

Community Building Reports

White Paper Series

◆ **Macro State of Mind: Shifting the Paradigm**

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Introduction: From Micro to Macro

We live in an uncertain world that is continuously evolving in fresh and novel ways. It is not surprising, then, that change within communities presents us with complex hurdles that even the best community organizers are unable to navigate without a few wrong turns. When communities are confronted with problems that demand change, all too often these communities tend to look specifically at elements thought to be associated with the problem, and then address these component parts in an immediate fashion. For example, if the problem is unemployment, then the answer appears to lie merely in developing a job-training program and the problem will be solved. Micro types of answers such as these have been tried and we still have significant unemployment rates in many communities: We have tried literacy programs and we still have poor test scores; we have tried food pantries and we still face hunger and food insecurities. Although some of these programs do indeed provide help, in another fundamental way they miss the key point entirely. Perhaps unemployment, literacy, and hunger are not the real problem. While we may have temporarily deflected the issue with our immediate response, the process of change within our communities requires us to fundamentally recast the way we think about our solutions so that they are not seen as merely temporary fixes. The real problem is how we are currently framing the question. In our zeal to “fix what is broken” we have found appeal in what is known as the medical, or treatment model, to represent the issue or problem. We see these as “micro” influences and feel strongly that there may be a better way to address such complex issues.

We often see the approach of the *medical model* used throughout communities across the United States. We see overcrowded streets with drug trafficking so we saturate the area with extra police officers. We see the hungry so we feed them a warm meal for the day. But does the drug war end, or does it merely move to a different block? Are we learning the real reason why John was hungry in the first place? Or whether John will still be hungry tomorrow? Does John have a job, employable skills, or a supportive network? Does this model take into account the social or emotional factors of why these things occur in our communities in the first place?

What we are suggesting is that rather than “fix the problem” with conventional solutions, we reframe our actions using a “macro” approach and further explore the origin of *why* these complex issues are happening in our communities in the first place. This “macro,” social model urges us to consider and change the environmental or emotional factors that may better allow citizens within our community to make better choices. The social model does not focus on a cure or “quick fix;” instead it focuses on the origin of the disease within the community and addresses the problem from a different, macro stance.

Interestingly enough, the social model is not new and has manifested in a number of variations. Community builders, organizers, and social workers have advocated for years for a broader, more “macro” approach to community-building, and this paper will examine some of

these efforts. Additionally, we will highlight some independent empirical research recently conducted as a focused illustration of a macro, social model approach.

The Struggle

Why do we keep going back to our “old ways” if the social model might be more effective? One likely reason is that change is a paradoxical phenomenon. On the one hand, change is inevitable; human development is constant and we often have no control around it. Minutes change to hours, hours into days, and the clocks of time push us to places we may not understand and to places we may not want to travel. Simply put, time passes. We must move on, sometimes in spite of our reluctances. We cannot stop the sands of time.

On the other hand, and regardless of this constant perpetual motion of change, we are creatures of deep habit and predictability. We long to stay as we are, and once our habits have been set begin to form, it is not always easy to erase their effects. This habitual drive is very important to our peace of mind and to our security. We need things to be predictable; too much inconsistency makes us feel insecure. When we are out of our habitual domain, we often become testy, nervous, or unsure. Stop and think about your habitual patterns. Like many, you are probably more comfortable when you are in familiar surroundings, surrounded by things you know and understand well. When you find yourself in settings that are unfamiliar, you may become uncomfortable and have trouble navigating a path. Add these competing feelings to the history of communities, informal or formal power within the culture of a community, and its political background, and we are left with a style of change that is very complex.

These two realities, the curve that drives change, and the curve that resists change, produce a powerful paradox and, in turn, a tension for people and communities. The tug of war that follows can derail, or completely dismantle, any change effort, even efforts headed in directions that cognitively make good sense. What often occurs at this juncture is that people resist until there is no other way; by then, however, it is often too late. Consider changing a personal behavior you feel may be better for you, such as changing dietary patterns so you can live a longer and healthier life. Cognitively, you have no trouble in understanding all the elements of this proposal. You know your current diet is not the best it can be. You equally know all the reasons why you should enhance your diet. All of this makes perfect sense, so you set the course for changing your diet. You decide you will begin eating foods that are better for you. You begin to stock your cabinets with these types of foods. You make a goal plan and even enter it into your daily planner or smart phone. Then you begin to execute your change.

