



## FORUM

## Development through educational collaboration: facilitating social equity

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Previously, psychology has not been recognized as bearing on the educational, managerial and health issues that often characterize developing countries. Recently however, the Departments of Psychology at the University of Newcastle (Australia) and the National University of Malawi have used the Internet to conduct joint research on applied issues such as expatriate-host national pay inequities, ambivalence towards workplace achievement, and psychological influences on charitable behaviour. This tertiary collaboration has produced practical recommendations concerning community development, stress management, and poverty reduction, each of which may in turn inform higher education policy. Since these recommendations apply both in Malawi and in Australia, the Internet is functioning as a two-way bridge between the two universities and their respective countries. In addition to development through university cooperation, such cross-fertilization is also generating theoretical developments within the academic discipline of psychology itself. © 1997 International Association of Universities

## INTRODUCTION

Psychology is one of the few academic disciplines which has not earned itself a profile in development work (Akin-Ogundeji, 1991; Carr and MacLachlan, 1993; Eze, 1991; Mehryar, 1984). The Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AusAID) did not utilize any psychological services apart from counseling for students visiting Australia from developing countries (Jones *et al.*, 1994). Even from within the discipline, psychologists are sceptical about their relevance in the, so called, "Third World" (see Ring and Vazquez, 1993). Thus, the editor of a psychology journal challenged academics at the University of Malawi to write a paper "justifying" their department, while another remarked on their presence "That's great for psychology, but hardly much good for the country" (MacLachlan, 1997). We confront such scepticism with scientific evidence recently gathered through research in university institutions. Our findings illustrate how universities in developing areas can incorporate behavioural science in their contribution to aid and development.

Half of our data were gathered in Malawi, which is one of the poorest developing countries on the African continent. For instance, nine-tenths of the population are subsisting below the poverty line in rural areas; just 4-5% of eligible students are admitted to secondary education (House and Zimalirana, 1992); and for 1994 there

were an estimated 400 new cases of HIV infection every day (Liomba, 1994). With this level of deprivation in organizational, health and educational infrastructure, Malawi provides a serious challenge to the practical utility of any academic discipline. However, the recent establishment of Internet nodes at the University in Malawi has opened up workable communication links with universities elsewhere, thus creating new opportunities for collaboration. The present paper is a synthesis and summary of some of the research produced by collaboration between the National University of Malawi and the University of Newcastle in Australia—where the remainder of our data were collected.

### DESCRIBING A DOUBLE DEMOTIVATION?

Aid is becoming increasingly difficult to separate from foreign investment (Remenyi, 1994). As part of this investment, growing numbers of human resources are being sent overseas (Chadwick, 1994). It can cost US\$150,000 to replace one of the 16–40% of expatriate managers who return prematurely from overseas assignments (Black and Gregersen, 1990). Psychologists are increasingly being called upon to develop an understanding of the variables predicting workplace performance in overseas places (see, for example, Mammann, 1994; Stroh *et al.*, 1994). One variable which (so far) has received comparatively little attention is the pay inequity that usually results when expatriates are paid from the home country (Kappachi, 1990). This phenomenon is naturally most marked in the poorer developing economies, where pay differentials frequently swell to double figures (Carr and MacLachlan, 1993; Machika, 1992).

In previous papers (Carr and MacLachlan, 1993; MacLachlan and Carr, 1993), basic psychological principles have been reconstituted to derive the prediction that such pay inequities are likely to demotivate both the host national counterpart and the expatriate—a “double demotivation” hypothesis. The prediction that host nationals will become demotivated derives from Adams (1965) Equity theory (reducing their input in proportion to their reduced outcome relative to expatriates), from the Belief in a Just World (Lerner, 1970), whereby people are assumed to receive their just desserts (possibly lowering host nationals’ self-esteem), and from empirical evidence of cultural preferences for allocating resources on the basis of comparative need rather than individual reward (Berman *et al.*, 1985; Hui *et al.*, 1991; Marin, 1985). On the expatriates’ side, the counterintuitive prediction of demotivation is also based on Equity theory (convincing themselves that their input matches their relatively inflated outcome), Belief in a Just World (“I deserve to be more highly paid!”), plus experimental evidence (Deci, 1975) that overpayment reduces intrinsic motivation (money becomes a focal motive).

