

Using the Hidden Rules of Class to Create Sustainable Communities

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INTRODUCTION

The way children experience life is determined by the families and communities in which they are raised; it falls to families and communities to create a way of life that is healthy, prosperous, and sustainable.

In her seminal 1996 work *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (third revised edition, 2003), Dr. Ruby K. Payne introduces the concept of hidden rules of economic class—and in future works she addresses sustainability, the next major challenge all communities must face. With Payne's ideas as a springboard, this paper seeks to contribute to the dialogue.

Economic and social trends going back to the 1970s show a decline in the quality of life in the United States. The middle class is shrinking (Lind 2004, pp. 120-128), social connectedness is declining in all social classes (Putnam 2000, pp. 9, 63), some rural areas are losing population and the sense of community they once had (Lind 2003, pp. 86-88), some urban areas are collapsing as middle-class families move to the suburbs looking for good schools (Warren 2003, p. 8), and working a second job is required to make ends meet (Miringoff 2000, p. 9). For low-wage workers, vulnerability is becoming a concrete experience; for people in generational poverty, vulnerability has always been a concrete experience.

This paper addresses the impact of generational poverty on families and communities, why we must respond, and how to use an understanding of economic diversity to build sustainable communities.

The sequence includes:

- Creating a mental model of poverty and middle class.
- Exploring the hidden rules of economic class that arise from those experiences.
- Examining the resources that define quality of life.
- Creating a mental model of communities at risk.
- Reviewing poverty research to uncover strategies for change.
- Naming the barriers to change for people in poverty.
- Defining strategies for change based on the research.
- Exploring evaluations and reports used to monitor progress.
- Defining the principles for change.
- Outlining community roles for creating sustainable communities.
- Offering a mental model for prosperity.

PARTICIPATING IN COMMUNITY CHANGE

Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, provides three definitions that can assist any group of people entering into a change process together. He defines a dialogue as a conversation that opens up a topic, examines facts, explores meaning, and promotes understanding. A discussion takes place when the group wants to narrow down the thinking and work toward a decision. Both are necessary to the process.

Senge defines mental models as internal pictures of how the world works or, in this case, how families function, what poverty is, and how communities can solve problems (Senge 1994, pp. 174-204).

It is important also to define the term “community.” For the purpose of this paper, the definition provided by Daniel Taylor-Ide and Carl Taylor in their book *Just and Lasting Change* will be used. They define community as “... any group that has something in common and the potential for acting together” (Taylor-Ide 2002, p. 19).

Members of a community who participate in a dialogue on community sustainability will need to be willing to suspend their existing mental models. Genuine dialogue cannot take place if individuals cling to their own mental models to the extent that ideas expressed by others are judged, categorized, and discarded as soon as they have been stated. There are many mental models of poverty. One model that has particular power over behavior is the Depression experience. How many people do we know from the Depression generation who still hoard food and save string? Another common mental model of poverty is the immigrant story: people who have come to the United States in poverty and, in two or three generations, moved into a middle-class existence. Another model is the indentured servant who had to work for seven years to earn freedom. Slavery, followed by the Jim Crow days and institutional racism, is yet another model.

All of these mental models are valid, but none of them tells the story of what it’s like to live in poverty today. This paper explores a new mental model of poverty that will enable us to study the impact of poverty on families.

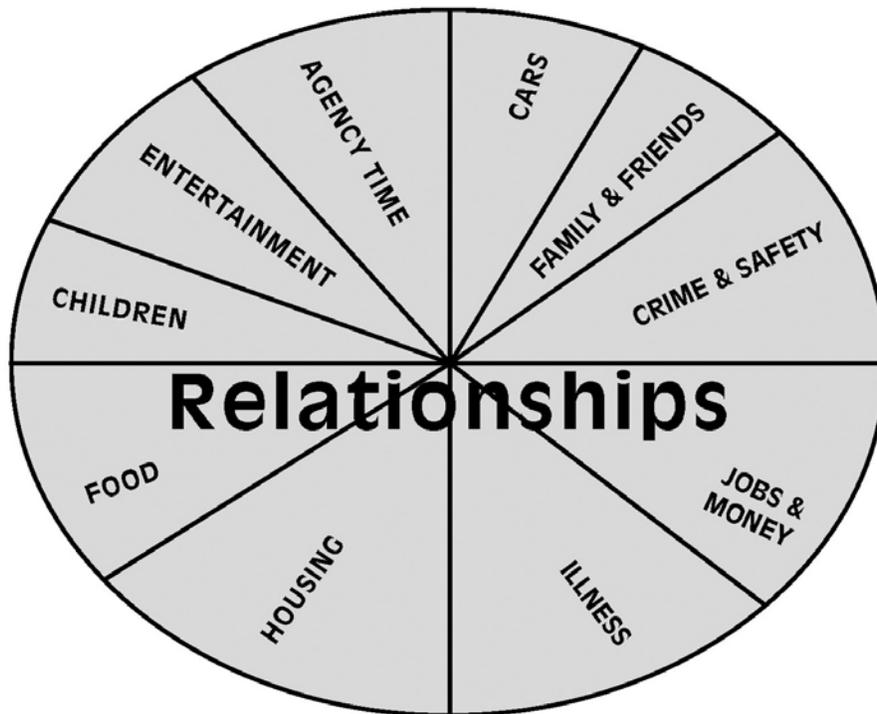
MENTAL MODEL OF POVERTY

To learn about the impact of poverty on families, one can go to social science research, to those who comment on the research, and to those who have worked with families in poverty—all valuable sources of knowledge. In addition, one can go to those who know the most about it: families actually living in poverty now.

Throughout this paper, abstract knowledge is promoted and honored. The argument is made that a person must be able to use abstract representational systems in order to succeed in school, achieve at work, and make the transition out of poverty. Yet concrete knowledge is also valuable, especially when abstract information in the form of statistics removes learners so far from the actual experience that it loses all meaning. For example, data from the American Housing Survey reveal that 73 percent of people in poverty own cars or trucks, and 30 percent own two or more cars or trucks. This might suggest that poverty isn’t all that bad after all (Rector 2004, p. 3).

People with concrete poverty knowledge explain that those cars and trucks are anything but dependable. They are the cause of missed appointments, lost jobs, bruised knuckles, a stressful series of crises. The second car or truck is often the parts car. A mental model of poverty created by people in poverty illustrates what life is like (DeVol 2004, pp. 7-18).

Mental Model of Poverty



The pieces of the pie are described below. Each piece, or element, is followed by concrete knowledge provided by people in poverty, then by examples of abstract knowledge that corresponds to it. Both forms of knowledge are necessary.

Element	Concrete Knowledge	Abstract Knowledge
Cars and transportation	Vehicles are not dependable and require constant repair; breakdowns result in lost jobs, missed appointments, and stress. Insufficient public transportation limits mobility.	Cars purchased “as is” from buy-here, pay-here dealers come with interest rates as high as 15.5 percent (Shipler 2004, p. 27).
Housing	Houses are often in isolated rural areas or unsafe urban and suburban neighborhoods. Houses are crowded, people come and go, there is no private place for children to do their homework, rooms are used for many purposes, people sleep on the couch, repairs can’t be made, landlord can be difficult, people have to move frequently	Fifty-nine percent of people in poverty pay more than 50 percent of their income for housing (Dreier 2000). Affordable rental units have been on the decline since 1970 (Mattera 1990, pp. 128-129).

