



# Making Systems Mapping Accessible

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# Purpose and Goals

- **Purpose:** describe the power of qualitative systems mapping and how to harness it
- **Goals:**
  - Clarify benefits of qualitative mapping
  - Expose myths and practices of qualitative systems mapping
  - Show examples of qualitative mapping applied to two issues
  - Review tips for engaging people in model-building
  - Explore further opportunities together

# Benefits of Qualitative Mapping

- Independent of quantitative models
  - Helps model beneficiaries build their own models
  - Helps model beneficiaries tell stories illuminating their responsibility for current problems
- Linked with quantitative models
  - Can prepare the ground for quantitative modeling
  - Can explain key themes in quantitative models

**Capturing the science behind the craft: a reporting framework to improve quality and confidence in nonsimulated models**, Benjamin L. Turner and Michael Goodman, *System Dynamics Review* 2023, DOI: [10.1002/sdr.1752](https://doi.org/10.1002/sdr.1752)

# Qualitative Maps Tell Two Stories

“The best arguments in the world won’t change a single person’s point of view. The only thing that can do that is a good story.”

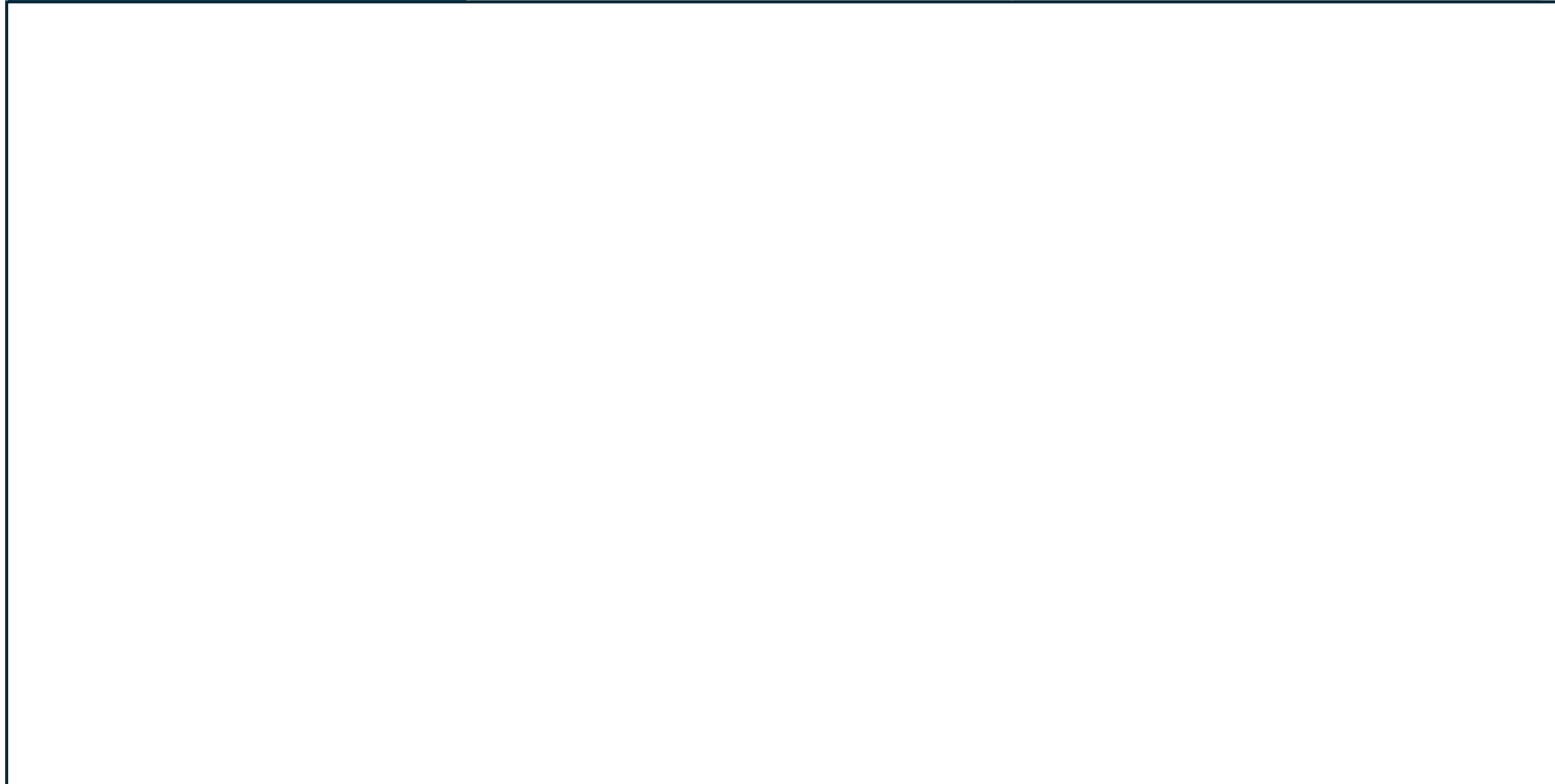
Richard Powers, novelist

Qualitative maps illuminate and differentiate two stories:

- How things should work (e.g., a R loop of growth or B loop of correction)
- How things actually work (e.g. unintended long term consequences that dominate the intended loop over time)

# Making Systems Mapping Accessible

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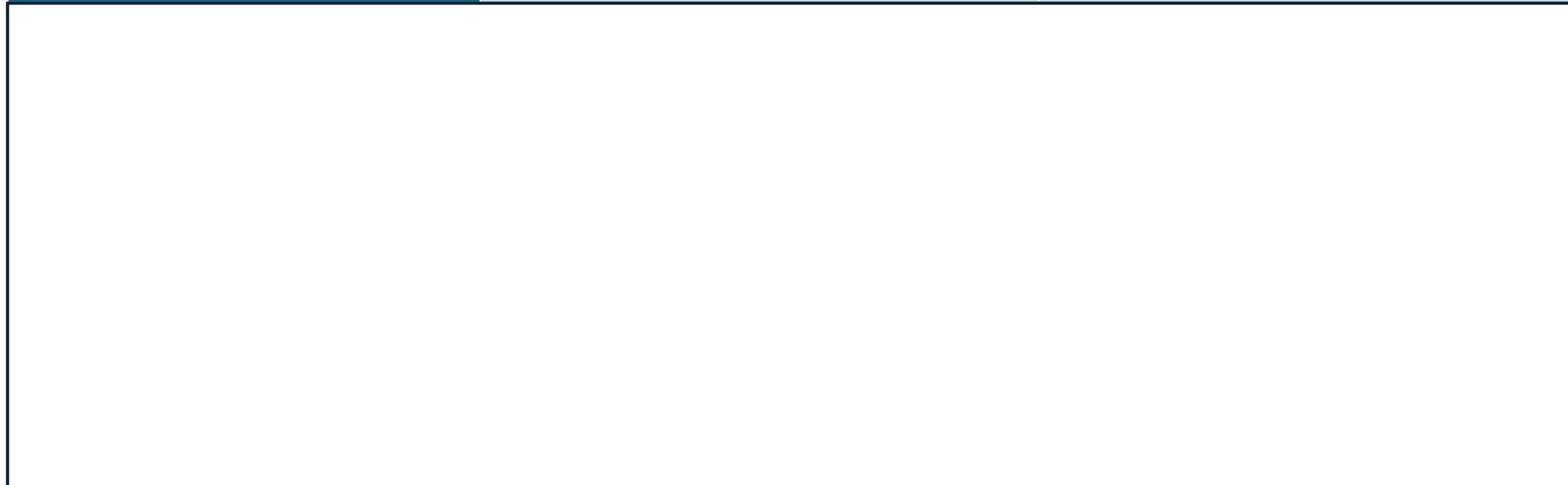


