Connecting the Dots: Challenges in Claiming Collective Impact

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Comprehensive Community Initiatives

- Adopt shared responsibility for community-wide outcomes

- Aim for comprehensive, rather than piecemeal (problem: program) efforts: a new "civic infrastructure"

- Are data-driven: Rely on indicators, as well as system-performance measures

- Meaningfully engage community members in planning, and as change agents

- Understand the need for sustainability

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But How Do We Know That It Works?

- If we see improved outcomes, can we attribute that to the new way of doing business?

- Why, or why not?

- The answer *matters*, not just for maintaining credibility, but because there are real *costs* to collaboration

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If "It" Works, What's the Explanation?

- "We believe"

- When something becomes the object of concerted focus, it is more likely to improve (aka the Hawthorne Effect, or is it the Heisenberg Effect?)

- A series of incremental, but cumulative improvements in the delivery and content of interventions (both formal and informal) make the difference

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Second-Generation CCIs: Emerging Evidence

- The White House Council for Community Solutions reviewed a number of cross-sector community collaboratives

- They identified 12 (including Strive) where "needle-moving change" had occurred

- "Needle-moving change" was defined as at least 10 percent improvement in one or more community indicators

- But the Council's review is still a collection of anecdotes . . .

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Milwaukee
Focus: *Teen Pregnancy*

Collaborative Strategies

Outcomes

- Substantial public awareness campaign

- Nearly 1,000 classroom teachers trained on evidence-based sexuality curriculum

? →

30 percent decline in teen birth rate, 2006-2010

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Nashville
Focus: *High School Graduation*

Collaborative Strategies

Outcomes

- After identifying attendance as a critical issue, revamped public transportation system

- Extensive involvement from youth, the Hispanic community

? →

- Graduation rates up more than 20 percentage points since 2002

- Truancy rates down 35 percent

Chicago
Focus: *High School Dropouts*

Collaborative Strategies

- Institute multiple graduation pathways for students not well served by traditional route

- Profile and monitor at-risk and off-pace students

- Create On-Track Labs to test strategies for freshmen

Outcomes

? →

- Freshmen on-track for graduation up 10 percent

- Graduation rates up by 3 percent

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Memphis
Focus: *Violent Crime*

Collaborative Strategies

Outcomes

- Tougher gun laws

- Re-entry programs for juvenile offenders

- Monitoring of crime "hot spots"

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Major violent crime dropped by 27 percent, 2006-2011

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San Joaquin County (CA)
Focus: *Gang Violence*

Collaborative Strategies

- Co-locate multiple social services in neighborhood centers

- Create a mobile unit to take services to more remote areas

Outcomes

?

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- Arrests, CPS interventions, unexcused absences, school suspensions, down by 25 percent or more

- Crime down by 65 percent

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Herkimer County (NY)
Focus: *Youth in Residential Placements*

Collaborative Strategies

- Focus on five risk factors

- Monthly review of community indicators

- Identify children who are candidates for community-based services

- Provide counseling, probation, and family support

Outcomes

?

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- Number of children in foster care dropped by more than half (2003-2011)

- Residential care-days down by 32 percent (2002-2011)

Parramore Neighborhood (Orlando, FL)
Focus: *Pervasive Neighborhood Decline*

Collaborative Strategies

- Tutoring and youth development programs at neighborhood sites

- Housing improvement projects

- Invest in social capital

- Improve quality of child care

Outcomes

?

- Improved scores on standardized tests in reading and math

- Juvenile crime rates down by 81 percent (2006-2010)

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East Lake Neighborhood (Atlanta)
Focus: *Community Violence, Economic and Educational Disadvantage*