Jobs and money	Jobs don't pay enough, temp work doesn't provide enough hours or benefits, many work two jobs to make ends meet, no vacation. Money is a constant worry. People are vulnerable to the price of gas going to \$2 (or more) a gallon and milk going to \$3 a gallon.	Proportion of unemployed workers looking for a job for twenty-seven weeks or more: 23 percent, highest proportion in twenty years (Murphy 2004, p. 111). If the minimum wage (\$5.15) kept pace with inflation, it would be more than \$7.50 an hour or \$15,000 a year (Bhargava 2004, p. A6). "... [M]ost available jobs had three unhappy traits: They paid low wages, offered no benefits, and led nowhere" (Shipler 2004, p. 40).
Food	There are concerns about not having enough. Grocery stores have moved out of the neighborhood. Local grocery stores that stayed overcharge, and the quality of produce is poor. Must buy from convenience stores. Fast-food outlets provide relatively cheap but fattening food.	"Twenty-three percent of the nation's lower-income classes are obese, compared with 16 percent of the middle and upper classes ... Large supermarket chains (the best bet for affordable, fresh and healthy foods) abandoned less affluent city neighborhoods, focusing instead on the suburbs ... A 1997 USDA study found that food prices, including those for produce, are, on average, 10 percent higher in inner-city food markets than they are in the suburbs ... There are three times as many supermarkets in wealthy neighborhoods as in poor ones, according to a 2002 study in the <i>American Journal of Preventive Medicine</i> ..." (Goodman 2003, pp. 137-158).
Illness and health care	Being sick, caring for others who are sick, and trying to get healthcare are time-consuming and exhausting.	Poverty is associated with increased risks of cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, ulcers, rheumatoid disorders, psychiatric diseases, and a number of types of cancer (Sapolsky 1998, p. 301).
Children	It's hard to get kids through the day; people have concerns about school, health, clothing, and safety. Childcare arrangements are unreliable, while good childcare either is unavailable or too expensive.	There are many more poor children in the United States than in most Western European countries. In the United States, one-fifth of all children live below the poverty level ..." (Lareau 2003, p. 28). "... [T]wo in every five children live in poor or near-poor families" (Duncan 1997, p. 3).
Safety, crime	Protecting your people and yourself is a constant concern. The criminal justice system is part of life; members of the family are in jail, on parole, or on probation. The drug culture is threatening.	Prison population: one in 143 adults in prison, an all-time high (Murphy 2004, p. 111). Sixty to seventy percent of people in prison are from poverty.
Friends and neighbors	Relationships are important. They are a resource needed for survival.	"... [I]nner-city social networks are not nearly as dense or effective as those Stack found in the late 1960s, for like the sprawling suburbs and small villages in the heartland, inner cities too have less social capital nowadays than they once did" (Putnam 2000, p. 317). "... [I]ndividuals who grow up in socially isolated rural and inner-city areas are held back, not merely because they tend to be financially and educationally deprived, but also because they are relatively poor in social ties that can provide a 'hand up'" (Putnam 2000, p. 319).

Entertainment	Entertainment takes many forms, including cable television, video games, drugs, alcohol, music, and spending time with friends.	Entertainment is a driving force for people in poverty. It helps them survive a very stressful life (Payne 2001).
Agency time	People in poverty typically go to three to nine agencies in the course of a year to get needs addressed. Each agency demands behavioral changes, a plan of action, and time for the activities listed in the plan.	“Much of human life consists of playing ... roles within specific institutions ... Individuals’ chances of interacting with any given kind of institution are not random: Families from elite backgrounds tend to participate in institutions serving the elite, and families in poverty tend to be involved in institutions serving the poor ... [C]hildren grow up within a broad, highly stratified social system” (Lareau 2003, p. 15).

The following mental model is about the middle-class experience. Comparing and contrasting the mental models of poverty and middle class will help explain the different mindsets of the two populations.

Mental Model of Middle Class



It goes without saying that there’s a mental model for wealth too. Elements found in that mental model would include:

- Building and maintaining social, financial, and political connections.
- Meeting with financial and legal advisers.
- Managing homes and staff.

- Traveling internationally.
- Pursuing arts, leisure, and personal interests.

Observations

Elements that appear in all three models are family/friends, housing, safety, and children.

Elements found in middle class but not in poverty are education, housing as a form of building assets, jobs as careers, pursuit of interests and hobbies, insurance as a form of security, vacation and travel, and participation in clubs and civic organizations.

Elements found in poverty but not in middle class are agency time, car problems, concerns about food, health problems to the degree experienced in poverty, and the criminal justice system.

Discussion

Interlocking: Elements of the model impact and influence other elements. Chain reactions are most severe in poverty where financial resources don't provide a cushion. For example, car problems or a breakdown in the childcare system will result in problems at work, which in turn may have a ripple effect across the whole system.

Vulnerability: For families in generational poverty, vulnerability is concrete and ever-present. For example, when the price of gasoline goes to \$2 (or more) a gallon or milk goes to \$3 a gallon, it hits people in poverty hard. For families in middle class, who can adjust to \$2 a gallon for gas, vulnerability is an abstract concept, a future possibility to consider.

Relationships: Survival in poverty requires reliance on others. In middle class, the higher level of resources (such as insurance) allows one to be more self-sufficient. In poverty, people resources replace financial resources. It's not AAA that responds to calls for help when a car breaks down but a neighbor, family member, or friend. It's not the repair shop that fixes the car, but a friend with the know-how.

Change: Richard Farson, in *Management of the Absurd*, says, "The healthier you are psychologically, or the less you may seem to need to change, the more you can change" (Farson 1996, p. 85). It's one of the sad ironies of life that the more resources one has, the easier it is to change, while the fewer resources, the harder it is to change. This is a crucial concept because, in order for people to gain economic stability, they must change some of the things they're doing.

Tyranny of the moment: Peter Schwartz, a business writer says, "The need to act overwhelms any willingness people have to learn" (Schwartz 1996, p. 231). This is the reason that education doesn't usually appear on the mental model for people in generational poverty. The daily pressure of survival in poverty requires that an individual be non-verbal and sensory-based. It keeps one focused on concrete problems, with no time for the abstract. On the other hand, survival at work and school requires that an individual be verbal and use abstract representational systems (Payne 2003).

No future, no choice, and no power: When attention must be focused on solving concrete, immediate problems, the view of the future becomes abstract. Families in generational poverty don't have clear future stories. Reacting to and solving concrete problems, which people in poverty are skilled at, is not the same thing as practicing choice, learning to be accountable for those choices, and developing the power to build a better future. Children in generational poverty grow up not witnessing or practicing that power.

Generational poverty and situational poverty are different. Generational poverty is defined as being in poverty for two generations or longer. Situational poverty is a shorter period of time and is caused by such circumstances as illness, divorce, debt, lost jobs, or death of a primary breadwinner.

SURVIVAL DEMANDS OF THE ENVIRONMENT CREATE THE HIDDEN RULES OF CLASS

The environment in which one is raised teaches the hidden rules of survival that are needed in that environment. In other words, economic realities described in the mental models developed earlier create the hidden rules. As stated at the outset, Ruby Payne defines and articulates these hidden rules of economic class. Hidden rules are the unspoken habits and cues of a group. They arise from cause-and-effect situations and reflect the mindsets that are needed to survive in that economic reality. There are hidden rules for race, nationality, region, age, sex, religion, and economic class. One need only be alive to learn them; they come to us by living, as if by osmosis.

All hidden rules influence behavior: One of the strongest influences is that of economic class. The hidden rules of class pervade the other rules to the extent that some middle-class African Americans have more in common with middle-class whites than they have in common with poor African Americans (Lareau 2003, p. 241). Churches divide and reassemble along economic-class lines; members aren't able to stay together beyond three of the nine economic classes. Paul Fussell defines the nine social classes as: Bottom and Out-of-Sight, Destitute, Low Proletarian, Proletarian, High Proletarian, Middle, Upper Middle, Upper Class, and Top Out-of-Sight (Fussell 1983). In this work we deal with only three economic classes: poverty, middle class, and wealth. Because hidden rules of economic class are so powerful in determining behavior, it's crucial that they be understood when a community decides to build sustainability.

This work describes patterns of class behavior; there will always be exceptions.

Food

The hidden rule on food illustrates how environment shapes the rules. For families in poverty, there is no guarantee that there will always be enough to eat. Some weeks there is plenty to eat, while other weeks the food has to be stretched. Many children from poverty who live in middle-class foster homes are known to hoard food. In poverty, the focus is on the quantity of food. In middle class (where having food is a given), the focus is on the quality of the dish. In wealth (where quantity and quality is assured), the focus is on appearance and presentation.

Family Structure

The different hidden rules for family functioning are just as understandable. In middle class, families tend to be patriarchal. The male gender role is that of provider; the female role is that of provider, homemaker, and nurturer. Children in an economically stable setting can expect their parents to support them financially, emotionally, and socially. Middle-class parents use a style of raising children termed “concerted cultivation” by Annette Lareau. These children are involved in 4.5 after-school activities a week under the supervision of adults: piano, dance, soccer, baseball, chess, church, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, and so on. Parents and adult leaders engage children in discussions and analysis of performance at every opportunity. Parents in middle class are focused on the future well-being of their children (Lareau 2003).