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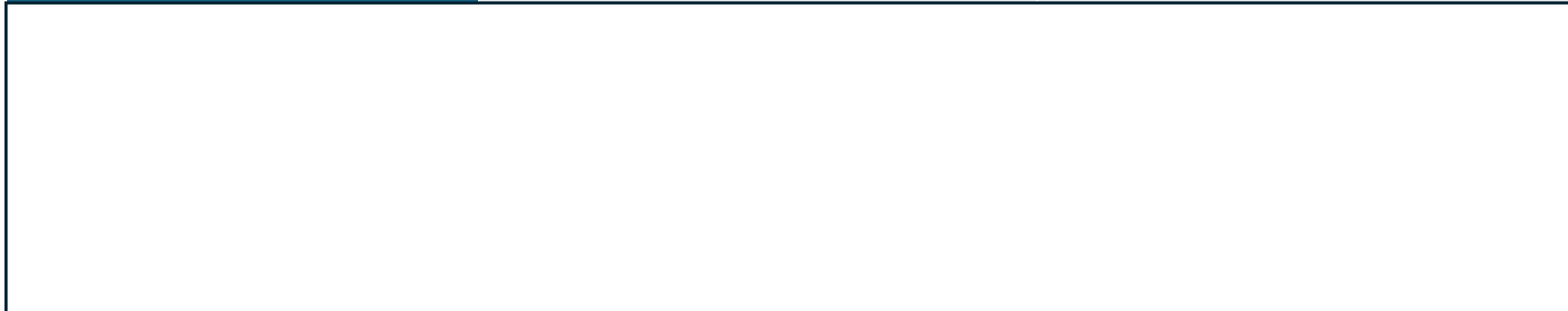
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<b>The more comprehensive and detailed the map, the more useful it is.</b>	Effective maps make a situation’s complexity in Einstein’s words “as simple as possible, but not simpler.” System archetypes help.	Use your map to tell a human story which distills why people’s well-intentioned efforts have been insufficient to achieve desired results. Build the map as a storyboard using archetypes where possible.





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<b>Comprehensive maps take months to build.</b>	Useful maps can be developed in a matter of weeks or even days.	Prepare for rapid map-making by taking time to engage and build ownership of key stakeholders.
<b>It’s okay to combine maps that explain problems with those that identify solutions.</b>	The first leverage point in shifting a system is deepening people’s understanding of why a problem persists despite their best efforts to solve it. Establish a map of current reality before creating a solution map.	First, help people fully appreciate why the problem has persisted and their personal responsibility, however unwitting, for perpetuating it.

Mapping for Two Issues:  
Wealth Inequality and Organizational Overload

Why is it so difficult for us to reduce wealth inequality?

# Connecting the Dots

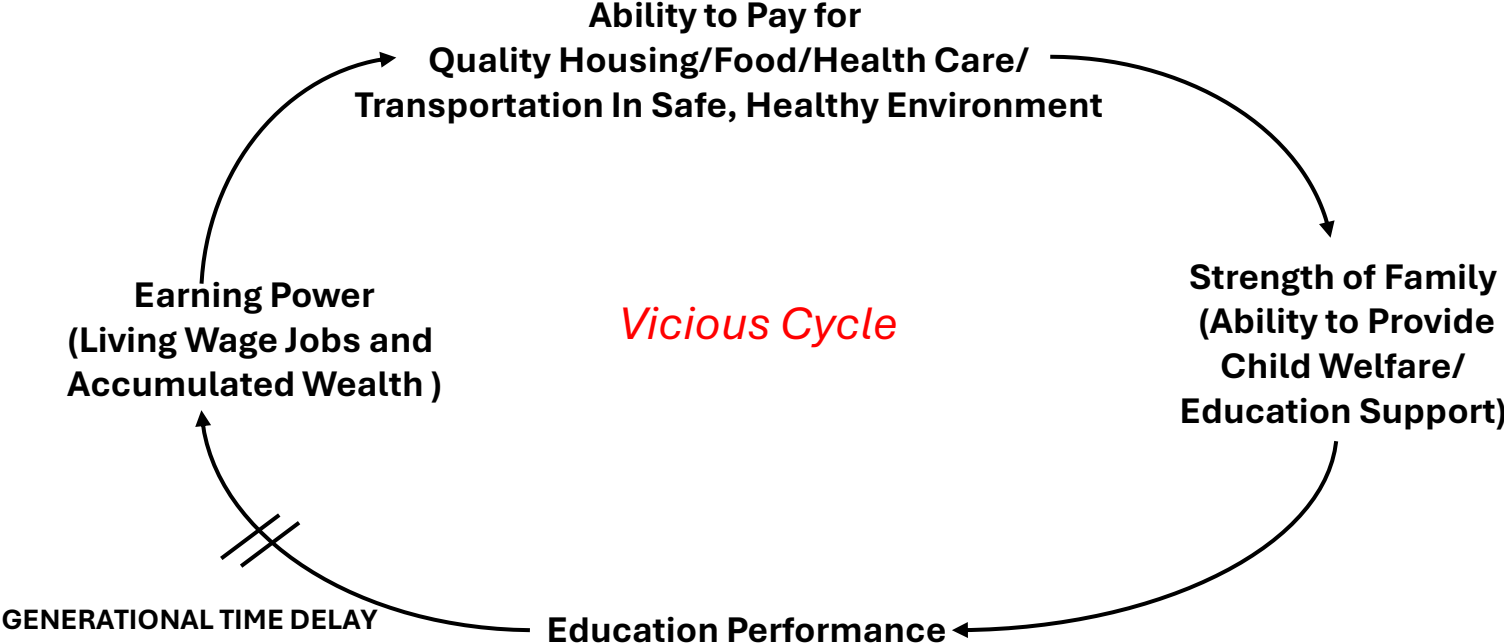
**Ability to Pay for  
Quality Housing/Food/Health Care/  
Transportation In Safe, Healthy Environment**

