COLLECTIVE IMPACT 3.0
AN EVOLVING FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

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FROM THE IMPROBABLE TO THE POSSIBLE

In 2015, the leaders of Medicine Hat, a small city of 60,000 on the Canadian prairies, declared that they had eliminated chronic homelessness. While admitting their limited influence on many of the drivers that create homelessness – such as poor jobs, mental health, family breakdown, or high-priced housing – they had developed a system that can place someone in an affordable house, with an array of support services, within 10 days of being on the street. Emboldened by this success, Medicine Hat is now turning its attention to eliminating food insecurity and poverty.

The citizens of this prairie city are not alone in their efforts to "move the needle" on complex issues. Across Canada there are hundreds of community-wide initiatives to end homelessness, reduce poverty, improve early childhood development outcomes, increase high school graduation rates, and strengthen community safety. There are thousands more across the world.

Many of them are inspired and informed by the Collective Impact (CI) framework. CI was coined in 2011 by John Kania and Mark Kramer of FSG Consulting. Their Stanford Social Innovation Review article of the same name distils some of the key ingredients of successful community efforts to move "from fragmented action and results" to "collective action and deep and durable impact." These ingredients (or "conditions") are a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support.[i]

The article's effect on the field of community change has been electric. The innovators whose work the article described praised its distillation of the key elements of an approach to community change. Paul Born, a collective impact pioneer, said: "Kania and Kramer understood the work we were doing so well, and described it so effectively, that they essentially laid out a new operating system for community change." Jay Connor, an early practitioner and coach for community-wide collaboration, noted: "I am grateful to FSG for what they have done. We have been trying in our own way to describe these ideas for so many years, trying in our own way to explain it clearly. We can spend more time doing the hard work on the ground."

The article excited early adopters even more. Countless community organizations, government agencies, philanthropies, and socially minded businesses embraced CI in hopes that it might help them to make deep and durable changes in the social, economic, and even environmental challenges facing their communities. Tom Wolff, an experienced coalition builder (and vocal critic of CI), credited the response as a "revolution" in the way that governments and funders thought about and approached community change. [ii]

FSG and other CI advocates have done much to expand and elaborate the original five conditions described in that first article. They have laid out what they feel are the pre-conditions for CI, the phases of the approach, a variety of key practices (e.g., strategy, governance, funding, evaluation), and more recently, eight key principles of practice. The Collective Impact Forum, an online community administered by FSG, is one of the world's most comprehensive resources on community change and a platform for practitioners to share and build knowledge, skills, and tools for the work. CI is now a permanent – even dominant – part of the landscape of community change.

AN EVOLUTION IN THE REVOLUTION

We believe that it's time for an evolution in the revolution. While the CEO of one philanthropic organization argues that support and buy-in for CI is now at "fever pitch," there are two compelling reasons for advocates to find ways to upgrade – not simply elaborate upon – the framework. [iii]

First, there has been enough experimentation with CI, by diverse communities working on diverse issues in diverse settings, to shed light on its limitations. These include: insufficient attention to the role of community in the change effort; an excessive focus on short-term data; an understatement of the role of policy and systems change; and an over-investment in backbone support. [iv] Our colleague Mark Holmgren warns that if these limitations are not taken seriously, the field may experience a "pendulum swing" away from collective change efforts. [v]

The response of the FSG team to the feedback has been excellent. They have welcomed the critiques on the CI Forum, admitted the framework's shortcomings, and worked diligently with others to address them or expand on areas that deserve elaboration. Their recently released "principles of practice for collective impact," for example, address many concerns about the framework. As Karen Pittman, head of the Forum on Youth Investment, noted: "Kania, Kramer and the FSG team get high marks in my book for being consistently open to adapting their theory to better reflect practice." [vi]

Yet the criticisms continue to roll in. And it is good that they do. Like all frameworks, CI reveals a great deal about how people tackle tough issues at scale, but is simply unable to capture the full complexity of the work. It is important for those who have devoted their lives to community change to point out where these gaps or weaknesses lie, because the stakes involved are so high.

