Systems Change in Early Childhood Using the Water of Systems Change Framework

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Early Childhood Developmental Health Systems

EVIDENCE TO IMPACT CENTER

May 16, 2024

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Housekeeping

- Attendees are muted for the duration of the event.
- Use the chat to introduce yourself, chime in, and ask questions! You can also submit questions through the Q&A feature.
- Today's slides are available under the Handouts tab on the eLearn event page.
- A recording will be available within 48 hours.
- CEUs are provided for this webinar (more details on how to receive credits will be shared at the end of the presentation).

About the Early Childhood Developmental Health Systems (ECDHS): Evidence to Impact Center

- We support states and communities to build early childhood systems that improve the health and well-being of young children and their families

- Our objectives:
  - Strengthen the evidence base of state ECD systems
  - Accelerate ECD systems development
  - Increase systems-building skills and the number of early childhood and health system leaders
  - Advance the delivery of high-quality ECD promotion and support services in pediatric settings

- Learn more about our mission and structure at **earlychildhoodimpact.org/about-us/**

Funding Acknowledgment

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Learning Objectives

- List the six conditions of systems change
- Identify ways to apply a shift of conditions to early childhood work
- Define conceptual models of systems and systems change

Agenda

- Welcome and Overview
- Key Definitions
- Conditions of Systems Change
  - Structural
  - Relational
  - Transformative
- Q&A Part 1
- Action Learning Exercise
- Q&A Part 2

What comes to mind when you hear the word “system”?

sys•tem

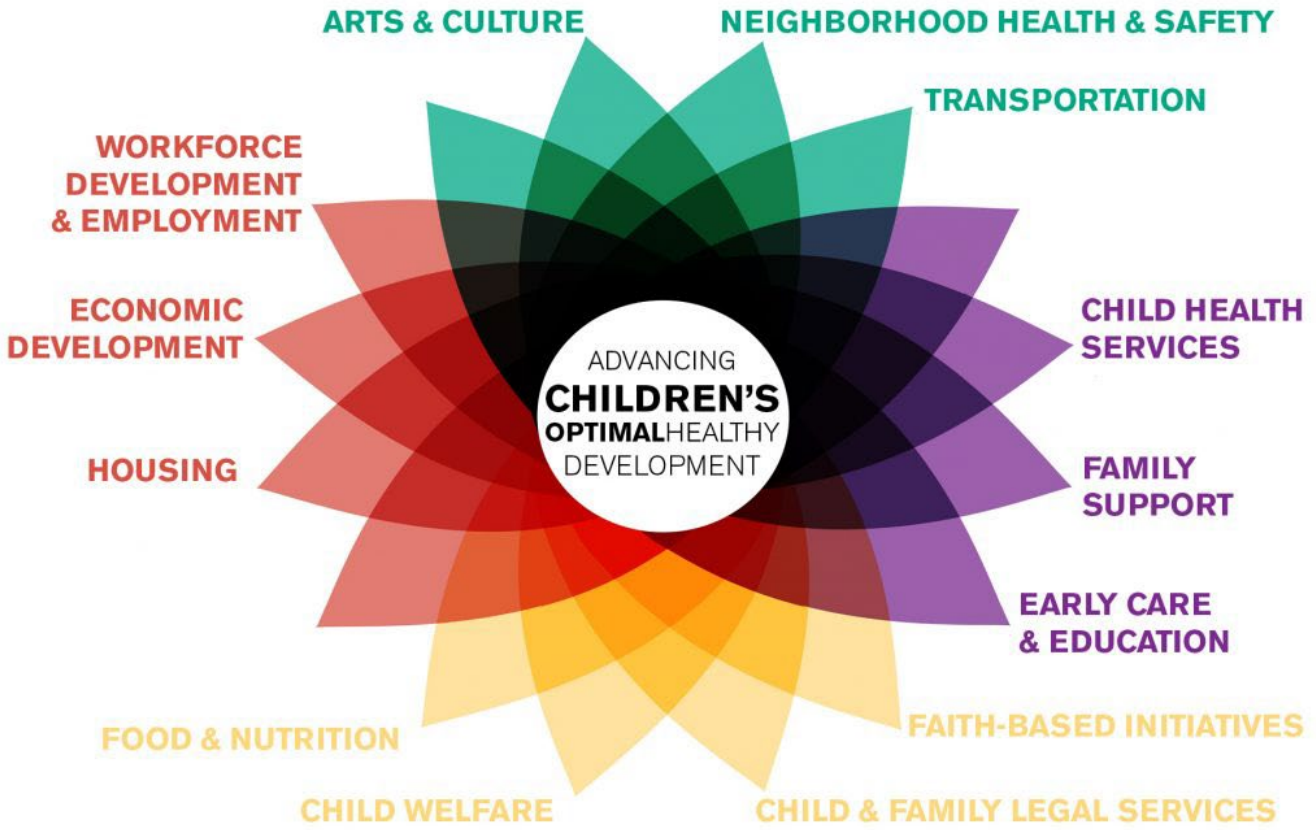
A group of **interacting, interrelated, and interdependent** components that form a whole.