Now, all great voyages start with the first stroke of the oar, and your dietary change is no different. The first day goes fantastic. You follow your diet and feel confident that you are on the road to longevity. Even the second day is a success; you’re still on track. On the third day, you find yourself unexpectedly invited to join some friends after work. During the course of your

meeting, your friends order a plate of nachos with sour cream. You look at this specimen, a long-time favorite in your old dietary days, but now taboo. You pause and think, “I’ve really been good up to this point. One nacho won’t hurt.” So you take the biggest nacho on the dish, and scoop up a huge dollop of sour cream and slowly, bite by bite, revel in the taste. Before you know it, you have single-handedly eaten the entire plate of nachos. In a split second, the rationalization of your behavior sabotages the best-laid plans for change.

This reality of sabotage not only happens in our personal efforts towards change, but with our communities as well. Since communities are nothing more than a collection of individuals, the same phenomenon occurs. Like people, communities develop habits, cultures and patterns that drive behaviors. They shape and are shaped by the people who inhabit them. Add to this the incredible pace of the world around us. With technology and information access changing almost daily, and with world markets and economies always unpredictable, the only constant is change.

This brings us to new ways of looking at facilitating change through different theories and social models that place relationship building at the core of their foundation. These theories are so simple; and yet, they are often pushed to the side, relegated to the dump-bin of failed ideas, fearful that a return to them may bring on an “eyeroll” from community planners, bureaucrats, and citizens who have been working for many years on these problems.

Before we dissect these new ways of addressing complex issues within communities, we must first recognize the hidden agenda of the insider/outsider phenomena that might derail community progress when we identify issues, or even think of macro, social model approaches.

The Insider/Outsider Perspective

Why do communities have such difficulty changing and what is causing us to fail? One of the more hidden barriers within communities as it relates to change is the role of insiders and outsiders. By “insider” and “outsider,” we are referring to people in the middle of the challenged community (insider) and the person brought in to help promote a change (often an outsider). This phenomenon of bringing an outsider into a perplexing situation is commonplace. For many years, outsiders have been imported to help diagnose, and then suggest, or directly implement a solution to a community problem. Of course this has been a clear manifestation of the micro, medical model: The assumption is that the community insiders know neither what the problem is, nor what to do about it, so they need an “expert” to handle the situation.

Their (the insiders’) resistance or surrender to change within communities is often the reason why any recommended initiative is ineffective. Let’s use one of the authors, Tera’s, experiences as an example. As a community organizer, most of her time is spent in communities in which she has built and sustained relationships over the past few years. As a career path, she has acquired many new friends, professional acquaintances, and opportunities. These benefits

however did not come without some cost. Since Tera does not live in the neighborhoods in which she was on the frontlines daily, she often experienced two realities: resistance and acceptance. In her experience, she was viewed as both an insider and an outsider; living in one community, yet through her constant involvement, creating strong and lasting connections in another.

This insider/outsider phenomenon can sometimes stall change or new initiatives within communities, allowing the process to be more complex than imagined, and often allowing us to resort back to our most comfortable pair of jeans (old ways). Communities may fear outsider intentions, yet do not capitalize on the power of insider local knowledge or the available assets and resources already present within the community. They are hesitant in trusting outsiders' intentions, and carry with them the "we have already tried that before" viewpoint when outsiders offer their experience and knowledge.

This push-and-pull way of thinking can often be mediated by creating relationships, or as Coleman tags it, developing social capital. Coleman proclaimed that social capital has the ability to transform social ties and shared norms into increased economic efficiency in a number of ways including better education, finding jobs, raising better socialized children, and even establishing careers for people (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). Others (Putnam, 2000) believe that social capital is critical to a community as it gives citizens the ability to dissect problems more easily, lessens our tendency to be aggressive towards others, and also widens our awareness to many more resources and opportunities. Coleman started the conversation about the impact of social capital. In return, social researchers and economists have discovered that social ties and culture effect citizens more than they are aware. According to Condeluci, Gooden Ledbetter, Ortman, Fromknecht, and Defries (2008), our social networks have the ability to not only keep us healthy and happy, but to also assist us in identifying other resources or opportunities that might have not otherwise been made available.

The ways in which we can break those insider/outsider mental models and move forward starts with building relationships, creating trust, and sharing in conversation. The initiative you choose to use in communities will harvest true benefits if you first realize the complex inner workings of the insider/outsider phenomena and the importance of relationships within a community. The need for the reconnection of people, both insiders, and outsiders, to community is imperative if we intend to keep our communities in a healthy state of living.

Social/Macro Community Building Approaches

In the following section, we look at different relationship social/macro approaches such as: Restorative Practices; Asset Based Community Development; Positive Deviance; and Interdependence strategies for building social capital and their use in addressing complex problems throughout our communities.

