

**EXPLORING SOCIAL CAPITAL THROUGH
A COLLECTIVE EFFICACY FRAMEWORK:
A Concept Paper**

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INTRODUCTION

Though familiar in sociological circles since the late 1970's, Robert Putnam's 1995 article, *Bowling Alone*,¹ catapulted the concept of social capital into the mainstream of popular language, public discourse and policy debate. Indeed, the construct is enjoying immense popularity. Reasons are many. The concept has high face validity. It embodies many of the attributes normally associated with American democracy including trust, and individual and group efficacy. It also has the benefit of political correctness and political expediency: the poor are not powerless to change their circumstances.

With all of this appeal, social capital is increasingly being used as an explanation for almost any positive outcome of individual socialization and socializing behavior. In fact, concern for its over application led Alejandro Portes to protest, in a recent article, that "the point is approaching at which social capital comes to be applied to so many events and in so many different contexts as to lose any distinct meaning."²

Underlying this immense interest in social capital is its potential to add to the nation's arsenal of weapons in the fight against the myriad social issues affecting residents in distressed communities in the U.S. But the catchiness of the phrase and its immediate appeal are insufficient to make it a useful instrument of intervention. Indeed, if social capital is to become a deliberate tool for eliminating poverty, expanding opportunity, developing communities, or creating any other positive social outcome, much more needs to be learned and understood both about exactly what it means and how it behaves.

The purpose of this writing then, will be both to attempt that clarification and to propose a framework through which the practical application of the social capital construct might be better understood. In so doing, we will indulge in some speculation and make some, hopefully reasonable, guesses both about what Putnam and others intend and about human behaviors. The intent is to stimulate more discussion about whether and how the social capital construct can be made more concrete so that it can be brought to the service of community improvement and change strategies.

In the following pages then we begin by: exploring our understanding of social capital; suggesting an hypothesized relationship to civic engagement; and developing other hypotheses about the conditions under which the civic engagement of individuals might transform itself into community action. Following that, we discuss the various "dimensions" of social capital and speculate on their potential utility at various levels of problem solving (e.g. between and among individuals, families, organizations, neighborhoods, etc.). We then use these arguments as the basis for creating a collective efficacy framework that places social capital in a larger context of social action. And finally, we will conclude this paper by speculating on the challenges of building, deploying and sustaining social capital as a means of strengthening the collective efficacy of distressed communities.

¹ Putnam, R.D. 1995. *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*. *Journal of Democracy*. 6:65 - 78.

² Portes, A. 1998. *Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Society*. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 24:1 - 24.

BEGINNING EXPLORATIONS: Understanding Social Capital

Our fascination with social capital stems from the utility we believe it holds for addressing individual and community issues and needs. But, as earlier, if the construct is to be useful as a deliberate "tool" of social intervention, it must be "manipulable" — that is, intentionally deployable in certain contexts and for certain expressed purposes. That, in turn suggests that it should be predictable, at least at some rudimentary level, otherwise there would be no basis for suggesting that its application to a particular issue or circumstance might bear fruit.

So, there is a need then for a workable framework — a clearer formulation of social capital that might explain both what it is and how it could be expected to behave as applied to a variety of social issues and in a variety of social contexts.

Social Capital: What is it? And how is it Created?

Though much has been written about social capital, the vast preponderance of the literature explores the construct in application to particular social issues such as crime, education, economic development and so on. Relatively little attention has been paid to devising a theory of social capital that would help us better understand it as a community dynamic. Our purpose in this section will be to devise such a framework drawing heavily from the work of Coleman and Putnam to create a coherent formulation. We begin by sifting through their interpretations to set forth a precise definition. What exactly is social capital?

Portes³ attributes the first systematic contemporary analysis of social capital to Pierre Bourdieu⁴ who, in 1985, defined the concept as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." This definition suggests that social capital has two parts: the relationships that allow individuals to have access to resources possessed by others, and the amount and quality of the resources themselves. But because it was written in French, Bourdieu's perspective has not gained widespread recognition in the U.S.

Perhaps the two best-known proponents of social capital in the U.S. are James Coleman and Robert Putnam. James Coleman's work states that "social capital is created when relations among people change in ways that facilitate action."⁵ Putnam, on the other hand, believes that "social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit."⁶

Three critical elements of social capital can be gleaned from these interpretations. The first is that social capital is an asset — a capital asset representing a collection of

³ Portes, A. 1998. *Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Society*. Annual Review of Sociology. 24:1 - 24.

⁴ Bourdieu, P. 1985. the Forms of Capital. In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J.G. Richardson. Pp. 241-58. New York: Greenwood.

⁵ Coleman, J.S. 1988a. *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital*. American Journal of Sociology. 94:S95 - 121. Pg. 100.

⁶ Putnam, R.D. 1995. *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*. Journal of Democracy. 6:65 - 78.

resources. Of the three authors, Bourdieu is alone in explicitly acknowledging this resource base that social capital represents.

The second implication is that these resources are embedded in relationships. In other words, the fact that these resources are accessed through relationships is what makes this form of capital "social." Bourdieu and Coleman state this directly while, in Putnam, it is to be inferred from his focus on social networks, norms and trust.

The third element is the notion that social capital is directed and purposeful. Bourdieu is silent on this point while Coleman clearly conditions the existence of social capital on the facilitation of action and Putnam's formulation implies purpose by asserting that the networks facilitate coordination and cooperation. So, for our purposes, we will combine these insights into a unifying definition: *Social capital is an asset representing actionable resources that are contained in, and accessible through, a system of relationships.*⁷

From this definition, we can conclude three things: first, that social capital grows out of human relationships; second, that its presence or absence is recognized by an ability to take action; and third, that that capacity for action grows out of and is dependent upon those relationships. This third inference is important because it allows us to consider another issue: What does Putnam mean by the term "civic engagement" and what is its relationship to social capital?

