

ISRAELI COMMUNITY CENTER BOARD MEMBERS: WHAT DO THEY DO AND WHOM DO THEY REPRESENT?

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A study of 19 community center boards in Israel found that board members and executive directors disagreed about the proper domain of the board, who held the ultimate authority, and who should monitor the implementation of board decisions. Clearly, both directors and board members need education and training in working with each other so that the resources of both can be used most effectively.

This article analyzes the membership of community center boards in Israel, their attitudes to policy issues, and their performance. Although it is not suggested that the data are typical of all boards of all types of organization in all countries, it seems likely that social workers will see parallels between these board members and those with whom they are in contact.

The data reveal both differences and similarities between board members and community center directors concerning the domain and scope of the board, the extent to which their decisions are implemented, the qualities and skills required of a board member, and their loyalties. The attitudes of the board members are compared with an analysis of board decisions and their implementation.

The Israeli Association of Community Centers (IACC), in contrast to its American counterpart, the Jewish Community Center Association of North America, is a government agency under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The IACC approves the setting up of local centers; generally obtains the funds for building and equipping them; and recruits, trains, and hires the directors. Although the IACC employs the directors and in a number of ways influences the policy and day-to-day running of the individual centers, each center is incorporated as a legal voluntary organization, and most of its budget and operations are locally determined. Each board has the

right—legal, political, and even economic—to set local objectives and policies and to supervise their implementation. A community center board therefore has a significant role in governing the center and determining its nature (Hasenfeld & Schmid, 1989; Yanoy, 1988).

Each board comprises between 9 and 17 members from these four categories: two to four nominees of the municipality, a similar number of nominees of the Ministry of Education, one or two nominees of other funding organizations, such as the Jewish Agency, and between four to seven "citizen representatives" (Bustin, 1989).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Nonprofit Organization Boards

The literature on voluntary and nonprofit boards is not extensive, and little empirical research has been conducted in this area (Shulov-Barkan, 1989).

One theme of the literature is that nonprofit boards generally function poorly (Blostein, 1985; Kramer, 1965). Chitayat (1980), in an analysis of 19 Israeli government corporation boards, found that they did little to direct the policy of the corporations and preferred to accept decisions already prepared for them by the directors and their staff. Murray and Bradshaw-Camball (1990), in their typology of Canadian voluntary sector boards, call this type of board

"ratifying." Zald and Denton (1963), in a study of the YMCA, show that much of the time of the board was spent on day-to-day administration and not on policy making.

The representation of local residents or other members of the client system is usually problematic. Blostein (1985), in a study of American mental health centers, found that it was difficult to find representative members of the public to serve on the boards and further that these members were unable to see themselves as representatives of the community as a whole. Kramer (1965) attributes this inability to the conflict of interests among the board members, and Greer (1982), in a study of private nonprofit boards, shows how these conflicting interests result in a variety of coalitions among the board members. Murray and Bradshaw-Camball (1990) describe these types of boards as "charismatic/dominated" and "factionalized." Cole (1980), in a study of nonprofit organizations, found that, when board members attempted to represent the public or consumers, that action always caused some sort of confrontation and generally elicited opposition from the senior staff members. Middleton (1983) argues that the setting up of "quiet," homogeneous boards is a frequent response to these advocacy efforts, a phenomenon condemned by Alinsky (1945) many years previously. Another solution, found by Schmid et al. (1987) in the two nonprofit organizations they studied in depth, is the voluntary abdication of authority by board members in favor of the professional staff and a consequent dependence on the staff to direct them and keep them informed.

The decision-making process in voluntary and nonprofit boards, as reflected in the literature, is generally depressingly poor. Schmid et al. (1987) describe the process as "organized anarchies" characterized by nondecisions, bad timing, late decisions, hasty decisions not supported by information, and a tendency to decide only about short-term matters. Decisions are frequently reactions to stimuli, rather than ra-

tionally thought-out conclusions, and there is generally insufficient exploitation of the energy, experience, and knowledge possessed by the board members.

