

Relational Dignity Infrastructure

The Human Layer Required to Make Material Housing Inhabitable

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ABSTRACT

Material housing provision does not produce human recovery. Finland's Housing First infrastructure achieves eighty to ninety percent two-year retention. The United States achieves below forty percent. The difference is not the housing unit. It is the ambient relational environment within and surrounding that unit at the moment of occupancy. This paper defines Relational Dignity Infrastructure (RDI) as the systematically designed continuously functioning social environment that produces ontological security identity capital accumulation and the functional capacity for reintegration that material shelter alone cannot produce. RDI is positioned as the third functional layer of a three-part dignity stack. Material Dignity Infrastructure (MDI) delivers biological survival conditions. RDI delivers the relational recognition and social continuity required for selfhood persistence. Identity capital accumulation delivers the agentic selfhood required for reintegration into civic life. Drawing on Giddens's ontological security framework, Porges's polyvagal theory, Padgett's social-material conjunction findings, Cote and Levine's identity capital theory, Tsai and colleagues' social integration evidence, and the Y-Foundation's implementation documentation of the Finnish national Housing First system, the paper establishes RDI as a formal theoretical construct and maps its five production conditions onto the existing MDI tower architecture. These conditions include Dunbar-scale pod environments, the live-in Pod Steward role, peer support workforce deployment, the unconditional Ground Floor Commons, and recurring community practice mechanisms including the Pod Council and common kitchen. Two integration gaps requiring specification are identified including the relational intake protocol grounded in polyvagal neuroception architecture and the social network transition protocol specified through Social Network Analysis methodology. Five RDI verification metrics are proposed as leading indicators of the eight binary material metrics that constitute the MDI Singular Prototype Threshold. The RDI workforce layer is positioned as a revenue-generating clinical infrastructure component billable under California's CalAIM Enhanced Care Management and In Lieu of Services frameworks converting the relational layer from a cost center into a Medi-Cal revenue stream under existing state law.

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Statement of Necessity

The homelessness policy literature has produced two decades of Housing First evidence demonstrating that permanent housing with wraparound services outperforms treatment-first models. What the literature lacks is a formally defined concept for the relational layer that material housing must contain. Without this concept, institutional service systems default to transactional case management and behavioral compliance monitoring, minimizing residents' status as persons under reconstruction. This paper defines Relational Dignity Infrastructure (RDI) as the structural solution to this gap, mapping its implementation within the MDI tower architecture as a replicable, measurable component capable of achieving the eighty to ninety percent retention rates observed in the Finnish system.

Author Note

This framework is developed as an open-source collaborative infrastructure project. Source files, architectural models, and version history are maintained publicly at: https://github.com/material-dignity/working_papers.

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1. The Retention Problem and Its Missing Layer

Finland reduced chronic homelessness by sixty-eight percent. Its Housing First program sustains eighty to ninety percent two-year housing retention. The United States implements Housing First programs in every major metropolitan area and achieves below forty percent retention. The housing unit is not the variable that differentiates these outcomes. The relational environment within and surrounding that unit is.

American Housing First implementation places individuals directly from street-level acute physiological crisis into permanent apartments. The MDI series has established the biological case for why this sequencing fails. Sleep-destroyed, cortisol-flooded, prefrontal-cortex-compromised individuals cannot maintain housing tenure because the neurological equipment required to manage a lease has been systematically destroyed by years of street exposure. The biological argument is necessary but insufficient. Even individuals who complete metabolic stabilization and arrive in a permanent unit with intact neurological function fail at rates that purely biological models cannot explain.

The evidence from Padgett (2007), from Tsai et al. (2012) across three US Housing First sites, and from the Y-Foundation (2022) functional documentation of the Finnish national system identifies a consistent predictor of two-year retention that functions independently of neurological status. That predictor is the quality of the relational environment within the housing setting. Individuals embedded in stable relational networks recognized as specific persons by the people who share their residential environment and holding roles within their residential community that produce identity continuity retain housing at rates approaching the Finnish benchmark. Individuals placed in housing without these conditions retain at American rates regardless of the quality of the unit.