Secondly, in the rush to embrace CI, many in the field have ignored the less well-packaged and promoted frameworks of community change developed by other organizations and practitioners. Some of these include the Bridgespan group's work on Needle Moving Collaboratives, the Aspen Institute's work on Comprehensive Community Initiatives and the grassroots Turning Outward model of the Harwood Institute. [vii] Each of these approaches is based on solid experience and research, and offers (slightly) alternative perspectives on community change. They deserve to be taken seriously. Many of the observations and strategies in these community change approaches can be woven into effective CI implementation.

Are CI's limitations significant enough to warrant throwing it away? No. The framework has too much "roughly right" and is too successful in expanding the field of those who want to work together to build stronger communities.

The correct response is to move beyond simply fine-tuning the original framework and begin upgrading it to reflect important criticisms and limitations. Hardware and software developers relentlessly upgrade their operating systems to reach the next level of capability and performance. So too should we look to upgrade the design and implementation of the CI framework.

The task cannot be left to FSG alone. The organization and its leaders have been exemplary in incorporating new learnings. However, the framework's redevelopment is simply too much work for one organization – and it disempowers the rest of the field. If CI is going to get to the next level, community change practitioners and those who support them must step up and partner in building the framework's next iteration.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT 3.0

We are willing to do our share. This article is the first of a series which will lay out a number of upgrades to the CI framework.

We call it Collective Impact 3.0, a term that emerged during our annual CI summit in Vancouver in 2015. At that event, we described the evolution of CI in terms of three phases. The 1.0 phase refers to the days prior to 2011 when diverse groups spontaneously prototyped CI practices without reference to the patterns identified by FSG. The 2.0 phase spans the five years following Kania and Kramer's article. Many communities adopted the CI framework laid out there, and FSG made diligent efforts to track, codify, and assess this second generation of CI initiatives. In the third phase, Collective Impact 3.0, the push is to deepen, broaden and adapt CI based on yet another generation of initiatives.

Who are we to offer Collective Impact 3.0? We at Tamarack have been knee-deep in community change initiatives for more than 20 years, including the sponsorship of Vibrant Communities, an evolving network of prototypical CI initiatives focused on poverty reduction. Tamarack made CI one of its top five themes. Our staff and associates have been involved in scores of CI efforts across North America and beyond.

We are committed to the basic structure of CI, which in our view has "good bones." However, we want to reframe many of the basic ideas and practices due to the limitations of the original framework, the insights of other frameworks, our own experience, and FSG's own work.

We do not believe that what we produce will be the only iteration of CI, or the best one. Like everyone else, we are prisoners of our own experience and limitations. We do hope, however, that our contribution adds to the next generation of the CI framework and encourages other practitioners to do the same. Our field needs diverse voices and perspectives moving forward.

FIRST THINGS FIRST: REVISITING THE FOUNDATIONS

This article, the first in our 3.0 series, revisits the foundational elements of the CI framework. This includes a new look at the Leadership Paradigm which underlies it, as well as CI's five conditions.

From	To
The Leadership Paradigm	
Management	Movement Building
The Five Conditions	
Common Agenda	Community Aspiration
Shared Measurement	Strategic Learning
Mutually Reinforcing Activities	High Leverage Activities
Continuous Communication	Inclusive Community Engagement
Backbone	Containers for Change

Some of these shifts are significant and some are modest. All broaden the original elements laid out in Kania and Kramer's 2011 article.

FROM A MANAGERIAL TO A MOVEMENT-BUILDING PARADIGM

Al Etmanski and Vickie Cammack, two of Canada's most celebrated social innovators, have developed a simple philosophy to guide their efforts: "Act like an organization, but think like a movement." [viii] Would-be change-makers must tend to the day-to-day tasks of research, raising money, planning, and management. But the chances that their efforts will achieve scale improve dramatically if the work is undergirded with relationships based on a common vision and value – relationships that span diverse organizations, sectors, and political affiliations.

In a management approach, the leaders of institutions responsible for a domain – such as health, education, or criminal justice – come together to find ways to get better outcomes than they might achieve independently. While they may consult with the broader community on the nature of the problem and how it might be addressed, they perceive themselves to be primarily

responsible for developing and implementing new responses to an issue. As a result, CI participants employing a managerial approach typically (but not always) focus on improving existing systems through such measures as data-sharing, coordination of services, and joint action on policy or regulation barriers.

