



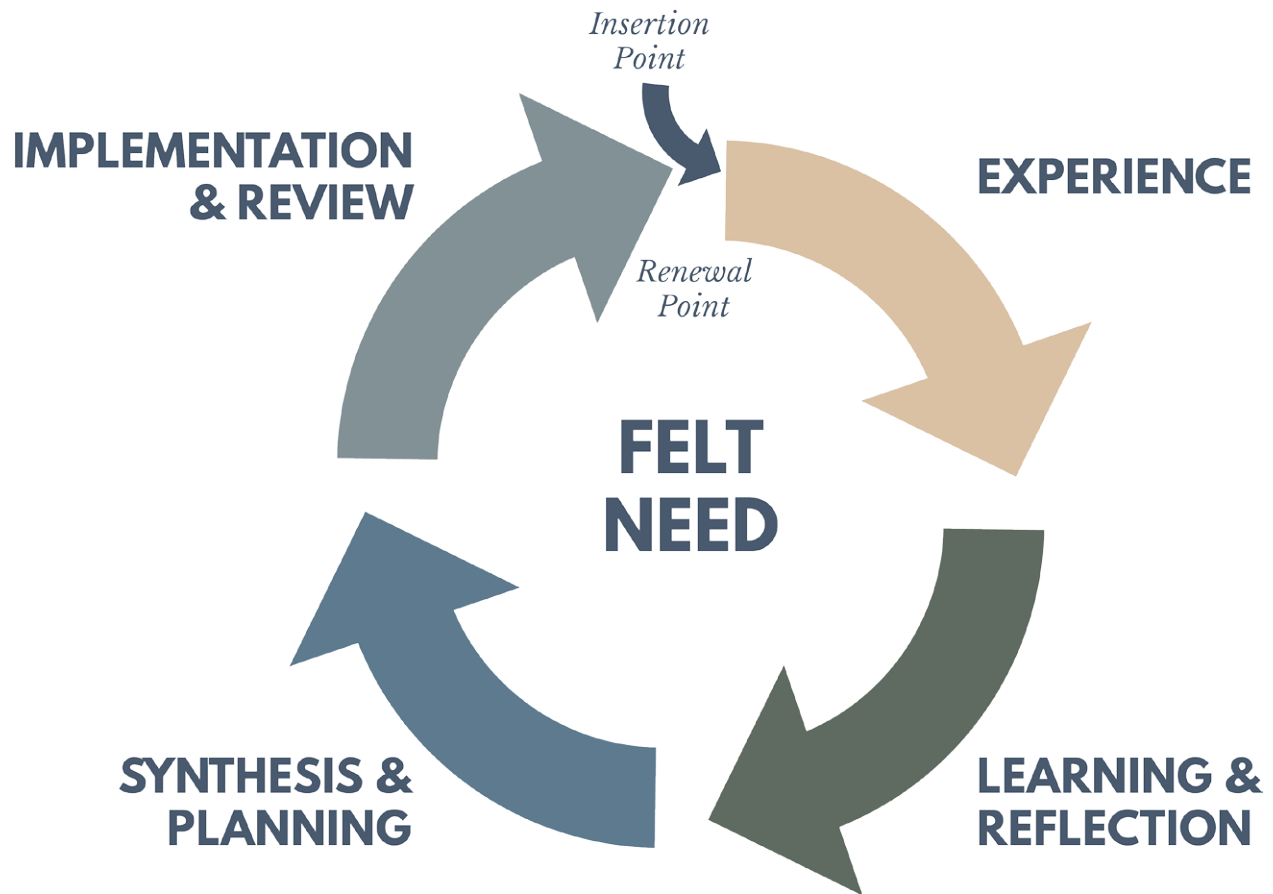
THE CYCLE OF PRAXIS

for community development

C. BJØRN PETERSON

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The Cycle of Praxis is a framework for creating sustainable, human-centered solutions in response to complex community challenges. It is both a tool box and a road map. As a cycle, it is responsive to the dynamic nature of problem-solving by providing structure that facilitates intentionality in analysis and action. It assumes flexibility to the needs of the process and encourages enhancement from the participants through the use of facilitation, planning, and budgeting tools. The purpose of the Cycle of Praxis is to prepare community members for learning and action while protecting the dignity of all affected by the work being done.

The Cycle of Praxis consists of four areas of focus: Experience; Learning & Reflection; Synthesis & Planning; and Implementation & Review.