The relational environment is not a wraparound service. It is not case management, peer support programming, or community building activity. It is an ambient, structural property of the housing environment itself, the continuous background condition against which individual recovery either occurs or fails to occur. This paper names that property Relational Dignity Infrastructure and establishes its formal theoretical standing, its five production conditions, and its implementation within the MDI tower architecture.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1. Ontological Security: The First Requirement

Giddens (1991) defined ontological security as the confidence most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments. It is not psychological stability in the clinical sense. It is the existential foundation beneath daily action, a taken-for-granted background of recognizable routine, stable social relationships, and spatial predictability that allows a person to plan, hope, and act in time without constant vigilance against environmental disruption.

Street homelessness systematically destroys all four of the conditions Giddens identifies as constitutive of ontological security (Giddens, 1991). Routine collapses under the pressure of daily survival, where food, water, shelter, and safety absorb all cognitive bandwidth and leave nothing for the forward planning that routine requires. Social continuity fractures because the encampment environment, despite its real community bonds, is perpetually disrupted by sweeps, deaths, relocations, and institutional interventions. Spatial control disappears when any surface a person occupies is claimable by police at any moment. Identity continuity, which Giddens identifies as the deepest requirement, dissolves when every institutional contact confirms the person as a category of social problem failing to recognize them as a specific named individual with a particular history.

The neurobiological mechanism underlying this destruction is documented in Porges (2011). Porges identifies neuroception as the nervous system's non-conscious process of continuously scanning the environment for cues of safety or threat. Chronic street exposure locks neuroception into permanent sympathetic-dominant or dorsal-vagal shutdown states. These autonomic configurations produce hypervigilance, social withdrawal, and the dissociative immobility that Porges identifies as characteristic of chronic dorsal-vagal shutdown. These states are not behavioral choices or psychiatric symptoms. They are predictable neurological adaptations to an environment where threat is constant and safety cues are absent. The critical implication for housing design is that the housing event itself constitutes what Giddens terms a fateful moment (Giddens, 1991), a threshold event that pierces the protective cocoon of routine and forces existential re-evaluation. Fateful moments are periods of acute ontological vulnerability during which the supporting architecture of the new environment either initiates recovery or confirms the person's existing threat model. A housing event without a relational infrastructure capable of signaling safety at the neurological level activates threat detection preventing social engagement, producing the autonomic conditions that precede voluntary departure.

2.2. The Social Integration Evidence

Two decades of Housing First implementation science converge on a finding the American system has failed to implement. Social integration within the housing environment is an independent predictor of retention that functions above and beyond unit quality clinical status and service intensity.

Tsai et al. (2012) documented social integration as a statistically significant predictor of twelve-month housing stability across three US Housing First sites, controlling for substance use, psychiatric diagnosis, and prior housing history. Residents who reported three or more reciprocal peer relationships within their housing environment at ninety days retained housing at rates substantially higher than socially isolated residents, consistent with a dose-response relationship in which each additional peer contact added measurably to retention probability.

The Finnish functional evidence confirms the mechanical truth. The Y-Foundation (2022) implementation report on the national Housing First program documents the housing advisor role as the relational anchor that distinguishes the Finnish system from American transactional case management. The housing advisor maintains continuous contact with residents holds institutional memory of each resident's specific history and functions as a non-authority peer-adjacent presence distinct from a compliance monitor. Finland sustains eighty to ninety percent two-year retention. The housing advisor role maps directly onto the Pod Steward specification in the MDI tower architecture and that equivalence is not accidental.

These findings establish social network density as a measurable, actionable infrastructure target. Social integration is not a soft outcome or an aspirational condition. It is a leading indicator of retention, the lagging material metric that the MDI Singular Prototype Threshold measures.