Despite the pattern of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and the creation of blended families, most middle-class families are ever conscious of biological relationships and keep boundaries distinct between half-siblings and stepchildren. Middle-class parents will use the institutions of society throughout their lives; they go to religious and civil institutions to marry and the courts to get divorced. The biological focus is never lost because middle-class families have assets to pass on to their children.

All families have certain capabilities and strengths, and all families have to face such demands as accidents, illness, lost jobs, divorce, and death. When challenged by adversity, family members will adapt and take on new roles. As a result, families grow stronger. In effect, a balance is achieved between capabilities and demands. However, when there is an unrelenting cascade of demands, family resources and capabilities are swamped. Events that can bring this about are addiction, chronic mental or physical illness, and poverty (Henderson 1996, pp. 151-159).

Poverty itself is a stressor of such magnitude that it alone can change a family structure. When men do not have jobs with which they identify, the gender role shifts from provider to protector. Physical prowess, the ability to fight, and the role of lover are how a “real” man is defined. Men may take pride in doing hard and dangerous work, but they think of work as something that “I do for you.”

In poverty, families tend to be matriarchal because men frequently are absent. Men are absent for many reasons. They may be looking for work, they may be in jail, or they may have to disappear for a time because someone is looking for them. Being a fighter/lover can mean that others have a reason to come after you. Men also may be absent because of policies that will deny resources to families if the man is present. The options for a man are to find another job, another town, or another woman.

The absence of men means that women are, by both choice and default, left to care for the children. Women in poverty become the keeper of the home, the keeper of the soul, the person of last resort, the rescuer, the problem solver. The matriarch's options when under stress are to get another man, get another job—and keep solving concrete, immediate problems.

Children in poverty are raised in the style termed “natural accomplishment.” In this pattern, children are given love, shelter, and nourishment with the expectation that the children will grow up naturally. Children are in 1.2 after-school activities a week with adult supervision. Adult interactions with children are not focused on achievement and performance analysis but on casual interactions. Parents in poverty expect the schools to give their children the education they need and don't expect to play much of a role in the children's success in school (Lareau 2003).

The gender roles and other patterns that arise from this family structure do not prepare children very well to succeed in the larger society. The structure does, though, meet the survival needs—but only the survival needs—of the people in it.

Driving Forces

In middle class, the driving forces are work and achievement. In poverty, the driving forces are survival, relationships, and entertainment. In wealth, the driving forces are social, financial, and political connections.

Survival, as a driving force for people in poverty, is easy to understand. Vulnerability in so many aspects of life requires immediate and concrete responses. Relationships provide resources and solutions that are often purchased by those with greater financial resources. But relationships do more than that; they provide identity, community, belonging, entertainment, and social standing. One needs others and, in turn, is needed by them.

When maintaining relationships becomes a driving force, it can interfere with achievement. Ruby Payne notes that, to achieve, people must give up relationships, at least for a period of time (Payne 2001). For example, to go to college means giving up time with high school friends and possibly one's parents. Leaving that circle for achievement of any sort (sobriety, education, work) carries some negative aspects, particularly the fear of losing others. This is difficult for people in poverty because of the importance of relationships; being there for others is as important as having those people there for you. When you stop spending time with your family and friends, the implication is that you have something “better” to do—that you would prefer to be with someone else.

Entertainment is a driving force (not just a pleasure deferred until work is done) because life in poverty tends to be unrelentingly stressful. While middle-class people can defer gratification with the certainty that the weekend will bring relief, poverty is a weeklong, month-long, and year-round experience. Jobs don't last long enough or pay enough to contemplate a two-week vacation that follows fifty weeks of work. Vacation must be taken every day—thus the indulgence in the least expensive forms of entertainment: TV with cable, games, drinking and drugs, bingo and the lottery, and the pursuit of sexual relationships.

Money

For those familiar with their own environment, but not the realities of poverty, the choices of people in poverty are baffling. The hidden rule for money in middle class is to manage it. So, when people in poverty spend what little disposable income they have on cigarettes, big-screen TVs, and cable, the middle-class rule is broken, and those who break it are criticized.

In poverty, the hidden rule for money is to spend it. Small amounts of money will not be enough to solve the deep financial problems of the family, so it should be used on the immediate needs of individuals in or near the family. Without the middle-class rules for money, even large windfalls will usually be spent quickly by people in poverty.

Time

In middle class, people have enough resources and stability to take care of today so they can concern themselves with the future. In poverty, resources are so low that today must be the focus. People are busy stamping out fires. In wealth, the resources are so high that the present and the future are both secure and people can make their decisions according to family traditions.

According to Dutch-born U.S. artist Willem de Kooning, “The trouble with being poor is that it takes up all your time.” Several problems arise from living in the tyranny of the moment, the first of which is that people in poverty break the first rule for work and school, which is never to be late.

Being focused on the present also makes it more difficult to plan; it’s harder to calculate how long it takes to complete a task and to determine procedural steps with any certainty. Perhaps the most severe impact of poverty is that it robs people of their future story. As a result, people in poverty make decisions according to their feelings at the moment and their survival needs. This means that relationships and survival (the present) will trump time (the future) just about every time. For example, helping a neighbor get a car started is more important than being punctual for one’s own appointment.

Schools, businesses—all organizations—run on middle-class rules and norms.

Destiny

Another benefit of stable resources as found in the middle class is the ability to make choices and have control over the direction of one’s life. Children in middle class get to observe their parents as they make choices, plan, and fulfill their dreams. They themselves begin practicing choice making from their earliest days when asked, “What do you want for breakfast?” “Which of these two outfits do you want to wear?” Choices are tied to consequences, and middle-class children learn accountability to others and themselves early on. By the time they’re ready to fly from the nest, they have proved that they’re responsible.

Poverty, on the other hand, demands reactions to crisis, and options are limited. Sometimes it's a choice between two bad options. The concrete problems that people in poverty solve are about the present; they aren't about the future. As a result, people find that nothing they do makes a difference. An inability to make things better, to see progress, makes it very easy to slip into a sense of "fatedness."

In an environment where choices are forced upon a person by circumstances—and inaction itself is a choice—accountability is hard to accept and enforce. Choice and consequence, accountability and responsibility thrive in stable environments.

Some people in wealth, particularly those from old money, have a sense of *noblesse oblige*. They recognize that they're privileged and, because of that status, feel an obligation to give something back. Every community has benefited from this in the form of public buildings, parks, museums, and support of certain organizations. Underlying this is a commitment to the community and its well-being.

Power

For people in poverty, power is about respect for the individual. Showing disrespect for a person is an affront that must be challenged. To survive in poverty a person must be able to fight or have someone who will fight for them. Backing down is seen as weakness. So on the one hand the individual in poverty is very powerful, but at the community level, people in power have little influence, control, or power. In fact, many people in poverty are so powerless they can't stop bad things from happening to them.

Power for the middle class is in the institutions it runs, the information it holds, and the positions it holds. Respect for the individual is separated from respect for the position, so someone who is respected as a supervisor may not be respected as a person.

Power for those in wealth is about setting the direction for institutions, the community, and the nation. Personal safety and maintaining the *status quo* are primary concerns.

Many people in poverty have quit and lost jobs because of this hidden rule. Direction and oversight from a supervisor may be read as disrespect, in which case self-respect dictates action—speaking out, lashing out, or walking out.

Possessions

For the middle class, possessions are things—houses, boats, golf clubs, motorcycles, furnishings, and so on. For the wealthy, possessions are one-of-a-kind objects, pedigreed animals, properties, and businesses. For people in poverty, possessions tend to be people. The terms "my woman," "my man," and "my child" are often meant literally. Possessiveness grows out of the value placed on relationships and the resources that people represent. The more possessions (people) you have the better you are able to survive. Children raised with the hidden rules of poverty may be encouraged to value belonging over belongings. Most families in poverty spend more time together than families in middle class (Lareau 2003).

Language

The middle class uses the formal register of language (proper syntax, large vocabulary, proper pronunciation) at work and at school for achievement. Formal register is the language of negotiation and is necessary for knowledge-sector jobs. The middle class (those who run community organizations and agencies) has important messages to convey to its customers and clients. Those messages are typically offered in formal register and the “let’s get down to business,” linear, sequential discourse pattern. Formal register, as explicit as it is, usually turns into meaningless noise in the ears of people from poverty (Sapolsky 1998, p. 306).

