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Framing Poverty as a Complex Issue By: Mark Cabaj

What would we advise communities interested in reducing poverty based on eight years of learning from great urban collaborations across Canada involved in [Vibrant Communities](#)? Probably several things. But the first would be to view poverty through the lens of complexity.

Unlike simple or complicated issues that can be effectively addressed by employing best practices or extensive research and planning, poverty is a complex issue. This means that it:



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- Is difficult to define;
- Has tangled up root causes;
- Involves stakeholders with diverse values, interests and positions;
- Varies from person to person and community to community;
- Is constantly evolving; and,
- Has no obvious answers or measures of success



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Making progress on poverty requires an adaptive approach to mobilizing stakeholders, crafting and evaluating strategies and stewarding a long-term effort characterized by unavoidable tensions, fast-moving environments, and blunt and clumsy practices implemented by traditional organizations.

Recently more than 120 people from across Canada participated in the first of a two-part tele-learning seminar that outlined ten emerging characteristics of adaptive leadership for those charged with leading responses to complex issues. These characteristics have shown promise in helping people to work effectively with poverty. They were developed by leading thinkers in the field and have been manifested by local groups involved in the Vibrant Communities initiative.

The seminar was only a beginning. Feedback from participants – sharing their experiences and questions about working with complexity – has helped to shape an in-depth paper on this topic which we will be launching very shortly.

Alan Perlis, an award-winning computer scientist once observed, “Fools ignore complexity. Pragmatists suffer it. Some can avoid it. Geniuses remove it. Simplicity does not precede complexity, but follows it.” In this spirit, my hope is that we not ignore the complexity of poverty but rather harness our collective wisdom so that one day, together, we can discover the necessary genius to eliminate it.

Related Links:

- [Access the podcast summary and resources from the Framing Poverty as a Complex Issue tele-learning seminar](#)
- [Register now for the upcoming tele-learning Phases of Collaborative Efforts to Reduce Poverty](#)

Love and Compassion: Exploring Collective Altruism By: Paul Born

What is collective wisdom and how is it linked to healing and compassion? What is known about altruism and what possibility does it evoke in community? I spent last week in contemplation, at a writer's workshop, looking inward and studying these questions deeply.

Collective altruism generates energy beyond what any one person can replicate alone. Like a choir to a voice or an orchestra to an instrument, something about working together on behalf of others calls forth a strength deep within each one of us. This collective caring creates something magical that grows exponentially within each person, igniting the mind, spirit and body.



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Christopher Fletcher

It is collective altruism that allows *Habitat for Humanity* not only to build homes but also to heal attitudes that contribute to homelessness as thousands of workers share their gifts. It is what allows a *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* to bring both justice and healing by calling forth stories and providing space for collective compassion and forgiveness. This same collective energy freed America of institutional racism and India of colonial oppression. It is what forms and sustains L'Arche homes to provide places of profound belonging for all.

I am eager to share some of my recent discoveries in exploring collective altruism with you. In particular, I've been quite impressed with the work of three groups that I think have done some profound thinking on this topic.

- [The Collective Wisdom Project](#) - For people looking for collaborative solutions in communities this is a must-read. The project's intent states, "In each of us lives a way of knowing that far exceeds mental constructs alone. And in each group or society, there is a way of knowing that exceeds the knowledge of any one person or any one group. It is our shared work, therefore, to perceive the existence of and to develop our inherent aptitude for collective wisdom."

- [The Fetzer Institute](#) - The mission of the Institute is: "*To foster awareness of the power of love and forgiveness in the emerging global community.*" The Institute is home to the Fetzer prize for love and compassion, which was just awarded to the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu in Vancouver. The Institute's site is a treasure trove of articles and video clips that inform and inspire those wanting to learn more about the power of individual and collective love and compassion.
- [Better Together](#) - Though I have read, re-read and been deeply influenced by Robert Putnam's work, I only recently discovered this five-year (1997-2000) project he initiated that focused on social capital with urgency to act. Another member of the project is, a then little-known man named Barack Obama. The project's report is a powerful read that emphasizes the need for civic engagement and giving. Never underestimate the power of a small group of people to change the world.

The words to describe what I am discovering are still wrapped tightly in my intellect and I struggle to share wisdom found in the unison of mind and heart. As research for my forthcoming book *Seeking Community: Finding Belonging in Chaotic Times* continues, I trust that I will find a way forward....by feeling.



[Learn more about Paul's upcoming book on seeking community](#)

Related Links:

- [Read 150 Ways to Build Social Capital](#)
- [Explore the possibility of community in our *Community Conversations* online seminar](#)

Ideas we're following...

Online Leadership Toolkit By: *Sylvia Cheuy with Anne-Marie McElrone*

Building Community Vitality: A Leadership Toolkit is a newly launched online resource developed specifically for those playing a catalytic role to support communities tackling broad issues of concern. It has been designed by Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) to support community leaders in “connecting the dots” between various issues that impact community life using the experience and expertise of Canada’s 160 community foundations.

The toolkit includes:

- What is community leadership? A primer on the concept and what it means to organizations and communities
- Tools to get you started. Three well-known leadership tools, adapted for the Canadian context, with the permission of the Transatlantic Community Foundation Network (TCFN), The U.S. based Monitor Group, and Community Foundations Leading Change (CFLeads)
- Resources you can use. A comprehensive listing of current and historical resources on community leadership including articles, books, journals, speeches, websites and blogs
- Community vitality in action. Leadership stories from CFC members and the opportunity to submit your own stories as well.
- Measuring your progress. Evaluation tools to help your organization determine whether you’re making a difference.