A system's overall purpose or goal is achieved through the **actions and interactions** of its components.

What are some of the systems that you are currently part of?

What is an early childhood system?

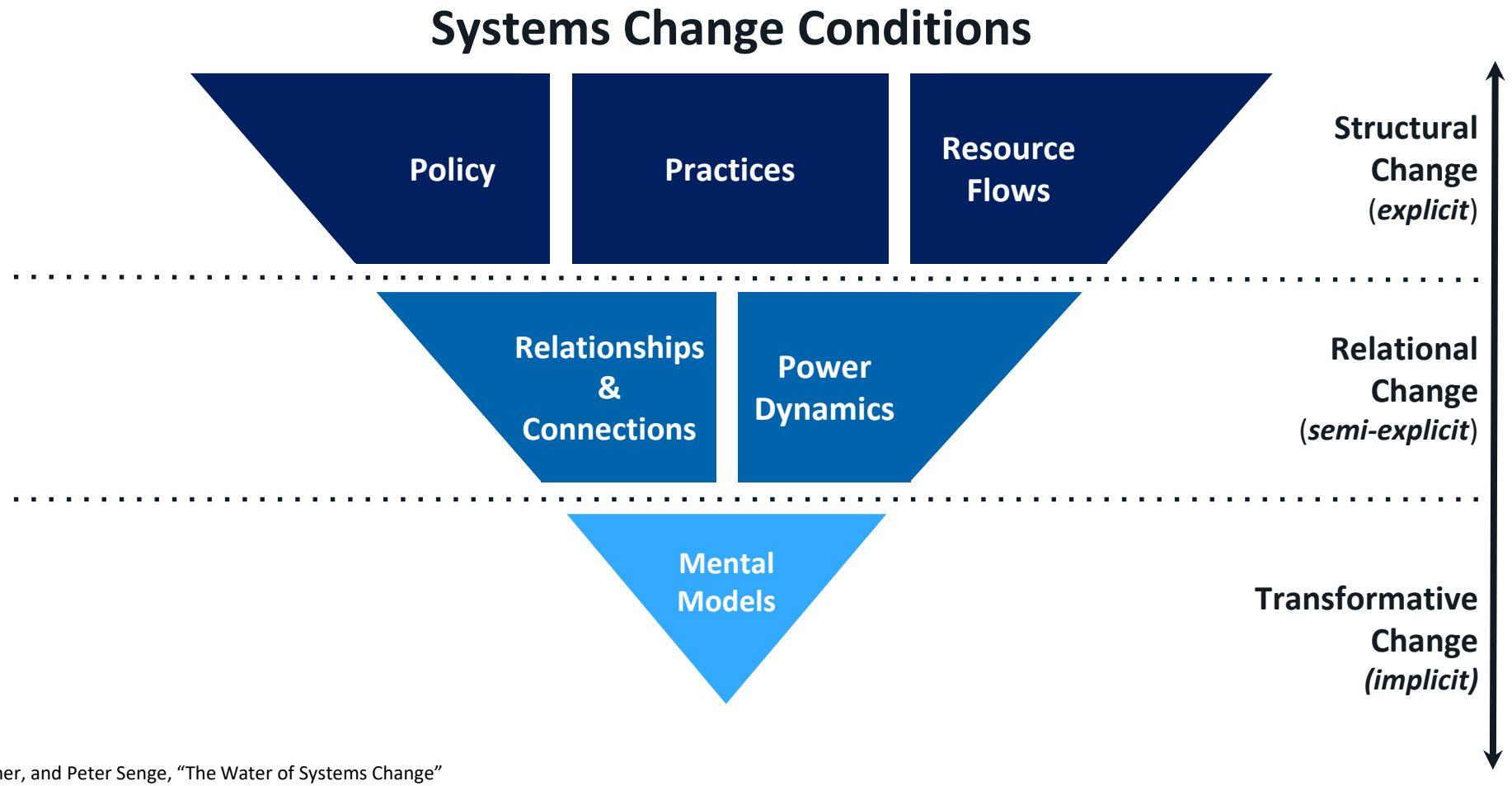
- Interdependent policies, programs, services, and infrastructure
- Inclusive of all child- and family-serving systems
- The system is a sum of its parts – it's how all of the gears work together



