

## A Conceptual Framework or Process Model for Community Psychology

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**ABSTRACT** The paper presents a simple ten-step process that may be valuable to those who work in the field of community psychology. The author opines that the conceptual values provided by process models in rehabilitation can be usefully extended to understand the work and routines of community Psychologist.

### INTRODUCTION

A process model of community psychology offers a conceptual framework useful for understanding by theorists, researchers, practitioners and clients. Beginning with those processes familiar to and drawn from the vocational rehabilitation arena, this article offers a simple ten step process that may be valuable to those who work in or study the field and discipline of community psychology. The key steps identified include: 1) the role of the professional community psychologist, 2) the community, 3) an engagement or involvement of psychologist with community, 4) the underlying strengths and needs prevalent in the community, including those found as a result of assessments, 5) strategy or long term and general planning, 6) tactics or design and development of specific interventions, 7) action or implementation of change, 8) evaluation including measurement of changes, 9) reporting after the process has begun and at the termination, and 10) awareness or enlightenment. These ten steps are presented and discussed as essential aspects of the work of the community psychologist.

### BACKGROUND

Rehabilitation has been described as a phi-

losophy, a discipline, a practice, and also, as a process. Sometimes the terms used in the rehabilitation field include step, phase, or stage. Clients engaged in the rehabilitation process have often been tracked through patient or case management schemes, from onset of disabilities to re-integration back into the community (Wright, 1980: 170-172). Programmes at rehabilitation agencies and facilities are often designed to accommodate recovery for the individual person or client and for the procedural steps taken by staff, such as intake, evaluation, planning, treatment, and discharge (Anthony, 1994; Guay, 1994; Jackson, 1995). Of course, the concept of process extends far beyond just rehabilitation (Romney et al., 1992).

The author, in teaching community psychology, noted that the conceptual values provided by process models in rehabilitation could be usefully extended to describe, explain, and better understand the work and routines of the community psychologist. Like rehabilitation workers, the field and discipline of community psychology depends upon social processes. Rather than leave these processes implicit, a clear statement making these processes explicit can be useful for those working in the field and perhaps also to those in related social science disciplines as well.

Though certain patterns are routine and typical, variations in the rehabilitation process are many, due to such factors as type and severity of disability, external environment or setting, resources available, and unique needs of the individual, agency, or rehabilitation practitioner (Wright, 1980: 14-17). The typical rehabilitation process runs through such steps as the following: A person with a disability applies to a

trained rehabilitation professional, who engages with empathy and skills and an appropriate helping role, to develop rapport, to gather and give information, to assessment and evaluation by medical, psychological, social and vocational services, to plan, and then treat or refer to treatment, along with periodic re-evaluations, and ends with placement or re-integration into the community and a final follow-up. This process is typical for rehabilitation practitioners working with the state federal system of rehabilitation in the United States (Wright, 1980), or with a variety of facilities and services, including overseas.

Given awareness of this process model, the author examined some of the literature about, and the practices of community psychologists (Heller, et. al., 1984; Orford, 1992; Rappaport, 1977). A ten step process model quickly became apparent, each step being capable of being further elaborated. The suggested steps follow, in a sequence arguably reasonable but not the only available.

1. The process begins with a clear definition of the role and tasks of the community psychologist - a professionally trained individual with personal characteristics, training, self-understanding, and an awareness of self and others.
2. The context for the community psychologist must be the community - a group of people related through common values, a common location, communication patterns, and or a relationship comprise a community. The community psychologist seeks to obtain a description of a boundary for the specific community, then demographic and other information about the group so defined. Further the community psychologist seeks to obtain information about values, internal and external communication patterns, and social structures including status hierarchies, dynamics, and maintains a particular interest in decision making and conflict points.
3. The third stage concerns the engagement between community psychologist and the specific community - having empathy for other people, sufficient conceptual frameworks such as general systems theory, the community psychologist has and uses skills to access, record and analyze information with a goal of identifying problems and seeking solutions. This engagement or involvement with the members of a community through participant observation may be deeply personal or clinically intuitive, or even objective in character, and is invariably dependent upon the values, felt emotions, and nature of both parties.
4. Needs and strengths must be elaborated carefully by the psychologist and members of the community - the community psychologist must be alert to the strengths inherent in the community, and be able to identify both assets and deficits, problems, or better phrased - needs. Needs as well as strengths must be assessed, objectively and yet with empathy and sensitivity. Accordingly the community psychologist needs skills to measure, gather baseline and continuous data, and analyze. Members of the community participate in this assessment, noting both strengths and weaknesses as well.
5. Strategy or planning - the community psychologist must be able to prepare, design, and formally develop a strategic plan, outlining management tasks on a long range basis, and yet be grounded on empirical, historical, intuitive and other sources of data. Given the many themes of community psychology, broad choices such as prevention, advocacy, social change, education, and other intervention activities may be identified as strategic approaches to the existing situations.
6. Tactics or particular interventions - the community psychologist must be able to intervene in the life of the people of the community in specific and detailed ways that advance their situation. The community psychologist uses social change strategies and tactics,



including advocacy (case and class), prevention programmes, networking, organizing, social support programmes, community education, organizational change, crisis intervention and empowerment, among other tools. The community psychologist may also be involved in environmental changes, and in consultation with members of communities who seek change.

7. Action or implementation of and creation of change - action may lead to alternatives which are intended or unintended. The community psychologist must be able to lead and direct social change efforts, and be responsible and accountable to the community for changes that occur.
8. Evaluation - the community psychologist must be able to design and carry out evaluations of change efforts or of programmes. This can be done through performance monitoring, by measuring indicators of process and outcome. The community psychologist can compare performance with goals, and determine whether or not an intervention has achieved particular goals.
9. Reporting - The community psychologist must be able to report to leaders and members of the community, on an informal or formal basis, and to the population at large through professional reports, journal articles, and other means of informing people about the work carried out.
10. Enlightenment - The community psychologist gains awareness, understanding, and more skills through his or her work. In that process, the members of the community too, become "better" (hopefully) and the psychologist and members of the larger world become more aware of results and process.

### DISCUSSION

Process models are valuable for understanding, for practical work, and for teaching and

training. They can be used to predict problems and pitfalls, as well as serve as guidelines. They should be coupled with other models, put in context, and recognized as having limitations and variations. Although it would be intriguing to review a large number of projects carried out by community psychologists to determine whether or not this process fits with what has been done, or to obtain comments from community psychologists as to whether the model fits their own concepts of the role and work, that remains to be done in the future. Unless and until further empirical work is conducted, this remains hypothetical, however.

### CONCLUSION

A ten step process model can serve as a conceptual framework useful for students and practitioners to guide practice in carrying out the work of the typical community psychologist. Although only one way in which to examine the role and work of the community psychologist, this step by step process chart as outlined offers some clarity about the work and role of the community psychologist to the beginner, as well as a checklist for the advanced practitioner for use.

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