Assumptions & Values Behind **THE CYCLE OF PRACTICE**

GUIDING ASSUMPTIONS

- Working on complex challenges in a community setting can too often be deeply contentious, frustrating, divisive, and ultimately harmful to the long-term health and vitality of the community.
- There is a better way to address complex challenges facing our communities than the ways typically practiced.
- That better way to address challenges is collaborative and participatory.
- Those who experience these challenges are best positioned to respond to them, and therefore, to articulate the felt needs at the heart of those challenges.
- Solutions to complex challenges will be sustainable if they are based in felt needs and animated by participatory self-help.

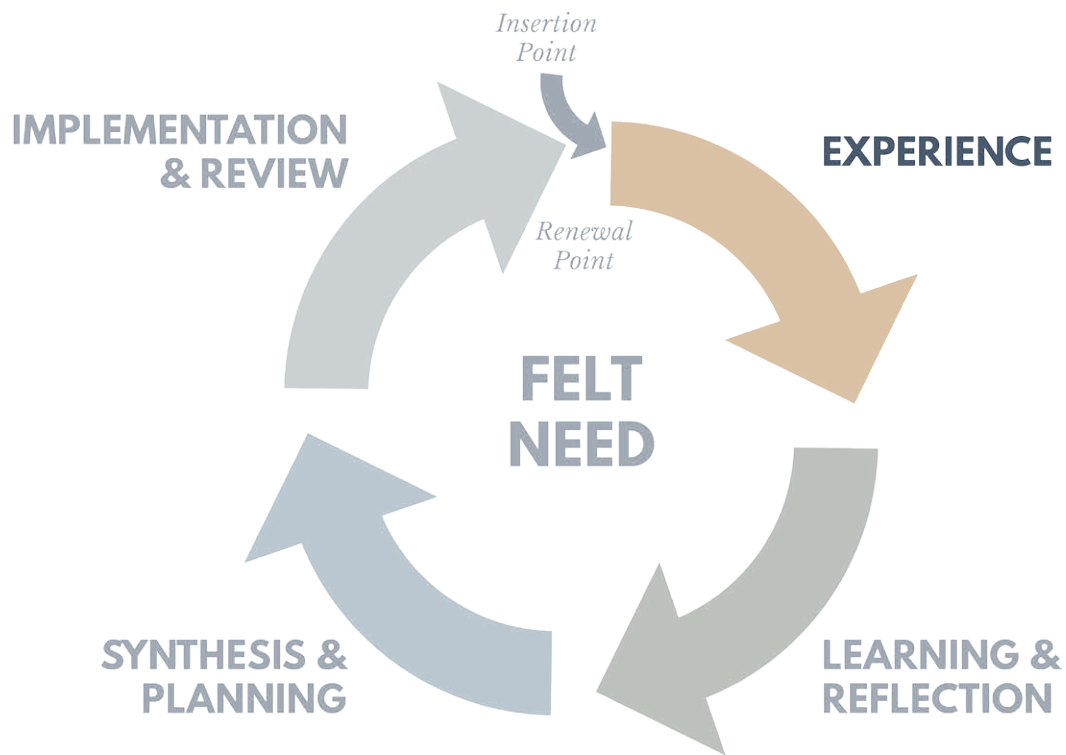
VALUE PREMISE

- Sustainable solutions to complex challenges require the best of all our traditions, knowledge, and behavior.
- Sustainable solutions to complex challenges require focus on lived experience so that outcomes matter to stakeholders
- Sustainable solutions to complex challenges require ongoing action and reflection over a series of cycles of learning and implementation.
- Sustainable solutions to complex challenges should promote and protect agency and solidarity in response to the community's felt needs, through self help and participation.

CONVENING QUESTIONS

1. What am I willing to commit to in order to facilitate fruitful learning and action?
2. What behaviors am I willing to practice in order to preserve the dignity of those involved in or affected by this work?
3. What am I willing to risk in order to promote and produce a fruitful process?
4. What strengths do I bring to this work? What weaknesses? What hopes? What suspicions?