The Water of Systems Change Framework

Systems Change

Shifting the conditions that hold the problem in place



Source: John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge, "The Water of Systems Change"

There are several leverage points in the system, some of which are more explicit than others

Policies
Government rules, regulations and priorities that guide its and others' **actions**

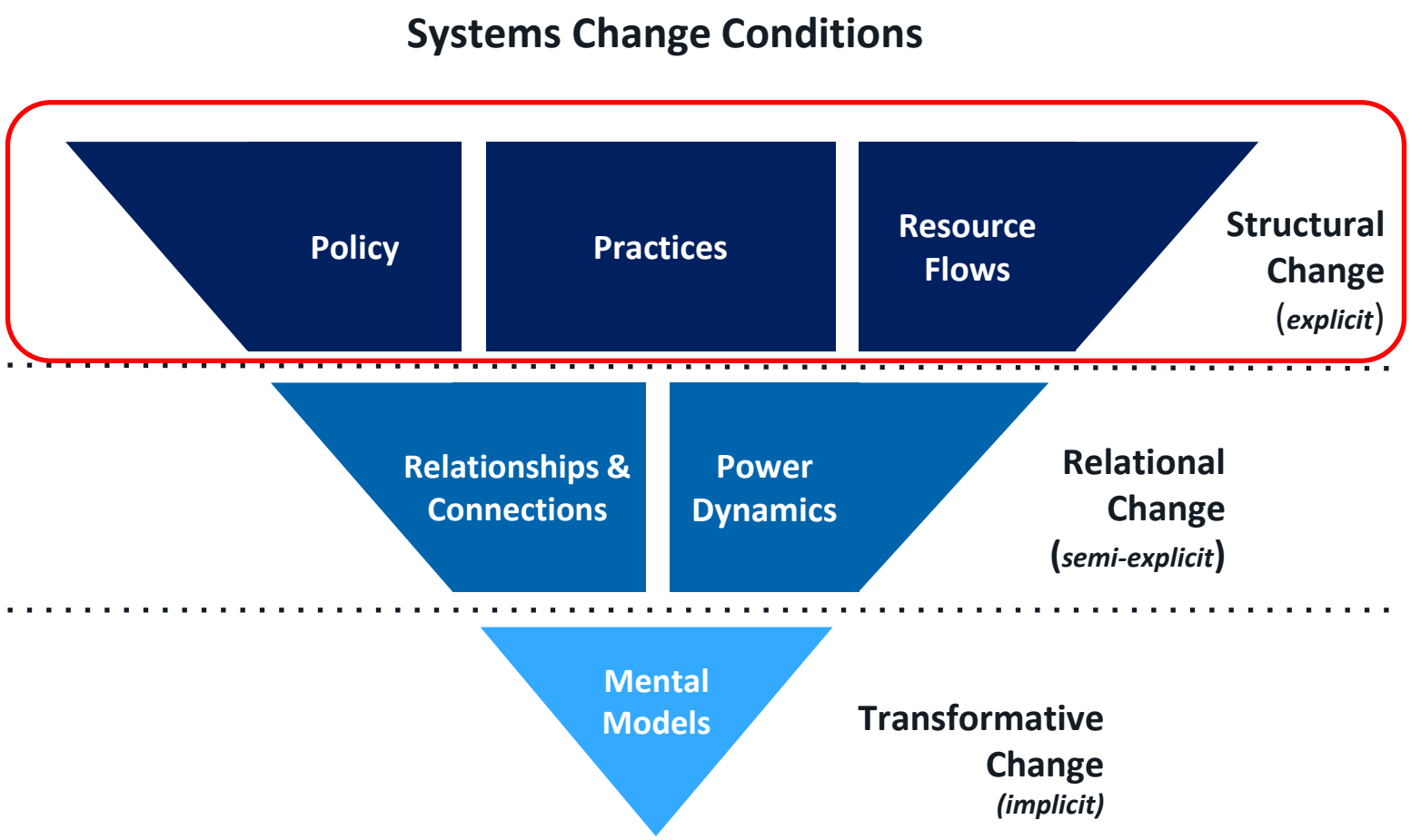
Practices
Organizational and practitioner activities that reflect their values and priorities