Relationships between the board members and the paid staff, particularly the executive director, are a source of conflict. Each individual brings with him or her varying quantities and qualities of resources—"detachable resources," in Zald's (1965) term. These include financial resources, legitimacy, knowledge, and personal qualities, and their value changes as situations, strategies, and times change.

Kramer (1985) analyzes the board-director relationship in terms of a political economy, in which individuals and groups have different interests and try to influence others in the competition for resources. The executive director and staff have a technocratic ideology, based on their perceived professional and technical expertise, whereas the board members have a more democratic, representative ideology, stemming from their public status (at least as they see it) or possibly a bureaucratic approach dictated by their political or administrative interests (Gilbert & Specht, 1979). Kramer draws a paradigm of situations and strategies showing how the executive director and the board members can best work together.

In conclusion, according to the literature, voluntary organization boards function poorly, are generally unrepresentative of the populations they serve, make decisions poorly, and find difficulties in their internal and external relationships.

Israeli Community Center Boards

The functioning of Israeli community center boards has been studied by several researchers. In his research conducted in 1980, Yanay (1988) found that the four categories of board members did not function as intended. The citizen representatives seldom represented the populations served by the center and were almost never directly

elected. In fact, there was hardly any difference between them and the nominees of the local authority, who were political appointees. Havassy and Yanay (1990) suggest that all local representatives are "co-opted," masking the clear central government domination of the board.

Another major finding of Yanay (1988) is that local representatives—both citizens and local authority nominees—saw themselves as representing the entire population, not groups in distress or special interest groups. It was the "technical" board members—representatives of the Ministry of Education and of funding agencies—who saw themselves as champions for the weaker elements of society (see also Hasenfeld & Schmid, 1989, for an analysis of Israeli community centers).

The research reported in this article extends the earlier studies of Israeli community center boards by analyzing the differences among the board members and between them and the executive directors of the centers.

METHODS

The research reported in this article was carried out in the spring and early summer of 1990. It was designed and executed by 19 senior community center staff members (one of whom is herself a board member) and included interviews with board members and community center executive directors and an examination of board minutes over the last 2 years. Because each member of the research team chose a community center with which he or she had no other connections, the 19 centers are not a random sample. They include eight centers in urban neighborhoods, eight in small towns, two in Arab villages, and one in a rural area.

The community center boards comprised between 7 and 17 participating members (nominal members who had not participated in board meetings for a year were excluded), for a total of 202 members (average

size: 10.6 members). Data were gathered from 158 board members (78% return rate), all 19 center executive directors, and the minutes over the last 2 years of all 19 community centers.

The board member questionnaire asked how long the member had been on the board; how he or she had been chosen or appointed; what was the domain of the board; to what extent were its decisions implemented; who monitored that implementation; what was the authority of the board and how was it defined; what were the qualities and background required of a center board member; which community groups did the member feel he or she represented; to which groups, organizations, and individuals did he or she feel loyalty; and, finally, some demographic and socioeconomic information.

The questionnaire for the center executive directors covered the same areas, sometimes asking for an opinion (for example, on the domains of the board and implementation of board decisions, the authority of the board, and the qualities of the ideal board member) and sometimes asking for an assessment of each member of the board individually (for example, their years of experience, how they were selected, which groups they represented, and where their loyalties lay). Since all the questionnaires were anonymous, no individual comparisons between the answers of the board members and the executive directors was made. Moreover, since the numbers of the board members and community center executive directors are so different and the latter number is small, it was not possible to analyze these differences statistically (using a test for example) or to establish degrees of statistical probability.

The board minutes for a 2-year period were analyzed. All decisions reached that demanded some form of activity were noted, and then the researchers, the executive director, and the board assessed whether the decision was implemented in part, in full, or not at all.

