MAKING WORK COUNT:

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING ECONOMIC MOBILITY

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A STORY…
FIX THE CONTEXT
NOT THE PERSON

CONTEXT MATTERS
THE STANDARD MODEL

**DECISIONS**
- yes
- no

**ACTIONS**
- A
- B

**OUTCOME**
- yes
- no

we decide “yes” if benefits > costs

action naturally follows from decision
ACTUAL BEHAVIORAL MODEL

DECISIONS

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

ACTIONS

- How difficult is it?
- Am I in the mood?
- Was I already "good" today?
- Will it take long?

OUTCOME

- What’s everyone else doing?
- Can I just do it tomorrow?
BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS AND POVERTY
Erynn Brook @ErynnBrook · May 15
Everyone I’ve ever talked to who has been poor and is not anymore has the same story of the moment they realized they weren’t poor anymore: grocery shopping.

Erynn Brook @ErynnBrook · May 15
Either at the checkout or in the aisles. I had this moment. I remember it clearly. Mine came when I was loading my groceries onto the cashier belt and I realized I didn’t do the math.

Erynn Brook @ErynnBrook · May 15
When I was poor grocery shopping was complex math, holding numbers in my head, constantly remembering pre and post tax prices for the things in my basket, combined with survival math like “if I go to bed before the hunger hits then half a bagel is enough for dinner.”
POVERTY INTERRUPTED: DESIGNING FOR SCARCITY

3 design principles and
15 recommendations for reducing the bandwidth tax and addressing the context of poverty
THE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Cut the costs

Create slack

Reframe and empower
DESIGN PRINCIPLE 1: CUT THE COSTS

Well-meaning programs increase these costs unintentionally.
Among families Tacoma Housing Authority worked with, 100% of college aged student received the scholarship because the sign-up was integrated into the standard housing application.
DESIGN PRINCIPLE 2: CREATE SLACK

Poverty is unforgiving, leaving no room for error or risk.

Even minor unanticipated “shocks” can be catastrophic for families.

Building resilience to these shocks to support families.
Poverty Interrupted white paper.

BUILDING BACKSTOPS

offers “stackable” trainings, each of which leads to a workplace credential, so participants get credit even if they can’t complete the whole program.
Living in poverty carries a powerful social stigma.

Many systems and programs unintentionally reinforce this stigma rather than affirm autonomy and dignity.
BUILDING PLAUSIBLE PATHS TO SUCCESS

invites successful participants back
to work with younger students and hires from within the community

Poverty Interrupted white paper.
POLICY IMPLICATION: WORK REQUIREMENTS
WORK REQUIREMENTS…

- INCREASE COSTS
- ELIMINATE SLACK
- MALIGN AND DISEMPOWER
FALSE moral narratives around poverty in the United States

- The poor are individually and solely responsible for their circumstances
- Those living in poverty lack the agency to manage their lives
- Exceptional rags-to-riches stories show that people can move out of poverty with hard work
RECOMMENDATIONS for increasing labor market participation

- Expand effective employment and training programs that meet clients where they are
- Subsidize (or provide) child- and elder care
- Increase take-home pay