In poverty, casual register is used for survival and to enhance relationships. A working vocabulary of four hundred to eight hundred high-frequency words, coupled with a reliance on non-verbal communication and the reading of the social context, makes for a very accurate register. For example, intentions are more accurately and quickly read from body language than from spoken words.

Like all hidden rules, this one can result in misunderstandings, criticism, and broken relationships. It takes but a few seconds to determine which language register a person is using; judgments can follow just as quickly. This is particularly important because change (and almost all agencies that serve people in poverty require change) is only possible when there is a relationship of mutual respect. Relationships are based on communication, and communication is based on the appropriate use of both formal and casual registers.

Language ability and the number of abstract words an individual has access to is directly related to the level of education, and education is directly related to economic class (Payne 2003). It’s during the first three years of life that thinking structures are being built in the brain. Research shows that children raised in welfare homes get a language experience that doesn’t prepare them very well for the abstract, cognitive demands of school. Welfare parents tend to talk less to their children, compared with adults from middle class. A study by Hart and Risley found that children raised in welfare homes hear ten million words from their parents, while children from professional homes hear thirty million words in their first three years. Children in welfare homes are familiar with one-word directions accompanied with a pointing finger, “Bathroom.” In middle-class homes, the parents are more likely to mediate, identify the stimulus (“your hands are dirty”), provide the meaning (“we’re going to eat”), and suggest a strategy (“so go wash your hands”). The nature of the interactions is also very different. In welfare homes, parents will prohibit their children from exploring language or their world twice for every one time they encourage them. In professional homes, the ratio is five encouragements for every prohibition (Hart 1995).

Children from poverty, therefore, are typically two years behind their peers and not ready for school. Children need to learn abstract representational systems from their parents because education is about learning and using those systems.

Discussion

This brief discussion of some of the hidden rules identified by Payne provides a lens through which to explore the issues of family stability and community sustainability.

The hidden rules explain why the best indicator of where someone will end up is the class in which he/she was raised. Understanding and using the appropriate hidden rules of middle class and wealth will assist people in transition by giving them access to more situations and communities.

Knowledge of the mindset and hidden rules of each class leads to an understanding of others and ourselves.

An understanding of the hidden rules gives people a way to identify and resolve problems at home with family member, co-workers and employees, customers and clients, and in the community itself.

People in middle class need to know the hidden rules in order to make the transition to greater stability themselves and to assist people in poverty. Access to new situations and people adds up to more influence and power. With power come choice and the ability to change.

We shouldn't criticize another person's hidden rules because they may well be needed for survival in that environment. We can, however, offer another set of rules, another option.

The hidden rules should be presented as a choice, not as a necessary change in identity. The wider the range of responses a person has the more he/she can control his/her situation. People in poverty need to know the hidden rules in order to gain that power.

RESOURCES

This paper began by discussing the impact of poverty on children and families. Mental models of lower-income and middle-class experiences were used to express that knowledge, and the hidden rules of economic class were described. These things hint at the quality of life, but they do not define it. Quality of life can be defined in many ways; Ruby Payne defines it by the degree to which one has ten resources (Payne 2003). These resources cover all aspects of life and set before families and communities the challenge, in the broadest terms, of building the good life. She defines poverty as the extent to which a person does without resources.

One purpose of families and communities is to build resources, and that is the purpose of this paper. Building resources is the way out of poverty; building resources is also the way to create sustainable communities.

FINANCIAL	Having the money to purchase goods and services, save for emergencies, and to invest. Having an understanding of how money works—being fiscally literate.
EMOTIONAL	Being able to choose and control emotional responses, particularly to negative situations, without engaging in self-destructive behavior. This is the “state of mind” that determines the way we think, feel, and behave at any given moment.

	It's an internal resource and shows itself through stamina, perseverance, and choice. This is about interpersonal skills for teamwork, teaching others, leadership, negotiation, and working with people from many backgrounds.
MENTAL	Having the mental abilities and skills (reading, writing, computing) to deal with daily life. This includes how much education and training a person has in order to compete in the workplace for well-paying jobs.
SPIRITUAL	Believing in divine purpose and guidance and/or having a rich culture that offers support and guidance.
PHYSICAL	Having physical health and mobility.
SUPPORT SYSTEMS	Having social networks of trustworthiness and reciprocity that include people from outside one's immediate circle. This is an external resource. Communities with rich social capital will improve life for everyone, even those with low personal social capital.
RELATIONSHIPS, ROLE MODELS	Having frequent access to people who are appropriate, who are nurturing to children, and who do not engage in self-destructive behavior.
INTEGRITY, TRUST	Trust is linked to two issues: predictability and safety. Can I know with some certainty that this person will do what he/she says? Can I predict with some accuracy that it will occur every time? The second part of the question is safety: Will I be safe with this person? This is an internal asset.
MOTIVATION, PERSISTENCE	Having the energy and drive to prepare for, plan, and complete projects, jobs, and personal changes. This is another internal asset.
KNOWLEDGE OF HIDDEN RULES	Knowing the unspoken cues and habits of both middle class and wealth.

Where Resources Come From

Some resources are internal, coming from within the person. Some are external, coming from or being present in the family, neighborhood, and community. Some are both.

No one builds resources entirely on his/her own. Even physical beauty and high intelligence are genetic gifts from our parents.

As individuals we determine if we will utilize, even enhance, our resources.

Some families are building resources, passing on high internal and external assets to the next generation.

Some families are losing resources through accidents, illness, bad choices, and other circumstances, thus passing lower resources to the next generation.

Assessing Resources

Agencies assess the resources of their clients as soon as they walk through the door. Financial resources are often the first to be assessed so the agency knows how to set the fee.

Each organization has its own focus, assessing some resources and not others.

Doing a self-assessment and investigating one's own life constitute the most meaningful assessment.

Assessing resources that are low across the board can be painful.

Building Resources

It's easier to build resources when you know the hidden rules of all three classes.

There are four common ways that people move out of poverty: an insight, goal, and determination to change; a particular talent or skill; a relationship with someone who guides and supports; and the pain of living in poverty. All of these ways are about utilizing and building resources.

Individuals can choose to build their own resources (for example, daily exercises to stay in shape, attending classes in money management).

Agencies can help people build resources. For example, mental health agencies can help individuals build emotional resources.

Communities can help citizens build resources. For example, communities can attract businesses that pay good wages, and communities can provide social capital through organizations that are inclusive of diverse people.

Discussion

The greater one's resources, the better the quality of life. It stands to reason that good health is preferable to illness, that financial stability is preferable to lack of basic needs, that having many friends and acquaintances is preferable to being alone and without friends.

Poverty is not just about money. For example, it is possible to have very little money and be very high in other resources (for example, spiritual, mental, and emotional).

Likewise, it's possible to have strong financial resources and be spiritually impoverished.

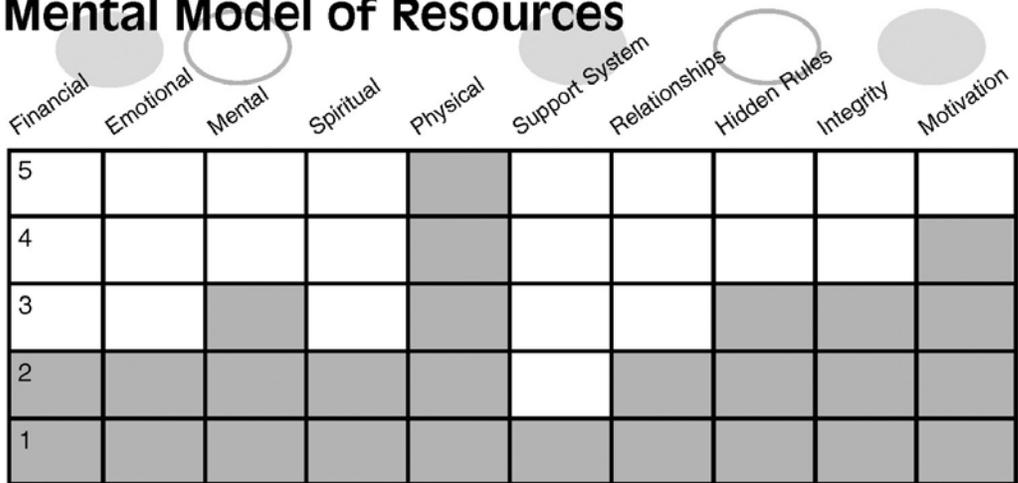
Resources are interlocking. For example, a serious injury will suddenly lower one's physical resources and could negatively impact a person's income (financial resources), the ability to think and remember (mental resources), and one's social life (social support) if the injury stops the person from joining others in activities once enjoyed.

