Journal of Refugee Studies Vol. 10, No. 1 1997

Policy Dysfunction in Humanitarian Organizations: The Role of Coping Strategies, Institutions, and Organizational Culture

MARK WALKUP

Department of Political Science, University of Florida

The proposed model helps explain dysfunctional dynamics within international humanitarian organizations (HOs) as a product of aid workers' efforts to cope with the psychological distress arising from their work. Through four stages of individual psychological coping strategies, aid workers collectively contribute to the development and perpetuation of institutions, which shape and reinforce the beliefs and behaviour of HO personnel. The discussion demonstrates how the resulting characteristics of HO culture—defensiveness and delusion—impede learning and innovation in the policy process. By exploring the manifestations and implications of this culture type, we can better interpret the behaviour of a unique, yet increasingly significant group of political actors often neglected by current organization theory. Once better understood, HOs can improve personnel support, thereby positively modifying organizational culture to better fulfil their objectives.

Introduction

The massive human tragedies of ethnic conflict and forced migration in the 1990s in such places as Kurdistan, Sudan, Bosnia, and Rwanda have increased awareness of the significant role of non-governmental and inter-governmental humanitarian organizations (HOs) that provide emergency assistance amidst these extremely complex environments. Despite their good will and persistence in the face of overwhelming tasks, HO personnel and those who interact with them continue to be frustrated by the lack of learning, improvement, and policy effectiveness within these organizations. A defensive resistance to innovation and information feedback causes HOs to make the same costly mistakes repeatedly when they intervene in crises, sometimes doing more harm than good to affected populations. Scarce funding is wasted through mismanagement and poorly-designed policy (often causing donors to cut funding to essential programmes), and the affected populations ultimately

©Oxford University Press 1997

suffer due to these institutionalized dysfunctions. Therefore, it is imperative to understand why these dysfunctional practices persist in order to improve the operations and better care for those in need.

The diverse group of actors referred to in this paper as HOs includes the multiplicity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the specific intergovernmental organizations (e.g. UNHCR, UNICEF, and the World Food Programme) that principally respond to emergencies. It is clearly understood that major differences exist among these organizations, especially between NGOs and UN agencies, regarding their operational styles, mandates, and purposes. Without forgetting these differences, however, this analysis draws attention to their commonalities and shows that the limitations to their improvement come from very similar institutional dynamics. In sum, from the perspective of organizational culture, they may be more similar than conventional wisdom would allow.

Research has explored the complex relationship between the rapidly proliferating numbers of HOs (especially NGOs) and their external political and economic environments (Bratton 1989; Hanlon 1991; Benthall 1993; Adiin Yaansah 1995; Smillie 1995). This research has revealed many external constraints on effective HO action and has shown how environmental factors affect the policy process. Such environmental factors include the donor obsessions with accountability; the often confrontational negotiations with host governments; the unpredictable tide of donor support and fatigue; the powerful influence of the media; the heated competition for funds and access; and the international exercise of political and ideological power between states and within international organizations. Indeed, one cannot understand the behaviour of HOs without considering their relationship with these contextual factors in their environment.

Much less research has carefully examined the endogenous variables that affect HO policy-making behaviour. Those who have looked inside these organizations have traditionally focused on such explanatory variables as authority structure, financial management, personnel training, and administrative skills. Significantly, they have tended to neglect the powerful descriptive and explanatory benefits of an organizational culture approach now receiving more recognition (Schein 1985, 1991; Smircich 1983; Frost and Moore 1985; Ouichi and Wilkins 1985; Allaire and Firsirotu 1984; Moran and Volkwein 1992). The concept of organizational culture is summarized by Schein as the

> . . . basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic 'taken for granted' fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment. These assumptions and beliefs are learned responses to a group's problems of survival in its external environment and its problems of internal integration (Schein 1985:6).

In addition to Schein's fundamental 'assumptions and beliefs', this analysis also examines the written and unwritten rules, codes of conduct, patterns of interaction, standard operating procedures, rituals, and myths that shape the

behaviour of both an organization and the individuals who comprise it. The collection of these components will be generally referred to as 'institutions' (see Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Scott 1995).

Using such an approach, we can better understand how HO behaviour is influenced by institutions of a common organizational culture that affects the process and outcome of policy design, implementation, and evaluation. Not only do these cultural dynamics influence the internal workings of the organization, they also affect HO belief systems, behaviour, and performance in terms of their relations with:

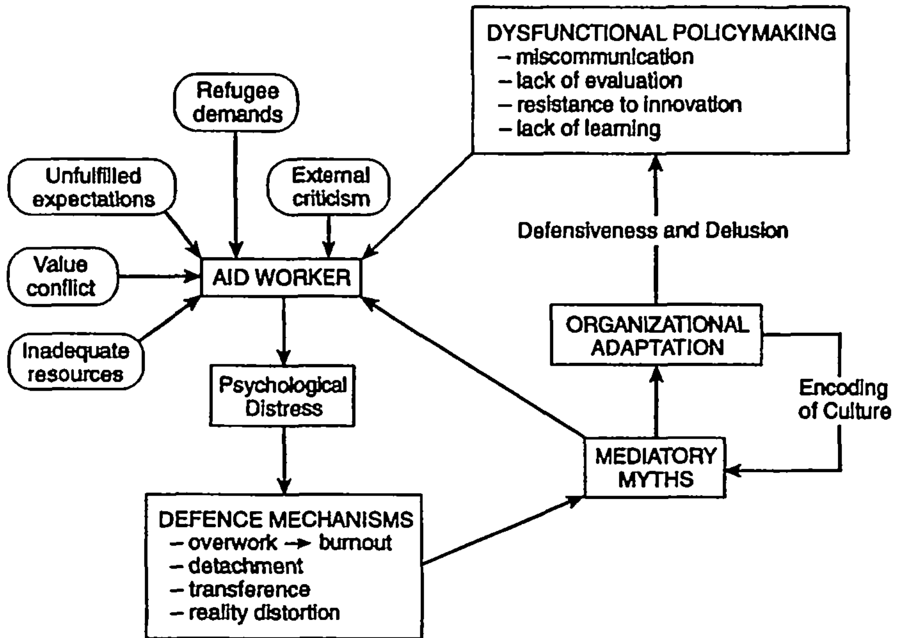
—each other (e.g. how HOs engage the politics and logistics of coordination);
—the state authorities (e.g. how HOs perceive and respond to state attempts to coordinate and regulate HO operations);
—the affected populations (e.g. how personnel communicate and operate with their clients and to what extent HOs incorporate truly participatory approaches to the policy process); and
—the donors (e.g. how HOs raise funds and negotiate accountability).

The origins of this organizational culture can be traced to many sources. This paper concentrates on one of the most important institution-producing dynamics: the aggregation of individual psychological coping strategies employed by HO personnel to mitigate the psychological distress faced in their jobs. Indeed, many have studied the psychological adaptive strategies of refugees; but few have turned the analytic lens toward the professionals working to provide assistance in these contexts of extreme distress. The concept of 'psychological distress' used in this analysis synthesizes elements of stress, anxiety, frustration, and guilt. It is recognized that these elements have distinct (yet debated) properties from a clinical and/or psychodynamic perspective; but such distinctions or precise valuations of the role of each element are not necessary for this analysis.

