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Phases of Collaboration

By: Mark Cabaj

You know the old adage, hindsight is always twenty-twenty? That could easily have been the subtitle for the recently completed Vibrant Communities' *Foundations* tele-learning series. This two-part series focused on foundational ideas that we in the Vibrant Communities network wished, looking back, that we would have embraced at the beginning of our initiative in 2002.

In September we explored the importance of viewing poverty through the lens of complexity. This month nearly 100 people came together to explore the implications of looking at the phases of collaborative efforts to reduce poverty through the lens of the eco-cycle.



Inspired by the work of the ecologist C.S. Holling, popularized by authors of the book *Getting to Maybe* and informed by the hard won experience of Vibrant Communities Trail Builders, the eco-cycle framework organizes collaborative into different phases.

Beautiful thinking for
November
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These phases are:

- *Exploration phase* - requires creative leadership to expand the possible ideas and stakeholders required to drive and guide a poverty reduction effort forward
- *Development phase* - where promising ideas are launched, developed and tested through a process of experimentation
- *Conservation phase* - where proven ideas are sustained, possibly scaled up, and managed for productivity
- *Creative destruction phase* - where non-performing work is let go and charismatic leadership helps establish new vision, values and directions

The eco-cycle lens also highlights the challenge of overcoming traps that make it difficult for collaborations to move from one phase to the next. These include:

- *The Traction Trap* - where collaborative leaders struggle to establish a shared vision and direction
- *The Scarcity Trap* - where a group has difficulty finding the energy or resources to pursue promising ideas or deciding which ideas deserve their full attention
- *The Parasitic Trap* - where proven strategies or ways of working struggle to leave the host that gave them birth (e.g. founding members, pilot project pools of funds)
- *The Rigidity Trap* - where members of a collaboration are unwilling and/or unable to wind-down a manner of working that is no longer productive and therefore do not create the conditions for renewal.

Out of this one lens flow a host of implications for leadership and management. Some of these include:

- Ensuring leadership that is matched to the unique demands of each phase
- Stewarding the group's work in a ways that improves the probability - but never guarantees - making it through transitional traps
- Adapting to shifts in the environment

- Striving for a healthy balance between the work in different phases so that a group is continuously renewing and performing

One of the implications of the eco-cycle framework is controversial: not all manifestations of collaborative efforts are robust enough to survive. The group's ideas may not be compelling. They have insufficient resources. The timing may be wrong. Their leadership group may struggle to get on the same page. There may be other collaborative efforts in the community competing for public attention. Sometimes, while all the individual ingredients of an initiative are strong, there is just 'something missing'.

While groups can improve the probability of developing a robust collaboration to reduce poverty, in some cases, it may be more productive for the community, and the cause of poverty reduction, if the members put a struggling initiative to rest so that their energy can be deployed in another collaborative effort now or in the future.

Like any framework, the eco-cycle framework cannot offer a comprehensive insight into the rich experience of collaborative work, nor offer practical solutions to deal with the challenges of working together. It is, after all, just a framework. However, based on the labour of over a dozen communities working on the ground, the framework reveals enough about the nature of the work that we think any group serious about working across boundaries on complex issues will want to view their work – even if only once – through the lens of the eco-cycle.

Related Links:

- [*Phases of Collaborative Efforts to Reduce Poverty* handout](#)
- [*Access the online audio seminar and supporting resources for Phases of Collaborative Efforts to Reduce Poverty*](#)
- [*Access the online audio seminar and supporting resources for Framing Poverty as a Complex Issue*](#)

Convergence: Five Trends Reshaping the Social Sector

By: Sylvia Cheuy

In the just-released research report *Convergence: How Five Trends Will Reshape the Social Sector*, authors David La Piana et al identify five key trends that they believe have significant implications for the future of not-for-profit organizations. The paper's aim is to stimulate dialogue and have these ideas and trends inform the ongoing planning and strategy of the not-for-profit sector in the face of the current economic reality.



The five trends are:

1. *Demographic Shifts Redefine Participation* – Younger generations are making up a growing percentage of the workforce. They bring with them significant distinctions in how they value engagement, transparency, technology, professional development and work-life balance. Successful not-for-profits will acknowledge generational differences, negotiate and find ways for leadership to be shared across generations; and develop new management structures to accommodate the generational needs of both staff and volunteers.
2. *Technological Advances Abound* – Social media has challenged not-for-profits to adopt new ways of connecting and communicating which demand greater openness and transparency. This new media culture wants authenticity, real stories and to be engaged in the dialogue on issues. This is true for both internal and external communications and it requires not-for-profits of the future to be able to use technology strategically, be clear on their goals and expectations and consider the “return on insights” offered by technology enabled communications.
3. *Networks Enable Work to Be Organized in New Ways* – While coalitions and networks are not new, technology and new norms of working collaboratively are exponentially increasing the impact of networks and allowing far deeper and more meaningful collaborations than ever before. As a result, “the organization as an entity is becoming much less central and important.”