Restorative Practices

Block (2008) notes that restorative community practices recognize that “taking responsibility for one’s own part in creating the present situation is the critical act of courage and engagement, which is the axis around which the future rotates” (p. 10). The heart of restorative community building is not economic wealth, political discourse or the capability of leadership; rather, “it is a citizen’s willingness to own up their [*sic*] contribution, to be humble, to choose accountability, and to have faith in their [*sic*] own capacity to make authentic promises to create the alternative future” (p. 48). Restorative practices “involve changing relationships by engaging people: doing things WITH them, rather than TO them or FOR them—providing both high control and high support at the same time” (Mirsky, 2007, p. 1).

So what would a restorative community look like to an outsider? Restorative approaches vary in communities, organizations, education, healthcare, social work or criminal justice. More recently, restorative practices in communities have been defined as communities where citizens choose to identify their responsibility in the present situation and come together in processes that create a different future (Block, 2008).

According to Wachtel (2005), when thinking about a restorative community we must:

Imagine a community where people regularly express their feelings to one another, including anger, in a safe and respectful way, and where conflict usually reaches quick resolution. Imagine a community where people routinely confront one another for their inappropriate behavior and where wrongdoers are expected to reflect on what they have done, whom they have harmed and how they have harmed them, and then suggest how they can repair that harm. Imagine a community where people routinely run circle groups for themselves and their peers to help manage behavior and even deal with chronic issues, like substance abuse. Imagine a community where managers earnestly solicit employees’ views in making decisions, explain decisions when they are made and clearly spell out their expectations. Imagine a community in which those in authority actively engage families and sometimes extended families in critical issues, such as setting goals for treatment or deciding where an abused young person should live or planning how to support a family member in maintaining sobriety. Imagine a

community where people minimize gossip and try to deal with concerns and conflicts in an honest and direct fashion (p. 1).

Using the kinds of restorative practices just described, citizens have the ability to change communities in a more empowering way. According to the International Institute for Restorative Practices, this perspective is emerging as a new social science called “restorative practices” and is defined as “the science of restoring and developing social capital, social discipline, emotional well-being and civic participation through participatory learning and decision making” (<http://www.iirp.edu/mission.php>). Why are restorative practices so different? Restorative practices foster the expression of affect or emotion. They also foster emotional bonds and connectedness.

The late Silvan S. Tomkins’s (1991) research about psychology of affect declared that human relationships are healthiest and at their prime when there is free expression—which entails a process of decreasing the negative, exploiting the positive, but always allowing free expression in the process of these relationships. Donald Nathanson (1998), director of the Silvan S. Tomkins Institute, further proposed that it is through the ongoing mutual conversation of communicated affect that citizens build a sense of community. This relational approach of addressing issues within communities is a great substitute to our older method of addressing such complex issues that may have previously focused on blame, highlighting the negative, and a lack of communication or expression in positive ways.

Asset Based Community Development

The shift in participation of democracy has also newly created a shift in how communities are viewed and their abilities to address their own issues from within. In North America, and other places, citizens often rely too heavily on others to fix their most compound problems. They expect doctors to heal them, nonprofits to save them, policemen to keep them safe, city officials to develop solid neighborhoods and fix broken ones, and teachers to educate their children (Green, Moore, & O’Brien, 2006). The need for a new approach to address these problems is growing increasingly more important as Green et al. (2006) state: “More agency leaders, researchers, and policy planners recognize that social and economic problems can only be addressed effectively by involving a larger part of the *whole* community” (p. 11). This new way of addressing complex community issues involves building bridges with local businesses, human services, and residents by creating partnerships in order to address the most complex issues within communities. Issues such as poverty or AIDS should not just include “some” agencies/individuals at the table dialoguing in the conversation, but should bring all to the table including schools, congregations, residents, and local agencies. The power of recognizing and creating partnerships brings to the table different views, better relationships, and more resources and capacity to make a better community. This new way of looking at communities is called

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), and it develops a wider network of people working together to address critical issues and recognize the need to reach future goals (Green et al., 2006). Green et al. (2006) stated that the ABCD “point of view encourages people to recognize that their community is a glass half full of assets, not a glass half empty with needs” (p. 12). Is not Green then saying that citizens should recognize their positive deviants. within the neighborhood, and focus on what is working, rather than focusing on what isn’t?