The management approach can generate results. In the case of Strive in Cincinnati (the example that FSG used to illustrate CI), educational institutions and community agencies agreed to organize their activities around a comprehensive "cradle to career" framework with 60 key measures. They have succeeded in getting dozens of organizations to align their efforts and produced a score of innovations. Cumulatively, these have resulted in improvements in reading and math scores, high school graduation rates, and post-secondary enrollment and completion. [ix]

In a movement-building approach, by contrast, the emphasis is on reforming (even transforming) systems where improvements alone will not make a difference. Movement-building leaders bring together a diverse group of stakeholders, including those not in traditional institutions or seats of power, to build a vision of the future based on common values and narratives. Movements "open up peoples' hearts and minds to new possibilities," "create the receptive climate for new ideas to take hold," and "embolden policymakers" and system leaders. [x] Movements change the ground on which everyday political life and management occur.

Participants of the End Poverty Edmonton initiative state clearly that they are creating a movement to end – not reduce – local poverty within a generation. [xi] To achieve this, one of their game-changing priorities is to eliminate racism, including a powerful six-point plan to support reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Racism, participants assert, is at the root of the difficulty that many residents experience when securing adequate housing, education, human services, and income. This bold commitment has cleared the way for the community to pursue some atypical initiatives. One is training local police and safety officials to improve their cultural literacy and reduce the stigmatization of racialized groups. More importantly, this initiative also challenges all the city's residents to become actively involved in dozens of little ways. It's too early to judge whether their gamble will pay off. But their prospects for large-scale impact now seem so much greater, it's hard not to be impressed.

This is not to say that a management orientation to CI is incapable of changing systems. Between 2010 and 2014, hundreds of organizations in New York state came together to reform its broken criminal justice system. Youth who committed even minor offences encountered an array of programs and regulations so disconnected and ill-designed as to increase, not decrease, the likelihood that the young person would re-offend or commit an even more serious crime. Through a variety of innovations (one being the requirement that young offenders are served in local day programs, not residential programs in another part of the state), the number of youth in custody fell by 45 percent without an increase in youth crime. Buoyed by these successes, state leaders are now working on a bill that will raise the criminal age of responsibility from 16 to 18, a key move to reduce the number of youth exposed to the harsher edges of the adult system. [xii]

It's possible to point to several other successful CI efforts led by mainstream institutions. Even so, we feel that the chances for impact are dramatically better if would-be changemakers explicitly bring to their work a movement-building orientation. Why? Because when people operate from a management paradigm, their emphasis tends to be on improving systems rather than changing them. As a consequence, participants typically are suspicious of bold measures. In some cases, they resist or block transformative ideas because their instinct is to preserve the systems they manage. As Eric Bonabeau, CEO of Icosystems, observes: "Managers would rather live with a problem they can't solve than with a solution they can't fully understand or control." [xiii]

Compare, for example, how the leaders of two major Canadian cities approached the challenge of ending poverty. In one western city, several

reputable non-profit leaders made the case that reducing wage inequity and introducing a guaranteed annual income should be key features of the poverty reduction plan. Key philanthropic leaders co-convening the plan's development vetoed the idea. It was alleged that such measures were unlikely to gain widespread support in a community that celebrates "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps." Moreover, they risked alienating several of the funder's generous conservative contributors. In Hamilton, on the other hand, the chair of the poverty roundtable declared that poverty was a public health crisis on the scale of SARS. A guaranteed annual income and living wage policies, he said, were as key to poverty reduction in the 21st century as the abolition of slavery and child labour were in the 19th century. Rather than alienate local leaders, the call to action has inspired them. The municipality, the Chamber of Commerce and local school board have signed on as living wage employers. [xiv]

Mainstream leaders are right to heed the interests of the organization they are paid to operate. But we believe that broad, deep, and durable changes in communities are more likely when CI participants embrace a movement-building rather than a managerial approach to their work. By approaching CI in the same way you would a movement, we are far more likely to "shift boundaries for what is socially acceptable and politically expected." [xv]

UPGRADING THE FIVE CONDITIONS

In their 2010 article, Kania and Kramer identify five conditions that communities must fulfill in order to get from isolated impact (where organizations operate independently and scale is achieved through the growth of individual organizations) to collective impact. These are: agreement on a common agenda; the development of a shared measurement approach; leveraging resources through mutually reinforcing activities; building continuous communications; and a backbone structure to mobilize the collective effort.