Study 1 was conducted at the National University of Malawi, where expatriate lecturers salaried by international aid organizations were receiving many times the salary of their local counterparts. Twenty-nine Malawian and twenty-nine expatriate lecturers completed an indirect, scenario-type questionnaire (for endorsement of this methodology, see Blunt, 1983, p. 87, and Sinha, 1989, p. 33). Using Likert-type scales, subjects described the probable perspective of a central character, someone in their own salary position *vis-à-vis* other lecturers. Responding as a projection of “someone like them”, Malawians more than expatriates agreed that Malawian lecturers were being treated unfairly and wanted more equity. Only the highly paid expatriate respondents failed to agree that the typical Malawian lecturer had become demo-

tivated by the salary levels of expatriates. Expatriate respondents were also alone in agreeing that expatriates felt guilty about, but also deserved, their pay (MacLachlan *et al.*, 1995). These results indicate that pay differentials may be demotivating host national personnel, and may also be creating a certain amount of guilt among expatriates. Being the only ones to agree that expatriates deserved their superior pay, the expatriate respondents may also (conceivably) have been psychologically inflating their own inputs as a defence against their feelings of guilt (Adams, 1965; Lerner, 1970).

In an effort to examine further the intrinsic motivation of the higher paid expatriate, Study 2 was conducted among seventy undergraduates at the University of Newcastle in Australia. In a variation of Deci's paradigm (Deci, 1975) in which subjects begin to receive pay for working on an intrinsically interesting puzzle (analogous to overpayment), conditions were added in which the subjects were informed that others were receiving more, or less pay for doing the same job. By holding everything else equal, any differences in motivation could be directly attributable to—i.e. caused by—pay difference. Following Deci (1975), intrinsic motivation was measured by the time voluntarily spent interacting with the puzzle after the session had officially ended. Compared to a no-pay control, payment significantly reduced intrinsic motivation. More importantly however, the introduction of knowledge about others' pay demotivated people still further, regardless of whether they believed they were being under- or over-paid compared to others (Carr *et al.*, 1996). Thus, inequitable pay differences caused a *double* demotivation in the laboratory. These data imply that expatriate-local pay differentials may be causing a double demotivation in the tertiary education field. By undermining motivation on both sides of the aid contract, we believe that such a process poses a dual threat to the sustainability of educational and other community development projects.

There remain a depth of issues to explore in relation to demotivation. For instance, clear overpayment has been known to result in a (temporary) upgrading of effort instead of a demotivating influence (Carrell and Dittrich, 1978). Whether one has the practical *opportunity* to upgrade one's effort (say ten-fold) may play a crucial role in determining which reaction occurs, and for how long (Carr, 1996). There is also likely to be a role for personality factors (and thereby selection tests), in for example feelings of initial commitment and "entitledness" (Chaiken and Baldwin, 1981; Huseman *et al.*, 1987). Mathematical models of the double demotivation process are presently being developed and tested, and may lead to specific proposals for optimizing pay differentials and/or overseas contract periods. In addition to reducing expatriate salaries toward local levels, another tangible possibility would be to redistribute salaries among a team comprised of both expatriates and host nationals.

The resolution of issues such as these is plainly relevant to the practical problems of selecting, training, and remunerating aid workers on overseas assignments. By recommending possibilities for reducing double demotivation, psychology may eventually contribute towards the sustainability of development projects, including those in higher education. Integral to this contribution may be research between universities in developing and developed areas, conducted via the Internet.

## MANAGING MOTIVATIONAL GRAVITY

Achievement motivation is another area of psychology relevant to economics with differing degrees of industrialization. In the past, psychologists have focused on the

role of entrepreneurial motives for small business development in countries such as India, Ecuador, and Malawi (McClelland, 1987). More recently, however, the focus of study has moved away from the self-promoting motives of the individual achiever (Festinger, 1954), and toward the reactions of fellow workers and managers (Carr and MacLachlan, 1995; Feather, 1994; Feather and McKee, 1993; Kaur and Ward, 1992; MacLachlan and Carr, 1994; Nasir and Ismail, 1997). The evidence consistently indicates that high individual achievers may have a social price to pay through the resentment of others. This may be particularly so in collectivist and developing countries, but is also the case in so-called "developed" countries such as Australia and New Zealand, that have a strong tradition of "equalitarianism" (Feather, 1994). Such parallels invite the possibility of collaborative research between universities in developing and developed areas.

In one study (Carr *et al.*, 1995a), seventy-eight respondents studying managerial psychology at the University of Malawi gave their predictions of how superiors and peers would react in six different scenarios. These were based on actual events and students rated on a 7-point scale the likelihood that peers (3 scenarios) and superiors (3 scenarios) would be extremely encouraging (rated 7) or extremely discouraging (rated 1), or somewhere in between, toward a promising individual (e.g. the originator of bright ideas). Superiors could either steal the bright idea ("pushing down" its originator) or provide open encouragement ("pulling up" the originator of the idea), while co-workers might either congratulate ("push up") or isolate ("pull down") the "achieving" individual (see Carr and MacLachlan, 1997, for a discussion of such "motivational gravity").