**Earning Power  
(Living Wage Jobs and  
Accumulated Wealth )**

**Strength of Family  
(Ability to Provide  
Child Welfare/  
Education Support)**

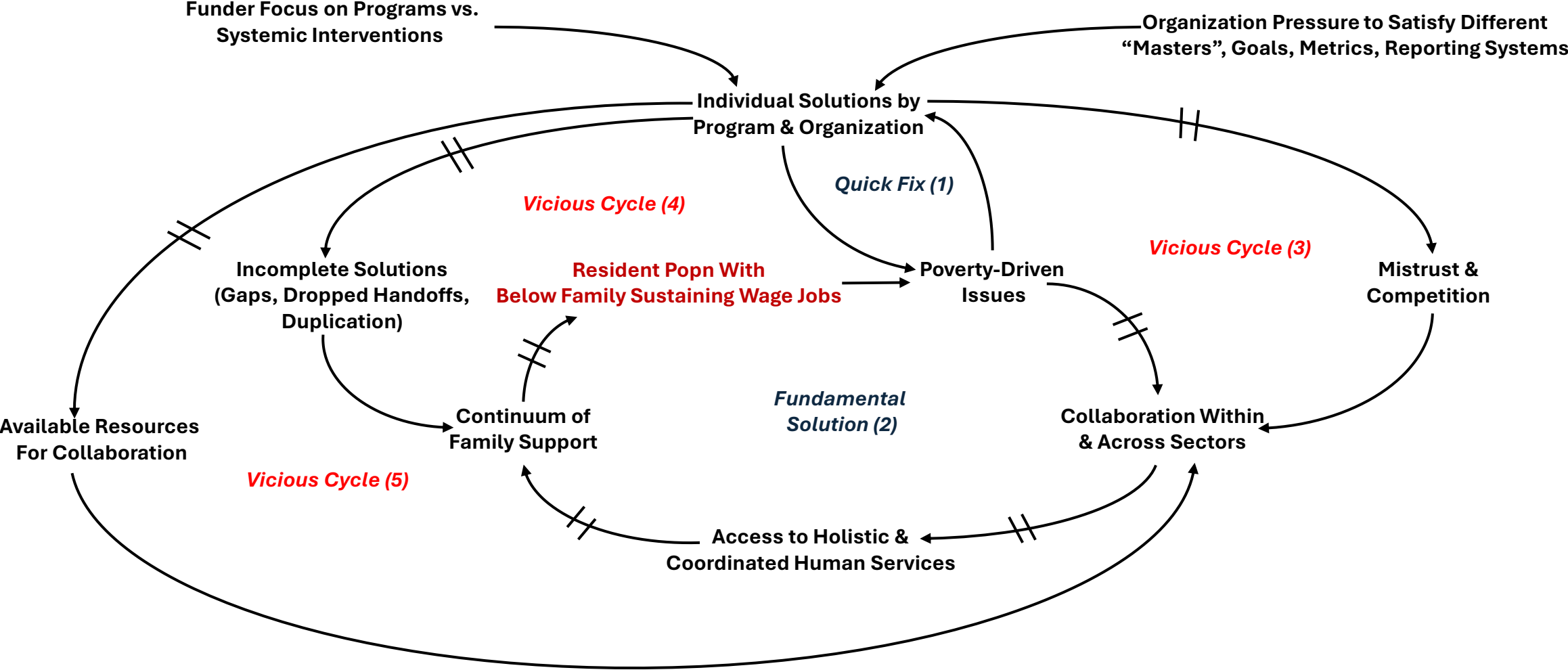