We often refer to Asset Based Community Development as the long forgotten childhood event of “Show and Tell.” All too often we forget what we have in our cupboards, since they are not as easily accessible up there, or down there, or we forget what is hidden below the first few shirts in our deep drawers. So we must recognize what is often forgotten in our communities as well. By identifying our community assets, citizens are coming to the table with others and “showing and telling” what their community has, and how these assets can help mobilize them into a healthier community (McIntosh, 2012). Citizens often forget about their strong senior citizen population, their diverse arts foundations, or even their local 30-year-old coffee shop and how those community assets can collaborate. By utilizing ABCD, citizens are utilizing their community assets and resources that multiply in value when brought together and made to be productive. The old way of community problem solving concentrates on problems and the deficits of local citizens, thus creating a “helper” and “client” dependency relationship. The new focus of ABCD highlights an asset based approach that uncovers the labels brought upon communities from the outsider view, recognizes the skills and abilities of the local citizens, and allocates resources available for them to act on their own behalf in creating a better community (Strickland, 2000). In order to establish this new approach, communities must tap into the interest and skills of the greater number of “others” such as organizations, citizens, and associations that are active in their neighborhoods and that often go unnoticed.

Positive Deviance

Positive Deviance is based on the idea that in each community, certain individuals or entities own special practices or creative strategies that allow them to create a better solution to problems than other citizens within their community who possess the same accessibility to the same resources (Pascale et al., 2010). Researchers refer to these individuals as “positive deviants,” and suggest that these individuals have the capacity to develop successful strategies that allow accessibility to all involved, by proposing new ways of looking at issues that allow citizens to practice the new positive deviant approaches in their own ways (Bolt, Carter, Goldsmith, Smallwood, & Ulrich, 2010).

Jerry Sternin, a former professor of nutrition at Tufts University, carried with him a passion for reducing hunger and starvation in the world that eventually led him to look at the

problem through a different lens. Sternin states (Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin, 2010) that so often when looking at the issue of hunger, his research team would bring in outside experts to analyze the issue. Instead of asking the community what it thought the issues were, the experts would just add the community agricultural techniques and solutions that they thought would be effective in solving the issue of hunger (Pascale et al., 2010). Without the customary help of outside resources and facing now limited community funds, Sternin along with his wife Monique now had to seek out new ways to address the issue of hunger among villagers. They suggested that perhaps they could begin by entering the villages suffering most drastically from hunger, finding those families with the best nourished children, and learning from them what they were doing right. Sternin later coined the term “positive deviance” to reflect the situation of those individuals who had achieved positive outcomes relative to what the rest of the community was experiencing (Pascale et al., 2010). The other villages then learned from the healthier family by visiting their home to observe what the mother was practicing, whether it was portioning meals better or adding more starches. As a result of this new positive deviance approach, malnutrition rates dropped 65-85 % within every village that the Sternins worked within (Pascale et al., 2010). What if citizens were able to apply this same idea and discover what is going right in our communities, or what other citizens are doing that is allowing them to be more healthy and safe? The positive deviance view would then ask citizens to formulate questions about what is working in their community and how can they utilize those answers to better themselves individually and communally, instead of focusing on what is not working within their communities.

Interdependence Strategies for Building Social Capital

To frame a philosophy for community demands, we find a paradigm that goes beyond the micro/medical model. To this extent, the Interdependence paradigm has been suggested by some as a framework for community. The term interdependence is not a new one. Although it has been used in human services, it is more popularly applied to geopolitical issues. Quite simply, it is a term that implies the interconnection, or interrelationship, between two entities. It suggests a connection or partnership between these entities in an effort to maximize potential for both groups.

Interdependence is about relationships that lead to mutual acceptance and respect. Although it recognizes that all people have differences, as an overarching paradigm, it promotes acceptance and empowerment for all. It suggests a fabric effect where the diversity of people comes together in a synergistic way to create an upward effect for all.

This review offers a fundamentally different perspective on community problems. In a way, it suggests a paradigm shift. Most of what happens in addressing community issues is short sighted and, at best, temporary. If we truly want to impact issues of concern in the community, then we must search and find it in relationship building and in the connectedness of neighbors.

As social capital research shows, people watch out for and take care of one another when they know each other. In an effort to harness the natural energies that can be found within people, we must shift to an interdependent framework, and build social capital with community members.

One Relationship Project

In support of the previously mentioned Social/Macro approaches, Tera McIntosh conducted a study that incorporated relational Macro approaches in addressing the issue of safety and violence within a community in the Pittsburgh, PA area. In this study, Al Condeluci, with others, served as an advisor. The purpose of the study was to explore how restorative practices and interdependence could help increase the social fabric within communities in order to help address complex community problems. Although literature on restorative practices is bountiful for the purposes of restorative justice and restorative practices in schools, there is little literature on how to use restorative practices to create more restorative communities or neighborhoods.

Tera looked at the issue of violence and safety within a particular community and implemented a framework of restorative practices that focused on asset based community development and building healthier relationships. She utilized action research to conduct intentional gatherings of communicative space that were supported by a study circle framework and collected data through interviews, pre- and post-surveys, and mapping documents, as well as documentation of all observed outcomes in relation to the study circles.

