

Promoting Social Justice in an Era of Globalization, Economic Crisis, and Increasing Inequality

Michael Reisch, Ph.D., LMSW

**2010 Joint World Conference on
Social Work & Social Development**

Hong Kong, June 13, 2010

Overview of Presentation

- **Visions of Social Justice**
- **Assumptions about Social Justice**
- **Principles of Social Justice Practice with Diverse Communities and Organizations**
- **Practice Emphases and Processes**

Competing Visions of Social Justice

All Include:

- Eradication of injustice
- Valuing differences, building on strengths
- Equitable distribution of power/resources
- Distributive & “opportunities” frameworks

Conflicts Between:

- Social Justice & Human Rights
- Outcomes vs. Opportunities

A Revised Vision of Social Justice

- Need knowledge of different definitions of social justice (contexts, contestations, fluidity)
- Components:
 - “Capabilities” approaches (e.g., Sen, Nussbaum)
 - Incorporation of different cultural & historical contexts
 - Consideration of multiple forms of power
 - Tailored to different types of oppression and manifestations of privilege.
- Common principles reformulated for particular contexts and updated regularly

Assumptions about Social Justice

- Social justice issues are always present
- Social justice is complex, fluid, evolving, conflict-laden, subjective. It is dynamic, not static.
- Definitions of social justice must be multifaceted with a positive vision.
- Social injustice exists in all societies, but takes different forms in different contexts.

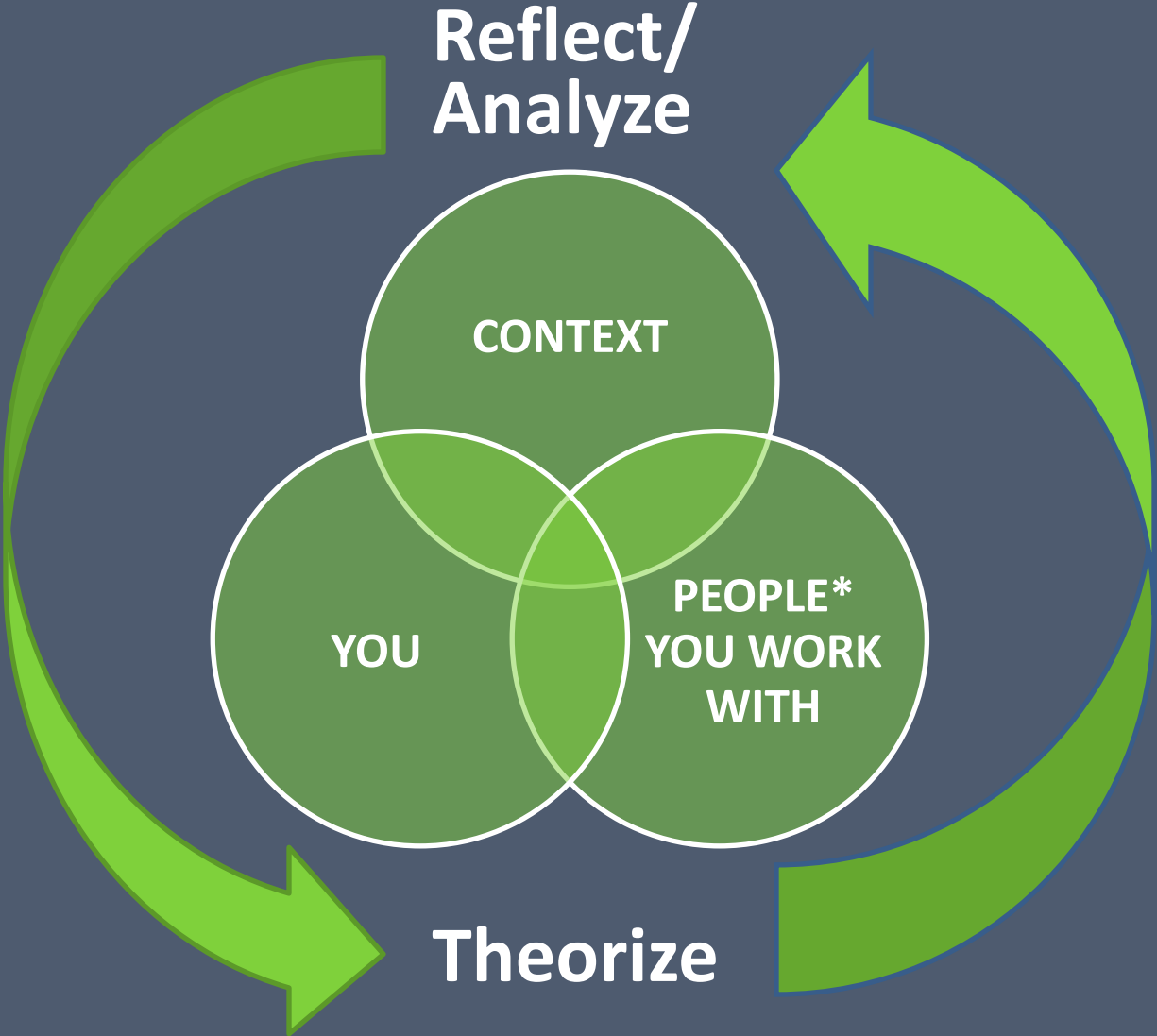
Assumptions for Social Justice Community & Organizational Practice

