

ARNOVA Conference 2012

The Generation and Application of Spiritual Capital in Faith-based Organizations

An exploratory study of the worldwide Bahá'í Community

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A HKU project supported by The Hong Kong Jockey Club

Research Objectives

- To introduce **spiritual capital** as an **important supplement** to our **existing notions** of capital
- To explore how spiritual capital can be **generated and applied systematically** in the third sector
- To explore what **models of social action** can be derived from spiritual capital



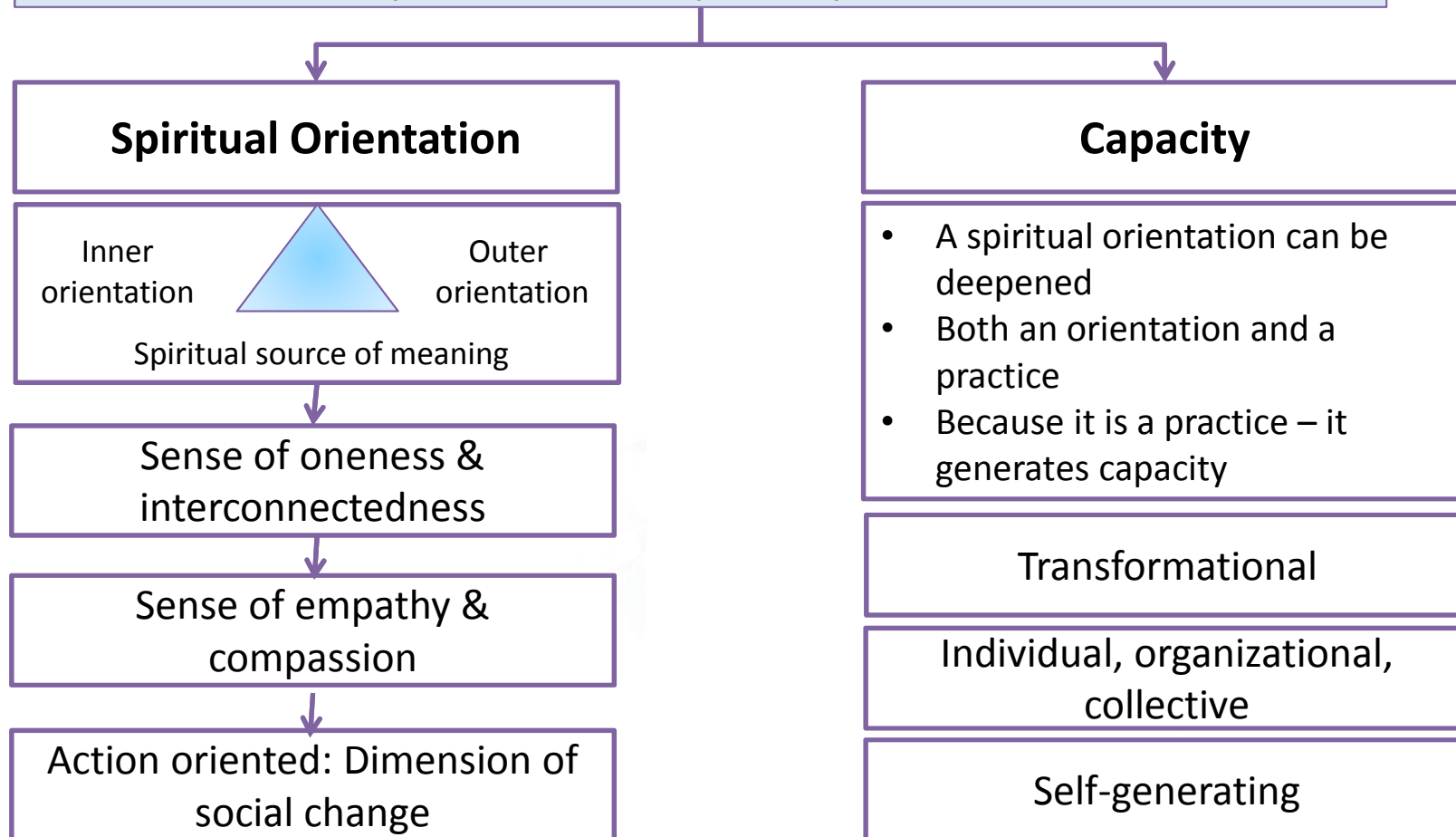
Presentation Content

- Preliminary concept of **spiritual capital**
- Apply concept to a **community development process** in the worldwide Bahá'í Community



Preliminary concept

“THE CAPACITY GENERATED BY A SPIRITUAL ORIENTATION TO LIFE”



Intrinsic Value

- **Motivations**
- Values related to spiritual orientation to life

Instrumental Value

- **Outcomes**
- Values are good if they provide the means for acquiring something else of value

TENSION
How to
resolve this?