Although we reaffirm that these conditions are "roughly right," we believe they are too narrowly framed to capture how successful CI actually operates, particularly efforts that are explicitly embedded in a movement-building approach to community change. The following section describes how we would upgrade each of the five conditions and why.

FROM CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION TO AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

One of the biggest critiques of the earlier version of the CI framework is its apparent failure to put community at the centre of the change process. While FSG in no way set out to diminish the role of community in the work, there appears to be a strong emphasis on "CEO-level cross-sector leaders" in some of the early articles. [xvi]

The case for authentic and inclusive involvement of a broad spectrum of system stakeholders, particularly those most affected by complex issues, is overwhelming. It allows participants to draw on "360-degree insight" into the nature of the problems and how they might be addressed. It creates a broader constituency for change – so critical in any effort to disrupt and change systems. It cultivates broad ownership and long-term commitment to the change process which is essential when the initial excitement begins to flag and the going gets tough. Most importantly, the idea that those most affected by an issue should participate fully in attempts to address it (aka "Nothing about us without us!") is a fundamental democratic and moral principle.

Robust community engagement is back-breaking work. It takes time to map out which stakeholders to invite to the table, skill to create good opportunities to engage people at each stage of the change process, and confidence and humility to navigate the inevitable conflicts between participants who differ in their values, interests, and power. Tamarack has been working on the craft of community engagement for over a decade. Some of that experience is captured in Paul Born's books, *Community Conversations* (2012) and *Deepening Community* (2014). As central as

community building is, we still feel like we are merely scratching its surface.

The FSG team has since more than made up for this initial omission. In 2015, Kania and Kramer's fourth article in the CI series focused on the importance of equity and argued that inclusion in the change process of the people most affected by an issue is "imperative." [xvii] More recently, of their Eight Collective Impact Principles of Practice, three concern equity, the inclusion of community members, and relationship, trust, and respect. FSG is working with organizations that have a long history in these issues to promote these principles to CI efforts across the world.

The original article on CI identified "continuous communication" as a condition for mobilizing stakeholders, building trust, and structuring meaningful meetings and work. Somehow, "continuous communication" hardly seems to convey all the work that is involved. Why not call a spade a spade? Authentic and inclusive community engagement is, without a doubt, a condition for transformational impact and therefore a condition for CI 3.0.

FROM COMMON AGENDA TO SHARED ASPIRATION

Jay Connor is fond of quoting an exchange between a journalist and Francis Ford Coppola, the movie director famed for *The Godfather* and other hits. When asked to explain the difference between what made a good movie versus a bad one, Coppola responded, "In a good movie, everyone is making the same movie." [xviii]

Kania and Kramer quite rightly point out that many participants who profess to be working on a common problem are in fact working with different perspectives on the nature and root causes of that problem and how it might be resolved. So the results they generate are likely to be fragmented, not collective. A true common agenda requires leadership to bring key stakeholders together; to review the key data which informs the problem or issue; to develop a shared vision for change; and to determine the core pathways and strategies that will drive the change forward. This is more than a simple planning exercise. Indeed, it requires would-be collaborators to find (or create) common ground despite their very different values, interests, and positions.

As much as we believe this to be true, a focus on a community aspiration can have an even more powerful impact when creating a broader movement for change. This requires participants to develop outcomes that are based on community values sufficiently ambitious that they cannot be realized through business as usual. A solid community aspiration can also create the kind of "big tent" under which a wide range of participants can pursue the interdependent challenges underlying tough issues. (See sidebar on *Perverse Consequences*).

Take, for example, the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. Formed in 2002, it drew members from the city's business, government, and voluntary sectors, and community leaders with the lived experience of poverty. After extensive consultations in the broader community, Roundtable leaders concluded that "poverty reduction" would not mobilize the energies of a large and diverse network of people. Instead, they called for the effort to embrace a bolder aspiration: "Make Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child." They consequently organized a framework around five critical points of investment (from early learning and parenting to employment) that engaged dozens of networks and organizations.