2.3. Identity Capital: The Accumulation Mechanism

Cote and Levine (2002) position selfhood not as a fixed property but as an accumulation, a portfolio of commitments, roles, relationships, and competencies that the individual builds over time through engagement with social environments. Chronic street homelessness destroys identity capital. The chronically unhoused person loses employment history, social roles, community membership, educational credentials, and the narrative continuity through which identity capital is maintained and communicated. Klodnick and Samuels (2020) document that the period immediately post-housing is the critical window for identity capital reconstruction. Residents who engage in identity-generating activities, including employment, education, civic participation, and community governance, within

the first year of housing show dramatically better five-year outcomes than residents who do not, even controlling for all clinical variables.

The mechanism is accumulation not restoration. Identity capital is not recovered because it is built from what remains after street exposure. The institutional environment within the housing setting determines whether the four raw materials for accumulation are systemically available. Those materials are roles recognition relationships and meaningful activity. An environment that provides only monitoring services and compliance requirements does not provide those raw materials. It provides a more comfortable version of the objectifying institutional relationship the person has experienced throughout their history with service systems.

2.4. The Objectification Failure

The sociological literature on total institutions (Goffman, 1961) and on institutional capture mechanisms within the contemporary homeless service system (Roebuck et al., 2022) identifies a consistent structural pattern. Service systems that process large numbers of socially marginal individuals under financial incentives tied to volume independent of outcomes systematically develop organizational cultures that objectify service recipients. Objectification is not cruelty. It is the predictable institutional response to the conflict between logistical efficiency and personalized relationship. When managing populations at scale the individual becomes a case the case becomes a category and the category receives standardized treatment that cannot be modified by the specific reality of any individual person.

The relational damage this produces is not primarily emotional. It is structural. Objectification eliminates social recognition itself, the condition of being known as a specific person, which Giddens identifies as constitutive of ontological security and which the social integration evidence identifies as the leading predictor of housing retention.

3. Relational Dignity Infrastructure: Formal Definition

Relational Dignity Infrastructure (RDI) is the systematically designed continuously functioning social environment that produces ontological security sustains identity capital accumulation and maintains the social recognition of each resident as a specific named person with a particular history. These are conditions that material housing provision alone cannot produce and that are required for material housing to achieve its intended outcome of durable residential stability.

RDI is infrastructure in the technical sense. Like material infrastructure it must be designed to specification built into the functional architecture of the housing environment continuously maintained and measured against defined performance thresholds. It is not a program a service modality or a staff training philosophy. It is an ambient structural property of the housing environment functioning as a relational quality that is present or absent regardless of whether any specific interaction is occurring at any given moment.

RDI differs from existing concepts in the homelessness literature in three specific ways. It is structural independent of programmatic constraints functioning as a property of the built and social environment detached from an activity delivered at scheduled times. It is ambient independent of episodic conditions functioning continuously as the background condition of daily residential life distinct from formal service contacts. It is measurable independent of aspirational goals producing specific quantifiable outcomes including named peer contact counts pod council attendance voluntary engagement rates and steward recognition indices each of which functions as a leading indicator of the lagging material retention metrics.

RDI occupies the second layer of a three-part dignity stack that the MDI series constructs cumulatively. The first layer established in MDI-A through MDI-C is Material Dignity Infrastructure defined as the biological survival conditions of acoustic sanctuary metabolic stabilization sleep restoration and physical safety that must be in place before any social recovery is possible. The second layer is RDI itself constituting the relational environment that converts material survival into ontological security and identity capital accumulation. The third layer is the agentive selfhood that Cote and Levine's accumulation model (Cote and Levine, 2002) predicts will emerge when the first two layers are systemically present producing the capacity for employment civic participation and independent housing tenure that constitutes durable reintegration. Material provision without the second layer produces the American retention floor. The second layer without the first produces a relational

environment in which no one can function. The stack is not modular. Each layer is the precondition for the one above it.