Civic Engagement as a Precursor to Social Capital

Putnam's *Bowling Alone* never provides a clear definition of the civic engagement he believes is so important to collective action. But the examples he uses to suggest its decline in the U.S. (voter turnout, reading the newspaper, declining participation in public forums such as PTAs, and the decline in choral societies and in bowling leagues), suggest that it refers to the behaviors of individuals and the extent to which those behaviors involve others, and are outside of, or at least to some extent removed from, the individual's immediate self interests. It would seem that Putnam may merely mean the kind of external activity that "gets people off the living room couch." Indeed, from these examples, it seems clear that, to qualify as civic engagement, these behaviors (e.g. voting, or reading the newspaper) neither have to involve others, be organized in any particular way, nor be directed at any particular action, goal or outcome. They can proceed as independent and autonomous behaviors of individuals.

Putnam's formulation suggests that social capital grows out of "networks" of this civic engagement — that civic/external engagement offers individuals a forum for building relationships that may be resourceful in certain contexts. This leads us to several conclusions that are important to the formulation of a framework. The first is, that the civic engagement of individuals is not itself a form of social capital. It requires that, neither relationships, nor intent to act, be in evidence. We can think of civic engagement as a form of "kinetic energy" — a "static electricity" that may be all around us but that

⁷ We should be clear here that social capital is an asset that can also manifest itself in negative ways. Organized crime, street gangs and the Klu Klux Klan are examples. But from a community perspective it would be interesting to speculate as to whether having negative social capital may be better than none at all. Perhaps the potential to redirect negative forms of social organization to positive purposes might be better than having a community be socially disorganized. It may be, for instance, that even depleted, crime ridden neighborhoods may have capacity for positive action if means can be found to redirect whatever organizational energies might exist there.

has not yet been "conducted" to a particular use. Its existence does not presume that social capital has been created.

Our second conclusion is that Social Capital is created when this civic engagement is "excited" by some catalytic issue or event and directed (appropriated or intentionally organized) toward a particular end or purpose. Adding two additional assumptions to our conclusions rounds out this formulation. The first assumption is implicit in Putnam's work and that is:

- That, with regard to the well being of communities, civic engagement is additive across individuals and should have positive cumulative impacts. This assumption simply suggests that the general health and welfare of communities should be expected to increase with increases in the numbers of civically engaged members.

This second assumption, however, is offered as a logical outgrowth of the relationships we have posited thus far; and it states:

- That the potential, and potential strength, of a community's social capital should also be expected to increase with increases in civic engagement. The notion here is simply that, the more kinetic energy a community has, the easier it may be to harness and deploy.

So, in this formulation, the creation of social capital presumes and depends upon individual civic engagement as a vehicle for building relationships, and the more the better. Two questions loom large here, however. The first is, on what does civic engagement depend? And the second is how is it converted to social capital?

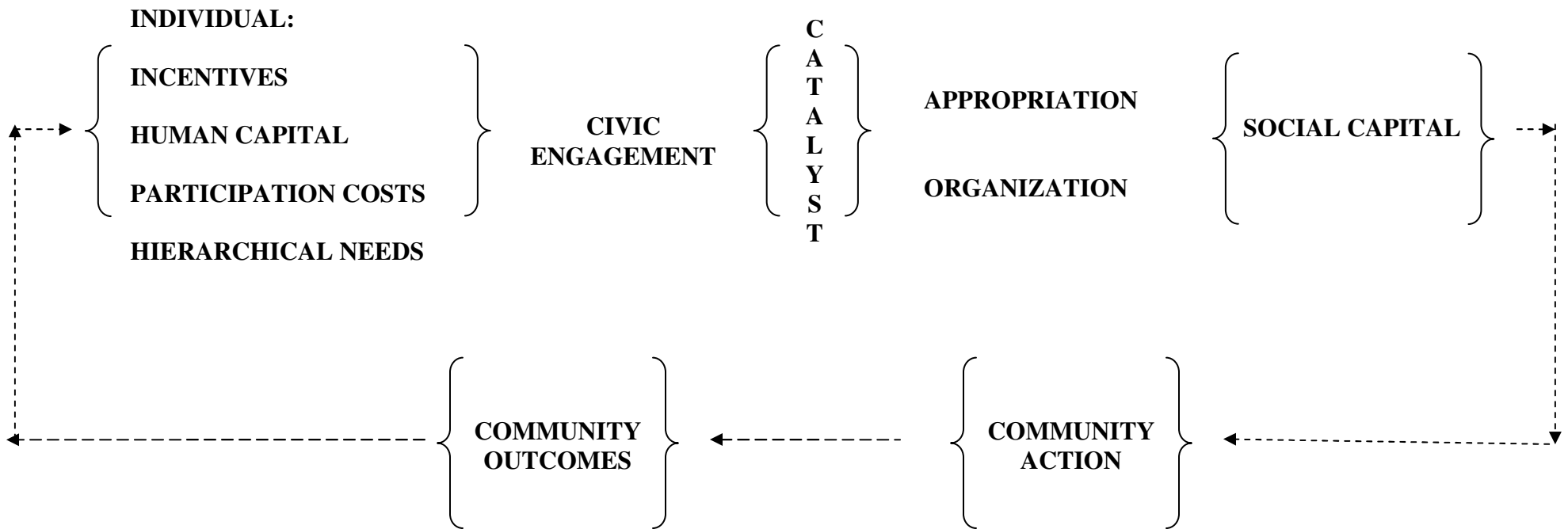
THE BEGINNINGS OF A FRAMEWORK

As our first approximation of a framework, we have constructed Figure 1 to represent a general formulation of the process of creating and deploying social capital. The figure suggests a "closed system" wherein civic engagement, is a function of individual incentives, human capital, participation costs and hierarchical needs that condition individual "appetites" and preferences for the kinds of "external involvements" that we believe Putnam intends by the term "civic engagement."

Figure 1 suggests that this civic/external engagement can be converted (appropriated or organized) into social capital as a deliberate response to some catalyst — civically minded individuals may decide to come together to act collectively in response to some issue, event, or need. Their success at coming together creates the social capital that is then directed toward some community action or activity, in an effort to achieve an outcome. Finally, the outcome, in turn, feeds back into the considerations that condition individual appetites for further civic engagement. So, in our framework, social capital is formed as individuals come together to respond to events, issues and needs.