Resource Flows
How money, people, knowledge and information are allocated and distributed across a system

Structural Change ***(explicit)***

Source: John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge, "The Water of Systems Change", 2018

Systems Change in Early Childhood: Structural Change



- Supporting practice change across partners to promote positive outcomes in development (for example: partnering around developmental promotion, implementing developmental screening across various sectors, including providing training and ongoing support)
- Establishing/improving referral pathways across partners in the early childhood system
- Leveraging/aligning funding
- **YOUR TURN: What other examples can you think of?**

Shifting and Sharing Power, and Mental Models, Are Often the Newest Conditions for People to Address

Policies
Government rules, regulations and priorities that guide its and others' **actions**

Practices
Organizational and practitioner activities that reflect their values and priorities

Resource Flows
How money, people, knowledge and information are allocated and distributed across a system

Relationships & Connections
Quality of connections and communication occurring between system players

Power Dynamics
Which individuals and organizations hold decision-making power, authority, influence

Mental Models
Deeply held beliefs and assumptions that influence one's actions

Structural Change *(explicit)*

Relational Change (*semi-explicit*)

Transformative Change *(implicit)*

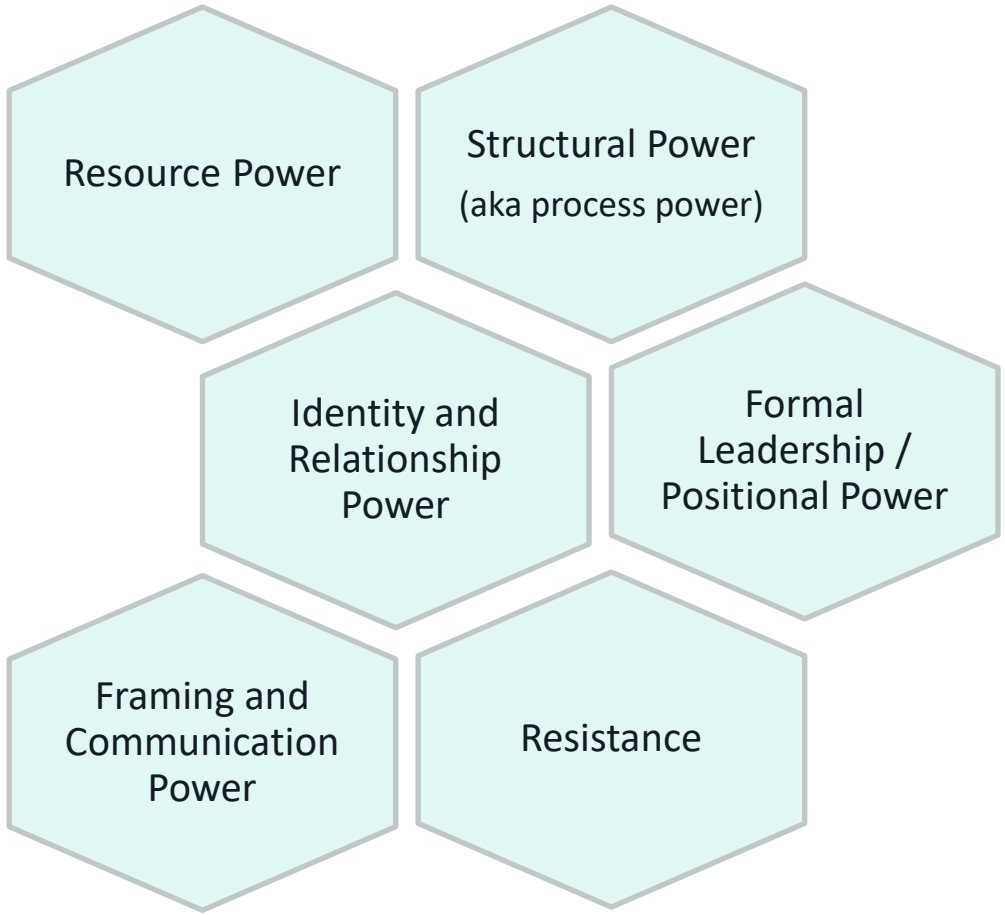
Source: John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge, "The Water of Systems Change", 2018