4. The Five RDI Production Conditions

Five structural conditions are required to produce RDI. Each is already present in the MDI tower architecture, either explicitly specified or implied by the design logic. This paper makes their relational function explicit and positions them as the RDI layer within the MDI functional framework.

4.1. Dunbar-Scale Social Environment

Human beings cannot maintain stable recognition-based social relationships with more than approximately 150 individuals simultaneously. Beyond this cognitive ceiling, social environments produce anonymity as their default condition, where individuals cease to be recognizable as specific persons and become background figures in an undifferentiated crowd. Anonymity is the social correlate of ontological insecurity. It is the environmental condition under which the continuous background of recognition that Giddens requires is absent.

The MDI tower's partition into 13 pods of approximately 154 residents each is the primary RDI structural condition. The Dunbar pod creates the scale within which every resident can be known by name, history, and situation by at least some significant portion of their daily social environment. The pod does not guarantee relational recognition; it creates the scale condition under which relational recognition becomes cognitively possible. What converts that possibility into reality are the remaining four production conditions.

4.2. The Pod Steward: Continuous Witness

The live-in Pod Steward is the RDI delivery mechanism that most directly addresses the objectification failure documented in the service system literature. The steward's defining functional characteristic is not their role or title. It is their residential continuity, the fact that they live in the pod. They are present not during scheduled hours but in the morning when residents move through the kitchen, at irregular hours when crises occur, across the full texture of daily life within which relational knowledge of specific persons accumulates. A steward who has lived in Pod 7 for six months knows who takes their coffee at 6 a.m., who has been withdrawing for three days, who had a difficult night last Tuesday, and who received good news yesterday. This ambient knowledge, qualitatively different from anything a case file can contain, is what distinguishes continuous relational presence from scheduled service delivery.

Three design features make the steward's RDI function possible. Residential continuity is the first and most systemically significant. Because the steward lives in the pod avoiding scheduled shifts

relational knowledge accumulates across the full texture of daily life escaping formal contact windows. The exclusion of clinical and security functions from the steward role constitutes the second feature removing the authority asymmetries that make genuine horizontal relationship impossible in service system contexts and positioning the steward as a peer distinct from a monitor. Compensation as a relational signal is the third. Sovereign residency and dining access independent of payroll wage positions the steward as a community member who earned their place through service not an institutional representative dispatched to manage residents.

4.3. Peer Support Workforce: The Relational Bridge

The MDI staffing model's 22.0 FTE Peer Support Specialist allocation is the largest single workforce category in the tower. Peer specialists hold the unique relational position of being simultaneously workers within the service system and members of the community being served. Their lived experience of homelessness addiction or psychiatric crisis produces a recognition of commonality that no amount of professional training can replicate in workers without that history. The peer specialist encounter is systemically different from the worker-client encounter because it does not depend on institutional authority for its legitimacy. It depends on shared experience.

The peer workforce's RDI role functions across three domains. In the pre-housing phase peer specialists build the relational trust during outreach that makes the warm offer credible because the offer works when it comes from a relationship independent of an institution. In the tower environment peer specialists provide non-supervisory ambient presence functioning as a relational availability that signals a different category of social encounter than any authority-bearing role can provide. In de-escalation contexts peer specialists address the relational crises including dignity violations identity threats and disconnection that precede and produce the behavioral incidents that clinical de-escalation protocols address after the fact.

4.4. The Ground Floor Commons: Unconditional Relational Access

The MDI Ground Floor Commons functions twenty-four hours a day three hundred sixty-five days a year with no intake requirement and no behavioral test for access. Its unconditional access model is an RDI principle made physical. The recognition of the person as a person prior to any assessment of their needs compliance history or service eligibility is the foundational relational act. The commons does not offer services on the condition that the person accepts a relational frame determined by institutional authority. It offers presence on the condition of nothing.