When asked whether "Malawians in general want to do better than others", 99% replied "Yes", indicating the presence of competitive motivation. Against this motive, however, respondents clearly predicted that superiors would discourage ("push down") rather than "pull up", while peers would also discourage, "pull down", not "push up". For five of the six scenarios, the modal prediction category was "1" (i.e. discouragement was perceived to be extremely likely). The students were also asked the question, "Should you encourage others to do better than yourself?". Those who had had practical experience as managers were significantly more likely to reply "No" than those without practical experience. This finding suggests that practical experience in industry fosters a stronger belief in forces discouraging achievement. Malawian managers apparently both advocate and disdain self-promotion at the expense of others.

The most frequent theme given in explanation for discouragement or no encouragement was that "Everyone wants to be number 1" (50% of responses), followed by "Threat to own position" (29%). The apparent ferocity here may also be perceived to contribute to psychological distress and disorder. In a recent study of 103 psychiatric admissions, 40% attributed their admission to traditional forces, mostly resulting from the envy of others (MacLachlan *et al.*, 1995b). In fact, Malawian workers may sometimes turn down promotion, or seek a spell of protection against witchcraft, before taking up the appointment (Bowa and MacLachlan, 1994).

There are other indirect indicators of motivational gravity from elsewhere in developing Africa, both "push down" (Jones, 1988; Kiggundu, 1991; Seddon, 1985), and "pull down" (Bowa and MacLachlan, 1994; Carr, 1994; Carr and MacLachlan, 1993; MacLachlan *et al.*, 1995b; Munro, 1986a,b). The same applies in Pacific Asia (Kaur and Ward, 1992; Lazarevic, 1992; Nasir and Ismail, 1997; Thomas, 1997, and Wan-Rafaei, 1984). Such motives have previously been directly studied in Australia

(Feather, 1994) and Japan (Feather and McKee, 1993), but in relation to relatively remote figures (e.g. politicians and sporting successes) rather than closer (and more comparable) fellow employees. The recent data from the University of Malawi suggest that psychologists should continue to investigate the applicability of motivational gravity in other developing countries.

In equalitarian Australia, individual achievement may attract as much ambivalence as it apparently does in parts of Africa (Carr and MacLachlan, 1997). Feather (1994) has shown that an individual may agree with rewarding high achievers while at the same time agreeing that they should be punished. Admiration (and encouragement) for "having a go" may be accompanied by dislike (and resentment) at betraying the bonds of "mateship" (Conway, 1971). Carr (1994) has suggested that an established psychological phenomenon, namely "group polarization", may provide a vehicle for strengthening encouragement at the expense of resentment. In group polarization, discussion of important issues has the effect of amplifying a group's initial average stance on an issue (Lamm and Myers, 1978). Given, for example, pre discussion norms (i) agreeing slightly with rewarding high achievers and (ii) disagreeing slightly with punishing them, polarization would produce a "net gain" in the level of encouragement of achievement (Carr, 1996). Such gains might benefit organizations operating within cultural settings characterized by negative motivational gravity (Carr and MacLachlan, 1997).

To test this net gain hypothesis, Carr *et al.* (1996) divided 146 psychology sophomores at the University of Newcastle into discussion groups of 4–6 members. Materials were taken from the Australian "Tall Poppy Scale" (McKnight and Sutton, 1994). This reliable Likert scale contains twenty positively worded items, each scaled from  $-3$  (strongly disagree) to  $+3$  (strongly agree), with no neutral point. Ten items express "favour reward" (FR) and a further ten items independently express "favour fall" (FF) attitudes toward high achievers ("tall poppies") in politics, sport, and business. Carr *et al.* randomly selected three items from each independent subscale, in preparation for a one hour group discussion task. Subjects responded three times to each of the six selected items. At a pre consensus stage, they recorded their personal opinions on each item. FR and FF correlated positively, indicating ambivalence in the sample. At a consensus stage, the group was allocated a maximum of 7 minutes to reach unanimity on each item (if a consensus could not be reached within the allotted time, subjects recorded their personal opinions). At a post consensus stage, subjects re-recorded their personal opinions.

