

RECOMMONING COMMUNITIES

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the commons





“therein
lies the
tragedy

each man is locked into a system that
compels him to increase his herd without
limit.” (Hardin 1968)

“My position is that this idea of a multiethnic society is a disaster. That's what we've got in Central Europe, and in Central Africa. A multiethnic society is insanity. I think we should restrict immigration for that reason.”

—**Hardin** Interview with *The Social Contract*, 1997



How do fallible
humans come
together, create
communities and organizations,
and make decisions and rules in
order to sustain a resource or
achieve a desired outcome?

–Ostrom

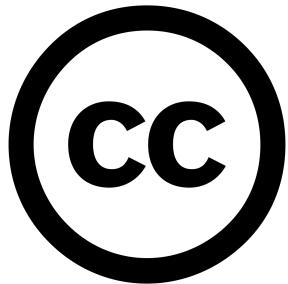
external
governance
mechanisms

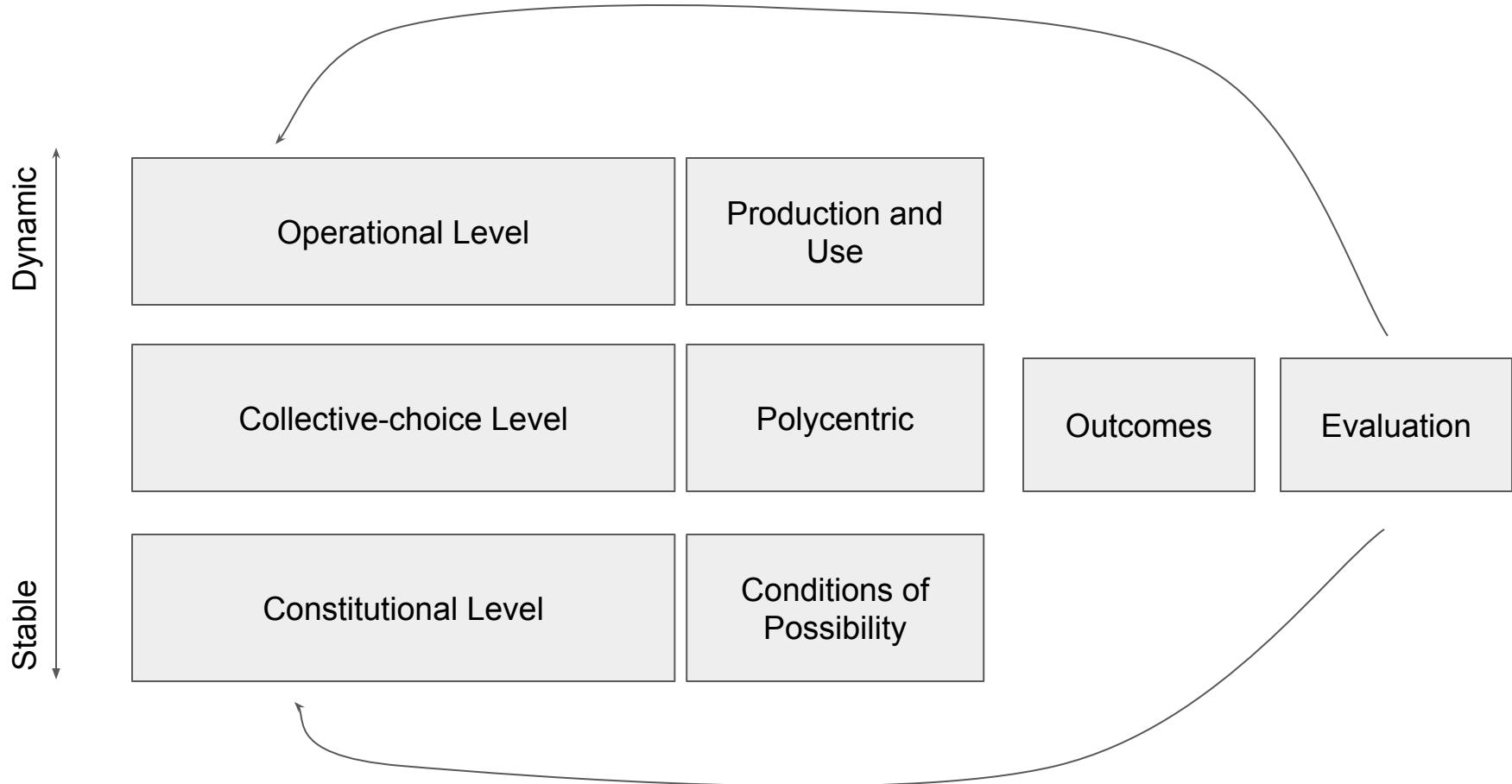
privatization

external
governance
mechanisms

Commons

privatization





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/*
* -----
* "THE BEER-WARE LICENSE" (Revision 42):
* <phk@FreeBSD.ORG> wrote this file. As long as you retain this notice you
* can do whatever you want with this stuff. If we meet some day, and you think
* this stuff is worth it, you can buy me a beer in return. Poul-Henning Kamp
* -----
*/
```



Fig. Portland Tenants United activists using recommending tools

- (A.) the need to protect a shared resource from enclosure, privatization, or commodification;
- (B.) the observation or action of peer-production and mass collaboration primarily in electronic media;
- (C.) evidence of new types of tragedies of the commons;
- (D.) the desire to build civic education and commons-like thinking; and
- (E.) identification of new or evolving types of commons within traditional commons; and
- (F.) rediscovery of the commons.

recommoning

Reclaiming a previously privatized, enclosed or commodified resource, property or resource system that is deemed essential to collective survival.

recommoning

- Organizations put resources in the wrong governance.
- Recommoning changes the equation to focus on negotiation and resource reclaiming
- Participatory roles embodied by commoners relating to resource sharing are drawn from conflict management norms and traditions
- Relationships through which resources might be negotiated are critical to the negotiation itself.
- The “micro” reclaiming acts visible in practice

Recommoning Cards - Roles & Patterns

Role:
Town Crier



Role:
Exploiting Commoner



Community Right to Steward
& not just individual right to access



Permeable Boundaries



Role:
The Oracle



Role:
Stewarding Commoner



Role:
Scribe



Collective Agency



Upstream Benefit & Downstream Impact



Role:
Upstream Ally



Recommending Cards - Roles & Patterns (back)

Role: **Town Crier**

Town criers existed in precolonial Nigeria to circulate information and call the villagers to meetings at the village square or the Baale's (chief) residence. A commanding designer serves the role of a town crier, which is to create conditions for participants to be able to gather.

Questions

How might a designer serve as a town crier on a platform discussing tenancy as a commons?

What experiences show the designer as serving this role

Role: **Exploiting Commoner**

An exploiting commoner is one who exploits a resource for individual gain but also to the detriment of others.

Questions

What are some calculations that cause an exploiting commoner to maximize self-interest?

How might a platform deal with issues of fairness, transparency, autonomy and agency?

Community Right to Steward

How might a community serve as an ally to its stakeholders?

Why? Access and stewardship in commons bear different modalities. Stewardship requires responsibility that isn't inherent to the right to access. For example, both a human and a soldier have different kinds of responsibility as well as levels of accountability.

Questions

How might a platform afford the use of a common resource in ways that stewardship matches expectations?

What experiences exemplify transfer of stewardship rights to communities?

Permeable Boundaries

The boundary of a complex system is comparable to a cell's organic membrane e.g. the eardrum and it raises questions about limits i.e. where the 'ear' ends and 'not ear' begins? – paraphrased from Dave Snowden

Why? Commons must have permeable boundaries, that is, boundaries open enough to allow information and communication to pass through but closed to external influence.

Questions

What characterizes a permeable boundary?

What experiences balance difference with inclusion?

Role: **The Oracle**

In southwest Nigeria, an oracle is a prophetic prediction through a medium. Data, like an oracle, is independent of truth. It supports arguments by presenting predictions strengthened by value ascribed to it.

