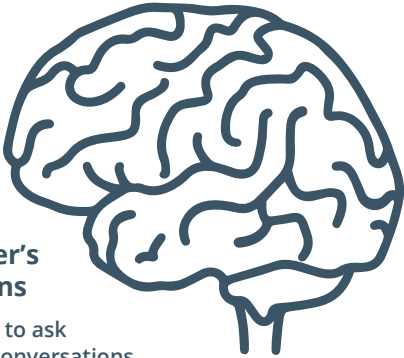Mental models are the attitudes, beliefs, morals, expectations and values that allow structures to continue to function in their current state. Often, these are learned subconsciously from society or family and we are largely unaware of them.

User's Guide to:
Mental Models

1 Check Your Assumptions

What beliefs are at play? Where did they come from? What data did you filter – why? What assumptions are grounded in facts? How might a different set of assumptions result in different conclusions and actions? Be mindful of your mental models and help others be able to see theirs.

2 Check Other's Assumptions

Consider how to ask questions in conversations with others to uncover people's mental models and the assumptions behind their perspectives. You also can facilitate conversations about mental models in the context of efforts to improve an outcome.

Source: The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook, Senge et al, 1994

15 minute deep dive into Mental Models and disparities:
Do by yourself or with community partners

Step 1:
2 minutes

How do you privately explain the persistence of disparities the families you work with are facing?

Step 2:
2 minutes

List the disparities in your community and describe the supporting evidence (observation/data) that they exist.

Disparities	Evidence

Step 4:
6 minutes

From the list you just generated, choose the most common mental model for explaining a disparity. How do your current strategies to address this disparity align with, contradict or disrupt these mental models?

Step 3:
5 minutes

What are some of the mental models in your field that are used to explain these disparities? What do people say out loud and what do they say behind closed doors?

Spoken Mental Models	Unspoken Mental Models

Mental models are the "big lifts" to creating sustainable social change. Understanding what they are in ourselves and society and how they are creating the outcomes we see in our community, is key to unlocking real results.

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Hey you!
Grab a pen and fill in the work areas.

Mental Models

Where does this fit in the Equitable Results Sequence?

1 Whole and program population with awareness of the disadvantaged

3 Targeted and universal strategies

2 Targeted and universal factor analysis

4 Performance measures centered on equity

It is important to understand what mental models you are holding since these impact which data you will select or filter out. Mental models are the foundation of why you react to events in certain ways, how your community views itself and how you visualize your contribution to the result. Factors can be created based on incorrect mental models which lead to innefective strategies.

What is this?

Mental Models are explanations of one's thought process about who people are and how they behave or work in the world.

How could this show up in my work?

As you look at data and events, you often make assumptions based on your own experience about what worked and didn't work. This is why it's important to be aware of your mental models because they can create blind spots as you make decisions at different levels in your community.

Framework in context: *Strategies to reduce bias

1. Doubt objectivity: You are never fully objective. Remind yourself of subconscious thought processes so you can guard against biased evaluations

2. Increase motivation to be fair: Seek fairness, rather than being driven by fear of external judgment

3. Count: Use data to determine whether certain patterns of behavior lead to racial disparities in communities

4. Collect data and monitor outcomes: Because implicit bias cannot be reliably self-reported, it is important to set goals and collect data to see if they are being met

5. Involve a cross-section of decision-makers: Research shows that includmng a critical mass of underrepresented groups in decision-making process reduces bias

6. Create institutional mechanisms to reduce bias: Having very clear criteria, for example, in the context of school suspension, reduces bias

*Source: john a. powell

How can you practice one of the above as you develop strategies?

_____

_____

Notes: _____

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