Definition of Power

"The ability or authority to influence others, to decide who will have access to resources, and to define reality or exercise control over oneself or others." – Frontline Solutions

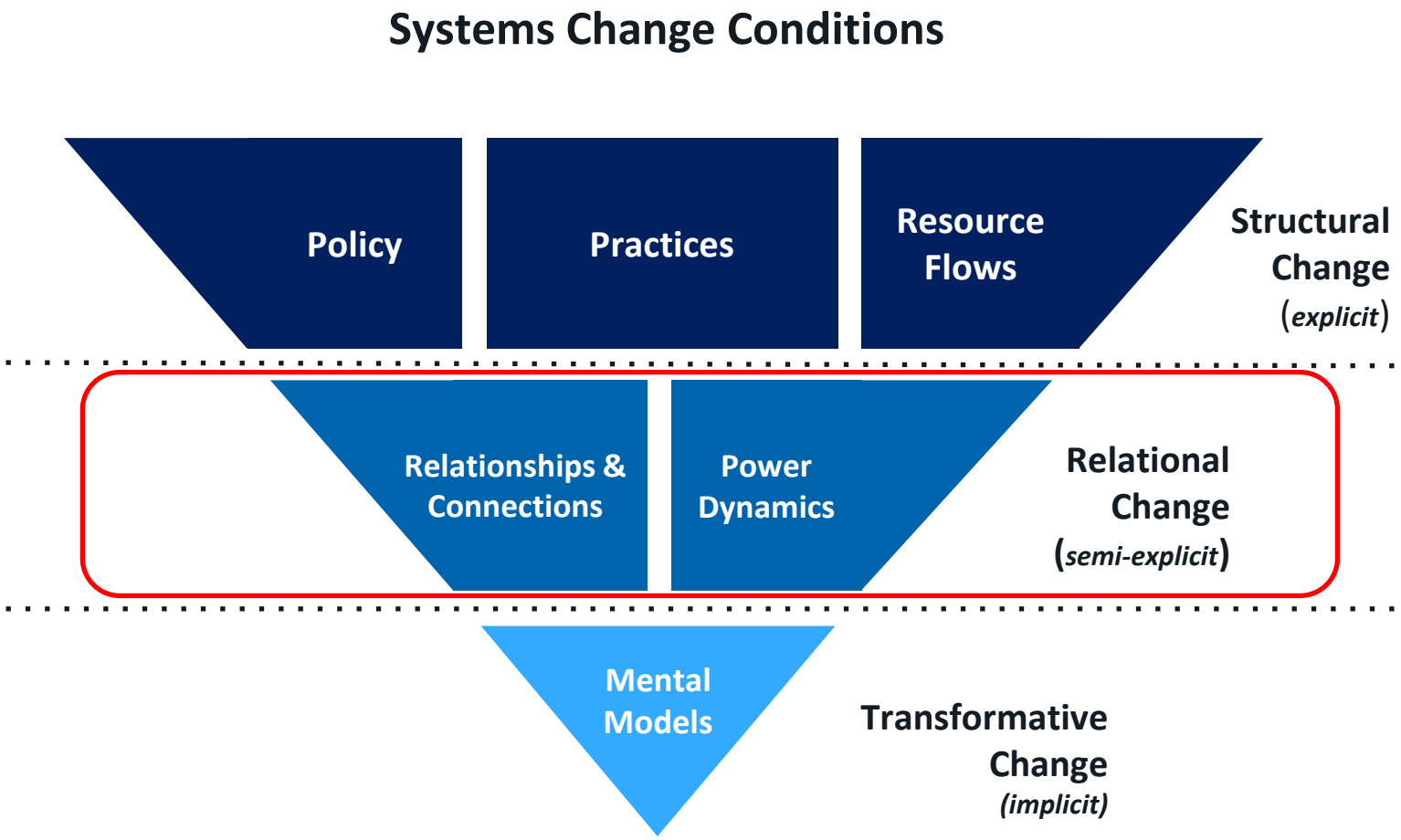
Source: Rebalancing Power: Examining the Role of Advocacy and Organizing in Collective Impact – https://frontlinesol.com/case-study/rebalancing-power-examining-the-role-of-advocacy-and-organizing-in-collective-impact/

