
Building Communities and Supporting Families: A Social Action Framework

Jay A. Mancini, Ph.D.

Lecture Given at University of Dublin, Trinity
College

Ollscoil Atha Cliath, Colaiste na Trionoide

School of Social Work and Social Policy

November 29, 2007



Overview

- **How connected are you?**
 - The Community Connections Index

- **A social organization framework**
 - Building community capacity
 - Leveraging toward resilience

- **Applications to research and practice**
 - Community health
 - Military family support systems
 - Intimate partner violence
 - Retention of long-term care professionals
 - Recovery from natural disaster (Hurricane Katrina)

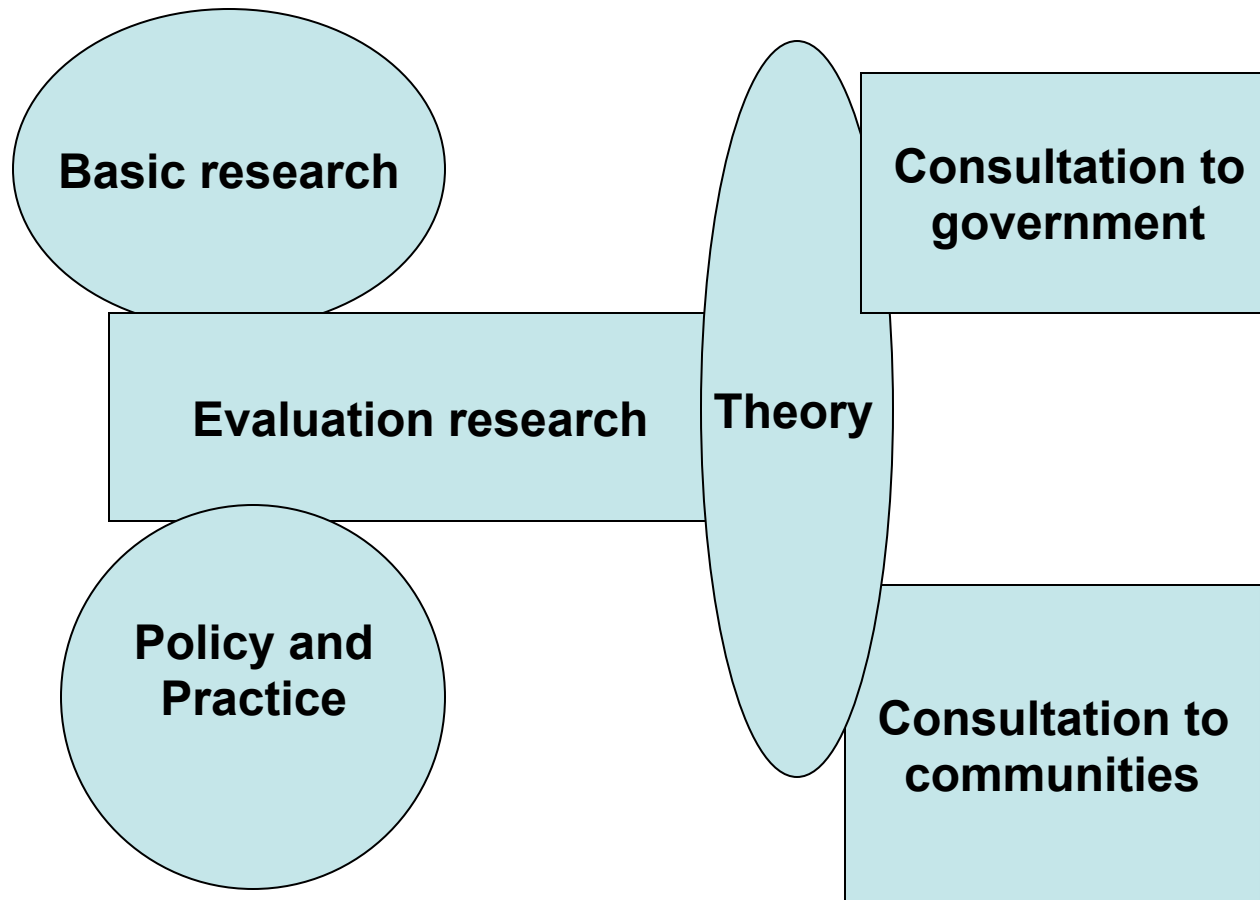
- **Implications for prevention science**

Theorizing and Research

Pathways

- **Since 1995 concerned with sustaining community-based programs for families (government and foundation funded)**
- **Since 2000 concerned with broader approach to building capacity of communities to reach desired results (government funded)**
 - Initiated with focus on observing military family communities
 - 2000 community capacity model
- **More recently expanded to community social organization**
 - Community capacity, network structures, and social capital
 - Broader substantive focus

Mix of Theory, Research, & Practice



How connected are you to your community?