The findings suggest that when communities are given the opportunity to intentionally gather in order to communicate in a restorative context, citizens are able to learn about new opportunities or assets within their communities. Further, relationships spill over from study circle processes, causing actions to occur directly and also post-study on a “second degree level.” These new actions can assist communities in rationing together better ways of solving complex community problems. More details on this specific study can be found at: or <http://aura.antioch.edu/etds/4/>.

Implications for Communities Today

There is no question that change is uncomfortable. When the challenge is collective change in a community, it is even more difficult. Still we must try, and this article attempts to reframe, or bring to bear on the reader the steps and stages that are necessary.

The most basic implication for the reader is to understand the broader framework of Interdependence as a starting point for community change. Regardless of whether the change agent is an insider or outsider, the framework of Interdependence aligns us with the goals, focus and actions that put the power, and emphasis, square in the bosom of the community. From this

perspective, then, an outsider coming into a community as an expert, with a limited sense of what the problem is and how to solve it, is clearly at a disadvantage. As Tera demonstrated in her research, the change agent, even as an outsider, must empower the community and allow the insiders to carry the day. Certainly, guidance and support can be offered; but the change agent must be a catalyst for change and not simply the person with the answer.

Another key point is that social capital is the glue to community building. To this end, any change effort must work hard to facilitate the building of social capital. This is done first by the act of hospitality. Peter Block (2008) writes about the basic elements of hospitality such as feeding people, and making them feel valued and respected. In her study, Tera made sure that the community members in her study were also welcomed and made to feel valued.

Another important lesson is the power of regularity in community building. Not only do people need to be welcomed, but the change agent must build in a consistent and reliable regularity where community members have the opportunity to see each other again and again. This simple element will begin to create a bridge between people and start to allow members to discover more and more similarity among them. As their relationships continue to be nourished, people begin to obligate themselves. This alone, moves the agenda for change forward.

Conclusion

When citizens focus on discovering what lies at the heart of their communities and what their communities already possess, they open up the possibility for more productive efforts in making their communities a better place to live. When a group of people discovers what they have, they find power (Green et al., 2006). This power, when used in a restorative context, has the ability to create change throughout communities everywhere.

It is increasingly recognized that to successfully address a community's complex problems, it is necessary to promote better collaboration and coordination of resources from multiple community sectors, groups, or citizens. It is also imperative that we recognize each citizen for his or her individual gifts and contribution to creating a better community. When we involve others, we restore once damaged relationships, initiate new relationships, and continue to increase the strength of our social capital and networks within our community. We can carry out these recommendations by utilizing the approaches of Restorative Practices, Asset Based Community Development, Positive Deviance, and Interdependence.

As stated earlier, typical solutions are no longer effective as we come across some of the most critical issues plaguing our communities. We must now reframe our actions using a Social Model and further explore the origins of these complex problems with a more relational approach. The Social Model will not offer a quick "bandaide" fix, but will instead focus on the

origin of the disease within the community and address the problem with some of the diverse approaches discussed above.

Accomplishing community change is never easy. Even harder is trying to promote a new paradigm or framework. History is replete with examples of innovators attempting to promote new frameworks in the face of challenge. Philosopher of Science Thomas Kuhn (1969), in his examination of historic scientific revolutions, tells the story of Galileo. During the turn of the 17th century, the received view was that our universe was geocentric, i.e., that the Earth was located at the centre of our universe while the sun and all the other planets revolved around it. The direct evidence was clear – the Sun did indeed appear to revolve around the Earth - and there was no doubt among scientists and scholars.

But an Italian astronomer and physicist named Galileo challenged this assumption. He had crafted a crude telescope and by contrasting the stars with the Sun, he came to the conclusion that the Earth was not the center of the universe and that our universe was actually heliocentric and that the Earth and other planets revolved around a central, stationary Sun.

When Galileo stepped forward and challenged the prevailing paradigm with his radical proposal, he was not met with open arms. Rather, Galileo was condemned by the church as a blasphemer and sent to prison for his "sins." Indeed, some even accused Galileo of painting the planets on the receiving end of the telescope – so ingrained was their belief in a geocentric universe. Sadly, Galileo never lived to see how his discovery and contribution helped to change the world.

In a way, the macro paradigm within communities is equally ill-received.. We have been powerfully conditioned to see community problems as isolated and microscopic issues. If we could only eradicate these problems, we can liberate our communities. It seems so clear and so simple - like the Sun going around the Earth.

Where is Galileo when we need him!

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