- Needs to **find realization in social life**
- We do want **beneficial outcomes** so long as they are for **intrinsic reasons**

- Must be used for the **purpose of realizing intrinsic values**
- **Side effect**, produced by pursuit of intrinsic values

Spiritual Capital in the Third Sector

- **Not restricted** to religious identity
- **Universal**
- **Implicit Foundation** of all third sector organizations
- **FBO context:** Religion provides conceptual and practical framework



Case: The worldwide Bahá'í Community

- **Originated** Iran, 19th century
- Over **5 million believers** worldwide
- **Represents** 2112 ethnic and tribal groups
- **Formally established** in 218 sovereign countries and dependent territories
- **Mission:** global civilization based on spiritual foundations



Community Development Process

Ruhi study circle



Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program



The Ruhi Institute

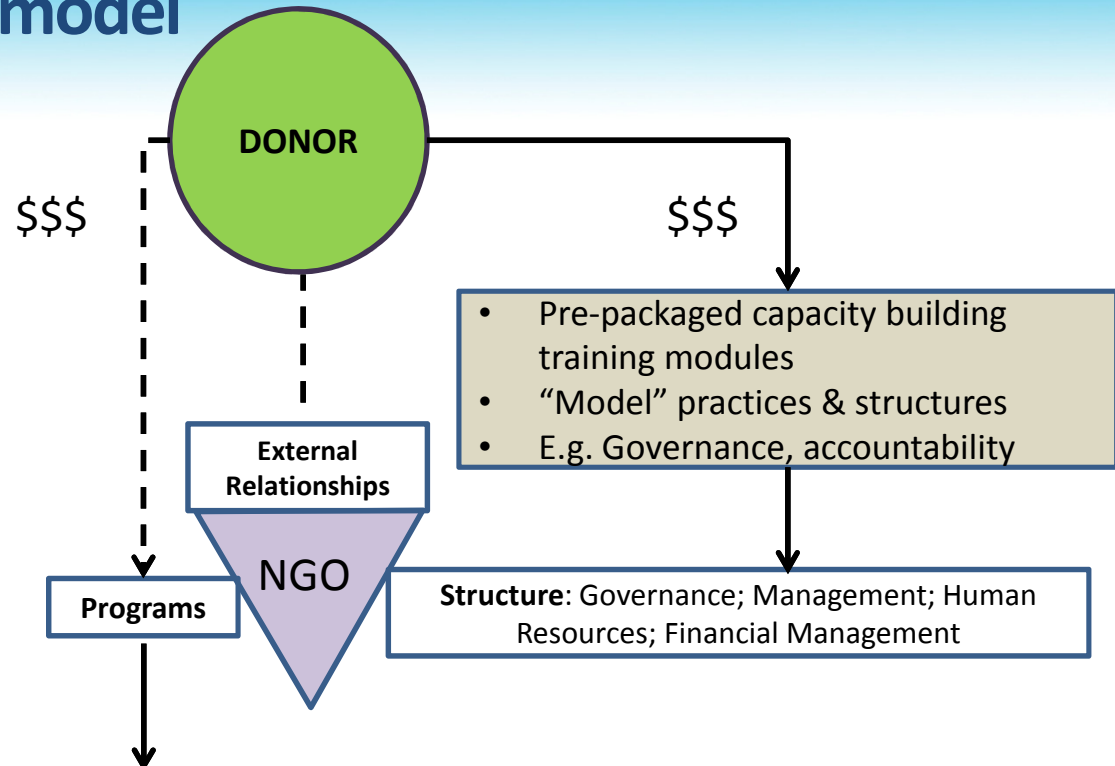


Small service activity



Institutionalized NGO project

Example of top-down model



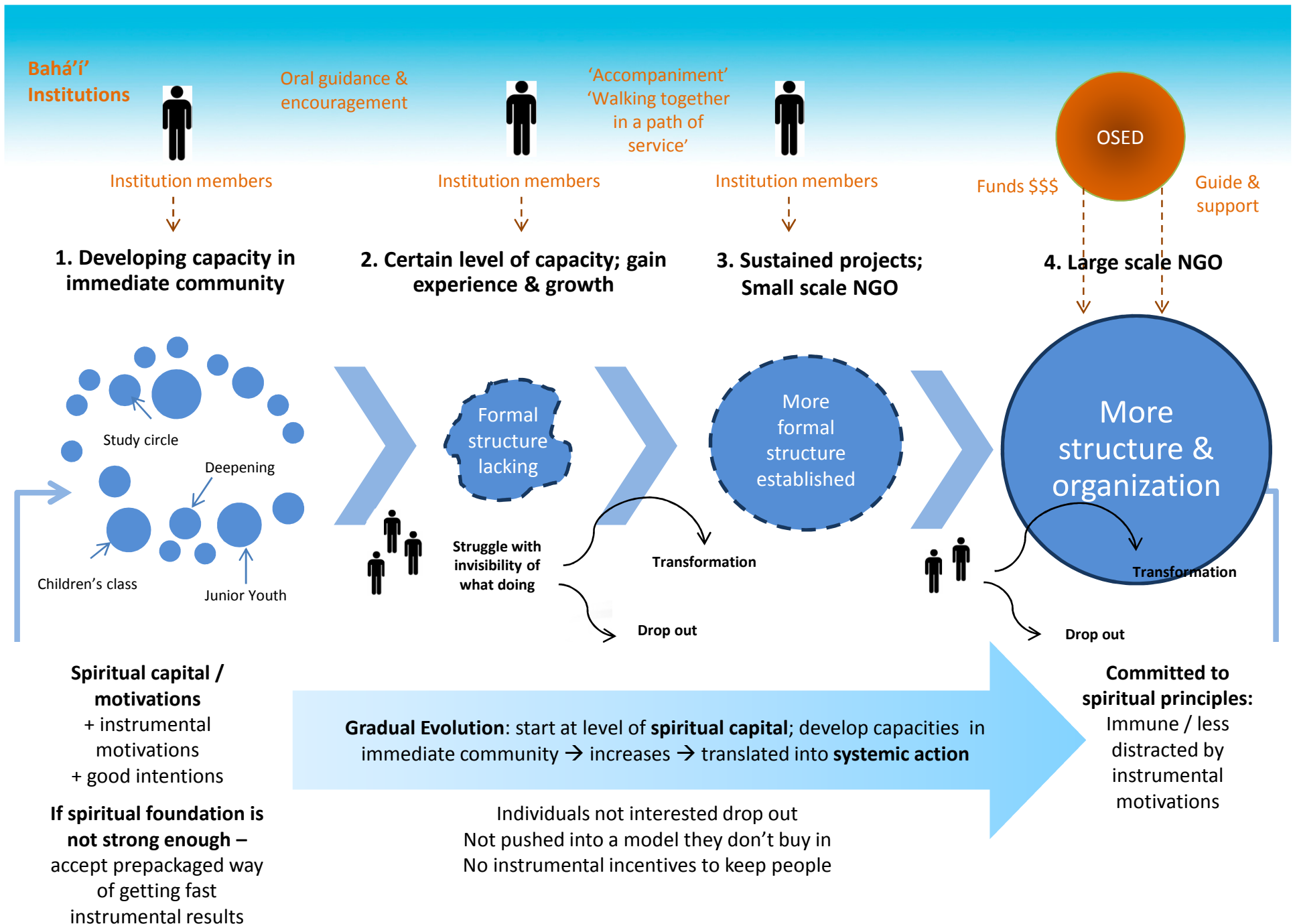
“The programs described in this article contain a **common kernel of failure**: rather than being grounded in the actual, lived experience of Chinese civil society organizations and emerging **organically** from the **bottom up**, they have been imagined and developed in a decidedly **top-down fashion**.”

(Spires 2012, p.145)

Bahá'í Community Development Model



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‘Value-addedness’ of spiritual capital?

1. Organic

- Emerges from an **intrinsic** basis
- **Social spaces** created in pre-existing social networks & spaces
- **Avoid rely on top-down activities → empowers**
- **Sustainable:** community & decision-making structures in place for action

2. Local participation

- Projects emerge from **grassroots motivations**

3. Human resources

- **Strongly committed** to spiritual principles
- Immune to **instrumental motivations** / temptations
- **Transformation** rather than burnout
- **Self-perpetuating**

In one Taiwanese city, **one study circle had developed into dozens** of study circles and children’s classes, forming a **densely connected community**: “Within two years, dozens of mothers were leading their own study circles or teaching children’s classes, and over 130 parents, children and youth were participants in those activities.”
(Palmer, 2012)



Summary

- Introduced the **significance of spiritual capital** as an **important supplement** to our **existing notions** of capital
- **Bahá'í Community Development Process**
 - Generation & application of spiritual capital
 - Model of social engagement and community building



Thank you!



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