Community Engagement and Sense of Community*

*Mancini, J.A., Bowen, G.L., Martin, J.A., & Ware, W. B. (June, 2003). *The community connections index*. Paper presented at the Hawaii International Conference on the Social Sciences, Honolulu, HI.

Now, I would like to know about your relationships with people in your community, other than family members. How often in the past year (“often, sometimes, rarely, or never”) have you:

➤ **Community engagement items:**

- Joined with people to solve problems
- Felt like you could make a difference in your community
- Volunteered in the community
- Participated in community events and activities
- Attended club meetings
- Attended religious services
- Attended an informational meeting
- Attended local government/political meeting

How often in the past year have you (often, sometimes, rarely, or never):

➤ **Sense of community items:**

- Spent time with others when you needed a little company
- Showed concern for others
- Talked with people about their difficulties
- Made new friends with someone
- Felt like you belonged in the community
- Felt your own circumstances were similar to others
- Felt close to other people in the community

Community Connections Elements

- Who we know
- How well we know each other
- How close we feel to them
- Our experience with them
- What we expect of them
- What we do together of importance
- Quality of life in our communities
- Nature of efforts to improve community life
- How programs and professionals help us
- How we can sustain what is good and helpful
- The best way to bring about change
- Shared responsibility and collective competence

Social Organization

**Networks, Social Capital, and
Community Capacity**

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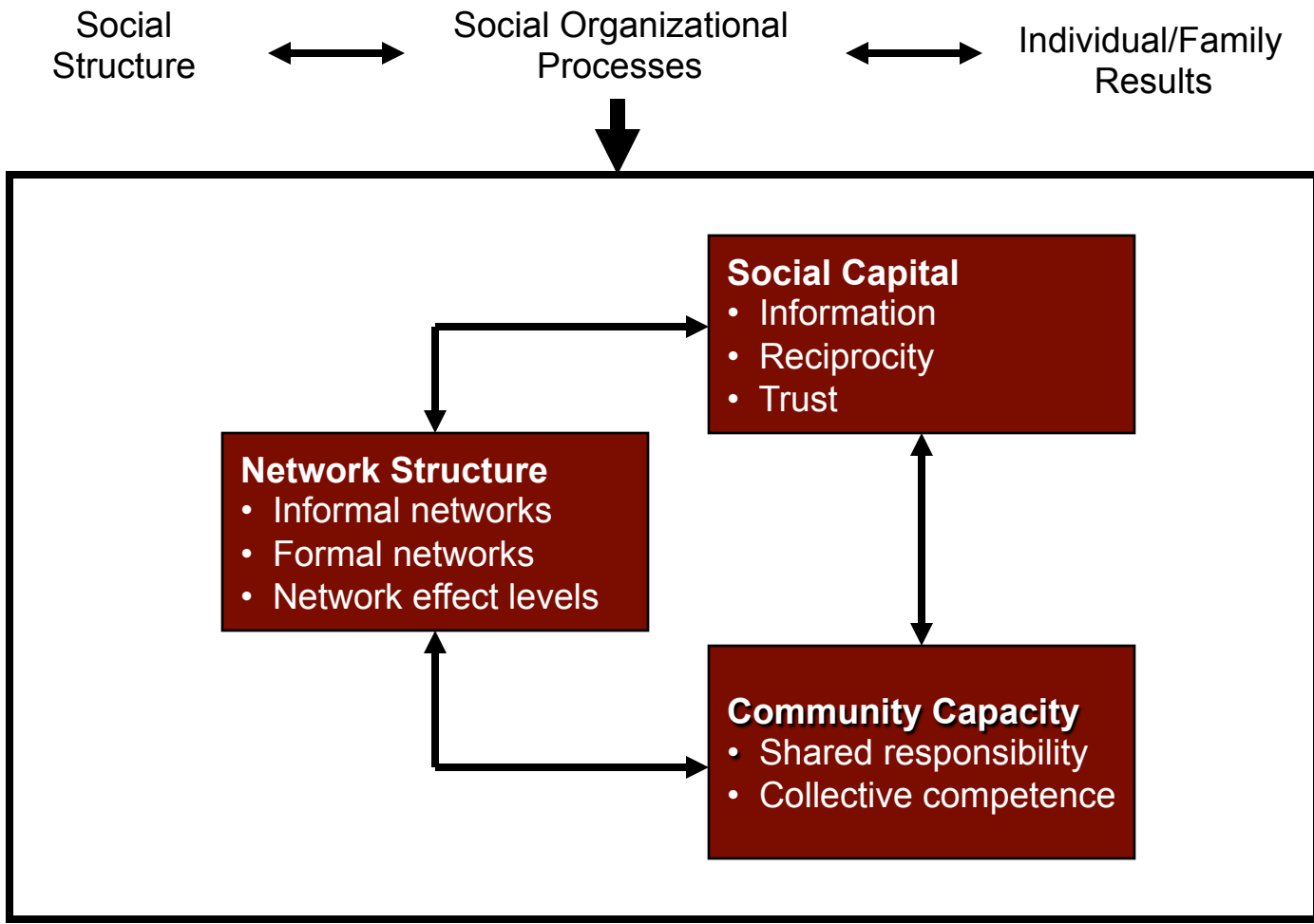


