

WHY SOCIAL SCIENCE?

Because Collaborating Across Cultures and Beyond Boundaries Leads to Progress on the World's Biggest Issues

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On Sept. 25, 2015 the United Nations (UN) established a historic plan entitled "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" which was agreed upon by the 193 Member States of the UN. The Agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), each one addressing a critical world issue. Many of these, such as climate change, poverty, equal rights and quality education, are directly relevant to the field of psychology. Given the effort addressing the SDGs will require, it is important that psychology itself unite as a science and profession and join with other disciplines in order to reach the 2030 objectives.

How formidable is the challenge we are facing?

Recent data suggest it is extraordinary:

- The summer of 2019 was the [hottest in history in locations ranging from Anchorage, Alaska to Paris, France](#).
- As of March of this year, the UN reported that [only six countries truly give men and women equal rights](#).
- In many parts of the world, efforts to achieve global education are literally starting from the ground up due to a [lack of classrooms, supplies, trained teachers and opportunities for children with disabilities](#).
- Progress has been made to end poverty, in that extreme poverty fell from 11% in 2013 to 10% of the world's population by 2015. That progress has, however, [slowed and the goal of ending poverty by 2030 has been brought into question](#).

Collaboration between professionals and across disciplines can lead to breakthroughs for our most complex problems from cancer to poverty to disaster management. Technology and mobility should make working together easier than ever. In fact, it should readily enhance a time that many industry leaders characterize as having "very few barriers" to [global collaboration with partners](#).

Considering the human element

It turns out that the key to solving major world issues using innovation, creative business models and global agreements is not our critical challenge. The biggest problem we face is, effectively, ourselves! That is, the [political and cultural human element](#). The roadblocks to impactful forward-motion focused

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on finding solutions are our [own turf wars, skepticism related to anything not produced by oneself and too many gatekeepers](#). This is as true in psychology as it is in any field; we are no exception.

We should, however, know better how to recognize the “it’s only valuable if it’s mine” approach to addressing the SDGs and how to address it — whether our efforts are at the local community level, the academic level, or the organizational and policy level.

Psychological science has made meaningful contributions to the understanding of negotiation, compromise, and innovative/creative thinking. Let’s better apply our knowledge to our work!

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Why don’t we break down siloes in our own work in psychology and work better within the profession and across professions?

When we approach any of our daily professional tasks, it behooves us, with the aim of bettering society, to ask ourselves:

- Why stop here? (That is, in lieu of publishing or presenting a traditional paper, reach out to a different audience or in a different manner.)
- Is there more? (That is, another perspective or resource that can strengthen a project or document?)
- Could this be bigger? (That is, does one’s work have the potential to partner with an organization, a business or a training program in a new way?)
- Am I being open, flexible and deciding to trust? (That is, share ideas and information, listen to feedback, and continue to grow in lieu of increasing resistance or barriers.)
- Is this about the mission/vision or about me? (Requires no further explanation.)

Collaborating across cultures and growing beyond boundaries of self-interest offers a way forward when it comes to progress on the world’s big issues. In fact, technical solutions to many of the world’s greatest challenges exist. Let us, those who study and understand human factors, share ideas widely and challenge ourselves to move beyond our own borders and boundaries to truly work at a global level. With more of this, we will be able to address the major issues of our time.



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