



WATERLOO INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL  
INNOVATION AND RESILIENCE



**As Frances** just said, Anthony Giddens' theoretical work on social structuration sounds abstract but, in fact, it's quite powerful and can be used to decide where the best place is to focus efforts to make significant change in social systems.

**This theory** can be really useful to social innovators, helping them to be more strategic and achieve more impact. That's worth paying attention to, so here's a little bit more detail on it.



**This theoretical** framework is usually presented as a chart or table, with three rows down the left hand side and four columns running across. The three rows are about different scales and are labeled, from bottom to top, Micro, Meso and Macro.

Macro			
Meso			
Micro			



**Micro scale** refers to our social interactions, conversations, etc. – right here and now. It's what we say and hear and think and do at this scale and we engage in these interactions all the time.



**Meso scale** refers to a broader scale that includes organizations, associations, networks and communities—all kinds of collections of individuals and individual entities.



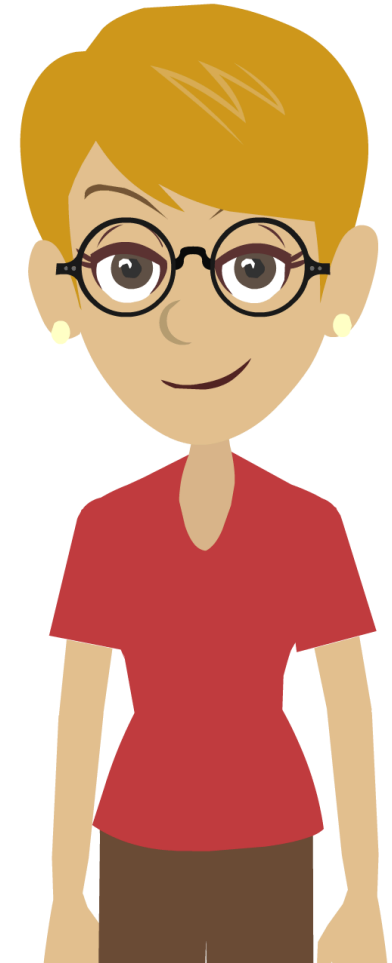
**Macro scale** is the broadest scale that exists and it's a label referring to our society itself or the culture in which we live and work.



**Although the** matrix is linear, remember that the scales are nested within each other—more like the circles here.



Macro			
Meso			
Micro			



**Along the top**, from left to right are four columns (domination gets *two*). These are labeled with four different social structures.



	Structures of legitimation (norms and procedures)	Structures of domination (power)	Structures of domination (resources)	Structures of signification (values and beliefs)
Macro				
Meso				
Micro				



**They are** about the rules and resources that we, as a society, have created and reinforced over time. These structures influence pretty much everything we think and say and do. As Frances said, “*We carry them with us.*”



	Structures of legitimation (norms and procedures)	Structures of domination (power)	Structures of domination (resources)	Structures of signification (values and beliefs)
Macro				
Meso				
Micro				

**Structures of  
legitimation (norms  
and procedures)**

**Structures of  
domination (power)**

**Structures of  
domination  
(resources)**

**Structures of  
signification (values  
and beliefs)**

**They are:**

**Legitimation**—about everyday norms and procedures

**Domination**—about power and authority

**Domination**—about resource distribution, access, and use

**Signification**—about values and beliefs

**Here's the** entire framework for you to look at in detail:

	<b>Structures of legitimation (norms and procedures)</b>	<b>Structures of domination (power)</b>	<b>Structures of domination (resources)</b>	<b>Structures of signification (values and beliefs)</b>
<b>Macro</b>	Legal institutions	Political institutions	Economic institutions	Cultural institutions (media, schools, churches, etc.)
<b>Meso</b>	Rules that govern our interactions (formal or informal) around work and social interaction	Rules that govern our interactions around power; hierarchies; distributions around power.	Rules that govern distribution, access, and use; markets, transactions, resource distribution.	Rules that allow us to interpret and reproduce the meanings of day-to-day events.
<b>Micro</b>	Rules that govern our exchanges	Who controls the topic and mood.	Who gets more time; whose ideas are privileged.	Values and beliefs that inform interactions.



**Be careful** of the word *institutions*—we often use it to refer to large organizations like universities or hospitals. But here, the word *institutions* has a much different meaning. It refers to the sets of behaviours and meanings that structure our social behavior and that are most visible at the **macro** scale. This scale is sometimes even called *the institutional scale*.

**But remember** that Giddens' insight is that, although we feel like these large institutional influences exist at the broad scale, *they are present and being acted out at every scale* right down to the micro. And this insight is hopeful and encouraging to change-makers, because it means that, while human beings are being influenced by these big social structures, human beings are also *capable of influencing and changing these structures*.



**To try to apply** this theory to the problem that you're working to change, consider how the different structures are played out at the different scales. Start asking yourself and others questions about these social structures and scales, like...

**What's the** positive and negative influence of certain rules and laws on individuals and communities in the area I'm working to change?

**What needs** to change in terms of power—things like hierarchies, policies, political agendas?

**Is change** needed at the micro scale—Is it individuals that need to change?

**Is change** in these structures needed at broader scales?

**What about** our values and belief systems is holding this problem in place?

**At what** scale is there an opportunity to begin shifting to new values and different beliefs?



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