The aspiration was contagious. In October 2005, Hamilton's major paper, the Spectator, announced that it would make poverty coverage a priority. It published a front page that was blank except for one statement: "The stories have been removed from this page to remind us that nearly 100,000 children, women and men live in poverty in Hamilton, people whose stories rarely make the front page. We're going to change that." [xix] Soon afterwards, city council embedded the words "Best Place to Raise a Child" in Hamilton's mission statement and a local marketing expert praised the

aspiration for its ability to inspire community-wide action. [xx] By 2011, a Nanos survey reported that 80 percent of respondents felt that municipal investment in poverty reduction should be the city's number one priority. It was a result that startled the veteran pollster administering the survey. "There are very few issues that you get 80 percent of anybody to agree on," he remarked in surprise. [xxi]

THE PERVERSE CONSEQUENCES OF NARROWLY FRAMED AGENDAS

Focusing on one slice of a complex problem may make the challenge less overwhelming and improve the chances of developing a shared agenda. It may also have some perverse consequences.

Take, for example, the efforts to reduce malaria and HIV, two leading causes of child mortality in the developing world. Spearheaded by the generous support and relentless leadership of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, international donors for the last decade have focused on developing and deploying high-impact vaccinations. While their efforts have saved millions of lives, they have created other problems. Funders, governments, and health organizations have diverted so many human and financial resources from other types of medical care, nutrition, and education that there has been a sharp jump in more common ailments, such as birth sepsis, diarrhoea, and asphyxia. One report described how some patients walked nine hours to clinics to get their HIV and malaria medications, only to vomit them back up due to hunger and fatigue. In some countries, malaria and HIV rates have begun to climb again.

In response, many international funders have adjusted their effort to focus on a bigger aspiration, "broader, integrated child survival," and have broadened their strategies to focus on prevention and treatment of diseases and on strengthening the entire health care delivery system. [xxii]

FROM SHARED MEASUREMENT TO STRATEGIC LEARNING

> "Developing a shared measurement system is essential to collective impact. Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures." [xxiii]

This sums up one of the most popular conditions of CI. It has generated the greatest experimentation across CI initiatives.

Five years later, we've discovered a great deal about the mechanics of developing shared measurement systems, and have concluded we still have a long way to go. [xxiv] One of the biggest of these insights is that CI participants have more success with shared measurement if they treat them as one part of a larger system of learning and evaluation.

Consider, for instance, the different measurement approaches taken by General Motors and Toyota in the 1980s and 1990s. General Motors was a data-heavy and report-heavy organization. It employed sophisticated systems to gather, analyze, and develop thick reports for senior managers. Toyota, on the other hand, emphasized management practices that were data-light and learning-heavy. It chose to focus on a few select measures, real-time feedback loops, and floor-level decision making. [xxv] While the performance gap between the companies has recently closed (due in part to a worrisome decline in Toyota's once-vaunted quality control), researchers and business leaders credit the different evaluation and measurement processes for Toyota's consistently better outcomes in earlier years.

A robust learning and evaluation process is even more critical in community-wide change efforts. Unlike the relatively routinized nature of an automotive production line, social innovators are trying to change the dynamic and complex systems that underlie social problems. They want measurement systems that (a) provide real-time

feedback on the multiple outcomes expressed in their theory of change or strategy; (b) are manageable; (c) have robust processes for sense-making and decision-making; and (d) can co-evolve with their ever-changing strategies. CI participants are known sometimes to rush right into shared measurement with the question, "What should and could we measure together?" Unfortunately, without first having laid the foundations for strategic learning, they find themselves wrapped up in messy, frustrating, tail-chasing processes with slim prospects for producing useful data.

The experiences of the many 10-year plans to end community homelessness illustrate the point. These initiatives are able to employ relatively sophisticated homelessness management information systems (HMIS). This is due in part to a well-developed "Housing First" philosophy that identifies the key outcomes whose measurement deserves extra attention. Most of the groups have also developed good processes for using the data to inform decisions about their overall strategy. Not only have these resulted in adaptations to the Housing First model, they have prompted many to recognize their need to develop entirely new models for the prevention of homelessness. [xxvi] Community-based initiatives to end homelessness are exemplars in strategic learning and data use.

A formal shift to a strategic learning approach, which includes shared measurement as a component rather than a central feature of the process, should be straightforward. It will appeal to more experienced community builders to know that measures are only part of learning. It also will be welcomed by evaluators who want to build measures for outcomes that matter – social innovators will use the feedback, rather than consign it to the shelf.