FINDINGS

The board members are predominantly men (78%), almost all (97%) are married, and all of those have children (three is both the median and the mode). They range in age from 24 to 78, but the mean, median, and mode age is 45. Only 39% were born in Israel, with the others immigrating between the years 1935 and 1981. Most are in occupations with high status (34% professional, 32% managerial, 19.5% clerical and trade); only 7% are blue-collar workers, and 8% are not employed. Although the range of education is from none at all to 23 years, the mean is 13.9 years and the median is even higher (15). Most of the board members live in the same city, town, or village as the community center (85%); of these, 20% live in the same neighborhood.

About half of the board members have served for less than 3 years (19% for less than a year, 30% for a year or two), 15% for 3 to 5 years, 28% for 5 to 10 years, and 8% for longer than 10 years (mean: 4.3 years, median: 4).

There is a clear disparity between the executive directors' and board members' perception of how the members were elected to the board. The executive directors consider the overwhelming majority of the board members to be appointees and that few have any right to consider themselves as having been elected. In contrast, nearly 40% of the board members consider themselves as having been elected, either directly by their fellow citizens or indirectly by their previous election to a public body, such as a town council, a neighborhood committee, or a party central committee.

There is more agreement between the executive and the board members on the source of the board's authority and how its decisions are monitored. Generally, both directors and board members feel that the board has a defined authority and that the Israeli Association of Community Centers is the source of that authority. Most think that the boards' decisions are monitored, but they differ as to who carries out that moni-

toring. On this question, the directors divided almost equally into three groups—those who thought that board members were the monitors, those who thought that community center staff were the monitors, and those who thought that some neutral body did the monitoring. In contrast, over 41% of the board members saw monitoring as the task of the board members, only 13% thought that the center staff were involved, and 46% thought that neutral bodies or a combination of functionaries did the monitoring.

When asked about the background qualities of the ideal board member, the responses of the executive directors and the board members are extraordinarily similar (Table 1). Indeed, on a scale between zero and five with five being the highest, there is only one quality about which there is a difference of more than one-fifth of a point: whether the member should have experience in informal education.

There was only slightly more disagreement about the personal qualities and skills required of the board member. Table 2 shows only two areas in which the difference between the mean scores of the directors and the board members is more than one-fifth of a point: "good-heartedness" (less appreciated by the executive directors) and lack of hypocrisy (less valued by the board members).

To what extent do board members represent interest groups: groups based on age, religion or religiosity, ethnic origins, areas of residence, length of time in Israel or in the community, or use of the community center? The executive directors consider that 76% of the board members (153 of the total 202 active members) represent some kind of interest group. It should be noted, however, that there is a wide range among the directors: 8 of the 19 placed all of their board members into the category of interest group members, whereas 4 claimed that none of their board members was in this category! In contrast, just over half of the board members claim to be members of in-

Table 1. Background Qualities Required of Community Center Board Members^a

Background Qualities	According to Directors (n=19)		According to Board Members (n=158)	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Financial knowledge	3.00	0.88	2.84	0.10
University education	2.42	1.26	2.26	1.59
Formal education experience	2.53	1.17	2.46	1.50
Informal education experience	3.42	0.96	2.88	1.45
Town council member	2.68	1.42	2.52	1.77
Neighborhood committee member	3.53	1.35	3.56	1.47
Resident of Center neighborhood	3.95	1.35	3.79	1.60
Resident of Center	4.16	1.26	4.07	1.34

^aMean scores on scale from 0 to 5, with 5 being the highest.

Table 2. Personal Qualities and Skills Required of Community Center Board Members^a

Personal Qualities and Skills	According to Directors (n=19)		According to Board Members (n=158)	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Leadership	3.47	0.77	3.54	1.15
Tolerance	4.32	0.67	4.14	1.04
Wish to help others	4.37	0.76	4.47	0.07
Wish to contribute to community	4.68	0.58	4.67	0.67
"Good hearted"	2.84	1.46	3.30	1.24
Ability to listen	4.16	0.83	4.15	1.11
Oral self-expression	3.74	0.87	3.78	1.04
Lack of hypocrisy	4.42	0.90	4.01	1.41
Represents residents of community	4.58	0.60	4.51	0.77
Openness	4.26	0.73	4.26	0.91
Perseverance	4.32	0.67	4.51	0.74
Good interpersonal relationships	4.47	0.61	4.51	0.88

^aMean scores on scales from 0 to 5, with 5 being the highest.

terest groups, though it is likely that the true number may be nearer that given by the directors.