FIGURE 1

**Proposed Framework for the Creation/Deployment
Of Social Capital**



Thoughts on Individual Civic Engagement: an Example

Figure 1 is incomplete however. It tells us little about the circumstances under which this conversion is likely to occur (i.e., the conditions under which people will elect to join forces.) Nor does it give us any clues as to whether, how or why this process is might vary from place to place. But indeed it does vary. Communities differ markedly in the degree to they are comprised of activist members or have a culture of resident civic involvement. In a recent study on volunteer activity in high vs. low SES schools⁸, Jane Hannaway' brings these variations into sharp relief.

In her study, Hannaway observed that parents in high SES schools were volunteering in large numbers to assist in classrooms. But they did so as individuals. They were not organized in groups for that purpose nor were they particularly dependent on relationships with one another to bring about the outcomes they sought from their participation. They were acting individually and responding to a set of incentives and preferences to get involved in their children's education. According to our framework this is clear evidence of civic engagement but not an example of social capital. This example suggests that our framework, in Figure 1, needs to be expanded to allow for the possibility that, in certain circumstances or communities, individual expressions of civic engagement may lead to desirable community outcomes without being "organized" into social capital.

By contrast, this civic engagement (volunteer behavior) was not observed in low SES schools. Not only did it not occur naturally, on its own, but a national school improvement movement, School Based Management, which proponents thought would be a vehicle for deliberately creating this kind of civic engagement, failed to do so in low SES schools. What accounts for the difference in behaviors? Figure 1 hypothesizes that incentives, human capital, participation costs, and hierarchical needs are the factors that condition individual preferences for civic engagements like school volunteering. This suggests that the communities observed by Hannaway may differ along these dimensions and that those differences may account for the differences in their behaviors. We will examine each of these dimensions in turn.

Incentives. There are at least two aspects of the incentive question worthy of mention: one is expected benefit and the other is intrinsic interest. On the one hand, much of what we choose to do reflects some calculation of an expected return — some level of net direct benefit that warrants our investment of time and effort in an activity. In short, we do some things because we expect to get some reward (material or psychic). There are other times however when we may do something, not expecting a direct benefit, but because it is the right thing to do; or we may do it because the value we see is in the doing of it and not in a consequent return. School volunteering may be some combination of both.

In any case, it is difficult to assert that the incentives facing parents in high vs. low SES schools differ markedly. We can presume that poorer parents love their children no less than their more affluent counterparts and are equally concerned about their welfare. Indeed, given the inordinate impacts of crime, violence, drugs and other social

⁸ Hannaway, Jane. Forthcoming. *Urban and Suburban School Districts: Two Different Worlds*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

phenomena in distressed communities, one might expect the motivation for civic engagement to be quite high among the poor in many areas of community life.

On the other hand, in the distressed communities about which our society is most concerned, residents may have less experience with social activism and political success and, consequently, may have little evidence supporting the value and/or efficacy of civic engagement and involvement as strategies for affecting change in the schools. Their expectations for a positive return may be quite low.

Human Capital. We might expect, however, that significant disparities exist in the human capital possessed by high vs. low SES parents and that those differences may have important implications for their behaviors towards the schools. For instance, high SES parents might be both more confident of what they can contribute and less intimidated by the "expertise" of teachers or by the "immensity" of the institution than their lower income counterparts.

Participation Costs. There are two components of participation costs. One relates to "burden." For instance, we might expect volunteering in the schools to be easier to do among higher SES families than among poor ones. Access to transportation, and childcare, as examples, favor affluent families and can reduce their relative costs of participation. Moreover, the high incidence of single parent households and welfare receipt in poor communities suggests a pattern of relative hardship, not present in more affluent areas that can also raise significant barriers to participation.

The other component is the "opportunity cost" of alternative uses of leisure time. This component is difficult to parse between these two groups because of the difficulty inherent in assessing individual valuations of leisure activities. For example, one person may find the opportunity to watch a soap opera on TV just as compelling as another's opportunity to be seated at center court at Wimbledon. As such, it is difficult to suggest that any systematic biases exist between the parents in high vs. low SES schools.

Hierarchical Needs. Finally, there is the issue of where individuals may be situated on Maslow's scale of hierarchical needs and whether differences on this dimension may cause people to attach different priorities to school volunteering or any other potential area of civic involvement. It is reasonable to assume, for instance, that higher SES parents may be more disposed, by virtue of greater financial security and other advantages, to meeting their needs for self-actualization and social efficacy, while lower SES parents may be more preoccupied with issues of daily survival and maintenance.

Our framework hypothesizes then that these four considerations are among the determinants of individual preferences for civic engagement. Our school-volunteering example further suggests that income differentials may introduce systematic biases into these considerations and may predispose entire communities toward greater or lesser levels of involvement in community affairs. There are likely other factors such as upbringing, and parental histories and influences that contribute as well to these outcomes.

Individual Civic Engagement as an Instrument of Community Improvement

Whatever the precise formulation for these differences in school volunteering behaviors, the example raises another interesting question. That is, how important is the exercise

of social capital to the ability of residents to achieve positive outcomes in and for their communities? Our school volunteering example points to a potential irony, and that is, that the affluent communities, that potentially have the greatest capacity for (civic engagement and hence) social capital, may have the least need to exercise it. We have already determined, for instance, that the behavior of high SES parents did not reflect the use of social capital, as we have come to understand it. Still, acting as disconnected individuals, these parents, through their individual expressions of civic engagement, produced a valued community outcome — educational accountability. And there was no need for them to organize to bring this about.

While this is only one example, it does suggest a plausible more general hypothesis: it may be that, in general, in affluent communities, less may be needed, by way of community organizing or the appropriation of social relations, to achieve community goals. These communities may tend to operate quite well on "automatic pilot." That is to say that, under many circumstances, individual expressions of civic engagement may be sufficient to maintaining community welfare. For instance, it may be that, in these communities, municipal and other authorities may, as a rule, be more responsive to individual complaints for street repair, noise abatement, police, fire and emergency services, school improvement and other important issues than they are in poorer communities.

Conversely, it may be that collective action is much more often needed as a means for making voices heard in poor and distressed communities. That is, perhaps the civic engagement of low-income individuals, to be effective, must more frequently be harnessed and strategically directed through community action if social welfare is to be maintained and/or improved.⁹ Consequently, the creation/enhancement of social capital may be a greater imperative in the lives of low-income community residents..