The paper will be structured by first presenting a basic model of cultural dynamics in HOs that will be explained step-by-step in the following sections. Second, stress factors for individual aid workers and their subsequent coping strategies will be described. Third, we see how these strategies become institutionalized within the organizational structure and reinforce cultural norms, beliefs, and practices. Fourth, the effects of these institutions on policy making will be shown, and some final recommendations for policy action and future research will be offered. Space constraints prevent detailing the complexity of components that form the culture of HOs. However, this brief paper does suggest a preliminary model with which to approach the analysis of HO culture types by tracing their origins and basic manifestations.

From participant observation and formal and informal interviews with HO headquarters and field staff, and through documentation of collective HO policy and behaviour, I have developed a model of HO culture and behaviour, which draws on research from psychology, anthropology, and organization theory (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Humanitarian Organizational Culture and Behaviour



Limits of Benevolence

Because of the scope of visible human suffering in humanitarian emergencies, HO staff are often incapable of significantly improving the condition of those placed in their charge. Despite their humanitarian mandate and will to help, their effectiveness is limited by many factors: vastly insufficient budgets and supplies; logistical complications; unreliable transportation and distribution networks; militarily hostile environments; unfamiliar cultures and languages; insufficient or incorrect information; inadequate communication systems; complicated negotiations with local and state leaders; interaction with other personnel with incongruous motivations and behaviours; and, most challenging of all, the scale of the needs of the affected populations. As one novice British aid worker coming from her first break away from the Rwandan refugee camps in Ngara, Tanzania said,

> The problems they expected us to solve were overwhelming, bigger than life—problems of justice, national reconciliation, human rights. I am just a community development worker. We were not trained in those things; we were just new to all this, but we had to make decisions about these issues almost every day.

Indeed, the scope of today's 'complex emergencies' requires aid workers to demonstrate 'superhuman' characteristics (well described by Slim 1995).

In addition, relief workers must face powerful ethical dilemmas in their everyday jobs. Decisions about distribution of inadequate resources make relief workers often decide who eats and who does not; and in many cases who lives and who dies. HO staff must decide whether to cut programmes that are believed to support the aggressors in armed conflicts, when doing so will place thousands of innocent people at risk. Indeed, faced with the questionable morality of assisting those involved in the Rwanda genocide and ultimately funding military training in camps, many HOs withdrew their staff from crucial relief operations in Goma, Bukavu, and Ngara/Karagwe. Further, in this UNHCR-declared 'decade of repatriation', HO staff must decide whether to accept needed funding and participate in repatriation programmes described for the international community as 'voluntary', while knowing that neither adequate protection nor resources necessary for successful return will be provided. Many relief workers assume they can remain neutral to the conflict and can provide aid in a fair, non-partisan manner. Not only is this impossible, it is unethical and dangerous. Providing aid without carefully considering its impact and potential use can be like pouring petrol on a fire. In sum, facing such dilemmas is an unavoidable part of the job and contributes to psychological distress.

Furthermore, the expectations, values, and ideologies of personnel may conflict with their assigned organizational roles and tasks. There are often conflicts between vertical structures (e.g. among headquarters, country directors, and field staff) and horizontal structures (e.g. between fundraising and operations, or 'development' and 'emergency') because of differing operational rules and priorities. Personnel often find themselves in situations where the HO's goals conflict with those it is supposedly assisting. De Waal bluntly describes the disturbing realization which confronts aid workers:

> Most of the people who start to work for relief agencies in Africa have not had previous experience of knowingly contributing to the suffering and death of a large number of people . . . Yet the disturbing activity of voluntarily being unpleasant to strangers is one of the most frequent activities that working in a relief programme involves (1988:1).

Despite the efforts, the affected populations continue to plead and perish, and truly committed HO staff at all levels must remain amidst incredible misery, enduring both external and self-imposed pressure for necessary action that they are unable to take. They live with the awesome burden that their actions (or inactions) powerfully affect the lives (and deaths) of numerous individuals for whom they are responsible; and that, at the end of the day, they must face the emotional conflict and guilt when they return in their air-conditioned vehicles to eat and relax in the relative comfort of their headquarters, homes, or compounds.

Significantly, these dilemmas and constraints may be more difficult for aid personnel to deal with because of the distinct personality traits characterizing many who work in the helping professions.

> Helpers tend to be quite altruistic, idealistic, and dedicated in their professions. They may have perfectionist tendencies, a need to prove themselves, and may experience difficulty in saying 'no' and in delegating tasks (Stearns 1993:5).

However, the context of relief work inhibits perfectionism; often causes workers to look bad; fails to give adequate recognition and praise of worker accomplishment; and requires delegation and decentralized management to accomplish complex tasks.

Informants have also asserted that many new aid workers have entered the field to escape the pain of a recently failed personal relationship and seek healing, while others have claimed that they did not feel as if they fitted in or were accepted by their home society or family, and were 'searching for themselves'. Many new aid workers have an agenda, conscious or subconscious, to find emotional healing and a level of acceptance not previously experienced; yet they come to environments where they not only fail to find healing and acceptance, but encounter rejection and emotional turmoil. Therefore, the work environment may be more severely damaging to aid workers' psyche and stability than it would be to others with lower expectations and needs, and their responses to these negative encounters may be more severe. In sum, it ironically seems that individuals with unique personality needs and vulnerabilities are attracted to work in a context with dynamics that prey upon those vulnerabilities and corrode their self-esteem and ability to cope.

Regardless of background, motivation, or personal stability, most aid workers face degrees of psychological distress because the system to which they had devoted so much hope and effort has been unable to address the problems and ultimately has failed to meet the very visible needs. The negative emotional responses arising from seemingly benevolent efforts conflict with the expectations of positive feelings of acceptance, contribution, appreciation, and self-fulfilment. The resulting 'cognitive dissonance' (Festinger 1957), or psychological tension caused by inconsistencies between beliefs and required actions, causes problems for the psyche.

These shared feelings of unfulfilled purpose, impotence, and powerlessness are dealt with in various ways corresponding to Hirschman's (1970) 'exit, voice, and loyalty' thesis which explains decline in firms and organizations. First, many aid workers 'exit' the organization at different stages of tenure because of the build-up of stress, unresolved conflicts, and perceived hopelessness. This stress (along with other factors discussed later) contributes to the extremely high staff turnover rates in HOs, especially at the field level. The perpetual cycle of new personnel (many of whom are young and lack appropriate experience or training) inhibits organizational memory and the capacity to learn from past experience.

Second, some actively 'voice' their frustrations in efforts to expose organizational problems that need to be addressed. Luckily, every organization has these 'mavericks', as de Waal (1988) calls them, who speak out against organizational practices and yet avoid being sacked due to their seniority or effectiveness. Indeed, they serve an important function for the organization. However, such voice is usually countered with various degrees and forms of suppressive action from the hierarchy because it threatens and embarrasses the organization. Since most field personnel rely on short-term employment contracts, the fear of losing their jobs will inhibit them from voicing their criticisms of policy problems.