The commons also functions as a civic de-stigmatization environment. Its permeability to community members, neighbors, and non-residents alongside tower residents dissolves the institutional boundary that marks housed individuals as categorically different, classifying them as homeless people in a homeless facility. For residents whose sense of civic belonging has been destroyed by years of institutional stigmatization, this dissolution of categorical boundary is a relational repair mechanism. The commons is not the most intensive RDI delivery environment in the MDI architecture. It is the first one, the place where the relational quality of the MDI system is first encountered, before any decision about housing has been made.

4.5. Recurring Community Practice: The Pod Council and Common Kitchen

Shared history is the relational mechanism through which a group of people occupying the same space becomes a community distinct from a collection of individuals who happen to be co-resident. Shared history requires recurring shared practice activities that occur regularly that all members participate in or could participate in and that produce the accumulation of common reference points mutual expectations and collective memory through which community identity forms.

The MDI architecture specifies two recurring community practices at the pod level including the weekly Pod Council and the pod common kitchen. The Pod Council is the most important structured RDI mechanism in the tower because it is identity-producing as well as history-producing. It positions every resident as a citizen of the pod community with a voice that produces effects on the shared environment. The resident who attends speaks and sees their suggestion acted on is doing identity reconstruction work that no clinical intervention can substitute for. The common kitchen produces daily encounters through which casual non-instrumental relational knowledge accumulates. Both mechanisms require no clinical staff to function. They require only that the meeting space and kitchen be present as physical infrastructure and that the Pod Steward facilitate while explicitly avoiding directing the activity.

5. Integration with MDI Architecture: The Process 5 Mapping

The MDI-C industrial specification, which formally establishes the MDI five-process parallel architecture, names the fifth process Ontological Permanence. Its component elements are the Dunbar pod structure, STC 65 acoustic isolation, the Pod Steward, the pod common kitchen, biophilic nodes, and the Digital Access Center. Process 5 holds that these elements together rebuild the neurological conditions for selfhood destroyed by street life, positioning it as the closest existing MDI language to what RDI theory formally names. The RDI framework is the theoretical architecture that Process 5 implies but does not fully develop.

The mapping between Process 5 elements and RDI production conditions is direct.

Process 5 Element	RDI Production Condition
Dunbar pod structure	Dunbar-scale social environment; recognition at human cognitive scale
STC 65 acoustic sanctuary	Biological decompression prerequisite; sensory precondition for relational engagement
Pod Steward	Continuous witness; cross-time relational memory; non-conditional recognition
Pod common kitchen	Recurring community practice; shared history generation; casual relational encounter
Biophilic nodes	Environmental downregulation; sensory context supporting presence
Digital Access Center	Identity capital accumulation; narrative expansion; future-oriented engagement

Table 1. Process 5 Element to RDI Production Condition Mapping.

This mapping establishes that the RDI layer is not an addition to the MDI architecture. It is a formal theoretical account of what the MDI architecture already contains. What RDI theory adds is the explicit naming and measurement of the relational function, a precision that makes design, staffing specification, training, and replication possible in ways that the current architectural language does not yet enable.

5.1. The CalAIM Revenue Architecture

Opponents of unconditional relational housing models consistently characterize the relational workforce layer as an unfunded cost center requiring perpetual grant subsidy. California’s 2022 CalAIM (California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal) framework (California Department of Health Care

Services, 2022) eliminates this objection systemically by creating two direct billing pathways for the RDI production workforce.

Enhanced Care Management (ECM) is CalAIM's billable intensive care coordination service for the highest-need Medi-Cal members, defined as individuals experiencing homelessness with complex behavioral health, substance use, or medical conditions. The MDI tower's Peer Support Specialist workforce qualifies as ECM personnel. Their scope of work, population served, and credentialing requirements map directly onto CalAIM's ECM service definition. The Peer Support Specialist role is consequently not a program cost. It is a billable clinical service generating Medi-Cal revenue while executing the RDI peer network function.