Figure 1. Social Organizational Processes, Social Structure, and Individual/Family Results

Social Organization Theory: Definition of Social Organization

- **Values, norms, processes, and behavior patterns within a community that organize, facilitate, and constrain interactions among community members**
- **Process by which communities achieve desired results for individuals and families, including ability to demonstrate resiliency**
- **Includes networks of people, exchanges and reciprocity in relationships, accepted standards of social support, and social controls that regulate behavior and**

Social Organization Theory

- **Our research program: 2000 to present**
- **Our work is informed by:**
 - Cantillon, Davidson, & Schweitzer (2003)
 - Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal (2001)
 - Furstenberg & Hughes (1997)
 - Janowitz (1991)
 - Kornhauser (1978)
 - Putnam (2000)
 - Sampson (1992)
 - Small (2002)
 - Small & Supple (2001)

Social Organization Theory Model

- **Our approach, however,**
 - Shifts social organization theory from single plane of explanation on disorganization and delinquency
 - Moves the theory toward a more layered approach to communities
 - Presents the theory as having a more fundamental role in explaining broader family system phenomena

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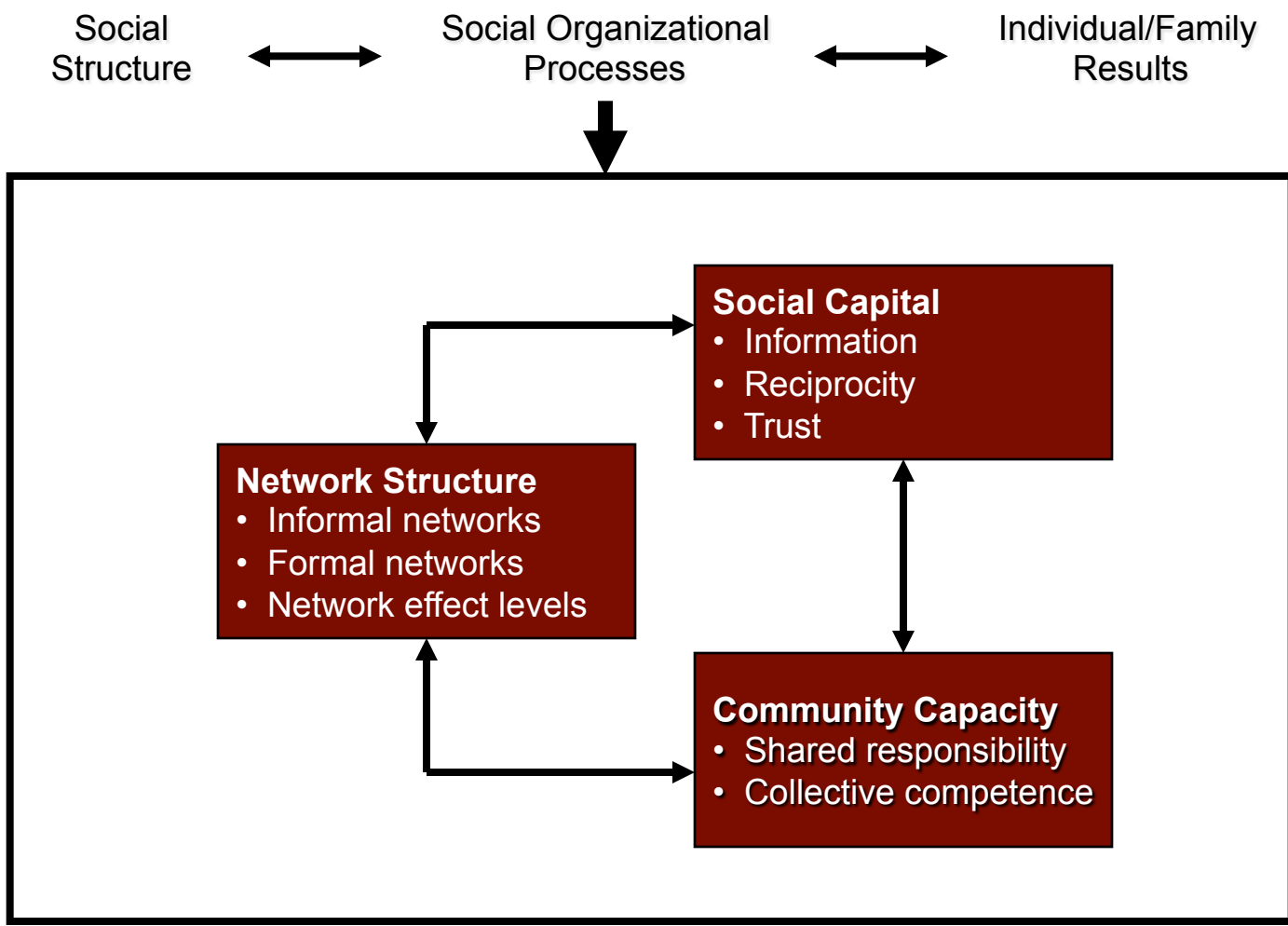