- **Centrality of Social Justice in ALL Work**
- **Social Justice as Ongoing, Expansive, Dynamic**
- **Infuse Goals & Processes Throughout Work**
- **Recognizing Critical Role of History & Context**
- **Omnipresence of Power in All Situations**
- **Significance of Positionality & Standpoints**
- **Ongoing Negotiation of Boundaries & Conflict**
- **“Victories” are Never Achieved Permanently**

Social Justice & Community & Organizational Practice: Goals

- Analyze root causes of inequality & injustice
- Emphasize power dynamics
- Juxtapose goals of market economy and SW
- Critique role of ideology and culture
- Focus on basic institutions and human needs
- Promote structural & institutional change not mere participation within existing systems
- Create alternative institutions

Figure one: Critical Analyses



* People/organization/community with whom you work

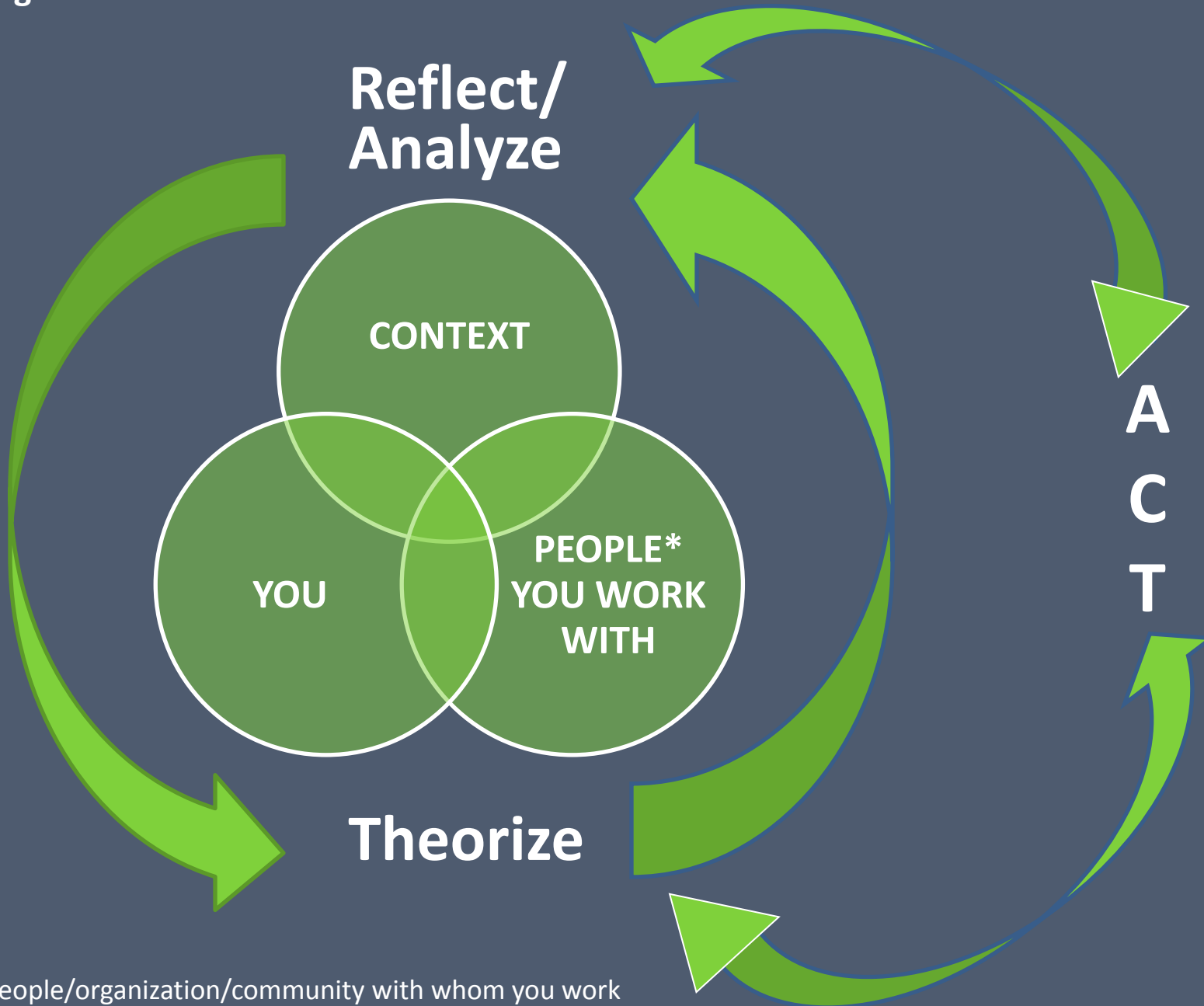
Application of Critical Contextual Analysis

- **History of Key Actors/Groups/Issues**
- **Diverse Positionalities /Standpoints of Actors**
- **Underlying Assumptions About Community, Social Goals, Politics, Inter-group Behavior**
- **Ideological/Theoretical Assumptions and World Views About Society, Change, etc.**
- **Self-Interests of Actors and Groups**
- **Dynamics of Power and Influence**

Practice Emphases

- Educational function of community work
- Praxis & development of critical consciousness
- Integration of marginalized groups
- Creation of multicultural coalitions
- Community-based action research
- Ongoing mechanisms of support

Figure Two: Praxis and Critical Consciousness



* People/organization/community with whom you work

Community Practice Processes

- Organizing Within and Across Boundaries
- Blending Issue and Identity-Based Approaches
- Focus on Expanding Participation: Create Diverse Means for People to Participate
- Ongoing Assessment of Participation's Impact
- Surfacing and Dealing with Power & Conflict
- Clarity About Roles of Workers: Positionality
- Forging Diverse Coalitions and Allyships
- Infusing Global Perspectives and International Influences into all Aspects of Practice

Organizational Practice Processes

- Creating and Strengthening Social Capital
- Leadership Development: Accepting Different Concepts and Dimensions of Leadership
- Socially Just Decision-making and Means of Allocating Resources & Responsibilities
- Creating a Socially Just Organizational Culture
- Dealing w/Intra & Inter-organizational conflict
- Monitoring/Assessment: SJ Technology