Third, many remain 'loyal' (to the organization, the 'cause', or the financial benefits and job security), managing to suppress the feelings of futility with the conviction that 'at least some good is being done' and it is better to work within the system than not work at all. They learn to subscribe to the conventional wisdom that supports organizational policy, and they accept the myths that sustain morale and prevent dissent. These loyal personnel tend to gain promotions (within the same organization or others) not from creativity, but based on their policy conservatism and aversion to risky innovation (de Waal 1988).

Rusbult and Lowery (1985) suggest adding a fourth option to Hirschman's classic framework: the option of 'neglect' in which individuals choose simply to remain apathetic to organizational surroundings and policies, doing their jobs without asking questions or getting involved. These persons often become highly focused on accomplishing their individual tasks and attempt to disregard the activity going on around them, unless it directly impacts their isolated task. Such individuals can often be found in HOs, accepting the constraints of their condition, and facing no better alternative than to shut down many sensory and cognitive processes to a degree that allows them to 'escape'.

Aid Worker Coping Strategies

Those who do stay with the HO, through various exercises of voice, loyalty, or neglect, must learn to cope with the resulting psychological distress. The concept of 'coping' is much debated within the discipline of psychology; but entering into that debate here is fruitless and would take the discussion far afield. To provide a useful conceptual foundation, Tallman *et al.* (1993) distinguish between 'coping' (action to change a distressing mental state) and 'problem solving' (action to change or eliminate the *source* of a problematic state of affairs). Many mistakenly confound the two concepts, they argue; and they illustrate that problem solving actions 'entail a greater risk of failure than would be true of a coping response' (Tallman *et al.* 1993:161). Indeed, this is a helpful distinction to keep in mind. However, the contexts of most humanitarian crises involve a problematic 'source' that cannot be 'changed or eliminated' because of its permanence and scope. Whereas it is possible to

change or eliminate manifestations or symptoms of the problem, one finds it impossible to relieve the immense burdens that confront humanitarian workers. Therefore, although aid workers do engage in 'problem solving' activity, more significant energy is expended on simply 'coping', or developing strategies to regulate psychological distress.

Various coping strategies (both conscious and subconscious) are utilized to maintain psychological stability. Psychologists assert that coping strategies develop and change in degree of complexity, degree of maturity, and degree of reality distortion through chronological stages as the individual develops through a crisis situation (cf. Blum 1952; Vaillant 1977). Following this logic, I suggest that coping strategies of aid workers develop through at least four identifiable stages: overwork, detachment, transference, and reality distortion. Each stage has many different strategies. Note that an individual does not necessarily progress in order, may skip a stage, may move back and forth, and may remain for a long time or permanently in one stage. This movement depends upon the context and the (consciously or subconsciously) perceived benefit gained by a particular strategy.

In the *overwork stage*, because of the psychological distress of recognizing the limits of their effectiveness, workers new to the field often try to overcome these feelings (including guilt, rejection, frustration) by working even harder. This overwork has several results. First, this strategy often causes workers to limit participation of colleagues or clients in decision making and implementation. Such individuals believe participation of others slows them down and limits their individual productivity. Increased participation is also perceived to reduce or dilute the individual recognition workers receive for their extra labours. Further, some individuals approach their work with religious convictions or want to satisfy personal needs to 'do penance'; consequently, others' participation is sometimes subconsciously perceived to reduce the atonement benefit gained in their efforts to 'right the wrongs' of society. This tendency is compounded by the use of work as an escape from boredom often experienced in field sites where the options for leisure activity are few. As a result of this overexertion, workers commonly experience stress-induced 'burnout' common in the helping professions. The clinically accepted term 'burnout' refers to the physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion exhibited by physical illness, acute tension, chronic fatigue, sleep disorders, depression, diminished coping capacity, negativism, apathy, inflexibility, cynicism, irritability and anger (Maslach 1982; Ratliff 1988; Edelwich and Brodsky 1980; Talbot *et al.* 1992; Kutscher and Seeland 1989). Burnout reduces the effectiveness of personnel by repressing their flexibility, creativity, and capacity for change.

In the *detachment stage*, after aid personnel realize that working 20-hour days will not solve the intractable problems, they attempt strategies of detachment from their suffering clients in order to reduce the level of distress caused by their limited capacity to help. Because of their desire to avoid direct interaction with the client populations—the source of their guilt and stress—aid workers reduce time spent in the field. They find themselves making

decisions from secondary reports instead of more accurate, personal assessments. Many become focused on paperwork, believing that they have seen enough of the field situation, know the problems, and can best address them from their desks back in the office. In addition, they increasingly avoid dealing with problems of individual clients or addressing needs that fall outside their individual job descriptions. As one Kenyan aid worker in the Rwandan refugee camps in Goma said:

> You have to put on blinders and act like a machine—it's the only way to survive. You do your job and don't look around. If your job is to build a latrine, you don't think about anything else: you just build the best latrine you can and move on. That is all you can do.

Seeking social support, HO personnel tend to isolate themselves in groups of expatriates in their compounds. Often a black humour about death and suffering of others develops among aid workers as they try to bring levity to their predicament and escape the harsh reality of emotionally disturbing tasks. This detachment can be an effective coping strategy, enabling workers to complete tasks efficiently without the bother of external stressors and without becoming overwhelmed by the severity of the situation. However, such workers often lose touch with reality, fail to see the broader perspective of their work, and misapply organizational policies. Thus the quality of decisions and actions is reduced.

As Lipsky (1976) describes, 'street-level bureaucrats' (in our case 'field-level')—those who are the direct implementors of organizational policy and operate where the policy meets the public—tend to protect their well-being by acting on their own volition before following standard operating procedures or promoting established policy. This defensive strategy most often occurs 1) when the organization's resources are inadequate for the assigned task; 2) when individuals perceive a threat to their physical or psychological well-being; or 3) when expectations about job performance are ambiguous and/or contradictory (Lipsky 1976:198). Perhaps more visibly than in other contexts, all of these conditions are acutely prevalent in relief work. To adapt to the stressful work situation and the relative distance between them and the central authority, field-level bureaucrats also employ coping mechanisms that cause them to develop practices that may even counter formal organizational goals and policy. As a result, individuals faced with limited power to change their environments, intense decision-making burdens, incessant client demands, and inadequate resources may develop 'procedures for effectively limiting clientele demands by making systems financially or psychologically costly or irritating to use' (Lipsky 1976:206). The tedious, control-oriented registration and food distribution procedures are obvious examples of such demand-limiting strategies used by HO staff to protect their interests.

In the *transference stage*, aid personnel are no longer able to detach themselves from the ever present suffering that they are incapable of alleviating. Now, to protect Self, they begin to rationalize failure by

transferring the guilt away from themselves and pointing the blame at other factors. Through this psychological process of transference, aid workers are quick to blame 'politics', 'the superiors', 'the donors', 'the bureaucracy', or 'the host government' for the errors. They frequently claim to have no control or power to change the system and use this excuse to rationalize inaction. While these external constraints indeed are real, workers are hesitant to admit the fact that their actions or those of their organization may have been miscalculated or poorly executed contributing to the policy failures. It is interesting to find how most personnel are quick to point out errors of other organizations, while maintaining that 'our organization is different'.