The hope is that this resource will provide community leaders with tools and resources to assess, start or continue their own journey. “Initially, we intended the toolkit to be an internal resource. However, as soon as it was launched we started receiving requests from other organizations to access the resources we’d collected,” said Monica Patten, President and CEO of Community Foundations of Canada. The recent decision to make the resource widely available made sense given CFC Canada’s mandate to strengthen communities. “If we can help organizations to help their communities, then we’ve succeeded” Patten added.

Related Links:

- [View the toolkit at Building Community Vitality](#)
- [Visit the Community Foundations Canada website](#)
- [Explore key concepts of Community Leadership](#)
- [Hear David Chrislip speak on *Collaboration: The New Leadership*](#)
- [Visit our *Resource Library* for more resources on Leadership](#)

Social Marketing the Complex Issue of Poverty By: **Liz Weaver**

Up and Out of Poverty: The Social Marketing Solution, by Philip Kotler and Nancy R. Lee, marries practical and tangible poverty reduction pathways to social marketing theory and approaches. The book contains interesting case studies about poverty reduction approaches from an international context.

The first chapters provide an overview of the world-wide context of poverty and begin to make the case that a multifaceted approach is required to deal with this pervasive issue. The following chapters focus on social marketing theory and its application to poverty including the application of market segmentation. Social marketing is about changed behaviours and the book provides tools to thoroughly understand the barriers, benefits and competition which either assist or deter behaviour change. The basic marketing concept of the 4 Ps: product, price, place and promotion are adapted to the social marketing concept.

Kotler and Lee then suggest the need for an integrated social marketing approach to the issue of poverty with important roles played by government, business and the community sector. Seven principles for how these groups can work together are outlined:

1. Agree on a common agenda
2. Develop clear roles and responsibilities
3. Work toward mutual respect and appreciation
4. Be willing to negotiate and compromise
5. Maintain open communications
6. Establish systems for accountability
7. Measure and report outcomes

Up and Out of Poverty is a useful and interesting book for communities dealing with the complex issue of poverty who are wondering about how to both encourage and communicate change. Many of the case studies, stories and theories provide practical change examples. Unfortunately, the book lacks an inclusion focus...with people living in poverty being marketed to rather than included in the solutions. Successful community change efforts occur when those most impacted are empowered to determine the solutions they need and want.

Related Links:

- [Learn more about social marketing](#)
- Read how [Vibrant Abbotsford](#) is asking B.C. government for a [comprehensive plan](#) to reduce poverty
- [Register for an upcoming webinar on social marketing offered by Tools of Change](#)
- Visit our [Resource Library](#) for more resources on Innovative Ideas

Charity Village – Online Capacity Building for Canadian Non-Profits *By: Nick Yeo with Sylvia Cheuy*

It can be challenging for not-for-profits to achieve their mission and vision with limited resources – and the economic downturn isn't making things easier. Despite the temptation to cut or reduce training budgets however, there are important advantages for maintaining professional development opportunities for staff.

Training during tough times allows staff to apply new solutions to current problems. When the economy eventually improves, these additional skills also position the organization well for success. To maximize impact, leaders must prioritize the organization's challenges – whether to develop a more effective human resource policy or cultivate new donors – and focus on training opportunities that can fill those gaps.

CharityVillage recently released a report, *Training in Tough Times*, which outlines reasons and strategies for addressing professional development in the context of shrinking budgets and funding cuts. Focusing on the opportunities for improvement is a tactic that has served several Canadian not-for-profit organizations well.

CharityVillage.com offers a one-stop shop for Canada's not-for-profit sector. It's recently developed *CharityVillage Campus* offers a practical curriculum, through a series of self-directed online courses, to develop fundamental skills for not-for-profits. Its *Nonprofit Neighbourhood* allows Canada's charities and non-profit organizations to connect with one another and to an extensive library of resources, news and articles. Its comprehensive job opportunities board, the largest of its kind in the country, is guaranteed to direct quality applicants to your organization.

Whether through its free newsletters, volunteer listings or how-to articles, CharityVillage gives not-for-profits the tools to continue to achieve their vision and mission in Canada and around the world.

Related Links:

- [Access the *Training in Tough Times* Report and Charity Village's e-training campus](#)
- [Visit the Charity Village website](#)
- [Visit our *Resource Library* for more resources on the Non-profit Sector](#)

Celebrating Community Innovation and Creativity *By: Sylvia Cheuy*

The recently held *Celebrating Communities* Conference in Truro was an opportunity to celebrate and showcase the creativity, innovation and entrepreneurialism of Nova Scotia communities. It also provided participants with an opportunity to listen, share solutions and learn about promising community development ideas.

Additionally, the conference served as the 10th anniversary of the *Celebrating Community* awards which recognize efforts of working together to achieve success for neighbourhoods and communities. In all, a total of six award winners were selected from a list of eighteen finalists.

The Community of St. Andrews, a small community of 1,100 citizens in Antigonish County, received the *Celebrating Communities Excellence in Collaboration Award*. Over the past 200 years, the citizens of St. Andrews have built every community building – except for the school. Recently, a community curling rink was built from the ground up with a group of volunteers who funded the construction by issuing preferred and common shares. Within four months, \$232,000 was raised. A

second example, an eight unit Senior Housing complex – which just added eight more units – developed a model of financing and building that has been dubbed “the poster child” for affordable housing. The senior’s housing was built by volunteers on land that had been donated by the local credit union.

By nurturing community leaders and celebrating achievements, Nova Scotia is charting a course towards a prosperous future.

Related Links:

- [Watch this video of the *Celebrating Communities* award finalists](#)
- [Learn about this year's *Celebrating Communities* award winners](#)
- [Visit the Celebrating Communities website](#)
- [Read more about Creativity in Rural and Smaller Urban Centres from the Martin Prosperity Institute](#)
- [Visit our *Resource Library* for more on Community Economic Development](#)



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