Figure 1. Social Organizational Processes, Social Structure, and Individual/Family Results

Social Organization Structure and Process

- **Differentiation of structure from process**
 - Structure pertains to configuration and composition
 - Process involves operations and methods of working
 - Process occurs within structural frameworks
 - Processes provide linkage between social structure and effects on families

Social Organization Theory: Focus on Processes

- **Main focus is on processes**
 - Networks
 - Social Capital
 - Community Capacity
- **Relationships between them**
 - Networks provide context for the development of social capital, and for building community capacity

Social Organization Theory: Networks

- **Primary ways through which community life is enacted**
- **Informal networks comprise web of relationships with friends, neighbors, work associates**
- **Formal networks associated with agencies and organizations**
- **Voluntary and obligatory relationships**

Social Organization Theory: Networks

- **Network effects levels**
 - Action element of our framework
 - Nexus of informal and formal networks
 - First level-within a network
 - Second level-between like networks
 - Third level-between dissimilar networks
- **Network configurations provide leverage for achieving results through generation of social capital and production of community capacity**

Social Organization Theory: Social Capital

- **Information, reciprocity, and trust**
 - Aggregate of resources (information, opportunities, and instrumental support)
- **Arise from reciprocal social relationships**
- **Results from participation in formal and informal settings**
- **Social capital observed in actions of civic groups, faith communities, and any number of community-based groups**
- **Increases odds of achieving results otherwise not attained**

Social Organization Theory: Community Capacity

- **Shared responsibility**
 - For general welfare of the community and its individual members
 - Sentiments
- **Collective competence**
 - Taking collective action, confronting situations
- **Assumptions**
 - Concern directed at community as a whole and at particular elements, action is beyond expression of positive sentiments, action is proactive and reactive, action targeted at threats and at normative situations

Social Organization Theory: Family and Community Results

- **Consequences of effective social organization**
- **Desired results (examples, safety, health and well-being, family resilience)**
- **Results not owned by any particular group but valued across community**
- **Identified results assist to determine leverage points for change**
- **Moves theory from interesting framework to theory of action**

Social Organization: Summary

- **Need for theorizing that connects families and communities**
- **Social organization provides linkage framework**
- **Theory focused on action and community change**
- **There are leverage points that can be mobilized to support families and communities**
- **Consequent set of considerations for professionals**
 - Program developers
 - Program and community researchers

Applications

- Community health
- Military family support systems
- Intimate partner violence
- Retention of long-term care professionals
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Community Capacity and Health