Sources of Power – to Understand and Address



Source: Kim Walker, The Construction and Impact of Power in Cross-Sector Partnerships: An Interpretive Phenomenological Study – https://aura.antioch.edu/etds/574/

Systems Change in Early Childhood: Relational Change



- Supporting co-leadership/co-creation with families
- Improving relationships across sectors/"silos" via integrating activities, having standard networking meetings, establishing/aligning collectives
- **YOUR TURN: What other examples can you think of?**

Shifting and Sharing Power, and Mental Models, Are Often the Newest Conditions for People to Address

Policies
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Practices
Organizational and practitioner activities that reflect their values and priorities

Structural Change *(explicit)*

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Relational Change *(semi-explicit)*

Power Dynamics
Which individuals and organizations hold decision-making power, authority, influence

Mental Models
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Transformative Change *(implicit)*

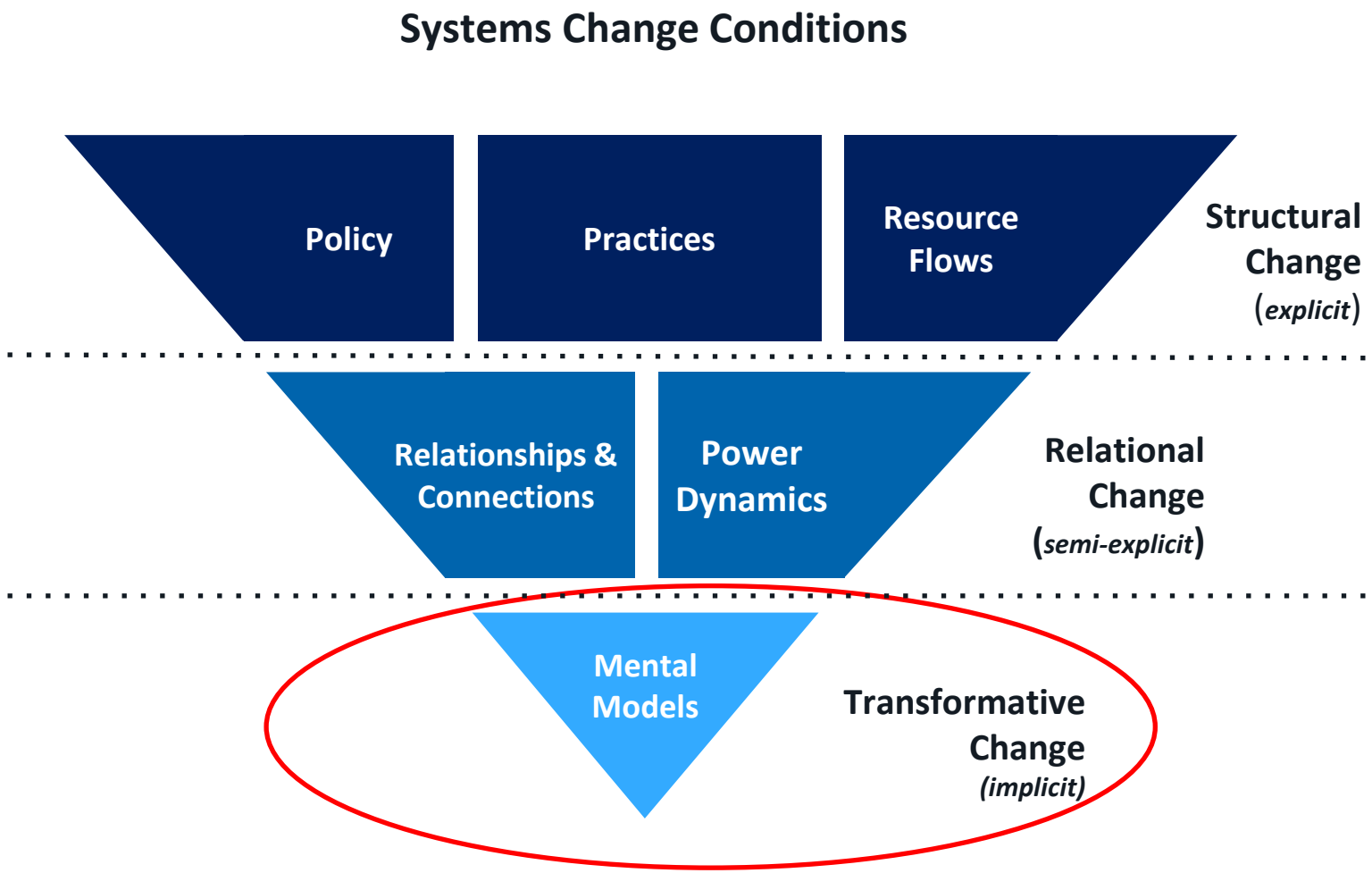
Source: John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge, "The Water of Systems Change", 2018

