

# The Global “War on unsafe Water” as Context for a new HR4SocialGood Movement

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Unsafe water is the real-world context here: “By 2025, 1.8 billion people will experience absolute water scarcity, and by 2030, almost half the world will live under conditions of high water stress” (World Health Organisation, 2009, cited by Russ, 2016). Unfortunately, densely-populated areas are already seeing brine-pollution of coastal underground aquifers due to hydraulic pressures via rising sea levels (NZAid reported by RadioNZ, 2016). Increasingly, these sea level rises will threaten important sources of drinking water and agricultural water. Given the enormous magnitude of challenges here, the sustainable water-supply arena must make more efficient use of its relevant resources. These obviously include its human resources (HR).

This looming crisis is sufficiently global (maybe even existentially universal) that it can, thus, serve as a context facilitating a new “HR4SocialGood” movement, for HR undergrads. Such could conceivably parallel the existing “IT4SocialGood” movement, e.g., see: <http://www.stemtec.aut.ac.nz/news-and-events/february-2015/seminar-professor-mikey-goldweber,-xavier-university,-cincinnati,-17-feb-2015>

Both of these movements connect well to the growing presence, across academia, of service-learning components in curricula. The leading scholarly voice for service-learning is likely the University of Louisiana’s Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education. Service-learning refers to the embedding of aid or community-service efforts inside college courses. It goes beyond “community-assisting” field-trips, in that it, instead, involves curricula-developed skills, and the initial practice of those skills in real-world settings or real-world applications. Service-learning can thus be an important part of how students earn college degrees.

The above-mentioned “IT4SocialGood” movement has now garnered hundreds of “info-technology” lecturers and professors into its very-welcoming coterie. Two separate movements were started independently by Xavier University Prof. Mikey Goldweber and Villanova University Prof. Robert Beck. These movements readily found each-other, and are effectively merging. The goal is essentially around minimizing the likelihood that computer science majors and IT majors and information science majors finish their degrees devoid of solid moral/ethical grounding. The damage done by unethical professionals with advanced IT skills is well known (see UN.org’s Cyber-security Overview, 2016).

Argued in this paper is that similar challenges are now likely to emerge amongst 21st century HR majors. Earlier in commerce education circles, business professors lecturing in HR

might have fairly expected that students drawn to a major in HR would be at least somewhat empathetic-humanists. In other words, in comparison to some business students, HR majors might more likely be aiming for a career serving in a “helping profession” (see Northwestern University’s “The Helping Professions” at [www.northwestern.edu](http://www.northwestern.edu)). But, argued in this conference paper, is that HR academia is increasingly vulnerable to the modern HR zeitgeist of “Strategic HRM” - - where HR is now viewed as a very promotable pathway to CEO roles, via somewhat callous subordination of HR’s traditional humanist and empathetic roles. It is, of course, logical that HR managers might enhance their promotability into CEO roles via their salient contributions to the dismemberment of labor unions, reduction of staffing budgets, etc. This can be viewed as consistent with a broader decline in business ethics (Chua & Rahman, 2011; Cordeiro, 2003) since HR managers have sometimes been viewed as carrying the “ethical water” at leadership or board meetings. A more strategic HR stance is likely to compete with, or at least, confound that boardroom role. As the authors here have witnessed an increase in somewhat ruthless student behaviors (and hard-nosed promotability-focused student attitudes) in HR-related classes, argued herein will be the timeliness of introducing service-learning as a ubiquitous and routine part of the HR major.

For such to become ubiquitous globally, the authors anticipate a need for a growing “HR4SocialGood” movement focused on embedding service-learning in HR curricula. Fortunately, there are seeds for such already. Much of the science undergirding HR is developed in the related disciplines of industrial, organizational, occupational and/or work psychology. Though started in New Zealand, there are now, globally, over three hundred psychologists as subscribers in the Global Organisation for Humanitarian Work Psychology ([www.gohwp.org](http://www.gohwp.org)). Many are academics with HR majors in their classrooms. The world’s leading professional body for HR, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, publisher with U.Michigan of the journal HRM) already has some volunteer-outreach activities, and hosts the E. C. Smith Humanitarian Award. The latter award is strictly for HR professionals.

This conference paper will describe how a new “HR4SocialGood” movement can grow from these seeds and also how it can learn from “IT4SocialGood’s” successes and shortcomings. It will also present empirical outcomes from the HR aspects of a joint HR/IT humanitarian app-development student-project (focused on unsafe water). This will include a novel use of SPSS/AMOS confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Finally, it will propose ways to bring awareness and engagement with humanitarian service into HR classrooms.