- **Health promotion and illness prevention**
- **Community capacity as key protective factor**
- **Juxtaposition of formal and informal networks**
 - Role of formal networks in informal support
- **High capacity communities care and act**
- **Model reflects “social fabric”**

Military Family Support Systems

- **Originally focused on retooling U.S. Air Force family support system**
 - Streamlining the system, addressing “silos”
- **Conducted Air Force wide community needs and assets survey**
- **Trained base personnel from Results Management planning perspective**
- **Demonstrated more effective service delivery**

* Bowen, G.L., Mancini, J.A., Martin, J.A., Ware, W.B., & Nelson, J.P. (2003). Promoting the adaptation of military families: An empirical test of a community practice model. *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies*, 52, 33-44.

Intimate Partner Violence

- **Prevention-oriented approach to community-level violence**
 - Accessed community capacity approach
- **Network-driven prevention efforts suggested**
- **Implications: Community presented as a “place”, a “target”, and as a “force” for prevention**

*Mancini, J.A., Nelson, J.P., Bowen, G.L., & Martin, J.A. (2006). Preventing intimate partner violence: A community capacity approach. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment, and Trauma*, 13 (3/4), 203-227.

Retention of LTC Professionals

- **National Institute on Aging funding (Grant 1-R03-AG020408-01 to Karen Roberto and Jay A. Mancini)**
- **Problem of high turnover rates among LTC professionals**
- **Influences of individual, family, and community factors**
- **Key finding: Being more “connected” to the workplace and workplace colleagues related to retention intentions, job satisfaction, and job commitment**

Recovery from Natural Disaster

- **Funded by *America's Promise: The Alliance for Youth***
 - Jay Mancini and Lydia Marek, Investigators
- **Study currently underway**
- **Focus on sustainability of programs for children and families in New Orleans, Gulf Coast (MS), and Houston**
- **Planning orientation grounded in building community capacity, collaboration, sustainability, and results management frameworks**

Implications for Prevention Science

- **Implications informed by theorizing, research, and practice experience**
 - General program development
 - Theories of change
 - Understanding the intervention
 - Differentiating structure and process
 - Specifying results

Implications for Program

Development

➤ Building community capacity

- Nexus of formal and informal networks
- Important program function of formal networks is to build informal networks
 - Example: parenting program
 - Example: neighborhood safety

*Mancini, J.A., Huebner, A.J., McCollum, E., & Marek, L.I. (2005). Evaluation science and family therapy. In D. Sprenkle & F. Piercy (Eds.), *Research methods in family therapy* (pp. 272-293). NY: Guilford.

Implications for Theories of Change

- **Prevention/intervention science focuses on expectations of change, and the trail that change follows**
- **Social organization theory tracks change**
 - What people know
 - With whom they interact
 - Who they ultimately trust
 - Level of regard for others
 - Collaboration with others
- **Theory provides leads on change linkages**

Implications for Understanding the Intervention

- **Ongoing challenge of knowing elements of prevention/intervention that make a difference**
- **Social organization theory interface between networks and social capital**
- **Products of social capital accrue from network interaction, and reflect what may make a difference in how community members interact and cooperate.**
- **Programs should focus on network elements**

Implications for Understanding Structure and Process

- **Theory suggests we must distinguish structure from process**
- **Confusing configurations with functions may lead to misspecification of what works to influence community change**
 - Within a particular program, is change furthered by a curriculum, program leader attributes, or interaction among program participants?

Implications for Specifying Results

- **Exactly what in communities should change?**
- **Theory highlights importance of results that can be clearly articulated**
 - Provides guidance for indicators
- **“Program results” and “community results”**
 - Former tied to particular programs
 - Latter responsibility of programs, organizations, agencies

Conclusions and Next Steps

- **Potential for social organization theory to provide bridges between community processes, community programs, and families**
- **Theory provides framework for program development and for research**

Next Steps in Our Research Program

- Provide greater precision to community concepts
- Improve measures of social organization concepts, particularly community capacity
- Clarify linkages
- Develop clearer sense of change leverage points, their importance, and their likelihood of change
- Discern layers and levels in communities, organizations, and in families
- Twists and turns

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Jay A. Mancini, Ph.D.

Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Society, Culture,
and Environment

Professor of Human Development
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, VA, 24061

mancini@vt.edu

Phone (540) 231-9816

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