It is likely, however, that these assertions are subject to a threshold effect — meaning that, in either community, there may be a point at which individual civic engagement becomes an ineffective means for addressing community needs. And once that point is reached, the need for collective action and the exercise of social capital become apparent. Still, even with this caveat, we would assert that that threshold is likely to be much lower in poor and distressed communities than it is in affluent ones.

What does this suggest about our framework? It suggests that Figure 1 should be further expanded to, first, allow for the possibility that, in certain communities and under certain circumstances, individual civic engagement might, by itself, be an effective means for achieving some social ends. But, secondly, it suggests a need to incorporate a "choice point" in the diagram that permits an explicit consideration of the threshold conditions under which collective action might be sought and social capital created.

Converting Individual Engagement to Community Action

Community action is not an easy commodity to arouse. In fact, we assume in this writing that, given a choice, most individuals, because of economies of time and effort, would prefer to resolve issues by themselves. Working in groups can be stressful because of

⁹ This assertion may have at least two components. The first, as discussed earlier, may be that "appetites" for civic engagement may be sufficiently weak among low-income individuals that its expression cannot and does not command the attentions of authorities. Or alternatively, it may be the case that attending to certain interests of low-income communities may conflict with other more highly valued agendas and interests of the authorities and decision makers.

its uncertainties, inefficiencies and demands for compromise. Consequently, we presume that an individual's first response and preferred course of action, given any catalytic event or issue, is to "go it alone" and just "take care of it." Again, by our reasoning, this is not an exercise of social capital but of individual civic engagement.¹⁰ Recall our assertion that social capital is created when the resources embedded in relationships are directed toward some purpose or goal. This means that, for social capital to be in evidence, a group of at least two people must be involved. So, in developing our framework, it is important to speculate about the conditions under which individuals would choose this less preferred option of involving others in addressing their concerns.

We believe that this choice requires that two sets of threshold conditions be met. The first relates to whether an individual affected by an issue feels that collective action is needed because individual actions, or the prospects of individual action, are deemed ineffective. This will occur if the person believes:

- that he/she lacks access — that the jurisdiction, or level of authority to which an appeal must be made, lies beyond his/her reach; or
- that he/she lacks clout — that the gravity/complexity of the issue in question is too large to be effected by his/her actions or appeals alone.

If either of these judgments is reached, the individual will be left with the choice of either abandoning the cause altogether, or alternatively joining, or enlisting, others in an effort to affect the desired change. But for this joining/enlisting option to take place, a second set of conditions must also hold, in particular:

- That the catalytic event in question must be deemed significant by some critical mass of other interested and accessible community residents who also see it as beyond their abilities to resolve on their own;¹¹ and,
- That some person(s) or entity(ies) must come forward to assume and exercise the leadership that will provide a fulcrum for organizing and for channeling community energies and action.

Converting individual civic engagement to community action requires that both sets of conditions must hold.

Exploring the Dimensions of Social Capital

But there are many forms of relationship on which such community action might be based. Coleman identifies six forms of social capital — six dimensions of our relationships with others that can act as a basis for acting in groups: mutual obligations, information, norms, authority relations, appropriable social relations, and intentional organization. In his formulation, social capital can be based on any one or any number of these dimensions. But it is important to our framework to speculate as to whether

¹⁰ One could argue that an individual's human capital is the most important of determinant of whether he/she, acting alone, will succeed in addressing issues of concern.

¹¹ At a micro level of application, say an individual's need for intervention with a landlord, this second set of conditions may reduce themselves to convincing another third-party individual (to employ his/her resources) to intercede on one's behalf. At a more macro level, however, we are referring here to a need for community organizing at some level. Either way our purpose will be to amass an effective set of relationship resources to deploy.

these different forms or "dimensions" of social capital are likely to be more or less effective as applied in different contexts.

Figure 2 explores this issue. On its horizontal axis, it arrays increasing aggregations of people from single individuals, to families, to organizations, neighborhoods, communities and states. This continuum, of the "owners" or beneficiaries of social capital, is intended to represent the varying units of analysis to which the social capital construct is often applied. By contrast, the vertical axis arrays the six "dimensions" of social capital, as posited in Coleman's work, and the contexts in which this author believes they have most utility. The goal of Figure 2, as depicted by its graphics, is to present hypotheses about whether the various "forms" of social capital may be more or less powerful, as bases for social action, as we move from one unit of analysis and application to the next (e.g. as the potential numbers of owners or beneficiaries rise).

Mutual Obligation, as a dimension of (basis for) social capital, reflects the expectation that persons will act according to explicit or implicit agreements they have with one another. Person A does something that benefits person B and that, in turn, entitles person A to a future service from person B. Trustworthiness and one's ability to accumulate and hold "debt" influence this form of social capital.¹² But Figure 2 suggests that the value of mutual obligations, and its transactional focus, as a basis for forming social capital, may decline as the numbers of potential owners or beneficiaries increase. Stated another way, it is easier to conceive of favors being swapped between and among individuals and families for instance than it is between and among neighborhoods, communities and states.¹³