Future-oriented not-for-profits will explore how to expand and deepen their impact through networks; use network mapping to understand and intentionally grow their networks; and think more systemically about possible approaches and partners when addressing issues.

4. *Interest in Civic Engagement and Volunteerism Is Rising* – As our society ages, an unprecedented number of active retirees and a new generation of young professionals with a strong community service ethic will create a vast pool of potential volunteers. Not-for-profits who are able to respect and appeal to an increasingly diverse volunteer pool with a range of options will be most successful. This may include “virtual volunteering” – where tasks are undertaken at least partly online and also “micro-volunteering” – where volunteers help out in small, convenient ways that don’t require any long-term commitment.
5. *Sector Boundaries Are Blurring* – While cross-sector collaboration is not new, what is new is a range of structural options now available to individuals and organizations wanting to “do well by doing good.” Social enterprises are a good example of this trend. The blurring of sectors presents not-for-profits with interesting opportunities to explore structural options for doing their work. Successful not-for-profits will remain strongly centred on their mission and have a compelling “theory of change” but be willing to consider and pursue collaborative opportunities and strategies to achieve their purpose.

While individually each of these trends is impacting the way not-for-profits operate, it is the dynamic interplay between each of these five trends that has profound implications for the sector. The authors suggest it is creating a convergence that is accelerating the emergence of a fundamentally new not-for-profit sector. “The future will demand a collective rethinking of what it means to be an organization, how individuals define their work and how best to both compete and partner across many permeable boundaries.”

In the months ahead, the authors have committed to furthering dialogue on the ideas summarized in this paper and augmenting the ideas introduced here with podcasts, resource lists and a blog on the NonprofitNext website.

Related Links:

- [Read *Convergence: How Five Key Trends Will Reshape the Social Sector*](#)
- [Visit the NonprofitNext website](#)
- [Listen to *Social Change with a Networked Mindset* podcast](#)
- [Visit our *Resource Library* for more resources on the Nonprofit Sector](#)

Ideas we're following...

Why Don't We Want the Poor to Own Anything? [By: Colette Murphy](#)

Why must newly unemployed people liquidate all their assets before becoming eligible for welfare? This is the central question explored by John Stapleton, Metcalf Innovation Fellow and social policy expert in his recently released paper entitled *Why Don't We Want the Poor to Own Anything?* Stapleton explores how current eligibility rules strip unemployed people of their safety cushion for the future by requiring them to liquidate all their assets, such as savings and RRSPs before accessing government-sponsored support.

Four government-sponsored programs in Ontario still have asset limitations – social assistance, disability support, subsidized housing and legal aid. The paper's review of the history of asset rules in Ontario over the last 60 years concludes that, "limits to eligibility for these programs are tougher than ever before." Stapleton then outlines a series of recommendations to the Ontario Government to reform its rules. These include:

- Raising asset limits in Ontario for social assistance, and legal aid to \$5,000 for single people and \$10,000 for families and people with disabilities.
- Following Alberta's example by exempting a further \$5,000 per adult in Tax-Free Savings Accounts and RRSPs. In the longer term, adopt the Quebec model of a blanket exemption in registered instruments of \$60,000

- Following the lead of Newfoundland and Labrador by exempting all assets for the first six months on social assistance
- Eliminating asset testing for subsidized housing applicants

He concludes with keen observation, "In a society that promotes saving and cherishes self-reliance, there is no good rationale for public policy that almost guarantees people will grow old in poverty." This is a timely paper given Ontario has promised to undertake a "social assistance review" as part of its Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Stapleton's observations were echoed by New Brunswick's Minister of Social Development, Kelly Lamrock, who recently criticized his province's social assistance policies as being bureaucratic and designed exclusively to save money, not to help the poor. Speaking to a group of business leaders, he said: "And I want to be really clear on this one, if we want people to be self-reliant, we can't have a myriad of complex rules that make people feel if they take one wrong step, they lose their cheques."

Related Links:

- [Access the paper, *Why Don't We Want the Poor to Own Anything?*](#)
- [Learn more about the Metcalf Foundation](#)
- [More about Minister Lamrock's critique of his government's approach to social assistance](#)
- [Visit our *Resource Library* for more resources on Welfare](#)

Contagious! Oprah meets Margaret Mead By: Paul Born

Join the nearly three million people who have already enjoyed this video clip. Remember when Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world – indeed it is the only thing that ever has". Well if you want to see how this works in practice watch this YouTube video.

The Black Eyed Peas perform a special live version of *I Gotta Feeling* for Oprah at her 24th Season Kickoff Party, while a flash mob of synchronized dancers connect in downtown Chicago.