Moreover, the most unfortunate, yet common response is to blame the aid recipients themselves for their predicament, instead of addressing the real source of problems (see Waldron 1987; de Waal 1988). Harrell-Bond comments that 'it is alarming to observe that assistance programmes are dominated by an ethos in which the victims of mass exodus are treated as the villains' (1986:305). The controversial, comprehensive, year-long evalation of the logistics and coordination of emergency aid to Rwandan refugees supports this observation:

> The attitude of some agency personnel towards the refugees was that they somehow represented the 'opposition', there to cheat at registrations and food distributions and to thwart agency attempts to organize their existence efficiently and equitably (ODI 1996:143).

Consequently, as Waldron (1987) observes, in the perspective of many HO staff, refugees cease to be people *with* problems; refugees *become* the problem. HO staff then focus their efforts on eliminating the organizational problem (refugees) instead of successfully performing their assigned functions by improving their effectiveness through innovation and creativity. This perception has led to increasing attempts to repatriate refugees prematurely or to prevent them from fleeing violence by corralling them in so-called 'safe havens', for example, in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. UNHCR has often been criticized for participating in illegal forced repatriation of refugees back into contexts of violence or famine, simply because proper care for them became difficult and they became a threatening budgetary problem for UNHCR. Unfortunately, the organizational solution often leads to increased suffering and death.

In the *reality distortion stage*, when reassigning the blame no longer satisfies and protects the ego, or when it is no longer possible to conceal the inadequacies, aid workers create false illusions of success to enable them to feel a sense of self-worth and accomplishment in the midst of institutional inadequacy or failure. They realize their relative powerlessness to change the problems of the system; consequently, they construct an alternative reality of humanitarian benevolence, organizational accomplishment, and client needs. For instance, Harrell-Bond has noticed in western aid workers the 'convenient belief' that people of other cultures

> do not suffer either physical or psychological pain in the same way as do 'white' people; they are used to death and suffering and therefore no longer feel these things (1986:206).

Further, as many have observed, when the aid provision falls short of needs, the perceived urgency of the needs often curiously becomes less severe in the eyes of many HO personnel. In fact, the needs have not changed; aid workers have simply adjusted their perception of the needs to fit the availability of resources more closely. This subconscious and sometimes conscious effort to maintain a false supply-demand equilibrium sustains the illusion of organizational success.

Institutionalization of Culture

In sum, to maintain psychological stability, aid workers utilize various defensive strategies depending on the severity of the distress. However, these strategies are not isolated to the psyche and behaviour of the individual aid worker in the field. On a deeper and more complex level, the resulting institutionalization of such strategies provides the structure for a common organizational culture. As Kets de Vries notes:

> It is now recognized that individual defensive processes operate throughout organizational life and may become integrated in the social structure of an organization, affecting strategy (1991:4).

As an HO develops from the time of its original incorporation, the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour of its personnel become established and routinized into rules, rituals, values, codes of conduct, and standard operating procedures. This culture is reinforced by new personnel as they progress through the coping process. At the same time, these cultural institutions shape the ways that new individuals learn to cope. The result is a dynamic evolutionary process, yet with a tendency to fortify institutional structures with an increasing permanance.

If it appears that the fundamental coping strategies of individual HO personnel are rooted in psychological processes tending toward denial and rationalization, then these attitudes and the resulting behaviours are bound to shape organizational culture accordingly. At the macro-institutional level, these individual responses to psychological stress result in two general dynamics within HO culture: *delusion* and *defensiveness*. Obviously, to reduce the description of a culture into two dynamics is questionable; and certainly many other dynamics are observable. However, the tendency of behaviour to adhere to the characteristics of these two dynamics in particular is remarkable. Therefore, these dynamics and their resulting operational principles will be used to describe the relationship between individual and organizational behaviour. In the subsequent explanation, the use of the terms 'myth' and 'delusion' is not meant to be derogatory; rather, these are analytic terms used

by anthropologists and psychologists to describe and explain behaviour, not to criticize it.

Organizational Delusion

HOs tend to be influenced by forms of organizational delusions. The American Psychiatric Association has defined a 'delusion' as:

> A false personal belief based on incorrect inference about external reality that is firmly sustained despite what almost everyone else believes and despite what constitutes incontrovertible and obvious proof or evidence to the contrary (Kuper and Kuper 1996:170).

In a somewhat less negative light, a delusion can also be described as a rational attempt to explain or justify anomalous or discordant experiences that produce cognitive dissonance and psychological distress. Regardless of origin, a delusion is a form of structured self-deception that is instrumental in reducing psychological distress. When many individuals within a common social context experience similar forms of psychological distress and cope with them in similar ways, a dynamic of 'collective self-deception' emerges. Over time, this dynamic is reinforced and often becomes institutionalized into many forms. Myths are one of these forms. Communities, cultures, and organizations have many types of myths with multiple functions that serve to explain the unknown, coalesce identity, and give meaning to events and actions. Myths of origin and descent, myths of heroes or personalities, myths of outsiders, and myths of caution and comfort all shape how individuals think about themselves, their social organization, and their place in it.

In organizations functioning with rather severe conflicts in the management of seemingly contradictory actions and dilemmas, we find the operation of 'mediatory myths' that enable personnel to get on with their work in spite of the various dilemmas arising from the institutional contradictions between expectation and reality (Abravanel 1983; Scheid-Cook 1988). Most notably, the contexts of humanitarian relief operations are notorious for the multiplicity of ethical, logistical, and moral dilemmas they present for HO workers. Scheid-Cook explains:

> . . . an internal dialectic exists between various social prescriptions for what the organization is expected to accomplish and technical prescriptions for what it realistically can accomplish. Mediatory myths allow organizational members to perform activities despite the bifurcation between what *should* be done (the fundamental) and what *can* be done (the operative) (1988:163).

These 'mediatory myths' become encoded into organizational culture through language, written and oral histories, patterns of communication, and ritual practices (Kets de Vries and Miller 1984). A myth of proficiency and success is often fabricated within HOs to mediate the distress resulting from the failure of humanitarian efforts. This myth is more than a public relations

strategy to promote a favourable image through the media. In fact, the function of the myth goes much deeper because it seems to be constructed by HO personnel to justify their actions not just to the public, *but also to themselves*. From his work in Yemen, Morris (1991) suggests that because so much money and energy has been invested by the aid workers and their organizations, a *projectismo*, 'a conviction of the rightness of one's cause', takes hold.

> In each project there may be a pendulum swing from despair towards flights of fancy, from abject frustration to belief in the omnipotence of the developers and the inevitability of their success (1991:4).

This myth often pervades HO communication and policy making and contributes to many counterproductive tendencies which arise in part from a need to protect the myth from contrary information. Standard operating procedures of HOs often demand a rigid format for field reports that makes it easier to write and process them, but more difficult to report negative information. These strict guidelines require field workers to satisfy quantitative indicators of progress or to fit vast amounts of qualitative information into very small spaces for easier processing. Also, the formats and headquarters' expectations generally allow little room for free expression of opinions. In addition, when field staff do express their opinions, middle managers often suppress or filter information of staff requests or client conditions if reports are too negative or if they believe that the information may require action that is either impossible or undesirable (Kent 1987:151). Morris asserts that:

> As reports from the field circulate upwards through the hierarchies of aid agencies they can become shorn of even the most veiled disquiet.... Discordant reports, rejecting the jargon and the conventional mould, may be buried at the bottom of filing cabinets, dismissed as non-objective pique, and not shown to new recruits (1991:5).