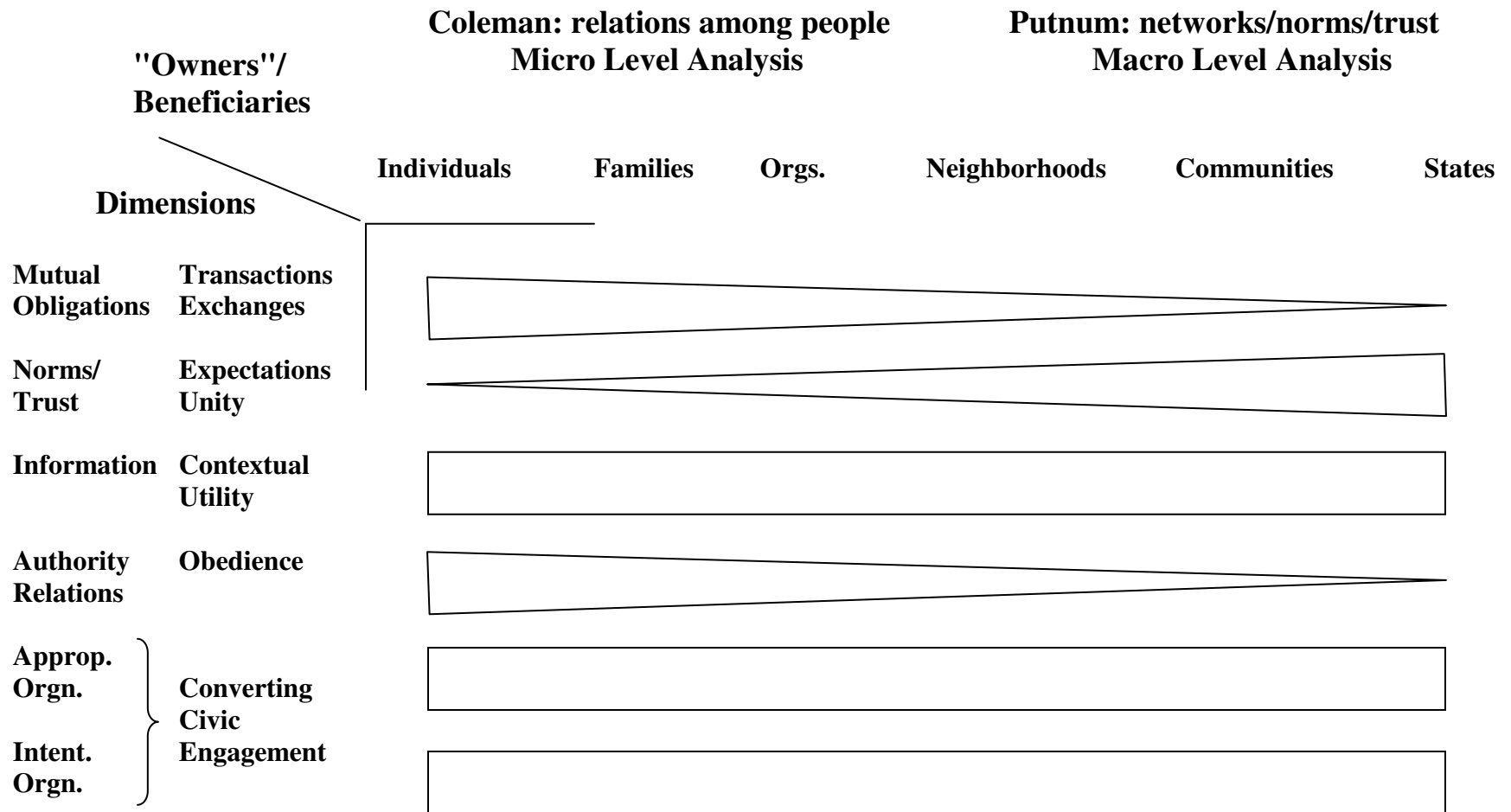
Norms can also be a source of social capital. To the extent that they may influence behavior (i.e. constraining/sanctioning negative behaviors or encouraging positive ones), norms can have powerful effects on community life and collective community aspirations and action. Shared norms and values allow us to anticipate each other's behaviors and to expect certain things from one another because of our shared understandings. Those shared understandings can add power to our relationships and can enhance our ability to act either as individuals or in groups. Figure 2 suggests that the power of norms, as a basis for creating social capital, grows at larger aggregations of people and action. For instance, what matter most, in the individual transactions cited above, are the preferences persons A and B have for the objects, services and/or terms of exchange. They probably care very little about what they have in common — norms, values or otherwise. But at higher levels of ownership and benefit the exploitation of shared norms and values are, not only powerful incentives for organization and action, but the very bases upon which civil societies are built.

¹² There are likely other forms of obligation however that do not conform to this "rational" approach of transaction and exchange. Person A, for instance, might do a service because it is expected rather than in anticipation of a return. This may be an example of action driven by norms and less by "mutual" obligation. In this case A may be fulfilling an obligation to himself, his community or his profession to behave in certain prescribed ways.

¹³ Exception might be taken with regard to treaties between and among nations.

FIGURE 2

Dimensions of Social Capital and their Efficacy at Various Levels of Application



Information becomes a form of social capital to the extent that relationships may impart knowledge that, in turn, facilitates action. For example, jobholders can be a source of social capital for job seekers needing employment. Figure 2 suggests that information may be an important component of social capital regardless of how micro or macro our focus. Even in individual transactions, person A and person B must each have some information and understanding about what (objects or services) each possesses that can be the basis of the exchange. And similarly, at larger aggregations, information is also the critical element in the determination, clarification and communication of the issues to which social organization and social capital might be applied.

Authority relations involve the ability to influence others to do things on the basis of status differentials. Person A is able to obligate person B to do something by virtue of a superior claim or status relative to person B (e.g. person A is above person B in a hierarchy). This particular dimension is different from our usual notions of social capital as involving "lateral" relationships — that is, relationships among equals — as opposed to vertical ones. Authority relations can be the basis of social capital to the extent that group members are willing to accede to a form of organization based on leadership from some structure of authority relations. But Figure 2 suggests that these authority relations may be more effective, as bases for social organization and action, at lower levels of ownership and benefit. Within the hierarchical structure that may exist among certain individuals and/or within families and organizations, authority relations may be very effective means for achieving positive outcomes. But in the less hierarchical worlds of neighborhoods, communities and states, authority relations probably work less well as catalysts for public action. For instance, neither my neighbor, Mayor nor Governor can compel me to get involved in an issue.

Appropriable Social Organization and Intentional Organization are also regarded by Coleman as forms of social capital. But we would speculate here that they might be more usefully thought of as means of redirecting the relationships that have their foundations in the first four dimensions. Indeed, in our Figure 1 framework, we have posited them as characterizing the process that converts civic engagement into social capital. Consequently, our graphic representation in Figure 2, suggests that their value to the formation of social capital does not vary as the unit of analysis changes from individuals to families and larger aggregations of persons.

The conceptual value of "appropriable social organization" derives from the focus it provides on the fungibility of relationships — whether and how relationships built around a particular set of dimensions, issues or circumstances can be adapted or redirected to other ends and purposes. Intentional Organization, on the other hand, forces us to consider what it takes to create or strengthen social capital where we presume relationships are weak or do not exist. The difference between these two dimensions appears to be whether relationships (built on norms and trust, information, mutual obligation and so forth) already exist and are relatively strong, or are relatively weak or have to be built from scratch.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the assertions embedded in Figure 2.