It is simply amazing to watch first a single girl dancing with huge passion, then 10 more people, then 100, then thousands. Watch how they have harmonized their actions – ah the passion the joy (that’s what my yoga teacher called it – joy!) The video is four and a half minutes, if you are in a hurry jump to 2:40 to watch the crowd act like one big heart beat – so fun.

Now imagine yourself as a community organizer. That girl is you dancing with all your passion and soon those closest to you start to join in, you engage! with others and soon you have a crowd all working together for change! Hamilton, Saint John, Calgary, Montreal, St. Johns, Headwaters (Dufferin/Caledon) and Victoria - I dedicate this story to you.

Related Links:

- [Watch the *I Got A Feelin'* Flash Mob Dance now!](#)
- [Visit our *Resource Library* for more resources on Innovation Ideas](#)

Building Networks for Social Change *By: Garry Loewen*

The practice of building networks of organizations and individuals to develop social innovations, increase efficiency and effectiveness of nonprofits, and reweave the social fabric of communities is spreading worldwide.

Most people are natural networkers, but it takes real know-how and skill to develop and grow networks that achieve large-scale social impact. The Innovation Network for Communities (INC) believes that networks provide social-change agents with a fundamentally distinct and remarkably promising “organizing principle” to use to achieve ambitious goals. Given the complexity and enormity of social problems, the unrelenting pressure to reduce the cost of creating and implementing solutions, and the recent proliferation of small nonprofit organizations, networks offer a way to weave together or create capacities that get better leverage, performance, and results. The INC helps to develop and spread scalable innovations that transform the performance of community systems such as education, energy, land use, transportation and workforce development.

The INC has three core hypotheses:

- Systems change at the community level requires the ability to assemble an ensemble of innovations and integrate them together in a place.
- The process of social innovation in communities can be systematized into a replicable practice at the community level.
- Social innovation at the community level can be supported and accelerated by a network of well-capitalized social innovation production networks that specialize in the design and development of social innovations for community systems.

The Center provides an array of resources to help people new to the concept understand the application of networks to social systems. It also offers practical advice for the development of networks for social change.

Practitioners may be particularly interested in the *Network Health Scorecard* which the Center provides. It offers a way of assessing the purpose, performance, operations and capacities of the networks you are a part of.

Related Links:

- [Learn about the Center for Network Impact](#)
- [Access the Network Health Scorecard](#)
- [Visit our *Resource Library* for more resources on Multisectoral Collaboration](#)

Healthy Communities: By Design

By: Sylvia Cheuy with Ann Callaghan, Callaghan Letellier Wiens Gibbons

Recently, public health officials have said that, “the greatest predictor of a person’s health status is their postal code.” This statement is a good illustration of the complex inter-relationship between individual health, community well-being and the design of our built environment.

In the fall of 2007, the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) published a report entitled, *Healthy Communities, Sustainable Communities* which explored the links between public health and land use planning as well as suggesting strategies for collaborating on tangible actions to create healthier communities.

Building on this work, they have recently released *Planning By Design: A Healthy Community Handbook*. The handbook, which OPPI developed in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, explores how rural and urban planning and design strategies – such as land-use patterns, transportation networks, public spaces and natural systems – are all factors that can promote increased physical activity, psychological well-being and healthier outcomes for all citizens. You can also be inspired by the handbook's 21 different case-studies, highlighting how various communities are applying these theories and enhancing their liveability.

Similarly, the [Canada Green Building Council](#) (CaGBC) is currently working on an exciting project to expand its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System to encompass whole neighbourhoods. LEED is a third-party certification program based upon internationally accepted benchmarks for design, construction and operation of high-performance green buildings. Known as *LEED Canada ND*, this voluntary rating system would provide a set of best practices for neighborhood development that would protect and enhance the overall health, natural environment, and quality of life of communities and promote the location and design of neighborhoods that reduce auto dependence by providing jobs and services that are accessible by foot, bicycle or public transit. Twenty-four Canadian communities are currently taking part in the US Green Building Council *LEED ND* pilot and their experience will inform the adaptation of the rating system in Canada which CaGBC hopes to introduce in 2010.

The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute estimates that if Canadians were to become more active, there would be: 26% fewer deaths from type II diabetes; 20% fewer deaths from colon cancer; and 22% fewer deaths from cardiovascular disease. While the decision to be active is a personal one, the decisions we make on how our neighbourhoods and communities are designed can and should support and encourage individuals in adopting active lifestyles.

Related Links:

- Download *Planning By Design: A Healthy Communities Handbook*
- Read more about the Canada Green Building Council's LEED ND Project
- Visit the Canada Green Building Council website
- Read about LEED ND as a sustainable development policy tool
- Visit our *Resource Library* for more resources on Quality of Life

Engage!
to create vibrant communities

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<http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g1s2.html>