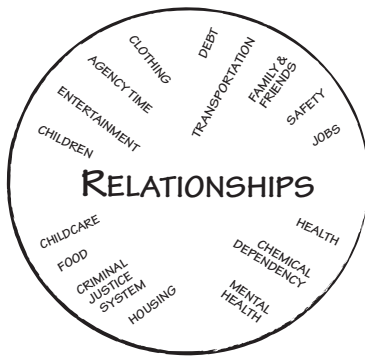


2. Mental Models of Economic Class

How things are now: In the United States few of us know how people in other classes live. Social connectedness has been decreasing since the 1970s as income segregation in housing has separated us into economic enclaves. This has led to a lack of knowledge and understanding between/among the classes. Programs in education, health, and workforce development that are for people in poverty are more often than not designed without their input. Thus the phrase, “If it’s *about* us, without us, it’s not *for* us.”

Context: These three mental models came from the first investigations people in poverty made while Getting Ahead was being created. They were quickly picked up by Bridges trainers and became icons for the understanding we have of class issues. These distinct environments arise when there is great inequality in wealth. The hidden rules arise from these environments and deepen the impact of being raised in generational poverty, generational middle class, and generational wealth.

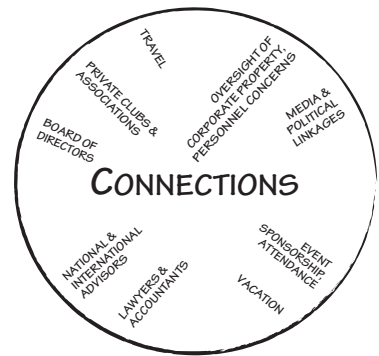
Mental Model for Poverty



Mental Model for Middle Class



Mental Model for Wealth



Developed by P. DeVol, 2006

Developed by R. Payne, 2005

Analytical Terms	
Mental bandwidth	Concrete/abstract
Power	Invisible, little influence/powerful
Stability	Daily instability/long-term stability
Time horizon	Tyranny of the moment/long view
Problem-solving approach	Reactive problem solving with relationships/proactive problem solving
Financial security	Daily insecurity/long-term security

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

Core ideas: The environments represented by the mental models explain differences in such aspects of life as driving forces, stability, power, time for abstract endeavors, time horizon, financial security, and problem-solving approaches. Poverty is experienced locally. Poverty in a Rust Belt city is different from poverty in a rural county or a prosperous, high-tech city; the barriers and opportunities will be specific to the Bridges site.

Poverty is also experienced differently by each individual according to a number of conditions and influences including race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, immigrant status, and religion.

How to use the tool

- Learn about poverty in your community by engaging Getting Ahead investigators and graduates. They can share the results of their investigations into poverty as it is experienced locally, their assessment of community, and their mental model of community prosperity.

- Include Getting Ahead graduates as speakers and facilitators during Bridges workshops and events, poverty simulations, and media events. Use knowledge of the environments and hidden rules to navigate new settings more skillfully.
- Use knowledge of the environments and hidden rules to navigate social settings more skillfully.
- During meetings, establish a safe setting and process so people can speak freely about hidden rules that are broken.
- Design programs so that hidden rules that break relationships are brought to light, then eliminated.
- Provide leadership training for people in poverty who want to serve on boards.

Learn more: Read *Bridges to Sustainable Communities*, Philip E. DeVol, 2010.