

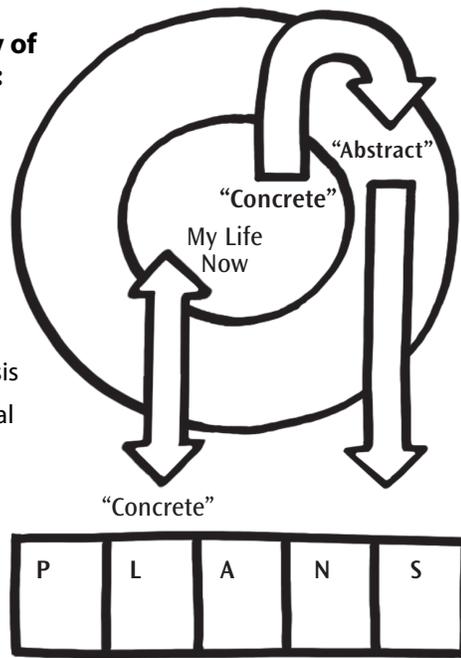
3. Theory of Change

How things are now: Problem-solving programs of any sort (workforce development, behavioral, emotional, health) require change from individuals. Change is hard, especially for those who are overwhelmed by instability and a lack of resources. Experience tells us that there are few poverty programs that are comprehensive and even fewer that share their *theories of change* with their subjects.

Core ideas: Those who manage Bridges initiatives must be experts in facilitating change because we ask for change at four levels: individual, institutional, community, and policy. Living in unstable environments will force people to spend time, social capital, and mental bandwidth to fix problems with cars, childcare, housing, safety, and food. Using reactive problem-solving skills and relationships, they fix problems on the fly over and over again, only to maintain themselves in poverty.

To escape the tyranny of the moment we need:

- A safe place to talk
- Time for dialogue
- Detachment and objectivity
- New information and education
- Thinking and analysis
- Plans and procedural steps
- A support team



Procedural Steps:

An institution or community that becomes under-resourced may lose sight of the long view and may attempt to solve problems by cutting staff, shifting costs to employees, cutting professional development costs, selling off assets, dropping research and development activities, failing to maintain infrastructure, cutting services, and increasing fees in order to survive. Leaders caught in the tyranny of the moment, or “short-termism,” tend to try to solve their problems using the same thinking and solutions again and again.

Getting Ahead investigators are able to use the theory of change even when living in chaos by making a conscious choice to think in the abstract and take the long view. It helps to be in a safe place, with people who share a common language and have sufficient time to devote to the process. To break out of the tyranny of the moment one must go to the abstract, defined by the terms in the “abstract” space. Through detachment and objectivity a person can think, do an analysis that leads to finding new information, make plans, and take procedural steps that will lead to a new future story.

Source: Philip E. DeVol, *Facilitator Notes for Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World*, 2013.

Context: The theory of change laid out in the *Getting Ahead* workbook puts all the cards on the table so that the Getting Ahead investigator can choose to use the change model—or not. It turns out that the Getting Ahead Theory of Change works for institutions and communities too. When they become unstable and under-resourced, they too tend to fall into the tyranny of the moment and their leaders typically seek out immediate, short-term solutions when what they need is a way to break out of the tyranny of the moment.

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How to use the tool

- Identify the tyranny of the moment for yourself and others.
- Find a safe place and safe people where you can find the mental bandwidth to think, to be in the abstract.
- Investigate new information.
- Think outside the box or bubble that is formed by a concrete environment.
- Guard against predators who take advantage of chaos.
- Recognize that people in institutions and communities also can get trapped in the tyranny of the moment.

Learn more: Read *Facilitator Notes for Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World*, Philip E. DeVol, 2013.