- There are four fundamental dimensions of our relationships with others that can form the basis for action (Mutual Obligations, Norms, Information and Authority Relations) but their utility as bases for action may vary depending on our unit of analysis.

- Mutual Obligations and Authority Relations provide stronger bases for action and at lower levels of aggregation (e.g. when benefits derive to particular individuals and families) than at larger ones (e.g. when the welfare of entire neighborhood and communities is at stake)
 - Norms, by contrast, provide a stronger base for action and benefit at larger levels of aggregation than at lower ones.
 - Information is an important ingredient in social action at all levels of aggregation.
- Appropriable Social Relations and Intentional Organization may be viewed as means by which actionable relationships are either redirected or created in the pursuit of some objective. And in our Figure 1 framework we have posited these two dimensions as the processes through which civic engagement is converted to social capital.

Implications: The Need for an Expanded Formulation

It becomes clear from this and earlier discussions that Figure 1 is insufficient as a general formulation. Much is still missing. The framework needs to provide for an explicit consideration of the threshold conditions that give rise to collective action — it needs to permit an option for individuals or families to either "go it alone" or seek community support? But we also need to make some provision in the framework for changes in the unit of analysis. Figure 1 explicitly targets communities as the units of analysis. This is so because most discussions of social capital are focused on issues of community welfare (e.g. crime, education, community building and community development). But, as our education example illustrated, our focus could just as easily have been on the actions and the well-being of individuals or poor families.

Moreover, the framework thus far has been silent on the important role of leadership as the vehicle for organizing and channeling civic engagement and energy into social capital and action. And it gives no clue as to how and where the various dimensions of relationships, that can form the basis of social capital, enter the framework as part of the dynamic process of converting civic engagement into social capital.

A COLLECTIVE EFFICACY FRAMEWORK: How Social Capital Works

Figure 3 expands the framework to accommodate these issues. But because we have adapted the framework in ways that illustrate the broader process of addressing a community's welfare, we believe it to represent not just a diagram of social capital formation and deployment, but a schematic for collective efficacy more generally. In our revised version, the formation and exercise of social capital should be viewed as a later-stage component of a collective "option" for problem solving that may or may not be invoked as individuals consider how to address important issues and needs.

As before, our starting point, in Figure 3, is a set of considerations that condition individual preferences for civic engagement. But here we explicitly recognize that a byproduct, of this civic/external behavior, is an opportunity for building and/or strengthening a variety of relationships, with family, friends, and/or other unrelated persons, and that these relationships can be called upon or exploited in times of need. In other words, here, civic engagement becomes the foundation for relationship building

amongst smaller units (individuals and families) using Coleman's various dimensions of social capital. And we allow that, once formed, these relationships can also be appropriated or intentionally organized toward some desired action, creating social capital in the process.

Essentially this suggests that civic engagement is not only a means of individual action, but also the foundation upon which we build actionable relationships with others. It stands to reason then that the greater our civic engagement, so defined, the greater our access to, and capacity for, "resourceful" relationships and hence social capital.

Also as before, we see in Figure 3, that the introduction of a catalytic event or issue can give rise to an organizing effort. But here our expanded framework also provides for the possibility that it may not. By explicitly including our threshold conditions, we acknowledge that, in certain circumstances (e.g. as in our education example), individuals may pursue resolution on their own; and that their individual expressions of civic engagement may achieve positive community outcomes directly, without the need of social capital. In this framework, the process of creating and exercising social capital begins when the prospects of individual efficacy are perceived to be unlikely. Even then, as we have described, the effective creation, mobilization and deployment of social capital are not assured.

Indeed, here our expanded framework recognizes the pivotal role leadership plays in community action and in social capital mobilization and deployment. The role of leadership is largely ignored in much of the social capital literature. But in our framework it is central. It is imperative that some entity come forward to act as the fulcrum around which organizing can occur as well as the vehicle through which action is initiated. Not only is the provision of leadership important to the process of mobilizing social capital, but the quality of that leadership is also a major factor in determining how effective it is when it is exercised. As a consequence, the development of that leadership in distressed communities should take on strategic importance as a principal tool/weapon in the social capital, community action and improvement arena.

Leadership development has become a popular component of social interventions. But in fashioning leadership development strategies, we have often been less than precise about our vision of what leadership is or is supposed to do. In much of the social capital literature, the issue of leadership has been largely a "black box." Neither Coleman nor Putnam addresses the role of leadership or leadership development in their formulations of social capital. In fact, there is no real focus, in either, on any particular vehicle, means or mechanism by or through which social capital is presumed to operate.¹⁴

¹⁴ In our formulation, leadership has both an organizing and a channeling role in the deployment of social capital. Thus an important challenge for leadership development is finding ways to help prospective leaders better-forecast community issues and exploit community energies in pursuit of community improvement. Such an agenda might include: devising "early warning systems" for the earlier identification of catalytic events; creating assessment strategies for maintaining an awareness and an understanding of the civic engagement forums and agendas operating in the community; arraying strategies likely to be successful in "networking," and mobilizing the community's civic engagement; instruction in the communication skills necessary to "making the case" for collective action; training in the organizational skills necessary to managing and sustaining a loose confederation of interests in a collaborative effort; and advising and counseling on the personal attributes needed to garner the trust and participation of community members and government, civic and other authorities and leaders.