The greater the resources, the easier it is to build other resources. If one has high emotional resources, it's easier to get and keep a job. Many people have the mental capability to do the job but can't get along with others, so they lose their jobs.

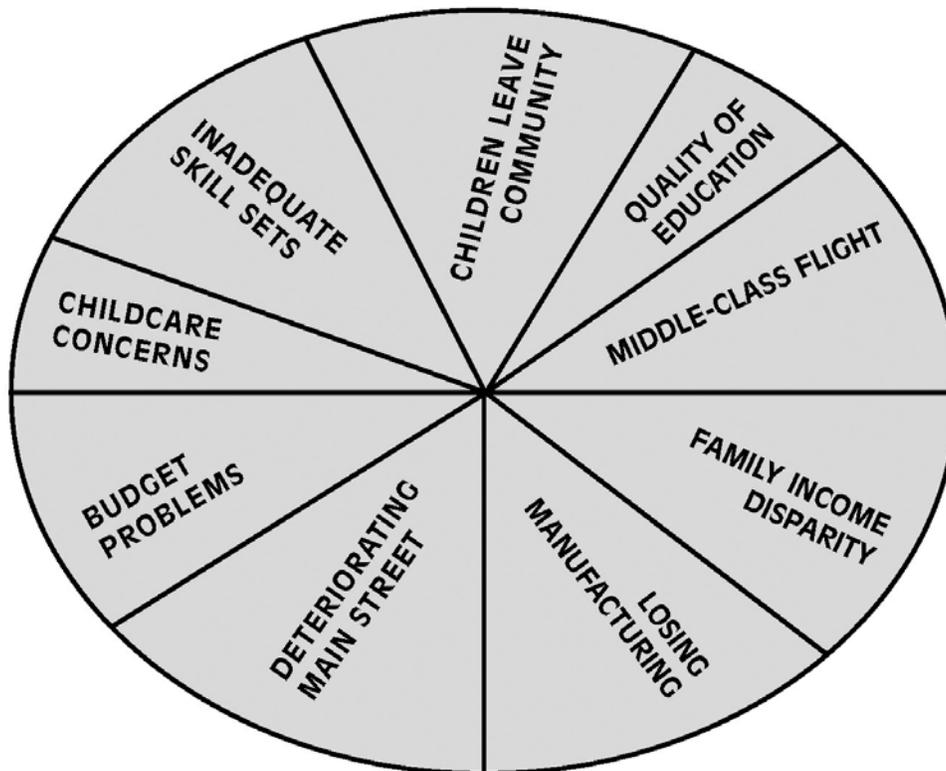
The job of building resources is the responsibility of everyone: the individual, the family, the employer, and the community.

The following bar chart represents the resources of an individual on a five-point scale. It illustrates where the strengths and weaknesses lie and suggests which resources need to be increased.

Mental Model of Resources



Mental Model of Communities at Risk



Just as we developed and learned from mental models of poverty, middle class, and wealth, we can learn from developing a mental model of communities at risk. Some communities are at more risk of becoming unsustainable than others. What do community members worry about? What is occurring that suggests problems?

Discussion

Interlocking: Elements of the model impact and influence other elements. Middle-class flight to the suburbs in search of safe and good schools or jobs that have moved out of the city weakens the tax base and resources of the city. This breaks up neighborhoods that were once well-connected, as well as weakens the social capital.

Vulnerability: For communities that lose manufacturing firms, vulnerability is concrete. Some elements of the mental model are warning signs; some have the status of a red alert.

Relationships: Survival requires a reliance on people and organizations inside and outside of the community. Community members have a shared fate.

Change: Change is harder for struggling communities than for those with strong resources.

Tyranny of the moment: Crises appear with a speed and frequency that demand immediate action and concrete solutions, thus drawing the focus of community leaders to the present and away from the future.

Destiny: Choices often come down to a decision between two equally bad options.

Future, choice, power: Communities at risk may lose sight of their future story, as well as the power to make a positive future story come true.

Equity and Critical Mass

The interlocking nature of resources is a fact, not just for individuals and families in poverty but in whole communities as well. According to Thomas Sowell, if a community allows a group to be disenfranchised for any reason, the whole community becomes poorer (Sowell 1998). It works like this: When 10 percent of the community is in poverty, most people will say that there isn't any poverty. At 20 percent, most will still say that there isn't any poverty, but the social workers will be concerned. At 30 percent, people will say there's a little poverty, and the social workers will be extremely concerned. At 35-40 percent it hits critical mass and shows up on everyone's radar screen. The community takes notice. When poverty hits this point, the top 10 percent of the community will typically pass laws and ordinances to control the bottom 40 percent. These take the form of zero tolerance for drugs, no vagrancy, and no loitering. When 60 percent of the population is in poverty, the top 10 percent (which pays 70 percent of the federal taxes and has the most financial resources) will move away. In addition, many middle-class families move to the suburbs in search of better schools (Warren 2003, p. 8). That leaves the community with the population that has the fewest resources (the bottom 50 percent of households pay 4 percent of federal taxes). At that point the community is no longer sustainable (Payne 2004).

RESEARCH ON THE CAUSES OF POVERTY

When a family or community decides to build resources it will need to know what strategies to use. Too narrow a set of strategies ... and the problem will persist. To define the parameters of the task we must understand the causes of poverty. David Shipler, author of *The Working Poor*, says that in the United States we're confused about the causes of poverty. As a result, we're confused about what to do about it (Shipler 2004). Clarity about poverty's causes is important. The research can be organized into four clusters, as presented in the following table.

CAUSES OF POVERTY			
Behaviors of the Individual	Human and Social Capital in the Community	Exploitation	Political/Economic Structures
Definition: research on the choices, behaviors, characteristics, and habits of people in poverty.	Definition: research on the resources available to individuals, communities, and businesses.	Definition: research on how people in poverty are exploited because they are in poverty.	Definition: research on economic, political, and social policies at the international, national, state, and local levels.
Sample topics: Dependence on welfare Morality Crime Single parenthood Breakup of families Intergenerational character traits Work ethic Commitment to achievement Spending habits Addiction, mental illness, domestic violence Planning skills Orientation to the future Language experience	Sample topics: Intellectual capital Social capital Availability of jobs Availability of well-paying jobs Availability and quality of education Adequate skill sets Childcare for working families Decline in neighborhoods Decline in social morality Urbanization Suburbanization of manufacturing Middle-class flight City and regional planning	Sample topics: Drug trade Cash-advance lenders Sub-prime lenders Lease-purchase outlets Gambling Temp work Sweatshops Sex trade Internet scams	Sample topics: Globalization Corporate influence on legislators Declining middle class De-industrialization Job loss Decline of unions Taxation patterns Salary ratio of CEO to line worker Immigration patterns Economic disparity

Discourse on the Causes of Poverty

People representing the two ends of the continuum argue the causes and cures of poverty most ardently. One group argues that globalization and free-market strategies as they are being practiced today result in the loss of well-paying jobs—and that political/economic policies should be used to overcome poverty. The other group argues that poverty has to do with the choices of the poor. If they would just be punctual, sober, dependable, self-sufficient, and motivated, poverty would be reduced if not eliminated. Unfortunately, the two sides are making *either/or* assertions as if to say, *It's either this or that; this is true and that is not.*

Rather than being an either/or proposition, the research on poverty shows that it is a *both/and* reality. Poverty is about *both* the choices of the poor *and* the political/economic structures; and, furthermore, it is about everything in between. Poverty is caused by the choices of the poor, the lack of human and social capital, exploitation of the poor, and political/economic structures. There is good research in all four areas and therefore our communities must address all four areas when developing sustainable communities.

Alice O'Connor, author of *Poverty Knowledge*, says that our society has typically looked at poverty through the prism of race and gender. She suggests that another analytic category is needed, that of economic class (O'Connor 2001). Ruby Payne offers that prism; it is what informs this work.