Communication is in a language shaped by the organization's mediatory myth. Staff use jargon that portrays reality in a more favourable light. For example, hoes and seeds provided to drought-affected populations are 'self-sufficiency packages', implying that self-sufficiency can be neatly and effectively packaged and delivered. 'Corridors of tranquillity' are the blissful landmine-riddled areas where warring factions tentatively agree to halt (or at least slow) the ambushing of convoys and murdering of truck drivers. 'Safe havens' are the UN-designated areas where refugees are corralled and theoretically 'protected' by ill-mandated UN 'peacekeepers', despite the atrocities committed within these safe havens in areas such as former Yugoslavia. Cutting rations to encourage refugees to evacuate a region becomes 'voluntary repatriation'. And the unpredictable delivery schedules of insufficient commodities becomes World Food Programme's 'food pipeline'. To justify the lack of assistance provided, HOs often claim to be preventing the 'dependency syndrome' (Karadawi 1983), or they cite their effort to 'stimulate self-reliance' (see Keen

1992:11). This intentional obfuscation of reality is done for several reasons: to generate 'good press'; to maintain or justify funding (a legitimate, 'rational' motivation); and to perpetuate the internal myth of efficacy, accomplishment, and humanitarian morality. This collective self-deception is necessary for the maintenance of staff morale.

Evoking memories of Orwell, Ferguson refers to the concept of 'dev-speak' where

> 'development' discourse typically involves not only special terms, but a distinctive style of reasoning, implicitly (and perhaps unconsciously) reasoning backward from the necessary conclusions . . . to the premises required to generate those conclusions (Ferguson 1990:259–60).

This 'backward reasoning' fits the widely-accepted methods of cost-benefit analysis (CBA) used for decision making and evaluation by most organizations. However, CBA unfortunately is used to legitimize often unsound, fundamentally political decisions by 'window-dressing' them with supposedly objective and technical jargon (Rondinelli 1993:8; Chambers 1993:81). If one uses this sort of backward reasoning to justify actions, especially ones taken in the name of humanitarianism, the potential for error and unethical conduct is obvious. Referring to UNHCR's myth construction, Pitt observes:

> Once this mythology is established, the programme can be spelled out in detail complete with computerized budget lines and a manual of management procedures . . . That goals are utopic or even that facts are demonstrably false seems to make little difference to the mythology (1986:28–29).

Many policies, pronouncements, and promises are made with clear understanding that they cannot or will not be implemented. Yet their public announcement is necessary to sustain the myths of success and contrived humanitarian pride deemed necessary both for organizational morale and future fundraising.

Organizational Defensiveness

Unfortunately for HOs, these myths of humanitarian success often fail in their protective function and have their validity challenged by outsiders or insiders who produce contrary evidence or opinions. HOs are in the business of giving and helping; therefore, they are often threatened by the assertion that they need assistance and improvement too. As a result, HOs characteristically assume a defensive posture to protect two interrelated components essential for organizational survival: myths and money.

HOs are often falsely perceived as being removed from profit-motivation because they are created to help people, not to make money. It would seem to follow that the motivation and ideologies that guide their actions should limit the self-interested tendencies of for-profit firms. Therefore, HOs are supposedly more able to provide aid efficiently and fairly. In reality, these organizations

(like any other firm) have to raise substantial funding to maintain operations and retain personnel. In short, HOs have a rational interest in their own survival, and they employ the same strategies of aggressive competition for survival and growth in a market environment as are employed by most profit-making corporations. Unfortunately, this competition produces policies and practices that often counter the interests of the client population.

Here we need to highlight the cultural effects of this seemingly contradictory characterization of HOs as both benevolent and selfless on one hand, and fiercely competitive and interest-maximizing on the other. This tension causes problems not only in policy making, but also in individual staff as they try to make decisions and justify their actions by two different sets of often conflicting criteria. First, we should make three fundamental assumptions about organizational behaviour: 1) organizations seek to maintain morale and internal consistency; 2) organizations have multiple objectives and are pulled in sometimes conflicting directions; and 3) survival is the strongest motivating force in any organization. In fact, both for-profit and non-profit organizations sometimes have conflicting agendas. On one hand, it is not uncommon for interest-maximizing, for-profit, market-oriented businesses to engage in charitable, *pro bono* work. Although such engagement can result in internal conflicts, the internal consistency of businesses is not threatened as much by charitable actions because they know their primary concern is to make profits. On the other hand, HOs, which focus primarily on helping others, also have the fundamental motivation of survival, which is dependent on fundraising and image. This requirement of image maintenance often threatens internal consistency of HOs when the interests of their clients (their *raison d'être*) conflict with the requirements for organizational survival. These common predicaments cause great stress for individuals who must make choices based on conflicting decision rules while maintaining their faith in organizational coherence and policy validity. In short, the morale and internal consistency of HOs is much more significantly threatened than that of for-profit firms, and the collective efforts to mediate the resulting tension produce a predominantly defensive cultural dynamic in HOs.

Criticism or negative feedback is difficult to internalize for any individual or organization. But unlike most market-oriented firms (which rely on consumer feedback to modify and improve their product or service), HOs seek to discourage consumer feedback. Unlike market-oriented firms, HOs are not threatened by the dissatisfaction of consumers (the affected populations), but by the donors' displeasure with their service. Understandably, then, they are naturally more responsive to donor interests than to the needs of the affected population (see Smillie 1995:148-150). However, the donor criteria for HO success (proper accountability; swift and complete expenditure; tangible construction) do not necessarily correspond with the consumers' values or expectations. And consumer displeasure often fails to be communicated to the evaluators or donors. So as long as HOs can spend money without stirring up criticism, they will retain their donors' support and will survive. Therefore,

negative feedback is not utilized or valued by HOs as it is in market-oriented firms. As one UNHCR management consultant reported:

> We work for no other organization in the political, governmental, or commercial world which has such an absence of mechanisms for determining citizen or consumer satisfaction (KRC 1991:8).

The consumers of HO products or services have little means of influence or recourse in cases where aid is unsatisfactory or sometimes destructive. Social service organizations operating in most northern countries are governed by laws, regulations, and licensing requirements that give clients rights to appeals and transparent public scrutiny to ensure that they uphold specified standards. However, the absense of consumer or client protection, and the HOs' defensive efforts to keep it that way, are characteristic of most HOs that operate in countries in the south.

The power that personnel exercise over their clients—the aid recipients—is reinforced and legitimized by several factors. First, the gift giver in any exchange relationship, even without intention, places the recipient in a subordinate position (Mauss 1968). Therefore, the recipient is wrong to question the gift or the terms on which it is given. Second, the giver's power is also legitimized by the implicit claim of benevolence and compassion. Because of their benevolent motives, humanitarian personnel feel threatened and insulted by claims of inadequacy or misconduct. As Waldron puts it:

> Criticizing refugee relief is an effort likely to produce much the same response as, for example, sending mother's apple pie to the Food and Drug Administration for chemical analysis (1987:1).