Walking the **CYCLE OF PRAXIS:** *Experience*



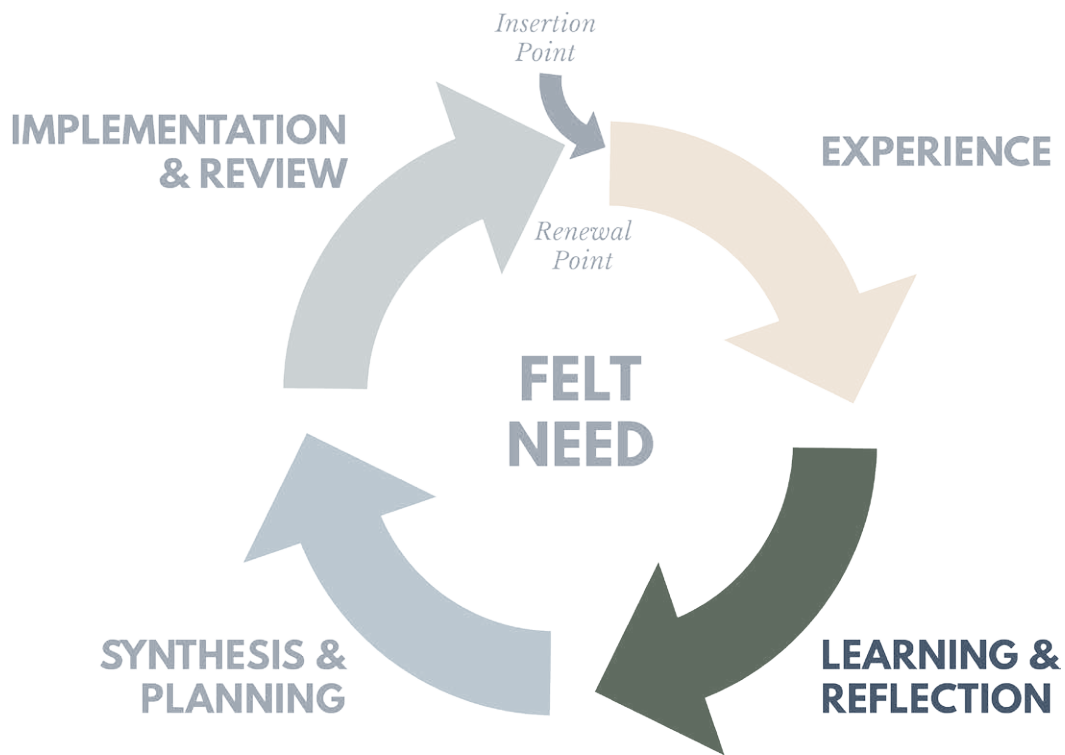
EXPERIENCE

Our insertion point into the work of Community Development is grounded in the felt needs of some portion of the community. We begin with the work of hearing the lived experiences that underscore the felt need being articulated (e.g. lack of affordable housing). Subsequent work in the cycle should continuously keep the lived experiences of those felt needs at its center. This will help ensure meaningful outcomes in the long run.

EXPERIENCE: FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. What are the lived experiences that have led to the articulation of the felt need around which we have convened?
2. What diversity exists among these lived experiences? What similarities exist? Do these cause us to reconsider our initial articulation of a felt need?
3. Is there someone whose experience needs articulation, but who is currently not present? Who? How can we successfully invite their participation in this process?
4. Having heard these lived experiences, how might we re-articulate the felt need around which we are convened?