Typically, communities put a great deal of effort into the first area of research: the behaviors of the individuals. Work-first was one of the key themes of the welfare reform act of 1996. TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) organizations focused on getting people to work. The idea was that getting a job, any job, and learning to work was more important than going to job training classes or receiving treatment. Community agencies offered treatment for substance abuse and mental health problems, money management classes, and programs to address literacy, teen pregnancies, language experience and more. The mission of these agencies is not to work directly on poverty issues, but to deal with co-existing problems. All of these agencies encourage their clients to change certain behaviors, recording and managing the changes through the use of plans and contracts. Many of the agencies hold their clients accountable for their choices and sanction clients who do not adhere to treatment plans.

Community efforts to enhance human and social capital include the strategies found in Head Start, WIA programs, One-Stop centers, Earned Income Tax Credit and other anti-poverty programs. In this area too, accountability and sanctions are used to measure and motivate community organizations. Schools that meet certain benchmarks are taken over by state departments, TANF organizations that don't meet certain benchmarks don't receive incentive funds.

Communities rarely develop strategies to restrict, replace, or sanction those who exploit people in poverty. Even those organizations charged with fighting poverty sometimes neglect this cause of poverty. In part, this comes from departmentalizing our community services. People who work in organizations charged with serving those in poverty don't think of exploiters as their responsibility. That falls to law enforcement and policy makers.

Departmentalizing is even more pronounced when it comes to the causes of poverty that arise from political and economic structures. Community economic development is left to the market system, developers, businesses, corporations, the Chamber of Commerce, and elected officials. People who typically work with those in poverty don't see a role for themselves in the debate on economic development issues any more than those who are engaged in business ventures make a direct connection between their work and the well-being of people in poverty. And yet, in concrete terms, there is direct connection between the quality of life and the actions of government and business. For the person in poverty it comes down to this: a person can get vocational training in a particular skill, get a job, and still be in poverty.

This all-too-common reality is the reason why communities must develop strategies across all four areas of research, not just the first two. To continue to focus exclusively on the first two areas of research is to invite more of the same, more poverty. There is good research in all four areas; communities must develop strategies in all four areas if they are going to build resources and sustainability

BARRIERS GENERATED BY POVERTY

We have already said that those who most need to change find it hardest to change. Making changes is very difficult for those in generational poverty. The following table lists the barriers to change that helping agencies will need to address to improve outcomes with people in poverty.

Barriers to Change			
Barriers Generated by Poverty	Barriers Generated by Family and Social Networks	Barriers Generated by Community Providers	Barriers Generated by Society
Crisis/survival/reactive mode lifestyle	Resistance and sabotage by family and friends	Program theory based on middle-class mindsets	Departmental thinking and planning
Living in the moment	Penance/forgiveness discipline patterns	Clients perceived as “needy” recipients	Distrust of people in poverty
Low resources	Low social capital	Middle-class “noise”	Acceptance of those who exploit the weakest members of society
Polarized thinking	The need to earn respect of one’s peers	Talents, skills, and abilities unrecognized	Acceptance of high levels of poverty
Fatedness	Not knowing the hidden rules of economic class	Organizational change difficult	
Not knowing how to plan		Departmental thinking and planning	
Cognitive problems			
Co-existing problems			
Not knowing the hidden rules of other classes			
Fear of losing others			
Fear of giving up identity			
Distrust of institutions			

Discussion

Many of the barriers listed above have not been explained in this paper.

Front-line staff trained in poverty issues can address some of the barriers.

Most barriers are program-design issues.

STRATEGIC BENCHMARKS

Strategies to build community sustainability can be organized to match up with the four clusters of research presented earlier. As noted, there is good research in each of the four areas, so communities must have strategies across the continuum of causes. Below are general benchmarks that point toward the action that will need to be taken. The specific programs and action steps will need to be decided by the community.

Research Category: Behaviors of the Individual and Family

- People in poverty will have the opportunity to explore information that applies to their environment, family life, and community—and make plans for enhancing their own resources.
 - Rationale: People are more likely to develop and follow through on plans that come from a self-assessment of resources and their own analysis of the situation. Motivation is much more powerful when the individual makes the argument for change, not someone else (Miller 2002).
- People will have the opportunity to learn the hidden rules of all economic classes.
 - Rationale: Knowledge of the hidden rules of different classes gives people a wider range of responses to any given situation. The wider the range of responses, the better one can navigate the world of school and work. Knowing the hidden rules makes it easier to build resources.
- People in poverty will take the opportunity to build individual and family resources.
 - Rationale: In the end it's up to individuals to find the motivation and perseverance to make choices and take the action necessary to change the future.
- Families will have the opportunity to learn how to enhance language experience for their children.
 - Rationale: One of the most direct and effective ways to help children have a positive experience at school—to win in that environment—is to give them a language experience that prepares them for learning. When parents are verbally responsive to their children, explain the world to them, and encourage them to talk they are preparing their children to succeed in school and in life.
- People in poverty will have the opportunity to partner with the middle class and the affluent to build family resources and make a stronger community.
 - Rationale: One of the most immediate and successful ways to build resources is to develop bridging social capital with people outside of one's usual circle.

Enhancing Language Experience

In Morrow County, Ohio, low-income people are running three-day weekend retreats on how parents can be more responsive to children and how to enhance youngsters' language experience. Seven retreats have taken place to date, with more planned. The parents who run this program, once participants themselves, began taking over the roles of facilitating, organizing, and teaching at the second event. Now six parents and two agency staff run the programs and are paid well for their work.

The community agencies and schools continue to conduct the events using grant funds with the expectation that, in the years to come, everyone will benefit. Research done on the first two events shows that parents did become more responsive to their children. Children who are exposed to lots of talk, mediation, and formal story structures are prepared for school and will be well-received by their teachers (Hart 1995 and Lareau 2003). These children have the cognitive structures in place that allow them to store, retrieve, and manipulate information (Sharron 1996).

The program was designed by professionals who understood the hidden rules of economic class, along with the importance of resources, family structures, and language issues. In addition, the design was based on the knowledge that people in poverty are problem solvers.

Research Category: Human and Social Capital

- Communities, businesses, government officials, and non-governmental organizations will establish mental models of poverty and prosperity.
 - Rationale: Without a dialogue (total agreement is not necessary) on these core elements of community life, fragmented approaches will continue to produce disappointing results. The mental model of poverty describes what is; the mental model of prosperity defines the community's future story.
- School- and community-based efforts to assist people in poverty will be coordinated.
 - Rationale: Many communities are already doing important things to address these issues. More coordination across departments could make them more effective. Coordinated efforts could include enhanced language experience for children, birth to age three; intervention strategies; development of public and bridging social capital; and the provision of ongoing, long-term support of people in transition.
- Schools and communities will develop intellectual capital.
 - Rationale: Thomas Stewart, author of *Intellectual Capital: The New Wealth of Organizations*, defines intellectual capital as the "... intangible assets—the talents of its people, the efficacy of its management systems, the character of its relationships with its customers ...". Ruby Payne notes that there is a direct correlation between the level of educational attainment in a community or country and its economic wealth (Payne 2004).
- Programs will be based on shared principles.
 - Rationale: Communities need to be flexible in their approaches to economic sustainability. A rigid, over-planned, machinelike approach will work against

community involvement and would be counter to the chaotic nature of community life. Guiding principles will help the process; programs will:

- Be based on a mental model that recognizes people in poverty as problem solvers.
 - Teach the hidden rules of economic class to staff, customers, clients, and participants.
 - Utilize the talents, skills, and gifts of participants.
 - Assist people to establish a future story, practice choice, and plan.
 - Bridge distrust.
 - Communicate with mental models, not with an over-reliance on formal register.
 - Provide opportunities for participants to earn respect with others as they make the transition.
 - Build social capital.
 - Assist low-income families to build assets.
 - Provide long-term support for people in transition.
- Businesses, chambers of commerce, and departments of development will adopt principles and practices that promote sustainability.
 - Rationale: The business sector, through its employment practices, contributes a foundational piece to quality of life through the quality of the jobs it offers, the wages it pays, and goals it seeks. Many businesses already subscribe to the worthy goals of financial returns, employee well-being, and community well-being.
 - Foundations encourage innovation in programming that will build community sustainability.
 - Rationale: Foundations provide direction and funding for community efforts and are often the catalyst for change. Free of government restrictions and departmental thinking, they can attract diverse groups to the table and address policy issues.