**Education Performance**

# An Intergenerational Cycle of Poverty

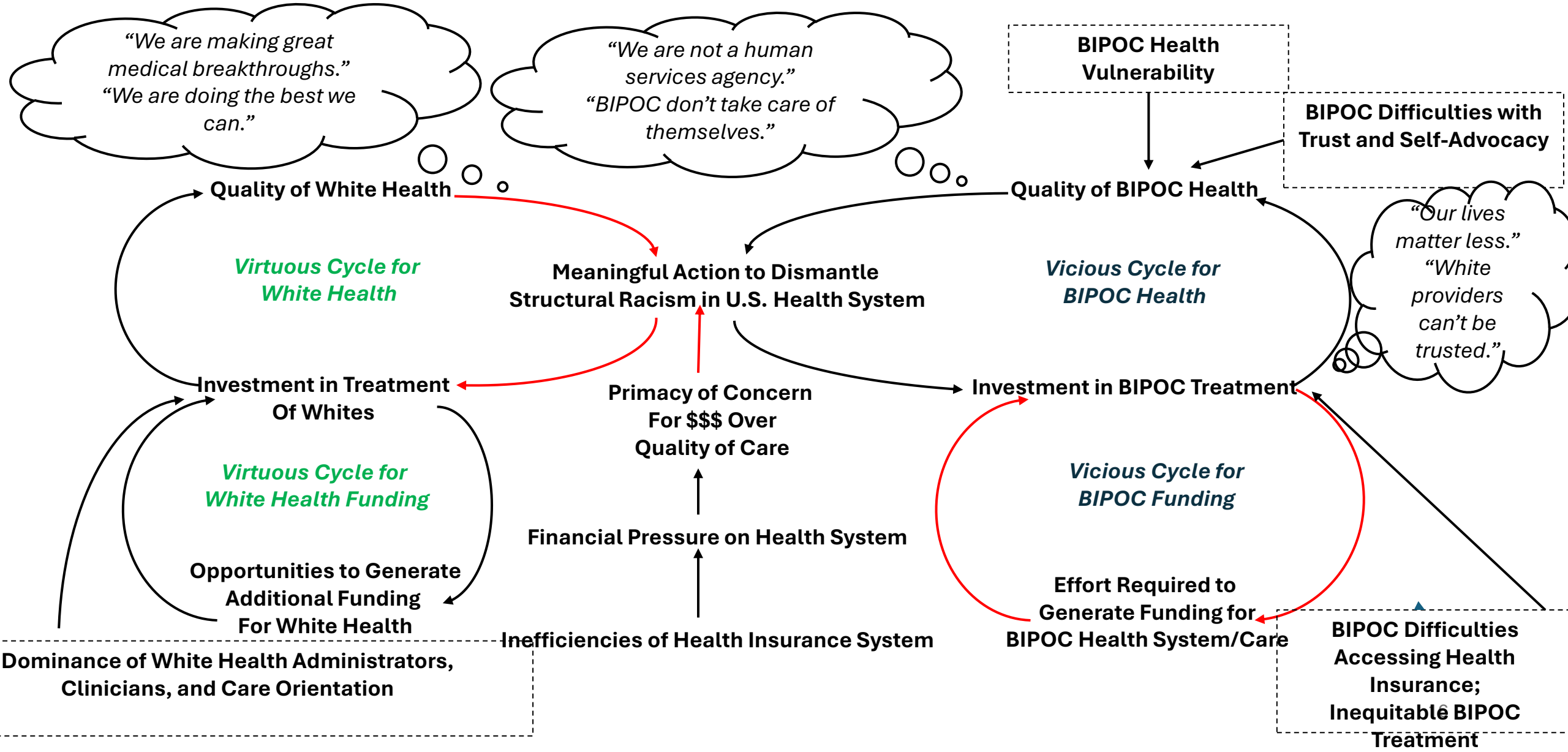


Addressing each factor independently helps people cope with poverty- not escape it