Indeed, they rest secure on the moral high ground. But HOs often erroneously assume that compassion and moral virtue alone can prevent (or excuse) the problems that plague their functioning. Harrell-Bond's critique of 'compassion' is noteworthy:

> Western notions of compassion tend to be inherently ethnocentric, paternalistic, and non-professional. Many humanitarian aid programmes fail for precisely these reasons; because the logic of compassion is believed to be morally right, it is the *reality* which must be wrong and which must be bent to conform to a compassionate template. Discussions of aid programmes conducted under the banner of humanitarianism concentrate therefore not on reasons for failures, but on competing claims to moral rectitude (1986:26).

This defensive cultural dynamic also results in a conservative, risk-averse tendency in HO personnel. Aiming to prevent mistakes and hence further criticism, staff take a prudent, minimalist approach to planning and task completion, seeking security by adhering to standard operating procedures and formal communication channels. Innovation increases the possiblity for criticism, and HO personnel tend to value the safety of the status quo over the potential benefits of change. This cultural dynamic is reinforced by the conservatism resulting from job insecurity.

The defensive nature is perhaps most apparent in the way HOs undertake research and evaluation to increase their capacity to learn from their experience and the knowledge of others. Fortunately, many HOs have incorporated 'evaluation units' into administrative structures and have provided them with varying degrees of power and financial resources to facilitate the feedback of information into the policy process. However, internal evaluators are constrained by their link to the organization and often are unable to remove themselves from the accepted organizational assumptions, principles, and institutions (those that are often at the source of the problems). In addition to internal evaluations, what is needed is a continuous healthy dialogue with external researchers and evaluators. However, HOs often fail to cooperate with researchers seeking to improve efficiency and effectiveness and are often unwilling to open details of internal decision-making to much-needed evaluation. To be sure, HOs often commission external reports and this gives the appearance of openness. However, from her extensive experience as a consultant who watched HOs hire multiple consultants but did not attempt to link their research, Epstein notices that:

> development bureaucracies often prefer to 'soothe' their guilty conscience about the ineffectiveness of many of their developmental programmes by engaging one 'expert' consultant after another, rather than to knuckle down to the much harder task of improving their operational practices. The multiple consultants relieve the internal pressures being placed on the developmental personnel from within the bureaucracy (1987:208).

She observes the common understanding that organizations value the stack of reports on the shelves but fail to actually use the data or recommendations to make policy changes.

Furthermore, researchers are most often selected according to their history of favourable reports; many reports are never distributed beyond the executive level or are 'buried'; and critical findings are dismissed as biased slander and are ridiculed. The UN agencies' reaction to the massive, multi-donor 1995 evaluation report on Rwandan relief operations is a case in point. According to one WFP official, 'UN agencies were furious' and they demanded that it be rewritten and many sections cut completely.

Indeed, not only do HOs often ignore outside research, such research is pro-actively countered. Executive decision-makers believe that negative reports exposing errors in projects, institutional weaknesses, and questionable methodology may harm the organization's ability to do its job, raise funds, or survive. In sum, even though supported in public pronouncements and literature, transparency and external evaluation are avoided when possible because HO survival is perceived to be put at risk. Therefore, the inherent problems encountered within the organizational structure and operations remain unaddressed.

Institutional Resilience and Organizational Evolution

As mentioned earlier, both the behaviour of new personnel in relation to their environment, as well as the structure of cultural institutions, are simultaneously evolving as they interact (i.e., institutions shape individuals, and individuals shape institutions). When new individuals begin work in an assistance programme, their strategies of adaptation to the stressful environment are shaped by the existing institutions of the HOs (both the HO that employs them and those with which they must interact). Their coping behaviours, in turn, shape and reinforce the existing institutions.

Due to the high HO staff turnover rate, logic would suggest that HOs would be very adaptive and innovative, constantly evolving as the new personnel provide fresh insights into policy and operations. When confronted with evidence to the contrary (that HOs are extraordinarily rigid, conservative, and defensive), several things can be surmised as explanatory factors: 1) the HO environment shapes individual behaviour and perception in unusually powerful ways; 2) both the experience and responses among new HO personnel to their environment must be very similar; and 3) the cultural institutions of HOs are very resilient. In short, the combination of many factors produces an intra-organizational and inter-organizational network of institutions, both purposefully designed and incidental, with quite extraordinary capacity for perpetuation. The resilience of the institutions indicates that they are very adaptive to the context of their environment. In other words, the institutions that are 'selected' in this evolutionary process must provide instrumental benefits. Paradoxically, these institutions, both purposefully designed and incidental, reinforce and perpetuate these cultural traits, making organizational change more difficult.

The perceived dangerous, high-profile nature of relief work leads personnel to develop a heightened sense of group solidarity and protectiveness, which fosters a perception of division between 'us' (the aid staff) and 'them' (the affected populations). This can be positive for aid workers in that it provides a greater sense of personal security in new, uncertain, and possibly threatening conditions. But this 'siege mentality' also can lead to isolationism, reactionary paranoia, and 'groupthink'. Obviously, these dynamics inhibit good deliberation and communication. Also due to the siege mentality, aid workers go to great lengths in efforts to cover for the errors of their colleagues and their organization. As Meyer and Rowan show:

> Assuring that individual participants maintain face sustains confidence in the organization and ultimately reinforces confidence in the myths that rationalize the organization's existence (1983:58).

Further, many management strategies contribute to the rigidity of cultural institutions which inhibit learning and evolution. HO managers must deal with a unique set of administrative conditions. First, HO operations and personnel are often dispersed over wide geographical areas making supervision difficult.

Second, because geographically-distant personnel often live among their client populations, there is a perceived tendency for them over time to identify more with the clients than the organization. Therefore, to maintain control and prevent field personnel from being 'captured' by the interests of their clients, HOs use several classic strategies (Kaufman 1960; Gortner *et al.* 1987). They frequently rotate staff to new positions, often where they have no experience or specific knowledge. (This is also done under the assumption that field personnel need a more general knowledge-base, according to one senior UNHCR evaluations officer.) They institutionalize formal and informal socialization processes, often formally facilitated through handbooks and training programmes. Further, they recruit 'self-selected' individuals with similar devotion to the goals and methods of the organization. These self-selected persons will more readily accept policy and procedures without questioning the assumptions under which they were designed or the wider implications of the policies beyond their explicit nature. Moreover, because most personnel are hired on short-term contracts, their employment vulnerability discourages questioning of authoritative decisions or policies that they know will be problematic in implementation.

Taken together, these factors reinforce cultural institutions. While some management strategies are instrumental for organizational control, they limit the degree of innovation, feedback, and learning necessary for improvement. Although some degree of personnel cohesion is necessary to provide comfort and security, such extreme conditions of threat enhance such cohesion in counterproductive ways. The result of such institutional reinforcement is a condition of organizational rigidity that hampers essential organizational change.

Recommendations

To sum up, as a response to their extremely stressful environment, HO personnel and structure tend to be inflexible, defensive, and governed by mediatory myths. A culture of delusion and defensiveness presents formidable obstacles for communication, learning, and innovation. Policy innovation may be resisted, whether it comes in the form of executive directives, suggestions from field personnel, or recommendations of external evaluators. Attempts to introduce new approaches often fail because innovation involves changing traditional methodologies and constructed realities supported by these myths and institutions. Paradoxically, organizational learning and improvement are obstructed by the same mediatory myths that sustain staff morale.