Happily, much of the groundwork for adopting a strategic learning stance in CI initiatives has already been laid. The Atlantic Philanthropies and the Center for Evaluation Innovation, the pioneers of the approach, feature multiple tools and examples on their websites. FSG has produced a comprehensive, easy-to-use, and solid resource on building strategic learning systems. The next generation of CI practitioners would do well to adopt and adapt these frameworks.

FROM MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTIVITIES TO A FOCUS ON HIGH-LEVERAGE AND LOOSE/TIGHT WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Of the five conditions, "mutually reinforcing activities" is our favourite. It so elegantly captures the need of CI to add up to more than the sum of its parts.

Yet, as elegant as it is, the focus on mutually reinforcing activities has two limitations. The first is that it may unintentionally encourage CI participants to focus on areas that offer great opportunities for cooperation rather than the greatest opportunities for results. This is nicely captured by two practitioners, Peter Boumgarden and John Branch. In their article, "Collective Impact or Collective Blindness," they remark:

> "While we do not doubt the benefits of collaboration, we argue that 'collective impact' over and above competition often results in coordinated but misdirected effort." [xxvii]

CI participants must see beyond collaboration and instead focus on strategies that focus on "high leverage" opportunities for change. They must commit to a systemic reading of the complex systems they are trying to change, and to making a realistic assessment of where local actors have the knowledge, networks, and resources to make a difference. [xxviii] Finding this "sweet spot" where these two intersect is not easy.

Just ask the thousands of CI participants working hard to replace fragmented programs for vulnerable families with more holistic, coordinated, and accessible services. The two most typical strategies, co-locating of services and case management methods, offer excellent prospects for cooperation: they are relatively easy to implement and "don't require co-locators to give up funds, authority or turf". [xxix] It turns out that they are also low leverage: while families benefit from having services in one place and an advocate

willing to help them navigate them, the majority of programs still operate with inflexible eligibility criteria, offer cookie-cutter supports, and are so poorly coordinated that accessing them is a full-time job. With few exceptions, these strategies have not resulted in better outcomes for struggling families. The higher leverage strategy is for policy makers and funders to decentralize responsibility for program design to regional and local organizations and hold them accountable for broad – rather than discrete – outcomes. While these measures are more far more likely to lead to comprehensive, flexible, and quality services, along with better results for families, they consistently meet with resistance from people within the systems because they are messy and require shifts in power and resources. [xxx]

The second limitation of a strong emphasis on mutually reinforcing activities is that it seems to exclude the periodic necessity to allow participants to pursue independent – even competing – pathways to a common goal. In the case of Tillamook County, Oregon, for example, health organizations, education groups, and faith-based organizations settled on a common aspiration to eliminate teen pregnancy. But they could not agree on a common strategy. As a result, each pursued its own unique path. Public health advocates promoted safe sex. Educators focused on increasing literacy on sexuality. Faith-based organizations preached abstinence. The cumulative result of their efforts was a 75 percent reduction in teen pregnancy in 10 years. [xxxi] Why? Because different strategies triggered different outcomes for different groups of vulnerable families and teens.

Pursuing different pathways is particularly productive when social innovators are unclear about the nature of the problem they are trying to address. In these situations, it makes good sense for people to fan out and try different approaches. In the case of Opportunities 2000, a pioneering CI effort to reduce Waterloo Region's poverty levels to the lowest in Canada, non-profit organizations worked together to advocate the creation of a fund to invest in innovative ways to reduce poverty. They then applied to access the fund through competitive bidding, with many non-profits participating in multiple proposals. This not only resulted in a range of innovative responses, including Canada's first head-hunting service for working poor immigrants and the country's first Individual Development Accounts, but also an increase in the monthly income of nearly 1,600 low-income families. [xxxii]

The late Brenda Zimmerman, a world expert on managing complex systems, concluded that one of the key attributes of successful social innovators was their ability to know when and how to "mix cooperation with competition." [xxxiii] This flies in the face of conventional wisdom, which suggests that collaboration is always the best response. So it may well be that conventional wisdom is a barrier to what appears to be a critical condition of Collective Impact 3.0: a focus on high-leverage strategies, and permission to participants that they work as loosely or as tightly as the situation requires.

FROM BACKBONE SUPPORT TO A CONTAINER FOR CHANGE

Backbone support, CI's fifth condition, was warmly received by veteran community builders and changemakers.