Retaining New Hires from Poverty

Cascade Engineering, a plastics firm in Grand Rapids, Michigan, raised its retention rate of new hires from poverty from 29 percent to 69 percent by applying Ruby Payne's concepts to the workplace. The welfare-to-career program includes these features: education on diversity and economic-class rules for all employees, long-term support for new hires through partnerships with community and government programs, mentoring efforts, accountability systems that support high performance standards that are designed to teach rather than discipline, and an accepting organizational culture (Bradley 2003).

Research Category: Exploitation

- Legislators will protect people from exploitation.
 - Rationale: Consistent, long-term protection requires legislation.
- Communities will replace what the predators provide with fair services.
 - Rationale: Organizations that exploit people are delivering a service or product that is needed; an alternative is essential.
- Communities will not engage in the “race to the bottom” but will attract businesses that build community resources.
 - Rationale: Selling local labor cheap contributes to the cycle of poverty and the breakdown of the community.

Fixing and Selling Cars at a Fair Price

Good News Cars in Burlington, Vermont, was started when the founder learned from a friend that she had purchased a car from a buy-here, pay-here car dealer that broke down two blocks from the dealer’s lot. Good New Cars takes donated cars, fixes them, and sells them at a fair price with a warranty.

Research Category: Political/Economic Structures

- Legislators will pass legislation that supports the development of sustainable communities:
 - Rationale: Those who set policy have the most influence over the well-being of communities and families. Principles for legislation should include:
 - Strategies across the entire research continuum on the causes of poverty.
 - Income support for low-wage workers.
 - Job training.
 - Childcare support for low-wage workers.
 - A measurement tool similar to the Social Health Index to monitor community well-being.

EVALUATION AND REPORTS

Social Health Index

Communities need a way of measuring their success that is as broad as the strategies they undertake—and encompasses the wide spectrum of sustainability issues. The Social Health Index fits that need. In the 1960s Minnesota Senator Walter Mondale and Wilbur Cohen, under secretary for the U.S. Department of Health, Education & Welfare, proposed the Social Health Index (SHI) in the National Accounting Act. The U.S. Congress did not adopt the idea, but every other industrialized nation did (Miringoff 2000). The SHI covers:

QUALITY-OF-LIFE INDICATORS	
Infant mortality	Wages
Child abuse	Healthcare coverage
Child poverty	Age sixty-five-plus poverty
Youth suicide	Life expectancy
Teenage drug use	Violent crime
High school dropouts	Alcohol-related traffic fatalities
Teenage birth	Affordable housing
Unemployment	Inequality in family income

Discussion

The SHI would provide data and reports in the same way that economic indicators are reported. There would be a Social Reserve, as there is a Federal Reserve; Leading Social Indicators, as there are Leading Economic Indicators; a Council of Social Advisers as there is a Council of Economic Advisers; and a Social Index similar to the Dow Jones Industrial average.

This would give communities, states, and the nation an ability to look at social issues in a more informed way: indicators instead of individual stories, conceptual stories instead of soap operas played out on the evening news, regular reports that show trends rather than episodic reports, and instant information rather than information that is months old.

The SHI would make it possible to get consistent reports, understand the evolving story, identify and respond to social recessions quickly, compare data between and among communities and states, deepen the discourse on sustainability issues, and enliven democracy.

Communities don't have to wait on a change in policies at the national level. More than 800 communities already have adopted the SHI or something similar to it. The information is available, but it's inside departmental silos at the local and state levels. Policies need to be adopted to institutionalize the SHI, and key economic indicators must be included in the data: unemployment, wages, healthcare coverage, affordable housing, and inequality in family income.

Limitations of Social Health Index

Like all other reports, plans, and evaluations the SHI is in danger of being put on the shelf and forgotten. The fact that it relies on hard data—information that can be provided by a few experts—almost ensures its shelf bound fate. Reports, plans, and evaluations conducted by the few are used and remembered by the few. Other features of shelf bound documents are that they fulfill a management or accountability requirement, are done by outside experts, are based on past information, and present only quantitative information.

To avoid the fate of other similar documents the SHI needs to be coupled with a process that enlivens it and makes it truly useful.

THE COMMUNITY-FOCUSED PROCESS

Einstein said, “No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it.”

The purpose of this paper has been to build a new consciousness of economic diversity and to present the interlocking nature of the problems faced by people in poverty and communities as a whole. This consciousness alone is not enough to successfully build sustainable communities. How the community approaches change is equally important as the knowledge itself. Old ways of problem solving are part of the old consciousness that created the poverty and problems that we have today. A new consciousness about how change can be achieved also is needed.

The process is as important as the product. One might say the process *is* the product. The process opens the door to other forms of knowledge: qualitative information, values, inventiveness, creativity, and new visions of the future. The goal is to engage the community as active participants in question making (rather than question asking), as sources of knowledge, as analysts, and as problem solvers. In essence, the process becomes part of the product and adds value to the SHI.

The idea of a community-focused process comes from the United Nations Development Programme, Office of Evaluation and Strategic Planning. It changes the roles of funders, evaluators, and community members as described in the table below.

PROCESS COMPARISON		
Roles	Top-Down Evaluation Process	Community-Focused Process
Funders: Government Foundations Local Partnerships	Pay for the evaluation Set the evaluation guidelines	Provide financial support Act on recommendations Provide institutional support
Evaluators: Outside experts	Provide the report Participate on the evaluation team Provide credibility	Facilitate funder and community communication Facilitate evaluation process
Community: People from all economic groups	Provide information Question asker	Provide knowledge Question maker Conduct research Conduct analysis Provide recommendations
<i>Adapted from Donnelly 1997</i>		

Discussion

Community sustainability is so broad a topic that all components of society must be engaged in the process. This topic truly engages people from business, government, health care, criminal justice, education, and social services.

People living in survival mode will find it harder to become engaged in this work. The following will assist in getting people from poverty to participate:

- Direct-teach the hidden rules of economic class to all those involved in the process, including people from poverty. In this way everyone has a shared language and vocabulary to identify and resolve differences.
- Approach the poor as problem solvers, not victims.
- Start the process by building relationships of mutual respect, giving whatever time is necessary to know one another, using food and entertainment.
- Allow participants to bring their children.
- Identify and include the connectors (those people who know everyone), mavens (those who know what's going on in the community), and sales people (those who can sell ideas in the community) (Gladwell 2000).
- Utilize the talents, gifts, and skills of the individuals.
- Invite them to work on real (concrete) issues that impact day-to-day life.
- Have people from different backgrounds work on common tasks so that conversations take place and people get to know each another.
- When people become confident about what they have to offer at the concrete activities, encourage them to move to other committees and activities.
- Provide opportunities to earn the respect of peers.
- Teach question-making skills.
- Pay them for their time with inexpensive gift cards, gas vouchers, etc.
- Use mental models to help identify, with a minimum of emotion, the areas of needed change.
- Provide constructive outlets for frustration and criticism.
- Celebrate every step of the way.

PRINCIPLES OF CHANGE

Building sustainable communities is a matter of creating a critical mass of citizens who share the ideas about sustainability and are willing to change their behavior in ways that fit local circumstances (Taylor-Ide 2002). To guide the work, principles of change need to be identified, agreed upon, monitored, and revisited.

Principles of Change	Process of Change
<p>Engage all economic classes in the effort.</p> <p>(People support what they create. Participation cannot be mandated from above or guided from the center; all levels must participate.)</p>	<p>Create a steering committee from a three-way partnership: people in the community, facilitators from the outside, and donors.</p> <p>Bring people in poverty into the process by sharing information about economic diversity with them, learning from them, and engaging them in concrete activities.</p> <p>All members of the three-way partnership must be “question makers.” Question makers have a more active role in the process than “question askers” (Donnelly 1997).</p> <p>Identify what the sustainable community would look like in twenty years.</p> <p>Identify target SHI indicators and milestones.</p>
<p>Conduct whole-system planning to include all sectors: business, government, higher education, social services, schools, law enforcement, criminal justice, neighborhoods, faith-based community, civic groups, and others.</p>	<p>Whole-system planning utilizes charrettes, the decision-making strategy of architects, to involve everyone. For example, the plumber is not left out of the planning process when designing a building. Curitiba, Brazil (a city the size of Houston) began using whole-system planning in the '60s. SHI-style indicators for that city are very high. For example, Curitiba has the cleanest air in the world for any city its size (Hawkins 1999, pp. 285-308).</p>
<p>The process of change should be designed to cover twenty years so that the vision will extend into the next generation.</p> <p>(It takes time to build critical mass and resources.)</p>	<p>Use methods that are simple and involve many people.</p> <p>Create an ongoing cycle of evaluation, development, and improvement. Example: observation, hypothesis building, experimentation.</p> <p>Engage the entire community in the analysis phase.</p>
<p>Collect “real” community data.</p>	<p>Collect quantitative data for the SHI.</p> <p>Collect qualitative data from the community.</p>
<p>Embed data, findings, and reports into community knowledge.</p>	<p>Open reports and records to the community.</p> <p>Make regular reports to the community.</p> <p>For example, reports on local SHI indicators would be used in local school math, science, and social studies curricula.</p> <p>Select a historian to chronicle the process, events, milestones, and outcomes.</p>

Discussion

A timeframe of twenty years moves the dialogue onto a higher plane, beyond the scope of quarterly numbers, terms of office, and typical accountability time frames.