How to “unstick” stuck mental models

1. Shift attention to a new *cognitive frame*
2. Support people in developing *different relationships*
3. Support people in having a *different experience*

Source: Collective Change Lab, Inc.

Systems Change in Early Childhood: Transformative Change



- Programmatic thinking → system thinking
- Deficit-based → asset-based
- Identification of problems → promotion of healthy outcomes
- Culture of scarcity → leveraging of efforts/ funding/ existing partners
- **YOUR TURN: What other examples can you think of?**

Common pitfalls applying the systems change triangle

You Don't Need to Do It All

- It is unlikely that any one actor can meaningfully impact all six conditions. The triangle can help folks to understand persisting gaps, better positioning them to advance new targeted action and/or strengthen the impact of existing activities

Don't Demonize the Top Row

- Efforts focused on policies, practices, and resources flows (the top row) help to meet immediate needs in a community and are incredibly important to continue supporting on the path to systems change

The 6 Conditions are Interrelated

- The conditions are interrelated and interconnected, meaning they must be addressed holistically not "box by box"

Always Look Around the Table

- It is critically important to have a diverse group of stakeholders involved, especially given that personal dimensions (e.g., positional authority, lived experience) impact one's ability to see certain aspects of the system

Use the Triangle for diagnosis and brainstorming strategies; but remember strategies can cut across the levels

Questions

Reflection Activity: Mapping Systems Conditions

1. Identify a social problem or challenge that you are working to making progress on.

2. Assess how the systems change conditions might be holding the problem in place.

3. Brainstorm potential strategies and who should be involved to address the desired change.

Step 1: Social Issue / Challenge Selection

Question 1. Think about an issue you are passionate about or working to improve. This is the issue you will be working with throughout this exercise.

Examples include:

- Improving the number/percentage of families successfully connected to helpful services
- Improving developmental screening rates
- Expanding accessible developmental supports

Issue: _____

Step 2: Assessing Systems Conditions

For Your Issue of Focus:

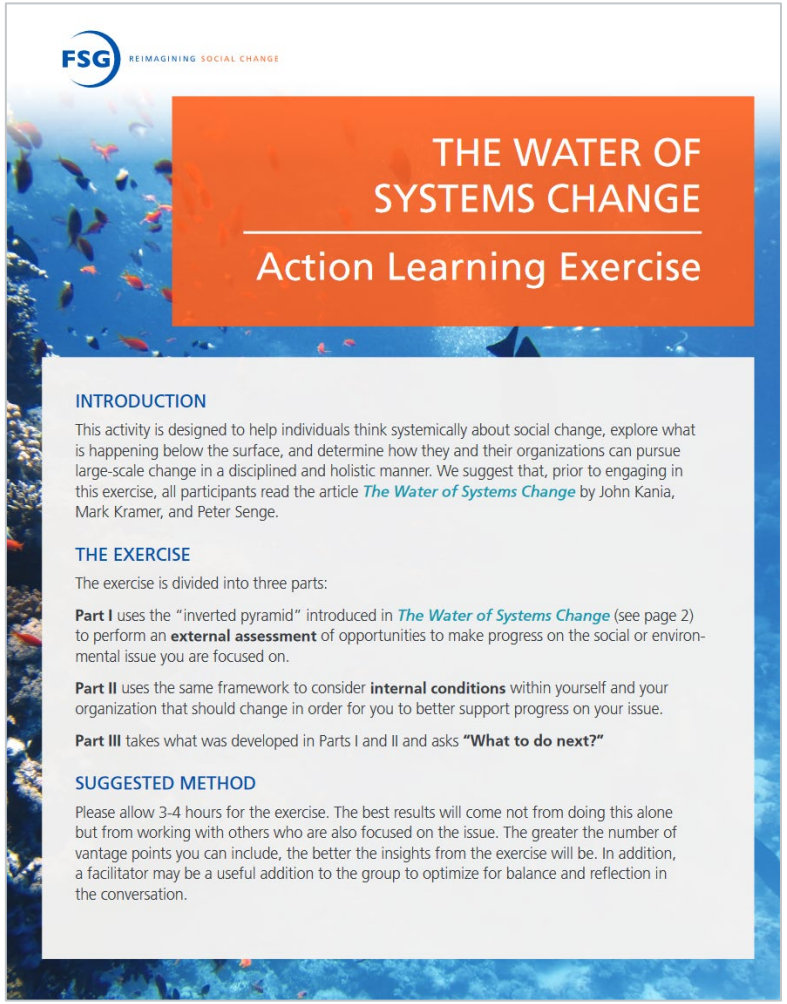
Systems Change Condition	What existing elements are reinforcing the current conditions and hindering our progress?
Policies	
Practices	
Resource Flows	
Relationships & Connections	
Power Dynamics	
Mental Models	