– Raw Data is an Oxymoron

Questions

How might small data be used to create new narratives?

What does data situated in practice look like?

Role: **Stewarding Commoner**

Stewarding commoners work together to ensure that the commons are held within a set of rules. These rules affect operations, day-to-day decisions, as well as eligibility to participate.

Questions

How might a platform help stewarding commoners bring others to the table?

What experiences exemplify the costs of exchange for stewarding commoners?

Role: **Scribe**

A scribe participates in managing the commons by detailing agreements on a platform.

Questions

How might scribes, through a platform, help detail rules in use (de facto)?

How might scribes, through a platform, help document rules on paper (de jure)?

Collective Agency

Can human and non-human actors combine to present collective agency?

Why? Bruno Latour believes that the neutrality of an object for resources under complete human control is a myth. Non-human actors have agency. Using a resource changes both the resource and the individual or community of users. A commanding designer is aware of this.

Questions

How might a platform afford resource use that highlights the changes in the consequences of use?

How might we a platform situate knowledge in practice and contextualize it within concrete circumstances? How might platforms help communities make better sense of knowledge or data.

Upstream Benefit & Downstream Impact

Downstream impact is a reality. It is reflects power inequalities and results in social dilemma challenges.

Elinor Ostrom refers to negative externalities i.e. the polluter gets the benefits of the pollution while population living downstream experiences its costs.

Questions

How might upstream dynamics & decisions lead to downstream impact?

How might we keep resource (e.g. data) accessible to a commons, yet free from destructive upstream influence?

Role: **Upstream Ally**

An upstream ally is a partner who, in recognizing his/her privilege, cedes some of the power it affords them to others so that they might achieve their objectives.

Questions

How might a partner (usually external to the platform) serve as an upstream ally?

What experiences might reflect the role of an upstream ally?

Recommending Cards - Dilemmas



Dilemma

Individual Landlord + Tenant
NO-CAUSE EVICTION

How might we negotiate a no-cause eviction

Janet is a single mom. She rents an apartment from Jabe, a landlord with multiple properties in Portland. Rent payments and rental upgrades were discussed upfront but never codified in a lease. After making numerous consistent payments, Janet finds out through an eviction letter that she needs to vacate the house soon.

Use the cards to negotiate the situation. Is there any recourse?

How might we use stories or data to change the situation to one that is favorable for

- 1. Landlord
- 2. Tenant
- 3. Both



Dilemma

Absentee Landlord
NEGIGENT LANDLORD

Dilemma

Negligent Landlord

Keeping up with property fixes
Ade is an absentee landlord. She owns a rental property over 500 miles from where she calls home. Jill is her renter. Jill is concerned that Ade is not keeping up with the upgrades and fixes that the house needs. How might a platform empower Jill and Ade to work together to give the house what it needs?

How might we use narratives or data to change the situation to one that is favorable for

- 1. Landlord
- 2. Tenant
- 3. Both



Dilemma

Rights vs Needs

Tunde is not an ideal tenant. He is always late on rent and has been evicted several times in the past year. Michael decided to take a chance on Tunde by renting his mom's house to him. But he now regrets it. Tunde is refusing to leave the property, not taking good care of it and not paying his bills on time. Is there a way to negotiate this stalemate?

How might an organization like PTU work with partners and willing landlords and tenants to get them to work together.



Dilemma

Engagement strategies

Dilemma

Engagement Strategies

Enhancing Participation
PTU is a tenant rights organization. The organization represents tenants through its advocacy against no-cause evictions and by supporting tenants through an eviction process. A number of the tenant-members face eviction due to rent increases.

How might an organization like PTU work with partners and willing landlords to get them to re-negotiate rental terms for its members to minimize no-cause evictions. Pls give examples of door knocking strategies?