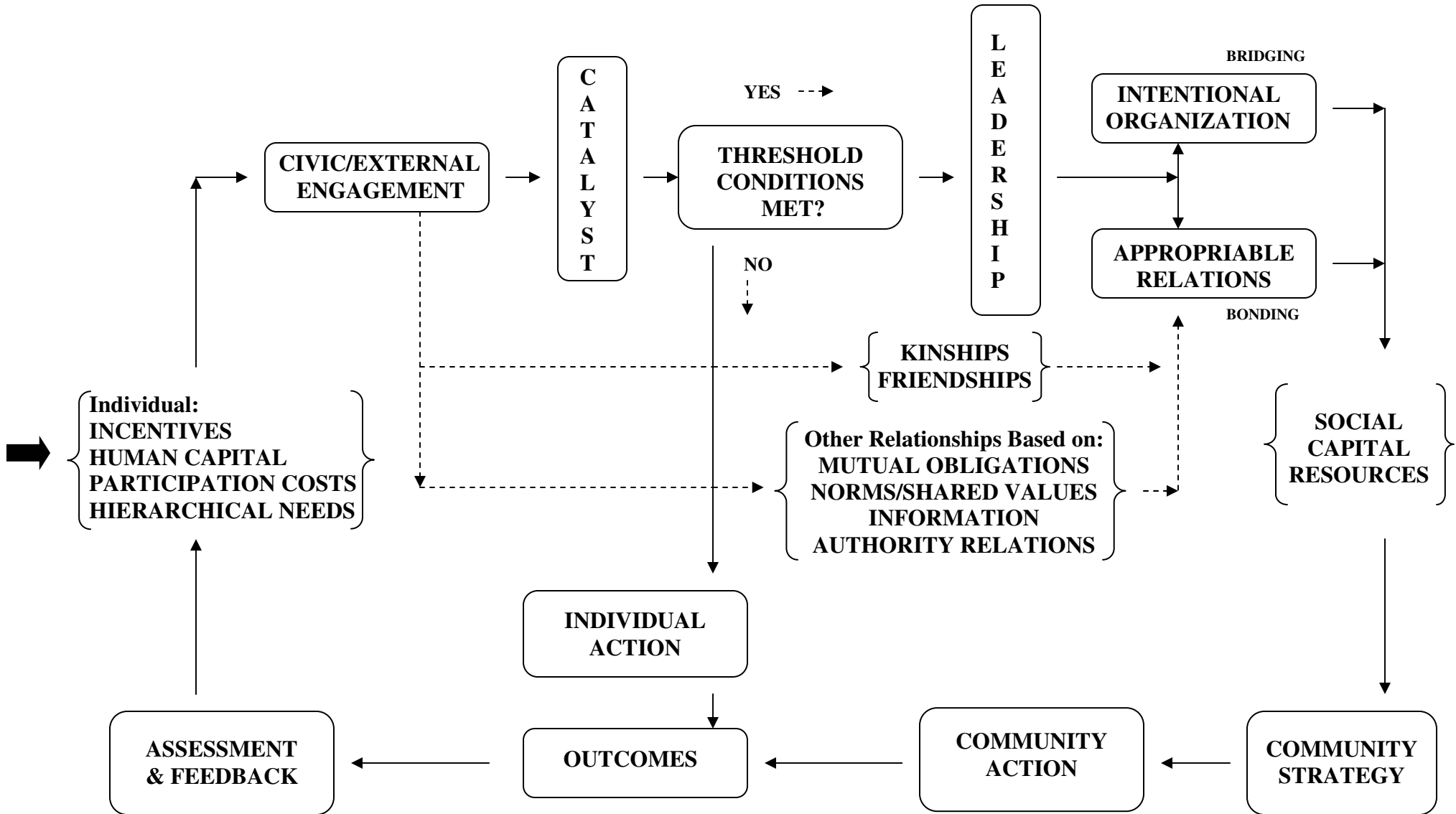
Our expanded framework also suggests that the organizing effort will require some combination of appropriating existing relationships (as byproducts of individual civic engagements) and/or creating and enlisting new relationships for the effort. The extent to which intentional, de novo organizing is required will be a result in part of the degree to which there are existing relationships and/or organizations that can be redirected to the particular catalyst (event or issue). But intentional organizing may also be necessary to create bridges to particular types of expertise and other resources that may not be readily available to the leadership through the appropriated relationships. This may be especially important when the issue at hand is unemployment or some other issue where access to resources outside of the community is important to success.

However achieved, the result of this organizing is an asset, social capital resources, that can be directed through community action toward a prescribed goal or outcome. Once that outcome is known, the result will inform residents' views on the efficacy of collective action and influence their preferences for further civic engagement. If the outcomes meet with community approval, residents will likely continue their engagement and investment in community efforts. This further suggests that a community response to the next catalytic event or issue might require less effort to organize. It may prove easier to recruit others to future efforts because of the positive experience. Alternatively, if the outcome is judged a flop, maintaining the engagement of residents or reanimating their energies for a new challenge may prove to be difficult.

To sum up for a moment, our discussions thus far have led us to propose a framework for collective efficacy that puts social capital in a larger context of community problem solving. And in this larger context, we recognize social capital as an asset that may result from a complex process that occurs as individuals seek avenues to respond to matters that are important to their sense of well being. Figure 3 then is offered in answer to our earlier questions of: What is social capital and how does it work?

FIGURE 3

COLLECTIVE EFFICACY FRAMEWORK



Challenges for Building Social Capital

But perhaps the most compelling questions in all of this relate to whether and how one can build or enhance social capital as a vehicle for community intervention and community improvement. Indeed, our ability to answer to these questions is critical to determining whether the social capital construct has any real utility to social policy, social research and/or social action. Our framework suggests an approach.

If we accept the assertion, in Figures 3, that individual civic engagement is both a vehicle for action and the foundation for actionable relationships, then the challenge of building or enhancing social capital hinges principally on our ability to encourage and/or increase individual preferences for civic engagement. In other words, we need to increase the level of "off the couch" behavior that will facilitate the identification of commons interests, mutual needs and information that can form the basis for (Colemanesque) relationships and action by individuals, families, communities and so forth. And according to our Figure 3 framework, this suggests the need to revisit the issues of individual incentives, human capital, participation costs, and hierarchical needs.

We should expect that intervening in these areas to affect greater civic engagement is both a long and short-term agenda. For instance, increasing human capital is a long-term pursuit that has been the subject of much of the nation's social investment and expenditure to date. Efforts at improving education, employment, and healthcare to name just a few, are all aimed at this objective and must necessarily continue.

The issue of hierarchical needs is, in large part, dependent upon the outcomes of these human capital investments. But it also has components that can be addressed in and through near term interventions. The Women, Infants and Children and Food Stamp Programs, for instance, have drastically reduced the incidence of child malnutrition among the poor. Housing vouchers and other social service interventions may make critical differences in alleviating some of the more harsh survival issues in poor communities. So, while human capital interventions will take time, there are means available, in the short term, to address certain hierarchical needs that may impede the civic engagement of poor community residents.