> "Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. Coordination takes time, and none of the participating organizations has any to spare. The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails." [xxxiv]

This simple statement reaffirms what community builders have been saying since the 1960s: work on community change across organizational and sectoral boundaries must be placed firmly in the centre – rather than on the side – of participants' desks. It warrants an investment of extra resources in an intermediary or coordinating body whose job it is to see to the day-to-day work of collaboration. Even CI's outspoken critics acknowledge how the

framework has encouraged practitioners and funders to invest greater time, energy, and financial resources into ensuring this support is in place. [xxxv]

The renewed emphasis on backbone support has also led to a much better understanding of the infrastructure required for community change. This includes an elaboration of the various roles that the backbone group can play (e.g., guiding the creation of a vision and strategy, mobilizing funding, and advancing policy) as well as the governance structures, funding models, and leadership styles required to support them. [xxxvi] These insights represent significant steps forward in practice in five short years.

PLENTY OF MISTAKES, TOO

CI practitioners have made plenty of mistakes in our newfound exuberance for backbone supports.

In many instances, people have been confused by what backbone support involves. It simply means to appoint one or more organizations to fulfill various essential functions, sometimes with extra financial resources. Instead, the term has been taken for a recommendation to create specialized organizations from scratch. This may lead to investing substantial time and energy in creating and managing a new legal body. It also increases the risk that leading organizations feel less ownership and responsibility for the change effort. They let the "the new organization" run the show.

In other cases, well-meaning CI leaders working on different challenges (including poverty, homelessness and early childhood development) have created their own boutique backbone groups. This has spread thin what few human and financial resources are available for backbone work. It has also served to strengthen silos and impede joint action across the boundaries of such artificial domains.

Tamarack staff will explore these – and other – missteps in backbone practices in a future article on CI 3.0.

While these capture the "outer game" of change, the next generation of CI practitioners needs to turn its attention to creating a "strong container" to assist CI participants with the inner game of personal change. Put simply, a strong container is where social innovators can:

> "… transform their understandings [of the system they are trying to change], the relationships [with others in the systems] and their intentions [to act]. The boundaries of this container are set so that the participants feel enough protection and safety, as well as enough pressure and friction, to be able to do their challenging work." [xxxvii]

Building a strong container requires paying attention to a variety of dimensions of backbone stewardship. Some of the more important ones are the following:

- The mobilization of a diverse group of funders, backbone sponsors, and stewardship arrangements that demonstrate cross-sectoral leadership on the issue.
- The facilitation of the participants' inner journey of change, including the discovery and letting go of their own mental models and cultural/emotional biases, required for them to be open to fundamentally new ways of doing things.
- Processes to cultivate trust and empathy amongst participants so they can freely share perspectives, engage in fierce conversations, and navigate differences in power.
- Using the many dilemmas and paradoxes of community change – such as the need to achieve short-term wins while involved in the longer-term work of system change – as creative tensions to drive people to seek new approaches to vexing challenges without overwhelming them.

- Timely nudges to sustain a process of self-refueling change that can sustain multiple cycles of learning and periodic drops in momentum and morale.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of creating a container for change. Some argue that it is more important than "charismatic leadership, technical expertise, or even funding." [xxxviii] Others argue that the critical "soft stuff" is more difficult to manage than the "hard stuff" of research, planning, and program design. Peter Senge notes:

> You cannot force commitment. What you can do is nudge a little here, inspire a little there, and provide a role model. Your primary influence is the environment you create. [xxxix]

The Energy Futures Lab in Alberta demonstrates the value of creating that kind of environment. It's an effort to help actors in the province's export-oriented, oil-and gas-dominated energy sector to "accelerate the transition to a carbon-constrained future" that is economically vibrant, socially equitable, and environmentally sustainable. The design team invested significant time and energy laying the effort's foundations:

- A formal commitment to create a radical middle position in the polarized mainstream debate over the energy system (e.g., "economy versus the environment," "resource development versus community well-being").

- The creation of a backbone group comprising five diverse organizations – an energy company, a key government department, two well-respected environmental non-governmental organizations, and an outstanding leadership development institute with growing expertise in Aboriginal leadership.

- The recruitment of a "whole system team" of participants who are a microcosm of the diverse values, interests, and perspectives of the energy system's current stakeholders, and the engagement of their organizations, networks, and the broader public.