Open data

Negotiation / Problems



Accurate poverty

When the US Foreign Inte

Amount of phosphorous in
prescription medicines

Accurate historical weather data

Cause of June 2015 black church
fires

Global web user measurements that
include VPNs

Public list of citizens on

Quantifiable effect of
corruption in loan economies

Exact rate of population inflow

Publicly available
gun trace data

Number of mosques
surveilled by FBI

Latents in Finns' mucus

Employment statistics that include

Locations of health facilities

Number of wizards in

Accurate age information for

Number of Americans without bank

Public conservatives that have
engaged in homoerotic activity

Location-specific data on

Accurate birth registration

Demographics of all bitcoin

Financial information for all

Number of jobs actually lost

Number of civilians killed
during Nigerian Civil War

Accurate number of car crashes
that occur in the U.S.

Facts about oil reserves worldwide

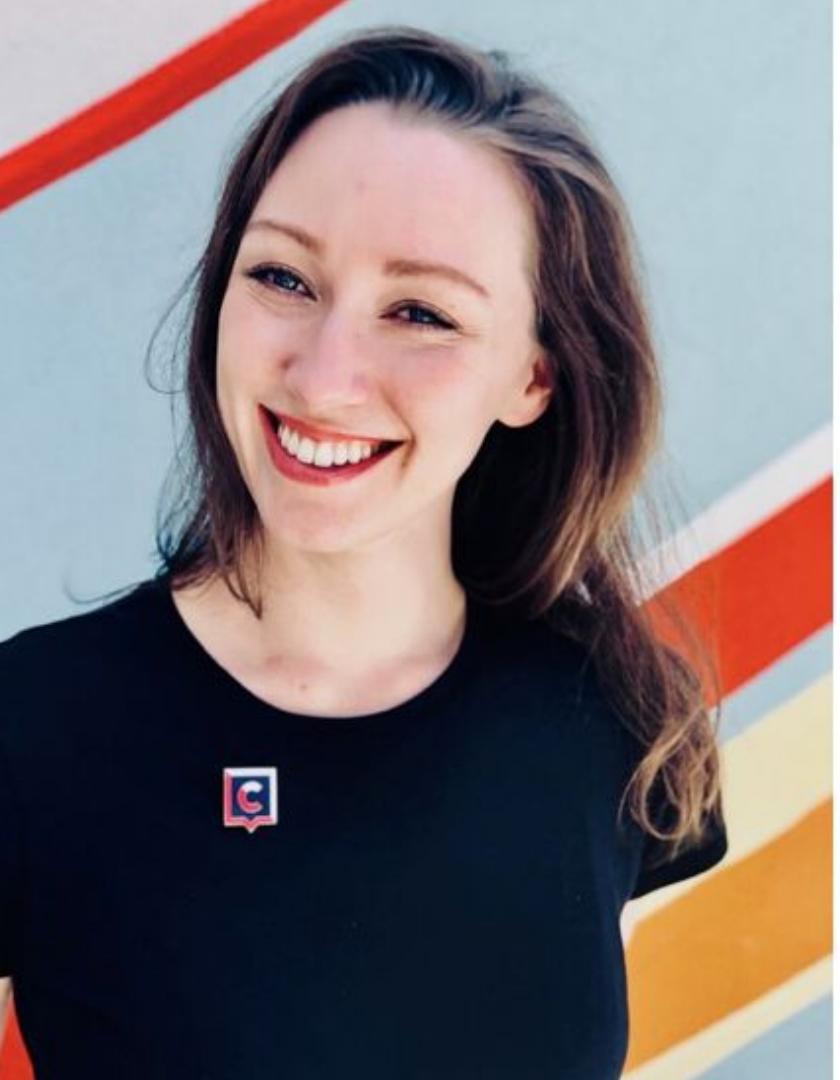


MAKING PUBLIC INFORMATION,
PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

ref: Hack Oregon website: hackoregon.org



Credit: Margot Black, Portland Tenants United



“If we don’t know enough about the number of evictions

as well as what is going on with short-term renting engagements, then we are at a critical juncture that makes inevitable a paradigm shift on data gathering, acquisition, process and workflow” (Cat Nikolovski)

Data Recommoning challenges

- Openness should not always mean access - expertise is needed for stewardship
- Privacy and security laws to ensure transparency and collaboration
- The 'right' versus 'wrong' data. Accountability for misuse or improper privatization
- Poorly curated data

Managing this resource pool is merely complicated, we should consult with experts and create policies

external
governance
mechanisms

Commons

Managing this resource pool is complex, requiring the active management of a system that can be more or less sustainable, and requiring the active negotiation of the polycentric requirements of multiple stakeholders

privatization

Managing this resource pool is simple, we should assign someone to be accountable for managing it. Shareholders will enforce norms.

