

Why Communities Succeed or Fail

The Hidden Power of Motivation

It has been said the “world is run by those who show up.” This certainly seems true when it comes to advancing community and economic development practices. Whereas the 80/20 rule describes well the dynamics of most economics (80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes—the Pareto Principle), the 99/1 rule generally describes community and economic development (1% of the population commits their time and effort for the sole purpose of benefiting their community). This is the foundational “truth” of the **Community Motivation Theory**.

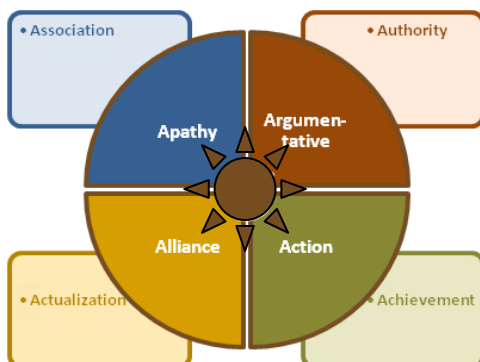
In a community of 10,000 people, therefore, approximately 100 individuals typically volunteer to serve in elected, appointed, or other volunteer positions. An even smaller percentage--10% of the 1% (0.1%)—are *super-activists*.

It is the collective motivation of this “group of 0.1%” that sets the civic tone of the community. There are four distinct underlying motivations that can dominate the purpose of the super-activists: 1) association, 2) authority, 3) achievement, and 4) actualization.

It is the collective motivation of the super-activists that helps enable or impede the civic agenda of a community, and set the stage for the strategic planning—and plan implementation—process.

There is typically a very strong interrelationship between the motivation of the super-activists and the civic stage of the community:

- **Apathy Stage Communities** tend to be driven by **association**-oriented super-activists. These people interrelate civically simply for the experience of socializing.
- **Argumentative Stage Communities** are dominated by super-activists that strive to maintain and enhance their **authority**. While the civics of the community may have the flavor of teamwork and cooperation, the underlying dynamic is control.
- **Action Stage Communities** are characterized by super-activists with a drive for **achievement**. This motivation matches that of the broader 1% volunteer-base.
- **Alliance Stage Communities** are led by super-activists who desire the holistic advancement of the entire community, and are primarily motivated to **actualize** the ultimate community potential.



Understanding the prevailing civic motivation can be very helpful to participants in the strategic planning process.

Because participants in the process (the 1%) are typically driven by *achievement*, it is frequently difficult for them to understand the motivations of the super-activists if their prevailing motivation is *association* or *authority* (vs. *achievement* or *actualization*). Heightened awareness of this dynamic can help community volunteers become more effective—or at least more understanding of the challenges that lie ahead.