Collaborative Strategies

- Raze housing project; build mixed-income apartments

- Provide early childhood education

- New K-8 charter school

- Offer physical education classes, employment opportunities
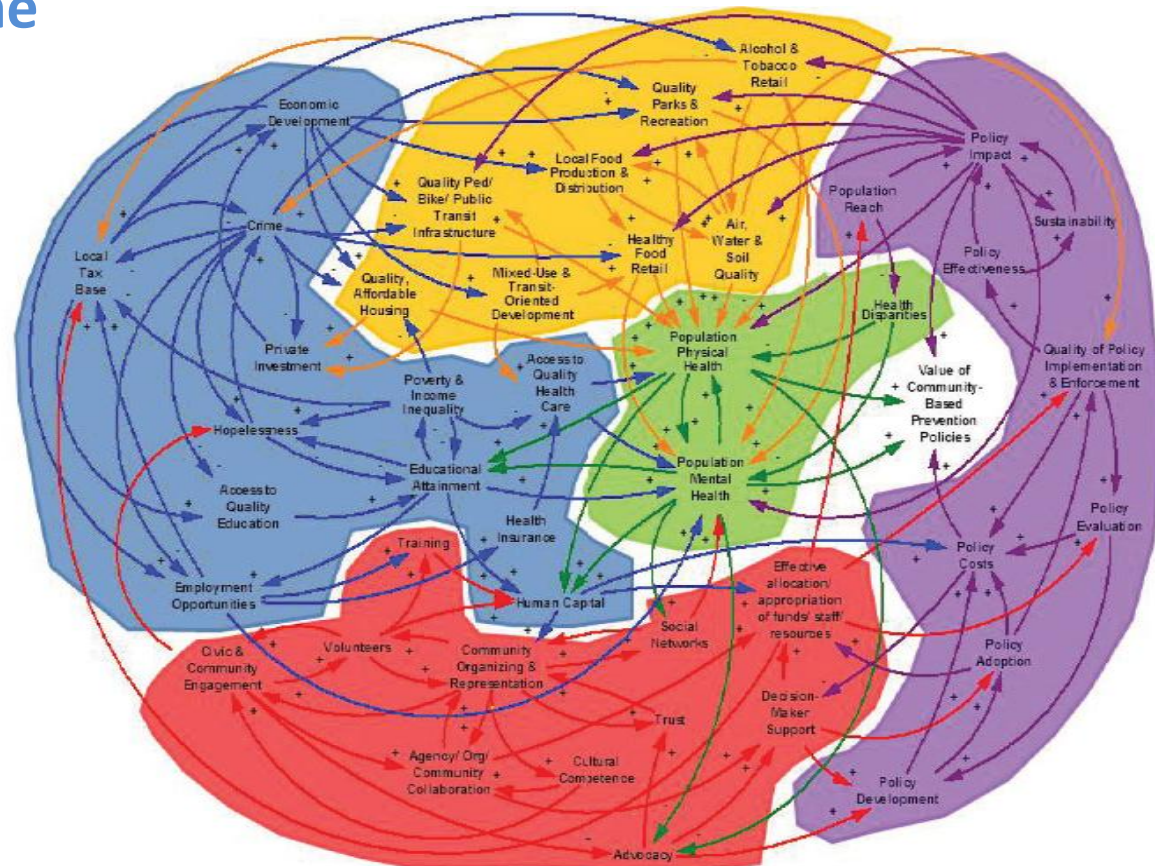
Outcomes

?

→

- Math and reading proficiency improved, esp. in charter school

- Crime down by 65 percent

What's Missing Here?
A theory of change

- We need, first, to specify (in detail) *what we think* is in the "black box"

- Then, we need to document (quantitatively as well as qualitatively) *what actually happened* in the now-not-so-black box

- Both the documentation and the earlier specification need to include, in addition to measures of system functioning, *indicators of short-term progress* toward outcomes

Making explicit the theory of change

KEY:

System variables		
Prevention policies	🟪	**Community Well-Being**
Health	🟩	*Physical environment*
Community Process	🟥	*Social, educational, and economic environments*

System pathways
Causal direction →
Same direction 🟧 +
Opposite directions 🟦 −

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What Does This Do?

- Provides a level of transparency

- Offers a basis (a "roadmap") to revise practice, and your theory of change, based on actual experience

- Ideally, provides early signs (short-term indicators) that things are either on- or off-track

- Shifts the burden onto skeptics to give an alternative explanation for the changes observed

What Else Would be Helpful for "Making the Case"?

- Identifying comparison communities, and running a "quasi-experiment"

- More data that are longitudinal (follow individual kids over time)

In Georgia,

- The Georgia Family Connection Partnership compared 25 GA counties that had targeted *infant low birthweight*, with387 similar counties without CCIs in four other southeastern states

- Used *propensity score matching* (a weighting procedure that adjusts for demographic differences)

- In the GA counties with CCIs, rates of LBW were *essentially stable* over time, while in the comparison counties rates *increased*.

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In Washington State,

- Researchers developed a way to score the capacity of county-level community networks

- Capacity included:
  - Focus/shared responsibility for targeted social problems,
  - Learning and collaborative leadership, and
  - Attention to results

- Outcome indicators were rates of child and family problems (child maltreatment, teen pregnancy, high school dropouts, etc.)

- Higher levels of capacity were highly correlated with reductions in problems between 1998 and 2006.

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