UnCommon Patterns

- Was placed into Private or Governance w/o an understanding of commons (error of omission)
- AntiCommons (error of commission)
- Started Privatized.. needs to be commons
- Was commons and “degraded” into Private or Central Governance

ReCommoning

- Recognize the value of Common Resources
- Determine which kinds of resources gain value as Common Resources
- Locate those resources in privatized or central governance
- Negotiate the ReCommoning of those resources

external
governance
mechanisms

Commons

privatization

Recommending reveals the complexity of the various stakeholder needs, and creates the conditions for a Commons to arise.

“Organizing is a process;
an organization is the
result of that process.”

—Elinor Ostrom



1. Clearly defined group boundaries
2. Benefits must be equivalent to costs
3. Commoners appropriating resource are also involved in creating collective choice agreements
4. Monitoring and sanctioning are a responsibility of commoners
5. There exists a graduated sanctioning mechanism for potential violators
6. Access to low-cost ways for conflict management
7. External governance entities recognize and protect the rights of the collective
8. Monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolution and governance are all held in multiple layers of nested enterprises.

Threats to the Commons

- rapid exogenous changes;
- transmission failures from one generation to the next of the operational principles on which community governance is based;
- programs relying on blueprint thinking and easy access to external funds;
- corruption and other forms of opportunistic behavior; and
- lack of large-scale institutional arrangements related to reliable information collection, aggregation, and dissemination; fair and low cost conflict-resolution mechanisms; educational and extension facilities; and facilities for helping when natural disasters or other major problems occur at a local level.

Some Last Thoughts...

THE "VICIOUS CIRCLE" OF THE AGGRESSIVE PATROL

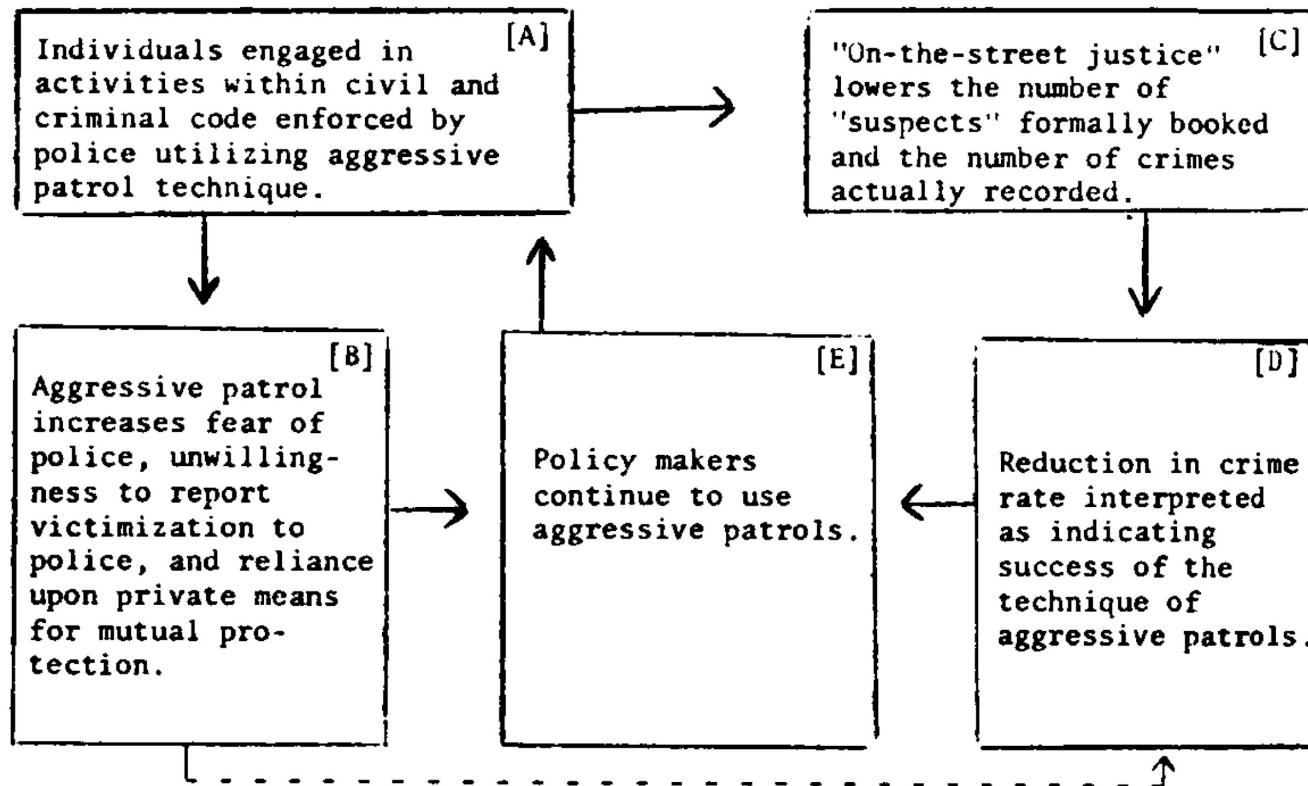
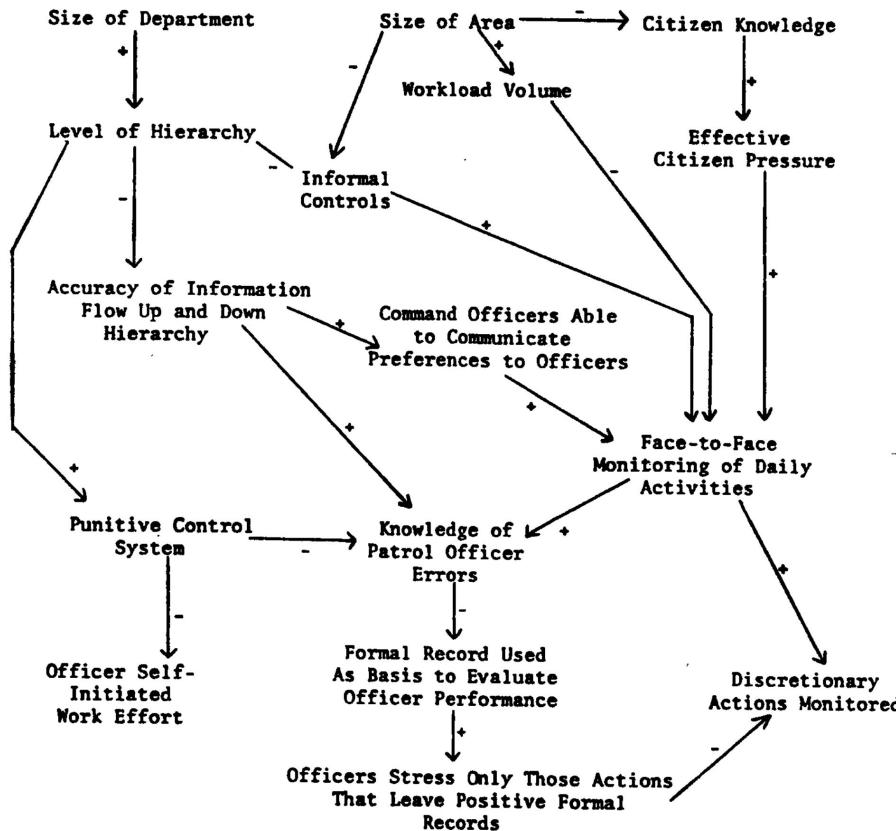


Figure 1

Relationships Between Size of Agency and Area and Monitoring of Discretionary Actions as Posited by Michael Brown



[avoid] ...an over-reliance on what police departments do as the major way of improving law enforcement, and a lack of focus on what citizens as coproducers can accomplish

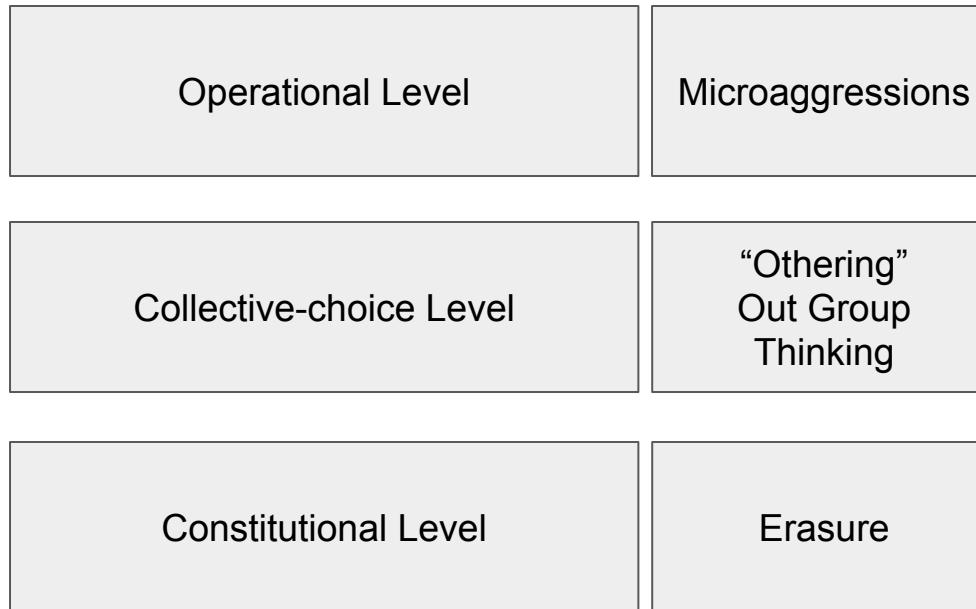


When a population is relatively homogeneous, individuals are more apt to agree on basic values and morals. By mutual agreement, interactions are more likely to stay within these agreed upon standards. However, when a population is relatively heterogeneous, individuals are more apt to disagree on basic values and moral premises.

—Ostrom



Institutional Racism and Sexism and other Oppressive Viewpoints are encoded across the multiple levels of adaptive governance structures.



Allyship

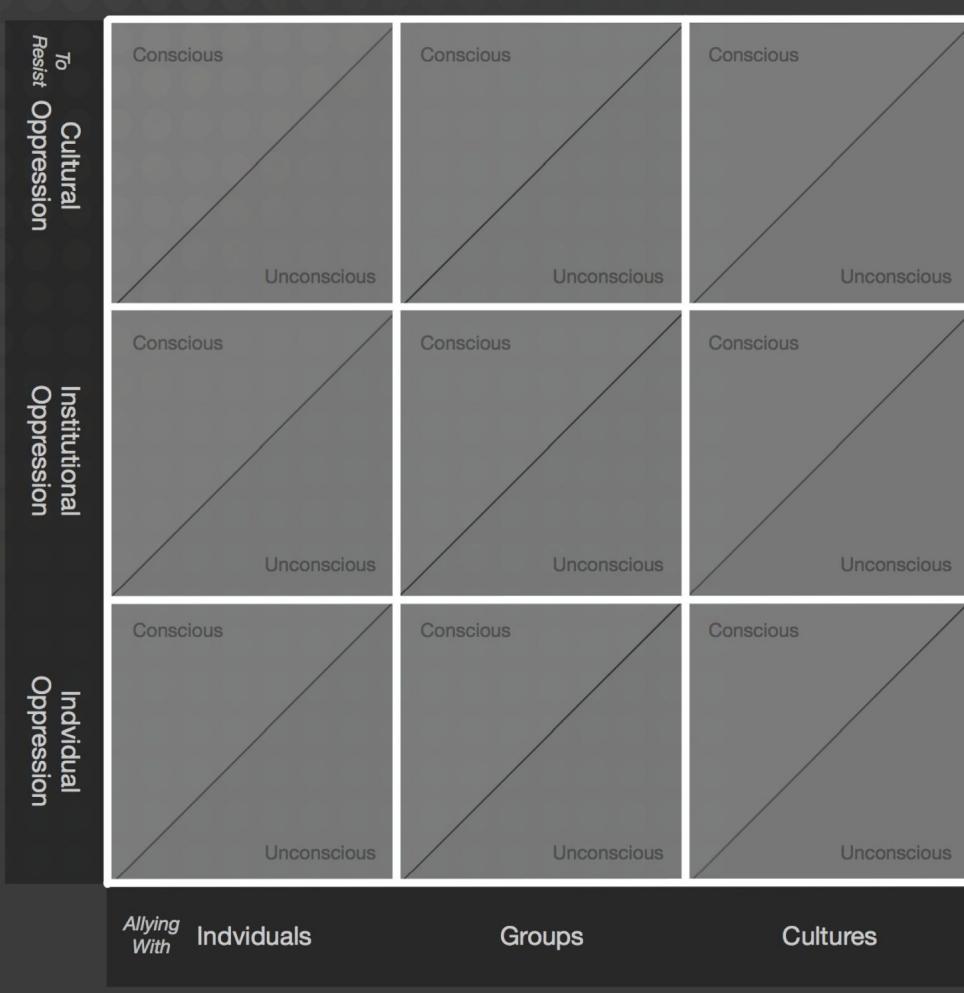
Lend privilege.

Provide honest narratives.

Give knowledge with no or limited bias.

Build the platforms that empower others.

And above all, **refuse to stay silent.**



About Dimeji



Dimeji Onafuwa, Ph.D