Before the discussion began, on average groups agreed slightly with rewarding achievers and disagreed slightly with punishing them, and these tendencies did not in themselves change significantly in the subsequent discussion. For each subject, Carr *et al.* then calculated the difference between FF and FR at pre consensus, consensus, and post consensus. This index provided an operational definition of net tendency for each person at each stage of the procedure, with a larger difference signifying a stronger tendency towards rewarding the achiever. From pre consensus to consensus and from pre to post consensus, those difference scores became amplified. That is, as a result of group discussion, the net tendency to favour rewarding high achievers became polarized. Thus, group discussion may provide one effective educational and training vehicle for managing motivational gravity in organizations based in "western" countries where equality is valued and—equally to the point—in collectivist developing countries where self-promotion is also cause for ambivalence.

## EXPOSING THE ACTOR-OBSERVER BIAS IN ATTRIBUTIONS FOR THIRD WORLD POVERTY

Psychologists have already invested much research in Westerners' attributions for domestic poverty (e.g. Commission of the European Communities, 1977; Furnham, 1993; Guimond and Palmer, 1990). In the original study, Feagin (1972) found that whites, the middle class, and the more highly educated in the United States were relatively likely to attribute domestic poverty to dispositional factors in the poor themselves (e.g. low effort), while blacks, low earners and the less well educated displayed a relative tendency towards situational factors (e.g. low wages). A classification of attributions into dispositional and situational has since been endorsed in a number of empirical studies (e.g. Feather, 1974; Furnham, 1982b; Payne and Furnham, 1985). Moreover, these studies have been conducted in a number of countries and cultures. These include Anglo Australia (Feather, 1974), India (Pandy *et al.*, 1982; Singh and Vasudeva, 1977), U.K. (Furnham, 1982c), Israel (Rim, 1984), The West Indies (Payne and Furnham, 1985) and New Zealand (Stacey and Singer, 1985).

Group differences in attributions have also been investigated. Feather (1974) found that younger, lower income, and less highly educated Australians often preferred socioeconomic (i.e. situational) explanations for domestic poverty. Furnham (1982b) found that English schoolboys from fee-paying schools (and wealthier backgrounds) were more likely to attribute poverty to dispositional factors than boys attending state schools. Compared to their Anglophone neighbours, Lamarche and Tougas (1979) found that "economically colonized" Quebecois tended to attribute domestic poverty more to situational than to dispositional factors in the poor themselves. Singh and Vasudeva (1977) observed that wealthier Indians were less likely to use situational attributions.

These and other results suggest that people closer to poverty (whom we could term "actors"), tend to blame situational factors more than those who are removed from poverty (whom we could term "observers"). The existing evidence is thereby consistent with a well established phenomenon in social psychology (Carr, 1996). The "Actor-Observer Bias" (Jones and Nisbett, 1972) refers to the tendency for observers to attribute others' behaviour to their dispositions (e.g. "the poor are poor because of laziness on their part"), while actors are more likely to attribute the same behaviour to situational forces beyond their control (e.g. "We are poor because of social injustice"). In the West, believers in a just world frequently have a negative attitude towards the poor (Furnham and Gunter, 1984), and tend to make dispositional attributions for poverty in the Third World (Harper *et al.*, 1990). Campbell *et al.* (1995) decided to test for an Actor-Observer Bias under the unequivocal differences in economic status, and therefore actor-observer roles, created by living in Australia and Malawi.

Kelley (1989) found that Australians favoured aid whenever the situation of the poor was inherently uncontrollable by the poor themselves, i.e. whenever a situational (vs dispositional) attribution was inescapable for the Australian public. A similar observation has since been made in the U.S. (Zucker and Weiner, 1993). Thus, an Actor-Observer Bias is likely to work against belief in giving. "Victim blaming" might be influencing some people in the world's more "developed" countries not to engage in charitable, or aid-giving, behaviour. Empirical support for such an hypothesis would indicate a way that psychology could make an important contribution, namely by socially marketing aid. Previous research on intentions to give to Third World

charities have focused on sociological and demographic rather than psychographic segmentation variables, e.g. religiosity (Kelley, 1989).

Psychological research has in fact shown that exposing biases towards victims will probably increase helping behaviour (Beaman *et al.*, 1978; for a full discussion of such "enlightenment effects", see Gergen, 1994). Exposing the nature of any bias between actors "in" and observers "of" poverty may therefore assist marketers to develop greater awareness in the western public, increasing the latter's donation behaviour. Changes of perspective from observer to actor, and the attendant information received, do result in more situational attributions (Storms, 1973). In the more developed countries, the media do influence attitudes towards developing countries (Perry and McNelly, 1988). Such psychology would answer Mehryar (1984)'s call for psychologists in industrialized countries to play a role in "development", by sensitizing their nations to the realities of life in the Third World.