Walking the **CYCLE OF PRAXIS:** *Learning & Reflection*



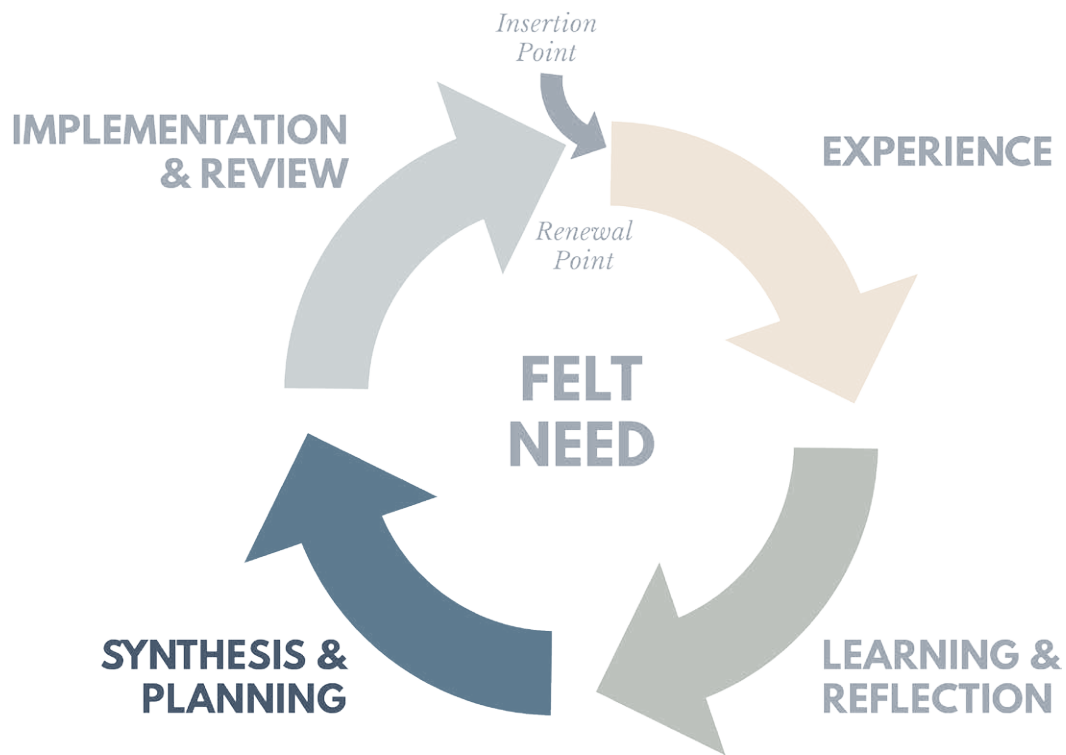
LEARNING & REFLECTION

The task here is to deepen and broaden our understanding of the lived experiences and felt needs that we are addressing. Our focus on learning and reflection represents an acknowledgment that if simple solutions to our articulated felt needs were readily available, understood, and actionable, we would not be here. The complexity of our challenges, particularly done in a community setting, requires that we collectively humble ourselves in order to be surprised by new learning and reflection, in service to new ideas, to be created by this new group here gathered.

LEARNING & REFLECTION: FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. What insights and analysis can give context and nuance to the felt need? (Historical, Psychological, Socioeconomic, Cultural, Legal, Anthropological, Natural Scientific, etc.)
2. What reflection and expression can give texture and depth to the felt need? (Artistic, Religious, Philosophical, Wisdom, etc.)
3. What technical knowledge or skills may be needed to better understand or respond to the felt need?
4. What interpersonal knowledge or skills may be needed to better understand or respond to the felt need?
5. As we gather new insights, what learning and reflection remain ambiguous or beyond our current scope? Can they wait or should they be addressed now?
6. As we suspect we are ready to move on to synthesis and planning, do we have a deeper understanding of the lived experiences first articulated?
7. With our new knowledge and deeper understanding, how would we outline our key learnings and reflections? How would we now articulate the felt need?
8. What assets, strengths, and resources exist in our community which might be mobilized for our purposes?