Community sustainability is a concept above the fray of typical political discourse that defines a shared future.

ECONOMIC CLASS ROLES IN CREATING A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

All economic groups will need to participate in the building of sustainable communities. The table below suggests the roles they might play.

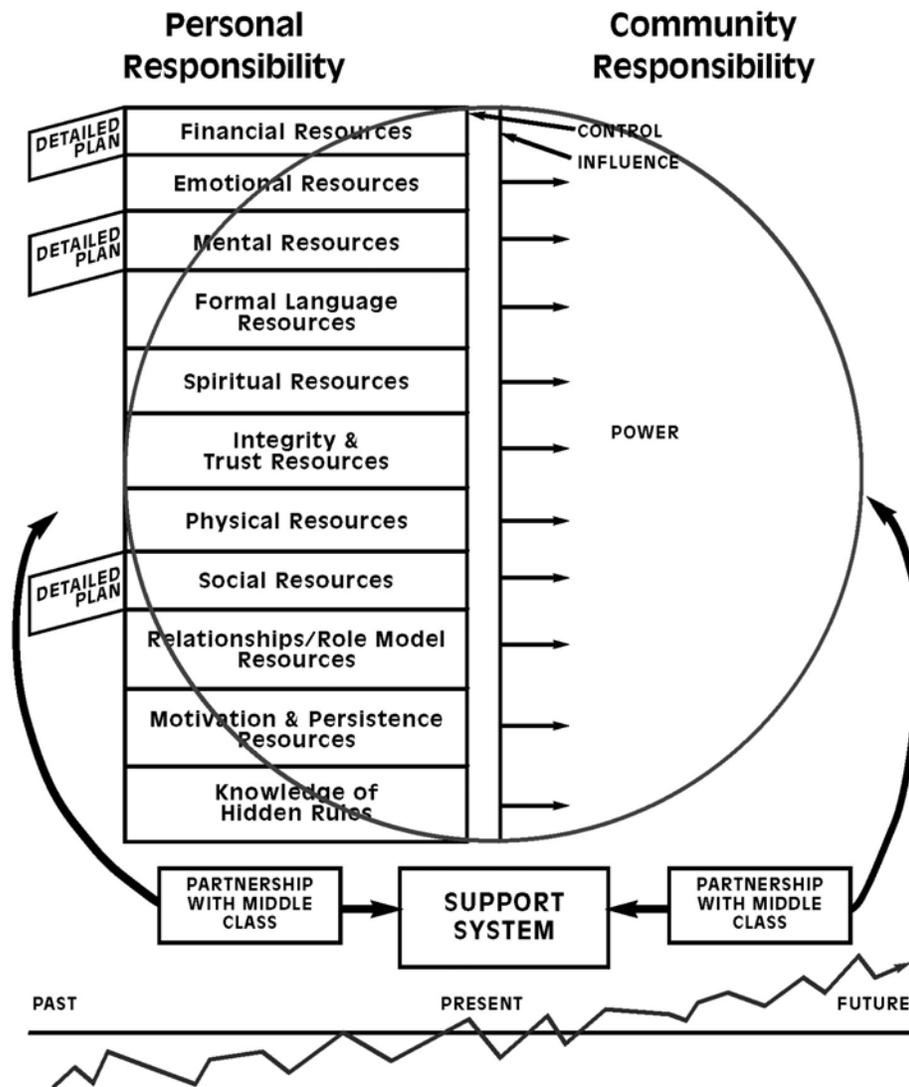
Problem Solvers from Poverty	Problem Solvers from Middle Class	Problem Solvers from Wealth
Learn about economic diversity.	Learn about economic diversity.	Learn about economic diversity.
Make plans to build personal resources. Use personal and community resources to build personal and family resources.	Make plans to build personal resources.	Make plans to build personal resources.
Assist agencies and organizations to design programs to better serve people in poverty.	Train staff in economic diversity. Design programs to better serve people in poverty.	Assist agencies and organizations to design programs that help others build resource.
Participate in community sustainability development activities.	Influence policy development and legislation.	Influence policy development and legislation to enhance well-being for people in poverty and for low-wage workers.
Participate in problem solving.	Encourage the development of community agencies and businesses that have worthy goals: the well-being of employees, clients, and community, as well as financial returns.	Encourage the development of businesses that have worthy goals: financial returns, environmental performance, the well-being of employees, and the well-being of the community.
Assist others in building resources.	Assist others in building resources.	Assist others in building resources.

MENTAL MODEL OF PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY FOR A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

The following model was created by a group of people in poverty who studied the information presented in this paper. The group developed a series of mental models to investigate the impact of poverty on themselves. They learned the hidden rules of class, did assessments of their own resources and the community, did an analysis of the information, developed detailed plans for the resources they thought they needed to enhance, and finally turned their attention to the needs of

the community. Their mental model for prosperity is shared here as a proposal, a beginning point in the dialogue that must yet take place in each community. Like all mental models, it can be improved upon; other communities are invited to pick up their markers and get to work.

Mental Model of Prosperity



Explanation of the Model

Personal responsibility: The left side of the oval is about the personal responsibility to build up low resources. All resources are shown to represent all quality-of-life issues; everyone’s story is different. In the example three resources were selected for detailed development plans: financial, mental, and social resources.

Support system: The group members recognized that they needed long-term support for the development of the resources that cannot always be found in their own families. The support system they developed included internal, personal supports such as self-talk, backup plans, mentors, and the like. The external support system included people from their families and neighborhood who would support them, as well as others with whom they might develop bridging capital, such as mentors. Group members also recognized that they would need to partner with middle-class organizations and agencies that hold the information, power, and funding necessary to build their own resources.

Community responsibility: In recognition of the fact that poverty is about more than the choices of the poor, the group assigned half of the oval to the community. Again, members were interested and willing to partner with the middle class and wealthy to create well-paying jobs, affordable housing, and higher levels of social capital.

Influence and control: Group members recognized that those in poverty tend to have little influence or control over their lives. As their personal and community resources grow, they expect to see their influence and control grow too—thus the arrows pointing to the right, extending their resources and problem-solving power into new territory.

Time line: The trend line shows an upward trend in resources, with numerous ups and downs to reflect the reality of the transition process from poverty to prosperity. No one expects the process to be smooth or quick, and everyone expects to be in the process for a long time.

IN CONCLUSION

The first major revolution in the world was the agricultural revolution, the second was the industrial revolution, and the third is known as the information age. The next revolution is expected to be the development of sustainability.

It takes about one hundred years for an idea to reach critical mass. It took one hundred years from the abolition of slavery to the fulfillment of the civil-rights movement. It took one hundred years for women to win the right to vote. The idea of sustainable communities is in the same process. For some communities the issue is not even on the radar screen, while in others a desperate struggle for survival is taking place. In many more, the first signs of trouble are appearing. Communities that respond to the danger signs early will still have the resources and health to make changes; waiting too long could be fatal.

New strategies are called for, and all members of the community are needed to find a future story that will share prosperity and health with the next generation. It is encouraging to know that the future is not fixed. As Joseph Jaworski says in his book *Synchronicity*, “[O]ur mental model of the way the world works must shift from images of a clockwork, machinelike universe that is fixed and determined, to the model of a universe that is open, dynamic, interconnected, and full of living qualities ... Once we see this fundamentally open quality of the universe, it immediately opens us up to the potential for change; we see that the future is not fixed, and we shift from resignation to a sense of possibility. We are creating the future every moment” (Jaworski 1998).

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