To whom does the board member owe his or her allegiance and loyalty? The board members' and executive directors'

were asked this question: "A board member, since he or she represents different groups of residents and different organizations and institutions, may find himself or herself in a position in which there is a clash of loyalties. Please rank your general

loyalty to each of the following people and bodies (from 0 to 5 with 5 being the highest)."

The order of loyalty is similar for both groups, although there are several differences between them. The board members feel the highest loyalty toward the community generally and the community center as an institution; here there is little difference between the ranking of the executive directors as they assess the board members and that of the board members themselves. The board members then rank loyalty to the organizations and groups that have sent them as representatives: an appointing organization, an electing group, a specific group of residents, or the municipality. For all four types of groups, the board members' mean rating is higher than that of the executive directors by at least a fifth of a point: either the executive directors have underestimated the loyalty of the board members to their "electors" or the board members are exaggerating those ties. The members then feel a moderate level of loyalty to the director and staff (similarly assessed by directors and board members) and a weak loyalty to the IACC, which maintains close links with board members and tries to provide them with services, and to the community center divisions and departments. The weakest level of loyalty is felt to the party; this tie was almost ignored by the directors, only two of whom even assessed it.

The data on loyalty of the board members were further analyzed using ANOVA, a form of correlational testing that is able to hold all other influences constant and so assess the impact of a specific variable. Each of the eleven variables of loyalty (self-assessed by the board members) was tested in turn as the dependent variable against the independent variables of length of time on the board, means of election or appointment, representation of specific groups in the community, and place of residence. Finally, several demographic and socioeconomic variables served as "covariates" or intervening variables: gender, age, immi-

gration, number of children, occupation, employment, and education.

Of the independent variables, length of time on the board had only a weak influence on loyalty, except for party loyalty for which the influence was significant in some cases. The means of election or appointment of the board members and the admission of the board members that they represented specific community groups had only a weak influence on their loyalty.

The only variable that had a consistent significant effect on board members' loyalties is place of residence. Those board members who live in the immediate vicinity of the community center show the highest loyalty to the community and the center, whereas those who live outside the town or village of the center show the lowest allegiance.

The executive directors and board members clearly differ in their perception of the appropriate domain of the board. The directors see the board as a budgetary and financial forum, generally concerned with staff appointments and policy. In contrast, board members consider finances as somewhat less central to their domain and more or less rank budget, policy, and personnel topics together as of equal importance. Moreover, they upgrade the domain of day-to-day affairs.

An analysis of the board minutes over the previous 2 years shows that neither group's perceptions are correct. Table 3 shows that finances and staff appointments are indeed the major topics of the boards, but together they make up only slightly more than half of the decisions reached by all 19 of the boards studied. Policy decisions make up less than 15% of the boards' decisions, which may not necessarily reflect their relative importance. More surprisingly, perhaps, (though confirmed by the findings of Blostein, 1985) is the content of decisions about day-to-day affairs: creating and terminating activities and classes and introducing changes in them, buying and selling equipment (not approving the bud-

Table 3. *Topics That Are within the Domain of Community Center Boards*

Topics	Number*	%
Day-to-day affairs	113	20.7
Policy decisions	80	14.7
Staff appointments	146	26.7
Budget and finances	153	28.1
Other	53	9.7

*Number of board decisions is 545 (from 19 boards).

gets), and the upkeep and maintenance of the center building. The "other" topics discussed mainly concern the organization of the board itself, such as membership and setting up subcommittees.

There is a slight difference of opinion between the members and directors about who has the final and decisive word on these topics: the director, the board, or the director and board together. Both the directors and board members see day-to-day affairs as primarily the directors' domain and policy decisions as primarily that of the board, whereas decisions on staff appointments are shared between them. Finances are mainly the boards' domain in the opinion of the board members, but the directors prefer to consider them a shared responsibility. These differences are not dramatic.

