



Industrial-Organizational Psychology and the United Nations: A Partnership

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Abstract. Since the United Nations began in 1945, it has reached out to experts in many fields, and in many parts of the world, to cooperate in its global work. Our field of organizational psychology has an important role to play at the United Nations, but this has begun only recently, in the past few years. This report offers a concise picture of I-O psychology at the United Nations today, and ways that I-O psychologists in the USA and other nations may learn more details on this.

Keywords: industrial-organizational psychology; United Nations; I-O psychologists.

On April 24, 2014, the 7th annual Psychology Day at the United Nations in New York City was a day of excitement and curiosity, as 300 attendees learned about new possibilities for engagement and collaboration. A scientific understanding of human behavior will allow us to better address the global issues at hand—of particular interest, the development and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the set of goals expected to drive the world's development agenda as the Millennium Development Goals come to a close in 2015.

Beginning with Dr. John Scott in 2013, then Dr. Lori Foster Thompson for 2014, this marks the second consecutive year a representative from the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) has co-chaired Psychology Day at the United Nations. Their service as co-chairs is only a glimpse into the expanding relationship between SIOP and the United Nations (UN)¹.

¹ Some resources about SIOP at the United Nations:

- History: <http://www.siop.org/Prosocial/UN.aspx>
- Current status: <http://www.siop.org/tip/oct11/19un.aspx>
- Global Compact: http://www.siop.org/tip/april08/PDFs/454_033to037.pdf
- News: <http://www.siop.org/tip/april14/UN.pdf>

Author notes: English Sall and Ann-Marie Clayton are industrial-organizational psychology doctoral students in the IOtech4D lab at North Carolina State University, specializing in how industrial-organizational psychology and information technology can be combined to improve work that is carried out for the purpose of poverty reduction and international development. John C. Scott, the Society for Industrial-Organizational Psychology's main representative to the United Nations, is Chief Operating Officer and co-founder of APTMetrics, Inc., a global human resources consulting firm that designs sophisticated Talent Management solutions for Fortune® 100 companies and market innovators.

The future of the SIOP-UN relationship can best be understood and appreciated while simultaneously considering its history. On July 25, 2011, SIOP was officially granted consultative status as a Non-governmental Organization (NGO) with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), one of six principal bodies in the United Nations system. This partnership is an invaluable opportunity for the entire industrial-organizational psychology community. Under the umbrella of this consultative status, SIOP is able to make direct recommendations and contributions to the UN's goals and agenda by way of collaboration and participation in projects with ECOSOC (Scott et al., 2014). Achieving consultative status is an incredible feat as SIOP's application was submitted approximately three years before approval.

It is important to note the youth and freshness of this relationship; compared to other fields such as economics and social-work, psychology is fairly new to the conversations happening at the United Nations (Takooshian & Shahinian, 2008). However, it is clear that there are many areas and projects within the UN where the theories of psychology, and the skills of I-O psychologists in particular, come to bear. Psychology Day at the UN, the UN Global Compact, the Psychology Coalition at the United Nations, and the Istanbul International Center for the Private Sector in Development (IICPSD) are a few examples of how SIOP is making an impact on the global stage.

The varied skills and abilities that SIOP members can offer to the United Nations' projects and goals are significant. To this end, SIOP has become an active participant in the Psychology Coalition at the United Nations (PCUN). PCUN is a uniquely innovative entity with the primary goal of helping to facilitate an understanding of psychological elements and underlying contributions that the field of psychology as a whole can make to varied UN bodies and organizations (Psychology Coalition at the United Nations, 2013). SIOP is one of many psychology-oriented organizations represented within PCUN, as well as on its executive committee.

It has become increasingly apparent that many of the issues that the world faces today cannot be fully comprehended or addressed without an intentional relationship between the public and private sectors. There is increased recognition of the role that the private sector can play in development, and this relationship is inextricably linked to issues around work, organizations, and corporate social responsibility—areas where I-O research and practice can contribute. The UN Global Compact is one important way this relationship is being fostered. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon describes the Global Compact as an entity that “asks companies to embrace universal principles and to partner with the United Nations” (unglobalcompact.org). An address by George Kell on the “state of the union between business and society” emphasized that the relationship between business and society is at a crossroads, where market success and sustainable practices are beginning to align (What is the UN Global Compact?, 2014). The Global Compact focuses solely on fostering a relationship with the private sector (Scott et al., 2014). Its goal is for companies to internalize 10 principles that are centered on human rights, labor, environment and anticorruption, into the soul of their organization (Carr, 2014). I-O psychologists are key in helping construct this process for companies and ensuring a smooth transition for these organizations. Sean Cruse, an I-O psychologist and SIOP member, currently works full time with the UN Global Compact.

Another program that is devoted to fostering global development partnerships with a focus on the role of the private sector is the Istanbul International Center for the Private Sector (IICPSD; Istanbul International Center for Private Sector in Development, 2014). In March 2011, the IICPSD was established as a result of the collaboration between the United Nations Development Programme and the Government of the Republic of Turkey. The IICPSD is attempting to outline and develop the role of the private sector in the areas of poverty reduction and human development. SIOP members have been collaborating with the IICPSD and have created an initial report detailing how psychology

can play a role in this mission (Scott et al., 2014). Overall, the report considers the barriers and potential solutions to poverty reduction; specifically, how the private sector can contribute to both (Scott et al. 2014). In this space I-O psychologists are not only able to contribute their skill sets and expertise, such as the relevance of work analysis, but also act as facilitators to help find the common ground between the private sector and the outcomes that the UN is aiming for.

Clearly, I-O psychology offers insights into the projects and goals that UN agencies and missions wish to undertake and accomplish. In addition, it offers insight into internal agency functioning and optimization. A final illustration of SIOP's involvement with the UN was a call for proposals by a large UN organization for implementing a more effective competency framework for its senior staff positions. Members of SIOP have been called upon to submit bids for involvement in this project. This is a central example of how SIOP contributes to not only the external, but the internal workings of the UN. Throughout history, we have seen development take many forms and rely on many facets of contribution. This is particularly apparent when considering the direct connection between the UN's internal functions and their role in external progress.

In sum, the 2014 Psychology Day at the UN demonstrated the relevance of industrial-organizational psychology, and psychology in general, to the agenda of the United Nations and global greater good (Foster Thompson, as cited in Below, 2014). Along with the example projects described above, this event illustrates a growing collaboration between SIOP and the UN: two entities partnering for a better world. It should be noted that SIOP's increasing contributions to the UN's global agenda coincides with a related trend within the field of I-O psychology – the emergence of the sub-discipline known as humanitarian work psychology. Humanitarian work psychology is “the synthesis of organizational, industrial, work, and other areas of psychology with deliberate and organized efforts to enhance human welfare” (The Global Organization for Humanitarian Work Psychology, 2013). Humanitarian work psychologists focus on utilizing the principles and theories of industrial and organizational psychology, such as organizational development and individual influence in the workplace, in thoughtful and purposeful ways to address issues related to global human welfare as a whole. SIOP's involvement with the UN provides a good example of humanitarian work psychology in action.

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