# Challenges of Increasing Collaboration



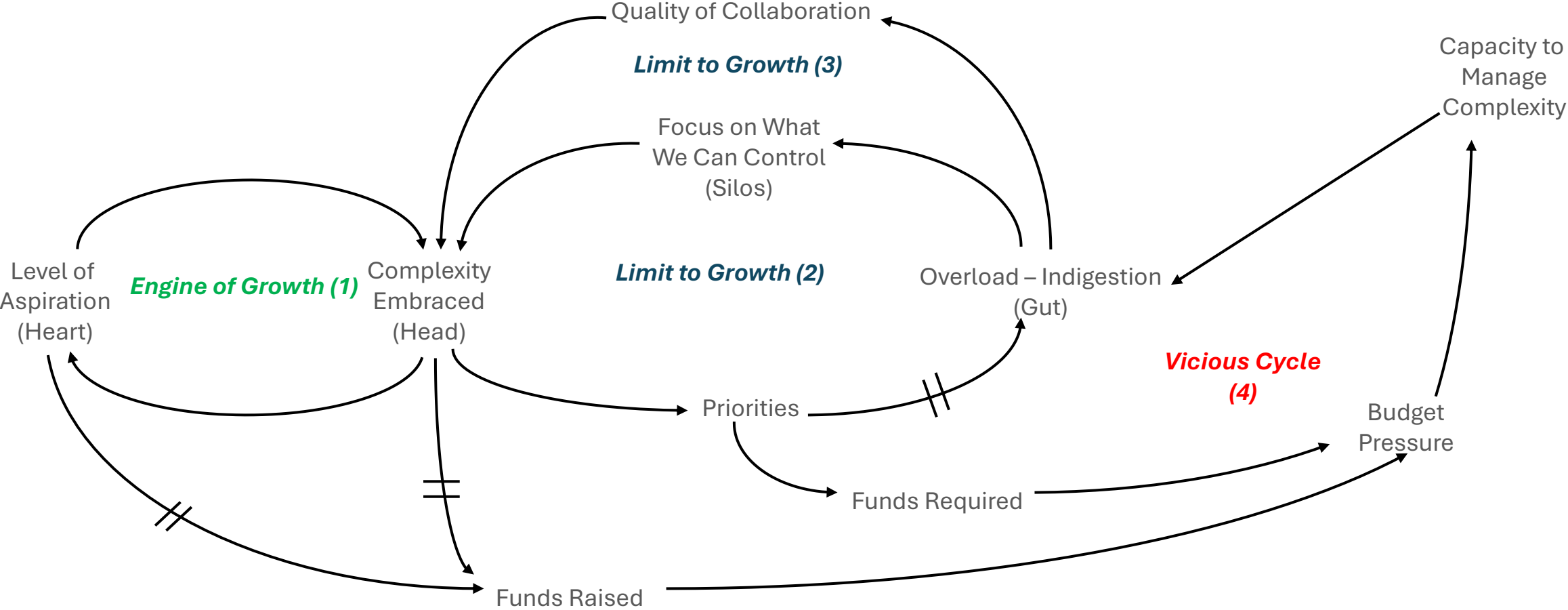
# Why Meaningful Action to Dismantle Structural Racism in U.S. Health System Is Weak: Summary





Why is everyone in our nonprofit overloaded despite increased funding?