Returning to a point raised briefly in this paper's opening paragraphs, clearly there is much evidence of the vast differences in HO styles, ideologies, methods, and specializations. Yet this discussion has downplayed those differences. At first look, lumping the astounding diversity of organizations that provide innumerable kinds of humanitarian assistance into one category called 'HOs' is certainly of questionable analytical merit. Indeed, most

academics earn recognition by distinguishing and classifying, not by 'lumping'. And any observer would confirm that Oxfam is significantly different from UNHCR, and Caritas operates differently from CARE. Nonetheless, this analysis demonstrates that all HOs face similar, predictable obstacles to their successful operation, and these problems find their origins (and solutions) in the institutional framework of their unique organizational culture. The contribution of this analysis lies in its accumulated observation, synthesis, and interpretation of the behaviour of diverse organizations. Its subsequent generalization of these institutions and tendencies for practitioners helps them not only to make sense of their own organization, but to understand the norms and institutions affecting the interaction of the multiplicity of HOs comprising the humanitarian regime.

Obviously, organizational cultures are not static; they constantly evolve as factors influence their perpetual reconstruction and redefinition. Therefore, there are many opportunities to break the vicious cycle of organizational dysfunction and improve HO efficacy: through structural alteration, changes in policy design, or stimulating the individuals comprising the cultural fabric. This analysis has basically shown that structural re-engineering alone will not solve the problems, and that strategies accounting for the unique human psychological dynamics will perhaps produce more lasting benefits. While this interpretive analysis was not meant to include specific strategies for change, the discussion of the individual-level dysfunctional responses to severe stress and guilt does indicate some obvious directions for action and future research.

Appropriate Selection and Training Mechanisms

Although it seems too obvious to mention, aid personnel need adequate training prior to and during deployment. Because of hasty recruitment patterns when HOs 'staff up' for emergency operations, staff often lack the skills and experience necessary to contribute to (and not impede) relief administration. A required system of 'apprenticeship' of new field personnel paired with veteran workers could encourage organizational learning and positive institutional reinforcement (Stephenson 1986). Although donors would rather spend money directly on 'victims', HOs need to educate their donors that it is in their interest to spend money on training and education. Many organizations are collecting data-bases on potential employees who are 'on-call' for such emergency work.

Retention of Personnel

HOs should prioritize the retention of personnel and the investment in their experience. HO managers must stop viewing their field personnel as 'expendable resources' to be used until they are 'burned out' and replaced from the pool of young, idealistic, hard working individuals waiting for positions. Until HO executives (and, perhaps especially, donors) are willing to invest money to support and develop their personnel (as for-profit firms are

more willing to do), assistance programmes will continue to fall short of their objectives.

Sabbaticals for Continuing Education

Part of such support includes the need to provide aid workers with opportunities to gain 'positive distance' from their work. This does not include the periodic rest and relaxation (R&R) breaks in which workers find respite in non-constructive activities such as alcohol consumption, sleep, and recreation with co-workers. While not to deny the benefits of those breaks, it would also be constructive to encourage sabbaticals for further training and education at institutions where they can receive exposure to interdisciplinary research on various aspects of the complex, stressful context in which they work. Many short and long-term courses are increasingly available which give HO personnel the chance to reflect on their experiences and interact with other personnel with different ideas and experiences. Such interaction and education help personnel to see the bigger picture and how their role and actions impact and are impacted by other dynamics in the system.

Psychological Support

As the recent proliferation of seminars and workshops on the subject should indicate, HOs should incorporate specifically-designed psychological therapy and stress-management training for their staff to pro-actively combat the impact of such high-stress environments (see Stearns (1993) for a brief review of such strategies). In fact, psychotherapeutic interventions are often included in many other helping professions because of the recognized benefits to professionals constantly exposed to trauma and suffering (Talbot *et al.* 1992). Many tired workers will deny the need for such 'therapy sessions', especially when R&R breaks are short and they would rather choose other activities for relaxation. But HO management should take a strong stance and make periods of psychological debriefing, using a variety of alternative approaches, a mandatory part of each R&R if they are to improve their operations. However, due to the recent fashion (and subsequent available funding), the unfortunate proliferation of opportunistic organizations suddenly offering psychological therapy training makes it necessary to carefully evaluate the merits and reputation of such courses and agencies.

Opportunity for 'Voice'

HOs need to develop a greater cultural acceptance of 'voice'. Instead of hiding their dissent and frustrations about having to implement ill-designed policy, personnel should have meaningful outlets through which they can vocalize the problems they face and suggest alternative policy options without risking their job security. Superiors should solicit advice from field personnel by

institutionalizing formal and informal communication channels through which personnel can have access to policy designers. Incentive structures should be developed which would reward individuals who show courage enough to propose alternative options or to question policy appropriateness.

Embracing Error through Evaluations

To curtail the duplication of blunders through sustained organizational learning, HOs need to adopt a 'learning process approach' to management and evaluation in the policy process which will 'embrace error' instead of covering it up (Korten 1980). Policy designers and especially donors need to be convinced that it should be acceptable to incrementally 'experiment' with programmes knowing that they may fail (Rondinelli 1993), but only if organizations have the capacity to learn while experimenting. HOs should also seek methods of learning by observing other organizations and exchanging information through a more institutionalized network. Internal evaluations (both positive and negative) should be shared. HOs should invite exchanges of staff evaluators who could view other operations and programmes without filtering information through the constructed ideologies and underlying assumptions of the organization under consideration. Further, the client populations should be incorporated (and not coopted) in the evaluation process from the outset.

Conclusion

The reform strategies described above will be much more effective after understanding the unique cultural institutions that influence individual decision making and behaviour. These institutional dynamics, and the proposed model used to explain them, deserve further investigation and adaptation through comparative and case-study analyses to provide a broader understanding of their various, distinct manifestations and cultural sub-types. Towards this aim, researchers and practitioners need to analyze the diversity of strategies that HOs can and do use to mediate and counteract the dysfunctional effects of this culture. In brief, how do cultures change and how can change be directed and facilitated in positive ways? Studies of the processes and effects of the various proactive and counteractive strategies would contribute to the improvement of the humanitarian regime.

The insight made possible by this new perspective can be helpful in the process of problem solving. First, HO personnel must recognize and accept that these dynamics exist. Second, they must begin to understand the underlying cultural institutions that influence their beliefs and behaviours. Third, they must learn to cope with failure and institutional limitations in ways that resist the stifling of creative innovation. Finally they must find methods to promote the positive institutionalized behaviours and counteract the negative ones. Obstructive organizational myths can be tempered through open

confessions of institutional burdens. Perhaps through such confessions, the powerful ideology of humanitarianism and the flawed logic of compassion can be altered so that those who engage in such necessary work will face their tasks with a clearer perspective and a more realistic, deliberative approach.