Figure Three: Dimensions of Practice

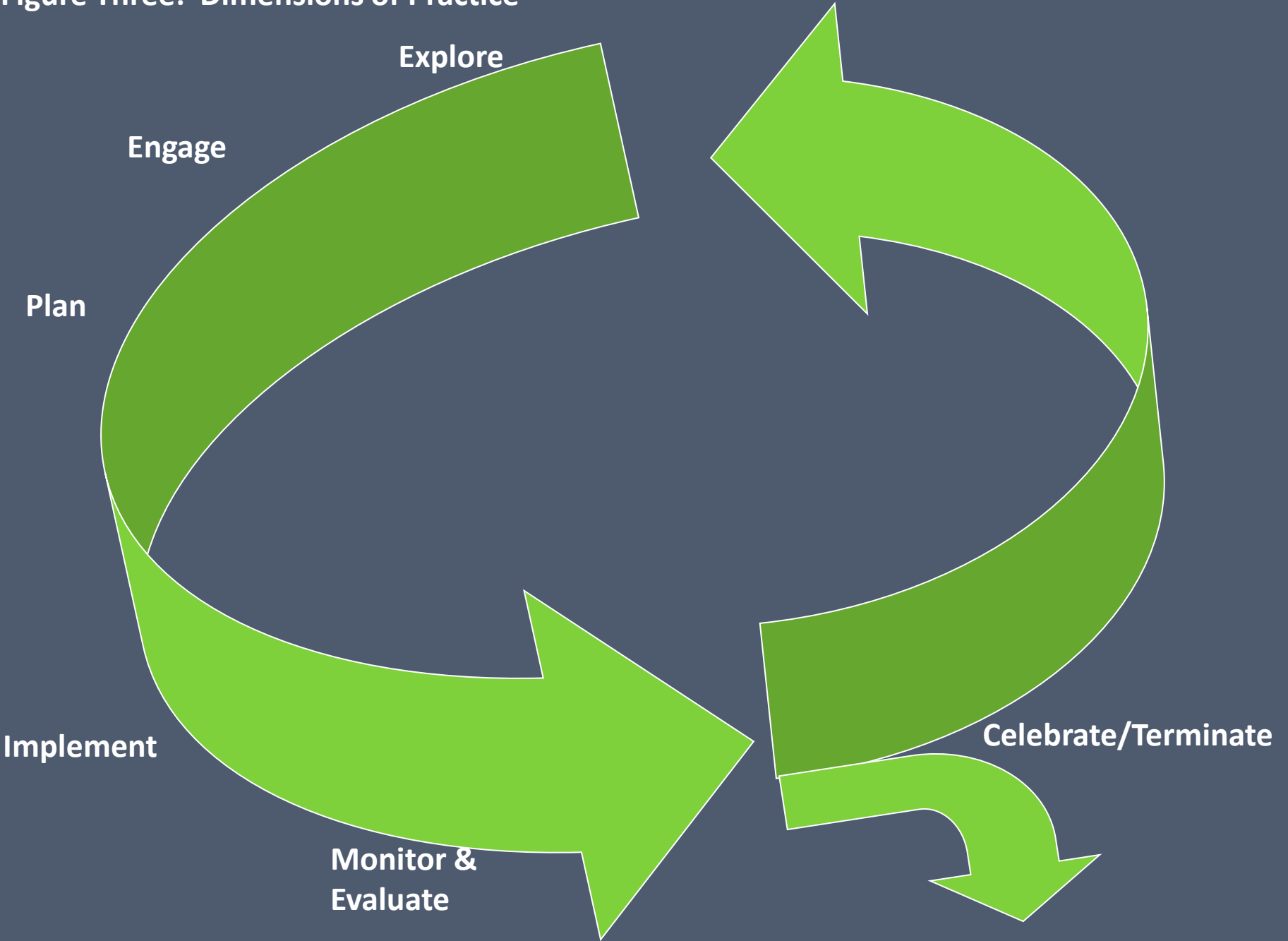


Figure 4. Dimensions of Social Justice Practice

* People/organization/community you work with



Thank You for Your Attention