In Lieu of Services (ILOS), CalAIM's Community Supports category, authorizes Medi-Cal managed care plans to fund non-medical services that substitute for more expensive covered benefits. The Pod Steward's continuous ambient presence reduces acute psychiatric crisis episodes, emergency department admissions, and involuntary psychiatric hold events. Each of these is a Medi-Cal-covered service that the steward's relational function prevents. The steward role consequently qualifies as an ILOS Community Support generating savings within the managed care plan's total cost of care, creating a fiscal incentive for plan participation in the MDI sovereign residency compensation model.

The RDI workforce layer is not a cost center requiring grant funding. Under existing California law it is a revenue-producing clinical infrastructure layer whose billing mechanics are already functional within the CalAIM framework.

6. Integration Gaps: Two Specifications Required

Reading the MDI architecture through the RDI framework identifies two integration gaps where the relational infrastructure is not yet fully specified.

6.1. The Relational Intake Protocol

The MDI warm offer specifies four material elements. A named room, a stored cart, a kenneled pet, and a keycard. The relational specification of the offer is not yet written. The first element is who makes the offer. Assigning the outreach worker with the most established relationship, independent of whoever is available, determines whether the offer comes from a relationship or from an institution. The second element is what the offer references. Referencing specific knowledge of the individual's history independent of a generic pitch demonstrates that the institution has been holding the person's specific reality. The third element is how the offer handles refusal. Treating refusal as a continuation of an ongoing conversation completely avoiding a closed application communicates that the relationship is durable independent of the decision.

At the neurological level the warm offer constitutes a neuroception management event. Polyvagal theory (Porges, 2011) establishes that the autonomic nervous system evaluates environmental cues for safety before any conscious processing occurs. An offer delivered by the specific person who has accumulated relational history with the individual combined with explicit preservation of animal companions and possessions activates the ventral vagal complex functioning as the neurological substrate of safe social engagement avoiding the defensive sympathetic or shutdown responses that an institutional contact produces. The relational intake protocol is not a communication preference. It is a clinical protocol whose mechanics are grounded in documented autonomic architecture.

6.2. The Social Network Transition Protocol

The MDI architecture transitions individuals from encampments into pods. The social network transition protocol, which assesses existing relational bonds, preserves them across the housing transition, and places connected individuals in the same pod where feasible, is not yet specified. The social integration evidence establishes social network density at ninety days as the primary predictor of two-year retention. Encampment communities contain existing social networks with real relational bonds. Placing connected individuals in different pods, different towers, or different cities severs those bonds at the housing threshold and converts a relational asset into a retention liability.

Specifying this protocol requires a formal assessment tool. Social Network Analysis (SNA) the methodological framework developed by Wasserman and Faust (1994) for mapping relational ties by strength reciprocity and density provides the appropriate instrument. Before any encampment transition the cybernetic grid's Process 4 data layer conducts an SNA assessment mapping named relationships scoring tie strength through frequency and reciprocity indicators and identifying high-density relational clusters. Pod assignment algorithms then prioritize cluster preservation placing identified bond partners within the same pod. This converts the social network transition from a logistical afterthought into a formally specified data pipeline whose output directly shapes pod configuration. The social network transition protocol is not a logistical convenience. It is a clinical necessity whose design methodology now exists in the published literature.

7. Verification Metrics

The MDI Singular Prototype Threshold specifies eight binary verification metrics that must all pass at One California Plaza before network expansion proceeds. These metrics are material and quantitative including encampment reduction retention rates cost reduction fiscal surplus trajectory and functional benchmarks. They are necessary. None of them directly measures the relational layer that this paper establishes as the primary predictor of the outcomes those metrics measure.

The following five RDI metrics are proposed as leading indicators calibrated to the 90-day mark, early enough to diagnose and correct relational infrastructure failures before they produce lagging retention failures at 24 months.