This analysis has attempted to make explicit what HO personnel and those that interact with them have agreed to leave implicit. To be sure, much of this discussion has probably been familiar territory for people associated with HOs; and perhaps for them the analysis of the shared understandings has not broken new ground. However, as Smircich demonstrates through applied analysis,

> The researcher studying an organizational culture tries to uncover the structures of meaning in use in the setting and to synthesize an image of that group's reality and make it available for consideration and reflection (1983:164).

Indeed, such analysis 'may serve the same purpose as that served by therapy for an individual' (ibid.). This paper was written with such intent.

ABRAVANEL, H. (1983) 'Mediatory Myths in the Service of Organizational Ideology,' in Pondy, L., Frost, P. J., Morgan, G. and Dandridge, T. (eds.) *Organizational Symbolism*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

ADIIN YAANSAH, E. A. (1995) *An Analysis of Domestic Legislation to Regulate the Activities of Local and Foreign NGOs in Croatia, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda*. Oxford: Oxfam and Refugee Studies Programme.

ALLAIRE, Y. and FIRSIROTU, M. (1984) 'Theories of Organizational Culture,' *Organization Studies* 53: 193–196.

BENTHALL, J. (1993) *Disasters, Relief, and the Media*. London: I.B. Tauris.

BLUM, M. L. (1952) *Readings in Industrial Psychology*. New York: Prentice-Hall.

BRATTON, M. (1989) 'The Politics of Government-NGO Relations in Africa', *World Development* 17(4): 569–87.

CHAMBERS, R. (1993) *Challenging the Professions: Frontiers for Rural Development*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

DE WAAL, A. (1988) 'The Sanity Factor: Expatriate Behaviour on African Relief Programmes'. *Refugee Participation Network*. Network Paper 2b.

EDELWICH, J. and BRODSKY, A. (1980) *Burn-Out: Stages of Disillusionment in the Helping Professions*. New York: Human Sciences Press.

EPSTEIN, T. S. (1987) 'Macro-planning versus Micro-needs' in Quarles van Ufford, P. (1987) *The Hidden Crisis in Development: Development Bureaucracies*. Amsterdam: Free University Press.

FERGUSON, J. (1990) *The Anti-politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

FESTINGER, L. (1957) *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

FROST, P. and MOORE, L. (eds.) (1985) *Organizational Culture*. Beverley Hills: Sage Press.

GORTNER, H. F., MAHLER, J. and NICHOLSON, J. B. (1987) *Organization Theory: A Public Perspective*. London: Dorsey Press.

HANLON, J. (1991) *Mozambique: Who Calls the Shots*. London: James Currey.

HARRELL-BOND, B. E. (1986) *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

HIRSCHMAN, A. O. (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

KARADAWI, A. (1983) 'Constraints on Assistance to Refugees: Some Observations from the Sudan', *World Development* 11(6): 537–47.

KRC Research and Consulting Inc. (1991) 'A communications strategy for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees: Executive Summary'. Report prepared by Mark Malloch-Brown for UNHCR, September 1991.

KAUFMAN, H. (1960) *The Forest Ranger*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

KEEN, D. (1992) *Refugees: Rationing the Right to Life*. London: Zed Books.

KENT, R. (1987) *Anatomy of Disaster Relief*. London: Pinter Publishers.
KETS DE VRIES, M. and MILLER, D. (1984) *The Neurotic Organization: Diagnosing and Changing Counterproductive Styles of Management*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
KETS DE VRIES, M. (ed.) (1991) *Organizations On the Couch: Clinical Perspectives on Organizational Behaviour and Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
KORTEN, D. (1980) 'Community Organization and Rural Development: A Learning Process Approach'. *Public Administration Review* 40: 5.
KUPER, A. and KUPER, J. (1996) *The Social Science Encyclopedia*. London: Routledge.
KUTSCHER, A. H. and SEELAND, I. B. (eds.) (1989) *Professional Burnout in Medicine and the Helping Professions*. New York: Haworth Press.
LIPSKY, M. (1976) 'Toward a Theory of Street-Level Bureaucracy,' in Hawley, W. D. (ed.) *Theoretical Perspectives on Urban Politics*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
MASLACH, C. (1982) *Burnout: The Cost of Caring*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
MAUSS, M. (1967) *The Gift* (translated by I. Cunnison). New York: Norton.
MEYER, J. W. and ROWAN, B. (1983) 'Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony', *American Journal of Sociology* 83(2): 340–63.
MORAN, E. T. and VOLKWEIN, J. F. (1992) 'The Cultural Approach to the Formation of Organizational Culture', *Human Relations* 45: 1.
MORRIS, T. (1991) *The Despairing Developer: Diary of an Aid Worker in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris.
ODI (1996) *Humanitarian Aid and Effects*. Study 3 of Millwood, D. (ed.) *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience*. Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda.
OUICHI, W. and WILKINS, A. (1985) 'Organizational Culture.' *Annual Review of Sociology* 11: 457–470.
PITT, D. (1986) 'Power in the UN Superbureaucracy: A New Byzantium?' in Pitt, D. and Weiss, T. G. (eds.) *The Nature of United Nations Bureaucracies*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
POWELL, W. W. and DIMAGGIO, P. J. (eds.) (1991) *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
RATLIFF, N. (1988) 'Stress and Burnout in the Helping Professions,' *Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work*. March.
RONDINELLI, D. A. (1993) *Development Projects as Policy Experiments*. New York: Routledge.
RUSBULT, C. and LOWERY, D. (1985) 'When Bureaucrats Get the Blues: Responses to Dissatisfaction among Federal Employees'. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 15(1): 80–103.
SCHEID-COOK, T. L. (1988) 'Mitigating Organizational Contradictions: The Role of Mediatory Myths,' *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* 24(2): 161–171.
SCHEIN, E. H. (1985) *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
——(1991) 'What is Culture' in Peter J. Frost *et al.* (eds.) *Reframing Organizational Culture*. Newbury Park, NY: Sage Publications.
SCOTT, W. R. (1995) *Institutions and Organizations*. London: Sage Publications.
SLIM, H. (1995) 'The Continuing Metamorphosis of the Humanitarian Professional: Some New Colours for an Endangered Chameleon'. *Disasters* 19: 2.
SMILLIE, I. (1995) *The Alms Bazaar: Altruism Under Fire—Non-profit Organizations and International Development*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
SMIRCICH, L. (1983) 'Studying Organizations as Cultures,' in Morgan, G. (ed.) *Beyond Method: Strategies for Social Research*. Beverley Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
STEARNS, S. (1993) 'Psychological Distress and Relief Work: Who Helps the Helpers?', *Refugee Participation Network* 15, September.
STEPHENSON, R. S. (1986) 'Action for Long-term Improvements in Relief Work', *Disasters* 10:4.
TALBOT, J., MANTON, M. and DUNN, P. J. (1992) 'Debriefing the Debriefers: An Intervention Strategy to Assist Psychologists After a Crisis,' *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 5(1).
TALLMAN, I., LEIK, R., GRAY, L. and STAFFORD, M. (1993) 'A Theory of Problem-Solving Behavior', *Social Psychology Quarterly* 56:3.
VAILLANT, G. E. (1977) *Adaptation to Life*. New York: Little-Brown.
WALDRON, S. (1987) 'Blaming the Refugees', *Refugee Issues* 3:3. Oxford: Refugee Studies Programme.

MS received January 1994; revised MS received March 1996