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 [@casajulie](https://twitter.com/casajulie)
 [Donafuwa](https://www.linkedin.com/in/donafuwa)
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As a professional, Dimeji has over 15 years of experience in design management, design strategy, design research, design-thinking, brand communications, service design consulting and design practice. He managed and directed design teams both as an owner in Charlotte, NC, and as an operations director in Pittsburgh, PA.

As a researcher, Dimeja designs tools that enable communities to "recommon" resources that are essential to their survival. He has worked with various collectives to gain perspectives on how to help them better intervene in social dilemmas. He also engages in theories & pedagogy on alternative economics, design-thinking, as well as technological innovations that explore the promises with as well as implications of technology.

Dimeja is an international speaker, having led and participated in podcasts, workshops and conferences globally.

He is a founding member of Common Cause Collective and an painter represented by Saatchi Art

Dimeji earned a BA with honors in Advertising/Design from Concord College, an MBA in Management from UNC Charlotte and a Ph.D. in Design from Carnegie Mellon University.

About Jabe



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jabeblom

Jabe specializes in helping groups embrace and leverage uncertainty, ambiguity and optionality. The rewards of allowing teams and individuals to discover and leverage their innate creative potential are worth the risks and challenges involved in holding open a space for innovation and creativity.

Jabe's deep practical experience, constant exploration via action research, and extensive theoretical investigations inform his public speaking and provide a foundation for his active engagement with colleagues, executives and entrepreneurs. He helps clients to clarify vague understandings of the problems they've noticed with their processes and products, learn to perceive and understand the causes of those problems for themselves, and make plans to act in order to create more effective environments and systems for collaborative work. He helps clients find a mindful way of working that enables their teams to continuously adapt their processes and products in an ever shifting business environment.

He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Design Studies at Carnegie Mellon University focusing on Transition Design. He is a go-to source for insights into improving organizational tempo, resilience and performance by transforming dynamics within the co-evolving interdependencies of management, design, development and operational practices.

We do not think of 'government' or 'governance' as something provided by states alone. Families, voluntary associations, villages, and other forms of human association all involve some form of self-government. Rather than looking only to states, we need to give much more attention to building the kinds of basic institutional structures that enable people to find ways of relating constructively to one another and of resolving problems in their daily lives.

-Vincent Ostrom