. In countries like Pakistan, where well over half of the country’s youth are not in school or at work and where state institutions are struggling, economic growth, prosperity, and human welfare rests largely on individual and community resourcefulness (World Bank, 2013). To put the issue in perspective, nearly half of the people at work in lower income countries around the world are farmers or self-employed (World Bank, 2013). Understanding and promoting human resourcefulness in these less formal occupational settings is perhaps one of the most important challenges facing our world today.

### **Conclusion**

Many thanks to Dr. John Lawrence for this insightful and in-depth look at the world’s human resources development challenges and how I-O psychology has, and can continue to, assist human welfare through the development of human resources. John’s insights serve as a reminder that although stereotypical examples of humanitarian work psychology include corporate social responsibility programs, the work of international not-for-profit organizations, and collaborative responses to natural and humanitarian

disasters, separating HWP from the rest of I-O psychology is difficult as practically any form of research and practice in I-O psychology is engaged in human resources development. As John has argued, and as highlighted by a wide range of scholars in economics and psychology (e.g., Harbison & Myers, 1964; Becker, 1993; Sen, 1999; Crook, Todd, Combs, & Woehr, 2011), the development of human resources results in greater human welfare by enhancing economic growth through firm performance and by enabling individuals' capabilities and personal freedoms. Thus, practitioners and researchers from across the discipline of I-O psychology, whether they realize it or not, are engaged in forms of work psychology with important humanitarian aims and implications. We hope that our interview with John Lawrence, and our profile of the field of national human resources development, has provided a reminder that by promoting human resources, we all engage in a *humanitarian* work psychology.

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