The final two issues covered in the questionnaire are to what extent the boards' decisions are really implemented and whether there is a difference in the rate of implementation among types of decisions. The

impressions of the directors and the board members differ slightly on these issues. The board members consider that less staff appointments and day-to-day decisions are actually implemented than do the directors, whereas the opposite is true of policy and financial decisions. The analysis of the board minutes (Table 4) shows that a more cautious approach is justified. Indeed, only the decisions on staff appointments even approach the levels of implementation expected by both groups.

DISCUSSION

The typical board member is a married middle-aged man with three children who is employed in a managerial or professional post and has some university education. This is the profile of a member of the elite. Yet, most of the community centers in Israel are found in communities with low socioeconomic status, making the typical board member not typical of those in his community, even though he lives there.

Table 4. *Implementation of Community Center Boards' Decisions by Topics*

Topics	Total Number (545)	No. Implemented	%
Day-to-day affairs	113	81	71.7
Policy decisions	80	52	65.0
Staff appointments	146	131	89.7
Budget and finances	153	121	79.1
Other	53	39	73.6

The literature on voluntary associations in general and on community centers in particular has consistently shown that voluntary leadership and participation are positively correlated with social class (Bottomore, 1963; Curtis & Zurcher, 1971; Schwartz, 1966; Warner & Lunt, 1959), but still the data are remarkably unambiguous.

Both the board members and the directors feel that the authority of the board is not always clearly defined, although in fact a written set of rules and regulations (Bustin, 1989) has been sent to all of them. The need to train and educate both groups is indicated also by some lack of clarity about who monitors the boards' decisions (Shulov-Barkan, 1989). Few members seem to understand that the board itself should monitor the implementation of its decisions.

The similar opinions held by directors and the board members on the background, experience, and qualities of an ideal board member is a more promising basis for a good working relationship. Both stress residence in the neighborhood as being important and see membership in a neighborhood association as a key qualification. One of the characteristics found significant by Miller et al. (1988) — expertise in the service provided by the agency, in this case informal education — scores high among the executive directors, but less so among the board members. The qualities considered important include motivation (the desire to contribute to the community and to help others), community representation, and leadership ability (tolerance, ability to listen, lack of hypocrisy, good interpersonal relationships, consistency, and openness). Personality alone (good-heartedness) is not enough. Few communal workers would disagree with these assessments.

Representing an interest group is obviously a legitimate role for board members, but the differences in this area between the assessments of the members themselves and of the executive directors are interesting. The range of views among the directors,

however, must make their group assessment somewhat suspect. Even so, half of the board members identify themselves as representing interest groups, which is support for Kramer (1965) and Greer (1982), both of whom found wide "extra-mural" memberships among the board members they studied.

The rankings of loyalties and the differences between the board members and the directors and among themselves are of great interest. All feel most loyal to the community and the community center, but the loyalty to those groups and bodies that appointed the board members is either exaggerated by the members or underestimated by the executive directors. The loyalty to the executive director and staff is moderate—less than that found by Schmid et al. (1987)—and that to other bodies is weak. Why, though, do the directors so underestimate party loyalty, and is it really so weak among the board members? Perhaps the board members consider loyalty to political parties to be less important than that to the appointing groups and bodies, which themselves are frequently politically motivated.

When all variables are controlled, the only factor that has a significant effect on loyalty is place of residence. Those who live nearby the community center are most enthusiastic and most "patriotic" in their loyalties, probably because they are most likely to be consumers of the centers, most involved with their day-to-day running and functioning, and most representative of the center clientele. Why then do they feel most loyalty to political parties? Perhaps they are less sophisticated than other board members and therefore tell the truth, or perhaps they are less disenchanting with the parties.