Psychologists have already designed a sophisticated measure of attributions for Third World poverty. Specifically, Harper and Manasse (1992) have developed the Causes of Third World Poverty Questionnaire. This attributional scale has demonstrated a four-factor structure in trials in Britain. In addition to "Blame the Poor", Third World poverty is also attributed to "Third World Governments" (e.g. corruption), "Nature" (e.g. pests), and international "Exploitation" (e.g. the world banking system). Harper and Manasse (1992) have substantially verified these separate subscales using factor analytic techniques.

Despite these advances, little is currently known about the relevance of poverty attributions for charitable *behaviour*. Zuckerman (1975) found that Westerners with a high belief in a just world would be altruistic in times of personal need and provided they could maintain their belief in justice. Skitka *et al.* (1991) found that attribution of responsibility for the Gulf War was a better predictor of aid advocated for Iraq than political beliefs or economic forecasts. These results imply that attributions for poverty may predict intention to donate to charity. Campbell *et al.* therefore employed such a measure with the Australian respondents in their study.

A total of 198 respondents participated in the study, 100 from Australia and a further 98 from Malawi. The respondents were recruited over five consecutive Saturdays at markets in Zomba (Malawi) and Newcastle (Australia). The former city contains the most widely frequented market in Malawi, while the latter is widely used as the marketing testbed for Australia, and is officially viewed as a microcosm of the national public (Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 1994). In both locations, every tenth person entering the marketplace was approached and asked if they would be willing to participate in a study of attitudes toward aid and Third World charities.

The results confirmed an Actor-Observer Bias. That is, Australians were significantly more likely than their Malawian counterparts to employ dispositional attributions to account for Third World poverty. Furthermore, and in agreement with earlier findings, Australians who already donated to Third World charities tended to attribute poverty to the environmental factors, while the non-donors tended to attribute poverty to the poor themselves. A further psychological discriminator between donors/nondonors included belief/disbelief in whether aid money actually reaches the poor due to corruption.

As well as the marketplace study, Carr *et al.* (1995a) report a parallel survey conducted with over 600 undergraduates at the Universities of Malawi and Newcastle, Australia. Although withholding donations was again linked with making a dispositional attribution, these highly educated samples from the same two countries

also produced an exact *reversal* of the Actor–Observer difference. That is, Malawian undergraduates were more likely to endorse the dispositional explanation, whereas Australian undergraduates were more likely to endorse situational factors. Carr (1996) argues that the circumstances of university life may have prompted this reversal, which was also obtained in one other study—again involving college students (Furnham, 1982a). In the West, tertiary education (in social science) has been linked with increased situational attributions for poverty (Guimond and Palmer, 1990), possibly accounting for the Australian student finding. In the developing world, the relative privileges of campus life (e.g. full board, basic health care, job prospects) might have rendered undergraduates akin to “observers” rather than “actors”. When coupled with possible distress from their sheer proximity to the deprivation of others, such privilege may have been enough to partly offset any influence of higher education, influencing students to begin to blame the victim (Carr, 1996). In conjunction with this privilege–proximity factor, an acute shortage of places in the Malawian education system (House and Zimalirana, 1992) may be fostering in continuing students a tendency to attribute deprivation to lack of personal effort (Carr, 1996).

## CONCLUSION

Psychological findings reveal new potential for sensitizing the Western public, and possibly non-Western elites, to the real causes of poverty in the less developed economies of the world. Like double demotivation and motivational gravity, the discovery of an Actor–Observer Bias casts new light on how Departments of Psychology, and the Universities that house them, might in future contribute significantly towards aid and development. To summarize the main points arising from psychological research collaboration among universities:

- (1) Current salary differentials between expatriates and host nationals may be undermining development project sustainability, including the development of university departments. However, there may be a number of psychological options to minimize and manage this risk, such as designing purpose-built selection tests, optimizing contract periods or salary differentials, and reducing or redistributing salaries.
- (2) Motivational gravity may be demotivating and deterring host nationals working in organizations running along foreign, i.e. individualistic, lines. Yet group techniques show some promise for managing collectivist reactions to self-promotion. Granted that higher education students in developing countries frequently graduate into managerial positions (Dubbey *et al.*, 1991), these could conceivably be incorporated into tertiary curricula.
- (3) Current marketing strategies for persuading the donor public to give money to aid projects may be overlooking psychological factors which negatively influence charitable behaviour. By exposing such biases, aid agencies may be able to help to offset them, thereby augmenting the effectiveness of their fund-raising campaigns. Within developing areas, the privilege of higher education itself may, inadvertently, foster a tendency to blame the victim. Exposing such biases would again undermine their potentially negative impact on development.

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