On the other hand, raising incentives and lowering the participation costs of civic engagement may be even more amenable to short-term intervention. While we presume that incentives to improve one's welfare may run high in poor communities, we can also fairly assume that they can be greatly enhanced, for example, by providing information about where and how to obtain needed assistance, or about strategies that others have successfully employed in meeting similar needs. Indeed, there are likely many ways familiar to community organizers and others that will raise the incentives for civic participation in distressed communities.

Likewise, reducing participation costs (reducing disincentives) is also possible in the short term. Doing so may involve the identification of places, normally patronized by community residents, and institutions, with which communities are already engaged, as potential forums for future organizing and involvement. It may mean looking for ways to mitigate obstacles such as childcare, transportation, work obligations etc.

The point here is that the social capital we hope to enlist in the quest for better community outcomes is premised on the behaviors of individuals and on a set of very fundamental issues that influence and condition those behaviors. And our ability to affect and deploy that social capital is contingent on our abilities to affect changes in those behaviors, in particular, our ability to enhance individual preferences for civic engagement.

Deploying Social Capital

To this point we have speculated about the individual behaviors and preferences that we believe give rise to community action and social capital. Equally important to our understanding, however, are questions about how social capital can be deployed and how, once deployed, it might be sustained. The literature suggests that social capital has two basic functions, bonding and bridging.¹⁵

Bonding capital is thought to function as a cohesive force in maintaining existing relationships. It does so by reinforcing and exploiting the bases of those relationships — things such as shared norms, values and objectives, common interests, or characteristics such as ethnicity, race, and religion. There is a vast number of factors that underlie our relationships and, presumably, each can be exploited to some extent to promote bonding. The reinforcing of these bonded relationships gives them the potential to be long term and fungible across a variety of social issues and contexts. Indeed, it can be argued that bonding capital is the thing upon which Coleman's formulation of appropriable social organization relies — that Coleman's appropriable social organization is premised on the ability to redirect existing bonded relationships.

Bridging capital, on the other hand, is about bringing people together who do not already have relationships. This "bringing together" is an active and intentional act that is purposeful and in response to some need or opportunity. It is transaction focused and based on the utility of a particular relationship or set of relationships to the attainment of a specific goal. As such, it is particularly useful, in problem solving, and in connecting groups with complementary needs for expertise and information (filling structural holes). At the same time, however, its transaction focus makes it necessarily short term and limited in its application to issues, objectives and exchanges that lie outside of the original transaction.

This suggests that, to be sustainable, social capital must itself be built on sustainable relationships, bonding capital, and that social capital built on bridging bases alone will necessarily be short term and of limited value beyond its initial impetus. Community policing offers an example. It involves the residents of a particular neighborhood or community "bridging" to each other, and to their local police precinct, in an effort to assist in the abatement of neighborhood crime. But community policing may not be a good vehicle for creating sustainable social capital. The primary reason is that, if the effort is successful, the incentive for coming together in the first place is removed, and with it goes the energy that residents invested in operating collectively. Unless people

¹⁵ In *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*, the authors, in interpreting Putnam, define two main types of social capital, "the type that brings closer together people who already know each other (we call this bonding capital) and the type that brings together people or groups who previously did not know each other (Putnam called this bridging capital..)" See, Gittell, Ross and Avis Vidal. 1998. *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage Publications

find another basis for their relationship, the accomplishment of the goal causes bridging capital to dissipate.

Moreover, we can reasonably conclude that it will be difficult to redirect that energy. There is no basis for assuming that the energies devoted to a successful community policing effort in poor communities could be "rewired" to address the needs for educational accountability, for instance. For one thing, the residents active in community policing tend to be older, retired persons for whom watching the neighborhood is a familiar and "uncostly" civic pastime that can be performed from the comfort of a living room chair. Volunteering in schools requires a much higher investment of effort with higher associated costs. Moreover, this relatively elderly population, with few if any remaining school aged children, may have little by way of residual interest in public education.

The implication here is that bonding and bridging capital may have different strategic applications in community improvement efforts. Bonding capital promotes stability, civility and order by acting as the social "glue" that helps in establishing and enforcing community social norms. As such, this form of social capital may be particularly important in areas, such as public safety, neighborhood maintenance and youth development, where a community's welfare relies heavily on resident adherence to social norms and values. Bridging capital, on the other hand, is more like a "grafting" of unfamiliar interests in the pursuit of a goal or objective. And it is of particular importance in areas where community welfare can be enhanced by relationships with persons and entities outside its boundaries. Access to educational and employment opportunities are examples.

It is likely however that most community initiatives will employ strategies aimed at promoting both — seeking ways to create greater social cohesion as well as greater social connection.

CONCLUSION

The intent of this paper has been to speculate on a question of great interest to persons interested in place-based community improvement movements and strategies — and that is, whether social capital is a useful construct for thinking about collective social behavior or merely an attractive catch phrase. I conclude that social capital is indeed a phenomenon of substance and an issue worthy of further study and deeper contemplation. Moreover, I believe that its rigorous pursuit has the potential to help those, toiling in the fields of community initiatives, to clarify their means and methods and to increase the yield from resident participation in community improvement strategies.

What are the policy implications? Well, that is a little less clear. Our framework in Figure 3 doesn't suggest many options for government intervention. What we hope it does do is present a plausible view of how community action can evolve from the concerns of individual residents in neighborhoods. And we think there is value in exploring these questions further. Our increasing interest, at the federal, state, and municipal levels of government, in devolving authority to local communities and neighborhoods, and our growing faith in the value of resident involvement in community improvement strategies needs a more firm foundation. We need a plausible model that

can offer reasonable hypotheses about the application of social capital in the larger context of community organization and action — some means of making the phenomenon of collective action more concrete both in an effort to “tame the beast” and to make it more predictable and subject to deliberate manipulation.

This paper is offered as fodder for that larger goal. As such, it is my hope that the above offering will encourage others to take a deeper look at social capital in additional attempts to clarify its practical application to community improvement efforts.