The domain of the board is seen somewhat differently by the members and the center directors. The board members' greater emphasis on day-to-day affairs and the fact that these indeed take up a good deal of the boards' time support the findings

of Blostein (1985) and Zald and Denton (1963). These researchers suggest that it is the wish of the board members to deal with simple, daily occurrences, rather than more complex policy and principles, and so they overload the board agenda with matters that are not really their concern.

The findings concerning the ultimate authority in the community center are less clear. The executive directors generally see themselves as more authoritative than do the board members, but the differences are slight and both groups agree, more or less, about which topics are more within the domain of the board, which are more within the domain of the director, and which are shared between them. This is a healthy state of affairs.

Finally we come to the data on decision implementation, which show that the proportions of implemented decisions are lower than those assessed by board members and directors alike. It is likely that board decisions are not consistently monitored, even by the executive directors, and so they would probably be genuinely surprised by these data. This implies that both directors and board members are incorrect in thinking that board decisions (or, at least, their implementation) are consistently monitored. Again, the need for training is indicated.

IMPLICATIONS

The major implication of these findings is the need for educating both the center executive directors and the board members about the scope of the board's authority and its monitoring. Neither group clearly understands who defines the authority of the board and who (if anybody) monitors its activities. There is not complete consensus between the two groups on whether day-to-day affairs are within the domain of the board, although these issues have been addressed both in written material and personal communications from the Israeli Association of Community Centers.

Moreover, the data show differing as-

sessments between directors and board members on the latter's commitment to interest groups and their loyalty to them. The assessments of what topics are actually discussed by the boards and what proportion of these decisions are actually implemented were not accurate. Skills are lacking and judgments are faulty.

Executive directors are carefully selected on the basis of their previous education and experience and their personality traits. They are trained for their job, their work is supervised professionally, they may turn to experts for advice and counsel, and they are often invited to participate in continuing education courses. Yet, too little of their professional education is devoted to working with boards. The academic institutions involved in educating community center staff and the Israeli Association of Community Centers should address this problem.

Because board members are volunteers, little has been invested in their training, supervision, counseling, and continuing education (Shulov-Barkan, 1989). Board members themselves do not see training in their roles as a priority. The author was involved a few years ago in setting up a course for community center board chairpersons. The course was attractive and interesting (as assessed anonymously by its participants), it was free (the IACC funded it), and it carried the prestige of a university extension course. However, attendance was problematic with both of the groups that took the course, and a third group could not be started for lack of participants.

Given the responsibility held by community center board members and the prestige that the position holds, it is important to organize more courses and programs for board members, perhaps locally or on a regional basis. More time should be devoted to sessions in which board members and center executive directors could discuss the issues raised in this research: representativeness, interest groups, loyalty, monitoring, implementation of decisions, domain, and authority (see Friedmann et al., 1988;

Rohs, 1990; York, 1987). Both the IACC and the individual community centers should initiate training and educational activities.

The second main implication concerns the representativeness of board members. Our data confirm those of Yanay (1988) of a decade ago: community center board members in Israel do not represent their communities in the sense that they are not typical residents of those communities. However, both board members and executive directors agree that representativeness is extremely important: (1) the board members apparently exaggerate to what extent they were elected, (2) they and the directors see residence as the major background quality and representing residents of the community as a major personal quality of the ideal board member, and (3) loyalty to all residents of the community is ranked highest by both groups. Living in the neighborhood of the community center and thus, it would seem, being of a lower socioeconomic status than the typical board member and so more representative of the community in general is an important factor in the loyalty of the board member. The more representative the board member is, the more he or she is loyal.

Client participation leads to greater effectiveness; that is, a community center that really encourages participation by its users (by having a board that truly represents them) will be more likely to achieve its objectives (Itzhaky & York, 1991, in press; York & Itzhaky, 1991). Community center boards will be more effective and not just more representative to the extent that board members are democratically elected by the residents of the community, the consumers of the center. The IACC must stress this point more strongly, directors and senior staff must internalize it and persuade board members at least to accept it, and all of them must persuade community residents to vote and to stand for office. This vision is idyllic but not entirely Utopian!

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