Walking the
CYCLE OF PRAXIS:
Synthesis & Planning



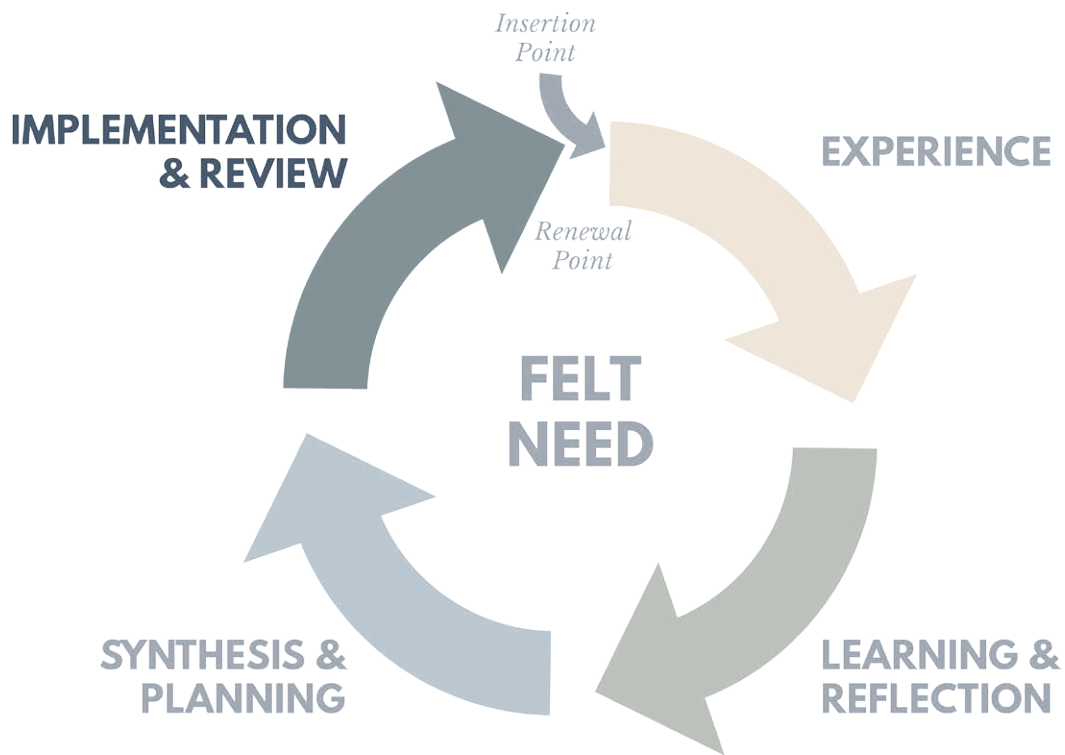
SYNTHESIS & PLANNING

The task here is to synthesize the lived experiences of the community with the new insights, learning, and reflection gleaned during the totality of the Cycle of Praxis thus far. The turn toward planning represents the application of our new knowledge in the form of strategic action to be taken as a response to our community’s felt need.

SYNTHESIS & PLANNING: FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Based on our articulated need and subsequent learning and reflection, what are our assumptions about a potentially effective plan? What diversity exists among our assumptions? Can we continue or is more learning and reflection required?
2. Based on our assumptions, what tasks need effort or completion in order to effectively respond to the felt need? How would we prioritize these tasks?
3. Given these tasks and the priority we have assigned them, who is willing to commit what in order to ensure their completion? On what timeline?
4. Whose assistance may be required in order to complete these tasks? How can we successfully recruit/invite their participation?

Walking the **CYCLE OF PRAXIS:** *Implementation & Review*



IMPLEMENTATION & REVIEW

The overall task here is to take action on the plan we have developed to respond to the community's felt need. Because sustainable solutions to complex challenges rarely are achieved through one set of interventions, implementation is not judged merely on the successful resolution of a problem; but, rather, on the increasing capacity of community members to effectively respond to their felt needs. Implementation, therefore, not only provides progress toward ultimate goals through direct action, but also through the creation of new experiences and knowledge as the Cycle of Praxis eventually goes into its next iteration. Action now, folds into further reflection, which leads to further action, and so on.

IMPLEMENTATION & REVIEW: FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Are the agreed upon tasks being engaged in meaningful ways? Are participants choosing to be accountable to their stated commitments?
2. Are the initial lived experiences being honored in the pursuit of our planned and implemented tasks?
3. What is the pursuit of our action tasks teaching us about our previous understanding of the felt need? Did we ask good questions about the meaning of the initial lived experiences?
4. What are the outcomes we are seeing? How do they confirm, challenge, or surprise our planning assumptions?
5. Whose experiences ought to be added to our conversation in the next iteration of the cycle? Whose voice is missing from this process?
6. What have been our strengths in this process? What have been our challenges?
7. What new assumptions do we have about this process? About our lived experiences? About our next steps?



BJØRN PETERSON, PH. D.

Bjørn Peterson is an international scholar/practitioner in community engagement and leadership development. Bjørn's work has taken him around the world, gaining insight and expertise in the action and reflection at the heart of social transformation. He is particularly skilled in coaching individuals and communities who are looking to integrate their values, practices, and visions into holistic approaches to life together, with an eye toward solution building.

Bjørn's PhD is in Community Resources and Development from Arizona State University. He has a Bachelor of Science in Communication and Group Identity from Oregon State University and a Master of Arts in Transformational Leadership from Seattle University. His research focuses on identity construction and sense-making among community workers as the foundation for problem solving. His academic expertise is in interpretive research methods, social identity construction, and sustainable and community development with area focus in the Western United States and the Indian Himalaya.

Bjørn grew up in Minnesota but has lived in 37 zip codes including living and traveling on six continents and Oceania. He has been married to Elise for 13 years. They have a son (Magnus) and love to be in nature. Bjørn is a big hockey fan, loves music, tattoos, books, woodworking, hiking, photography, and street art. You can contact him at c.bjorn.peterson@gmail.com.

Keep up with his community leadership work at lookingbearleadership.com.