Step 3: Activating Leverage Points and Key Stakeholders

Systems Change Condition	What existing elements are reinforcing the current conditions and hindering our progress?	What strategies can help advance our systems change efforts? Who would need to be involved?
Policies		
Practices		
Resource Flows		
Relationships & Connections		
Power Dynamics		
Mental Models		

Drafted during Step 2

Consider Walking Through this Exercise with Colleagues


FSG REIMAGINING SOCIAL CHANGE

THE WATER OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

Action Learning Exercise

INTRODUCTION

This activity is designed to help individuals think systemically about social change, explore what is happening below the surface, and determine how they and their organizations can pursue large-scale change in a disciplined and holistic manner. We suggest that, prior to engaging in this exercise, all participants read the article *The Water of Systems Change* by John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge.

THE EXERCISE

The exercise is divided into three parts:

Part I uses the "inverted pyramid" introduced in *The Water of Systems Change* (see page 2) to perform an **external assessment** of opportunities to make progress on the social or environmental issue you are focused on.

Part II uses the same framework to consider **internal conditions** within yourself and your organization that should change in order for you to better support progress on your issue.

Part III takes what was developed in Parts I and II and asks **"What to do next?"**

SUGGESTED METHOD

Please allow 3-4 hours for the exercise. The best results will come not from doing this alone but from working with others who are also focused on the issue. The greater the number of vantage points you can include, the better the insights from the exercise will be. In addition, a facilitator may be a useful addition to the group to optimize for balance and reflection in the conversation.

- The complete Action Learning Exercise is available for Download

- The full guide walks through:
  - Assessing elements within the six conditions for systems change that may be holding the problem in place and hindering the impact of your work.
  - Perspective on strategies that might address those elements, and some thoughts on people within the system who are and who might be engaged in changing those conditions.
  - Reflecting on the extent to which you and your organization might be contributing to the problem.
  - Perspective on strategies you might take to address your and your organization's contributions to the problem

- Groups have done this exercise with:
  - Staff teams
  - Board members
  - Partner organizations
  - Community coalitions

Questions

Final Reflection

What are two or three things that you are taking away from this session?

How will you share these with your colleagues?

ECDHS: Evidence to Impact Center Feedback Survey

- Please take a moment to complete a brief survey to support the Evidence to Impact Center in improving its trainings and technical assistance offerings and assessing program outcomes over time.

- The survey is anonymous, voluntary, and should take **no longer than 10 minutes** to complete.

To complete the survey, please click on the link in the chat or scan the QR code below on a mobile device.

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CEUs

- Go to the “Contents” tab on the event page.
- Select “CEU Survey.”
- Enter the verification code provided at the end of the survey. (Code is case sensitive.)
- Complete the quiz.
- Once all items are completed the certificate will become available for download.
- You have 30 days to return to the event page and complete items for CEU credit.

Event page link: https://elearn.zerotothree.org/p/ECDHS-Water-of-Systems-Change#tab-product_tab_contents__5

Thank you again for joining us!

Please scan the QR code to complete the feedback survey and visit earlychildhoodimpact.org for more resources and information.

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