# Organizational Overload

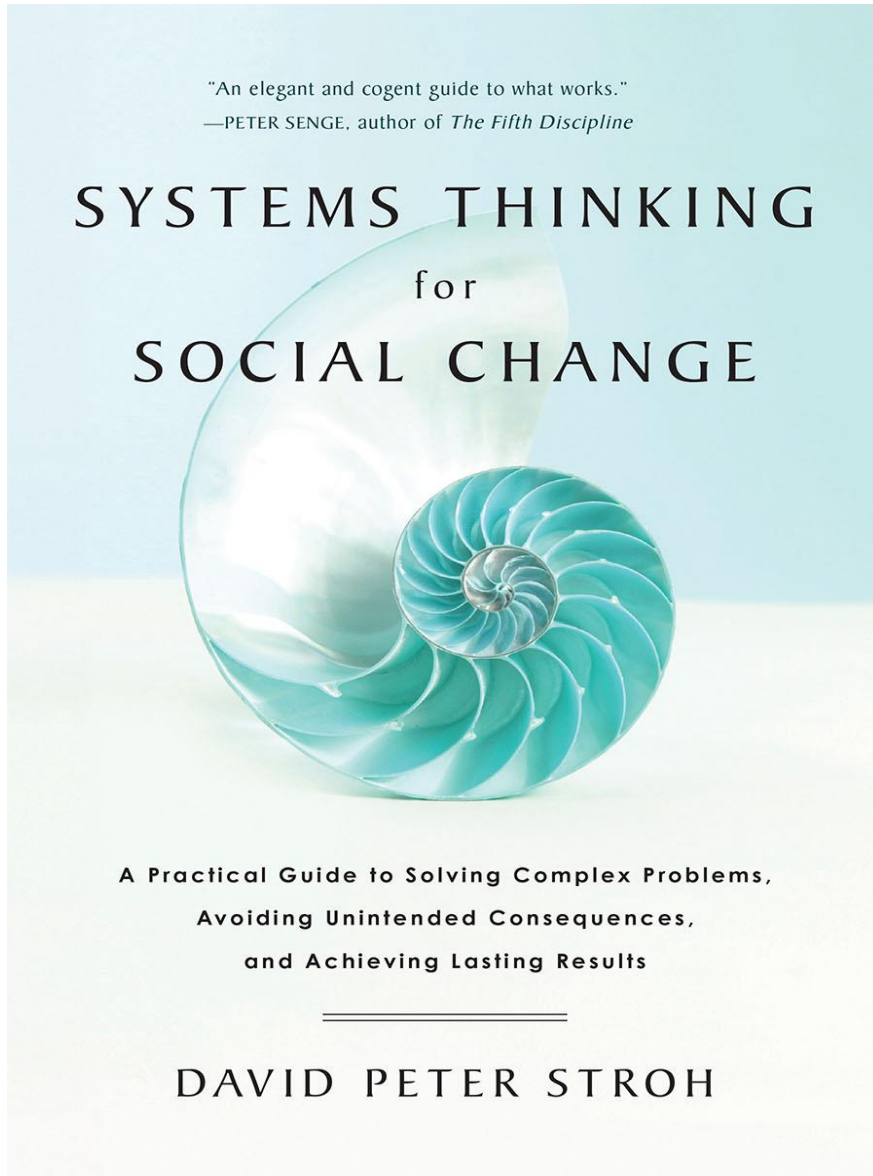


# Engaging People in Model-Building

1. Embed systems mapping into a change management process (e.g. the four-stages in *Systems Thinking for Social Change*)
2. Establish a focusing question to focus mapping
3. Gather qualitative data through interviews with supporting documentation and quantitative data where possible
4. Develop a straw model that builds on systems archetypes
5. Hold your model lightly
6. Work with a client modeling team to refine the model using such techniques as Connect the Dots, filling in the template, and adding mental models
7. Engage decision-makers in reflecting and acting on the model vetted by the modeling team

# Conversation

- Questions you have
- Opportunities you see



# Resources

- [\*Systems Thinking for Social Change\* \(Chelsea Green, 2015\)](#)
- [\*How to Make Systems Mapping More Accessible\*, Bridgeway Partners blog post, 2021](#)
- ["Overcoming the Systemic Challenges of Wealth Inequality in the U.S.", \*The Foundation Review\*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 2020](#)
- [\*Confronting the Rise of Authoritarian Leadership in the U.S.\*, Bridgeway Partners blog post, 2018](#)
- [\*A Health System Built on Racial Equity\*, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2022](#)
- [\*Our Work Is Connected – But We're Not\*, Bridgeway Partners blog post, 2019](#)
- ["Is Moving Too Fast Slowing You Down? How to Prevent Overload from Undermining Your Organization's Performance", \*Reflections\*, Summer 2013](#)
- <https://www.bridgewaypartners.com>
- <https://www.appliedsystemsthinking.com>
- [Email David at: Dstroh@bridgewaypartners.com](mailto:Dstroh@bridgewaypartners.com)