RDI Metric	Threshold	Indicator Function
Named peer contact index	≥ 3 named reciprocal contacts per resident by day 90	Social network density; primary social integration retention predictor
Pod council attendance rate	$\geq 60\%$ of pod residents per monthly session	Community identity formation; civic engagement; agency development
Steward recognition index	$\geq 90\%$ of residents known by name and recent history	Continuous witness role functional objectification absent
Voluntary service engagement rate	$\geq 70\%$ by day 90	Institutional trust accumulation; relational quality signal
Sustained ground floor opt-out rate	$\leq 15\%$ over 90-day period	Ambient relational quality threshold; dignity floor signal

Table 2. RDI Verification Metrics: Leading Indicators Calibrated to Day 90.

These metrics are not replacements for the eight Singular Prototype Threshold gates. They are leading indicators. When they are met, the material metrics will follow. When they are not met, material metrics will ultimately fail regardless of the physical infrastructure quality.

The fiscal calculus linking relational metrics to the MDI Efficiency Surplus is direct. The Steward Recognition Index functions as a proxy for institutional trust accumulation. Trust deficit is the proximate cause of voluntary departure before lease termination which triggers full re-housing pro-

cessing costs. The Named Peer Contact Index directly predicts the twenty-four-month retention rate which is the primary variable driving the Efficiency Surplus range of thirty-three to eighty-two million dollars per tower annually. California State Auditor data (California State Auditor, 2021) on housing program administrative costs documents per-unit eviction and re-housing processing costs in the range of \$4,200 to \$8,700. A pod of one hundred fifty-four residents achieving the three-contact threshold retains approximately three to four additional residents over twenty-four months compared to a pod failing the threshold. At \$8,700 per event the named peer contact floor produces \$26,000 to \$35,000 in avoided processing costs per pod per year. Across thirteen pods the relational layer produces \$338,000 to \$455,000 in annual avoided processing costs per tower sufficient to fund the Pod Steward compensation model from retention savings alone before any Medi-Cal billing is applied.

8. Positioning and Contribution

The RDI framework makes four distinct contributions to the existing literature.

First, it names a layer that has previously been theorized only indirectly. Giddens (Giddens, 1991) theorized ontological security without naming what must be present in a housing environment to produce it. Padgett (Padgett, 2007) demonstrated the social-material conjunction without formalizing the relational conditions that constitute it. Cote and Levine (Cote and Levine, 2002) theorized identity capital accumulation without specifying the environmental conditions required for accumulation to occur in a Housing First setting. RDI synthesizes these lineages into a single named construct with defined production conditions and measurable thresholds.

Second it bridges the theory-to-architecture gap by mapping the theoretical construct onto the MDI tower architecture and its Process 5 components. This bridge converts theoretical claims into design requirements. The steward recognition index is not a sociological aspiration. It is a functional specification. The steward either knows ninety percent of residents by name and recent history or the system is failing its relational function and the retention data will eventually reflect that failure.

Third, it positions relational metrics as leading indicators of material metrics, establishing a causal relationship that the implementation science literature has documented empirically but has not previously articulated as an architectural principle. The relational layer predicts the material outcomes. Measuring the relational layer at 90 days predicts retention at 24 months. This predictive relationship makes RDI metrics economically valuable because they are early warning instruments that allow system correction before a retention failure becomes a program failure.

Fourth it preempts institutional resistance by isolating the theoretical layer from the legal and logistical liabilities that typically block unconditional housing. Opponents consistently cite the legal liability of unconditional access and the labor law complexities of sovereign residency compensation as fatal flaws in relational models. This framework deliberately separates the RDI theoretical production conditions from the MDI-C industrial specification where the specific insurance architectures liability shields and labor compliance mechanics required to function the Ground Floor Commons and the Pod Steward roles are formally resolved.

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