Having laid this groundwork, the backbone team worked diligently to create space for Lab participants to learn more about the energy system, themselves, and other participants. They carried out "deep interviews" with Fellows to surface their hopes, aspirations, and fears of energy transition; facilitated structured conversations about social and political narratives that shape people's perspectives on tough issues and how to empathize with alternative viewpoints; sponsored learning journeys to explore different parts of the energy system from a worm's-eye view, and systems-mapping sessions to look at the same systems from a bird's-eye view; and facilitated methods for dialogue that allowed people to have unspeakable conversations (e.g., can Albertans really maintain this standard of living in a carbon constrained future?). [xl]

The commitment to building a strong container has paid off. The participants signed their names to an op-ed piece in a major newspaper that advocated cross-sectoral leadership to shape – rather than endure – the energy transition already in progress. They crafted a vision document with 11 "pathways to energy system innovation" that they intend to upgrade once it has been tested with scores of networks and organizations across the province. There are nearly a dozen teams developing prototypes to test breakthrough technologies, policies, and business models that comprise the Lab's portfolio of promising initiatives. As one veteran of sustainability activism commented: "The commitment and the progress of this diverse group have been simply remarkable." [xli]

Bill O'Brien, a well-regarded business leader, noted: "The success of an intervention depends on the inner conditions of the intervenor." [xlii] In the same vein, the success of the next generation of CI initiatives depends on the ability of backbone teams to create the strong containers for change that support participants to dig deep when tackling stubborn social challenges.

CONCLUSION

The jury is still out on the ability of CI efforts to generate deep, wide, and sustained impact on tough societal challenges. In their study of 20 years of comprehensive community initiatives, the top-drawer researchers of the Aspen Institute's Roundtable on Community Change concluded that while there have been an impressive number of successful changes in policy and system changes, along with innovative programs, "few if any [initiatives] were able to demonstrate widespread changes in child and family well-being or reductions in the neighbourhood poverty rate." [xliii]

The CI framework has breathed new life into the weary efforts of many long-standing community change initiatives. It has also dramatically increased the number of new and aspiring changemakers. For all that, the exemplary stories of impact (like Medicine Hat's success in eliminating homelessness, or the slow but steady improvement of academic outcomes in the environs of Cincinnati) are still the exception rather than the rule.

The success of this next generation of community change efforts depends, in part, on the willingness of CI participants not to settle for marginal improvements to the original version of the CI framework. Instead, they must take on the challenge to continually upgrade the approach based on ongoing learning of what it takes to transform communities. The CI approach is – and always will be – unfinished business.

In this article, we've laid out what we feel are foundational elements of a CI 3.0 framework. Our core argument is that CI efforts are more likely to be effective when their participants operate from a movement-building paradigm. It is impossible for a leadership table compromised of 20 to 40 leaders – no matter how committed and influential – to tackle issues and make deep and durable change on their own. It requires the engagement, commitment, and investment of an entire community striving to be the best it can be and willing to make whatever changes to community systems – and its own behaviours – that are necessary to build safe, prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable communities.

This is only the beginning. In subsequent articles we plan to weigh in on other elements of the approach, namely:

- Preconditions for CI
- Phases of CI
- Principles of practice for CI
- A selection of key practices (e.g. governance, shared measurement).

We encourage others to do the same. While there is no sure-fire recipe for community change, there are patterns of effective ideas and practices that can improve the probabilities of success. In a world that seems a bit more fragile, disruptive, and anxious than normal, we need all hands on deck to uncover, frame, and share those patterns. It'll make it easier to create newspaper headlines like those now appearing in the local papers of Medicine Hat.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Liz is passionate about the power and potential of communities getting to impact on complex issues. Liz currently leads the Tamarack Learning Centre, providing strategic direction for the design and development of learning activities. Previously, Liz led the Vibrant Communities Canada team at Tamarack, assisting place-based poverty reduction tables across Canada to grow their impact. Liz was also the Director of the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction, which was recognized with the Canadian Urban Institute's David Crombie Leadership Award in 2009.

ABOUT TAMARACK INSTITUTE

Tamarack is a connected force for change. We believe that when we are effective in strengthening community capacity to engage citizens, lead collaboratively, deepen community, and innovate in place, our collective impact work contributes to building peace and a more equitable society. Learn more at www.tamarackcommunity.ca.

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