JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN A DIGITAL WORLD
Some New Considerations

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Our digital culture has transformed our understanding and experience of community, and Jewish institutions must adapt, embracing innovation and change. The organizational literature offers a valuable roadmap to change.

L ife is now defined by new realities. They are subtle, but have a great impact on our lives. Instantaneous communication via email, pagers, faxes, and cell phones has accelerated decision making, forcing us to assimilate ideas and issues faster than ever before, with less opportunity to integrate and synthesize issues. Most importantly, the explosion of on-line communities and web pages that address every facet of the human condition and experience has transformed our understanding and experience of *community.*

Other societal forces are redefining Jewish identity as well. Linzer (2001) points to the shift from ethnic identity to more of a religious/ spiritual identity. Historically, their ethnic identity gave Jews a strong allegiance to a larger collectivity called *Klal Yisrael*. This identity was given at birth and was reinforced by a total system that controlled the individual's environment with a detailed pattern of pre-scribed actions and fixed roles. The shift to a more spiritual identity has motivated people to search for meaning through individual en-deavors. Judaism then becomes more of a privatized religion where individuals pursue a private course of action. This leads to a decline in involvement with and participation in Jew-ish communal organizations (Eisen, 2000).

Our Jewish communal structures need to adapt to the new definition of community, which will require us to think and work differ-ently. The prominent thinker and expert on change management, Rosabeth Moss Kanter (2001), describes how the culture we are part of reinforces continuous dramatic change and not stability, and the existence of instanta-neous communication magnifies any mistakes we may make.

It is ultimately through the re-engineering of our structures that we can adapt to the continuous change swirling around us. And it is the human behavior of lay and professional leaders from our boards and institutions that ultimately will create the desired change nec-essary for Jewish continuity.

There are seven elements of community articulated in the organizational literature (Moss-Kanter, 2001) that form an inventory of opportunity for change within our Jewish com-munal structures.

SEVEN ELEMENTS OF COMMUNITY

Membership

The Jewish community needs to be clear about who belongs to it. Are its members employees, clients, or the consumers of our services? Is membership solely determined by current affiliation to the organized Jewish com-munity in some way? Do we put our resources into more intensive "in-reach" to the core participants of the community, or do we focus on "outreach" to those Jews who are margin-ally or non-committed, due to assimilation, intermarriage, or lack of interest?

One lesson learned from the Internet is that someone can feel like a member of something while retaining his or her own identity and even anonymity. Paradoxically, the Internet has also reinforced the "cocooning" effect, the impulse to go inside when it just gets too tough and scary outside (Popcorn, 1991). At a time when the Jewish community is re-engaged in

promoting solidarity marches, rallies, and forums to create a sense of membership, advocating for causes ranging from religious pluralism to support for Israel, there are far too many who still do not come out.

Today, Jews are more American than Jewish (Solomon, 2001). Jews have essentially declared themselves as members of the American community. Within Judaism itself, the trend of denominational switching has now become a characteristic of Jewish life. Overall, 44 percent of American Jewish adults have switched from the denomination of their childhood to another one as an adult. This frequency of change is as much as 35 percent higher than that reported for white Protestants. The consequence of all this movement is that membership becomes more diluted and universal.

Identity

In the digital culture, a community is defined more by ideas than by geographic location. Most organizational theorists agree that the notion of a geographical community has weakened over the years, due to the greater mobility of people and because communication has extended human bonds (Kanter, 2001). In e-culture, a community exists because many people think it does and define themselves as part of it, whether it is a professional community, a community of interest, or a birthplace.

Jewish communal identity is further complicated by the artificial dichotomy between local and overseas issues, which is a residue of an earlier era. As we continue to describe ourselves in this way, the donor/member has a hard time grasping the tangible dimension of community and can become overwhelmed by the array of important issues. The donor of today is more attuned to his or her own needs rather than the historic ideals of *Tzedakah* or *Tikkun Olam*. Therefore, identity is strengthened when narcissistic needs are met, i.e. "How does your campaign help me with my frail and aging mother?" We have become a community of self-interest, supporting issues that tend to mirror our needs and wants.

Fluid Boundaries

Communities are essentially loose aggregations. They may have a formal core, but around that core are people who come and go and move in and out. The possibilities therefore are open-ended for membership. The Internet teaches us that people can belong to several communities at once. Years ago, in a marketing campaign, the federation mistakenly stated that they were the "central mailing address" for the Jewish community, offending all the local "post boxes" in the community—the synagogue, agencies, and a variety of cultural structures. In fact, there are multiple portals for the expression, identification, and access to things Jewish.

The digital world reminds us that while centralization may enhance efficiencies, it does not necessarily build greater community. Because the outcomes of the dramatic change around us are not known in advance, the action itself creates the goal (Kanter, 2001). In organizational terms, the process of the change is the goal, unleashing potential transformations. Consequently, organizations within a community need to build networks, providing multiple partners from all areas of the communal structure. To become an integrated community in organizational terms is the closest approximation to *Klal* in Jewish communal terms. Organizational theory guides us as to how to create an integrated community—through flatter hierarchies, fluid boundaries, greater use of teamwork, and an emphasis of process over structure.

Looking inward dominates Jewish communal policies, which frames our sense of peoplehood and shared obligation. Solomon (2001) points out that despite the vision of reaching any Jews in need, we are increasingly focused on the local scene.

Volunteerism

The core of a community is the dedicated people—professional and volunteers—who do more because they *want* to. Leaders of organizations who create new agendas for change require an "above and beyond" ap-

proach from their employees. Similarly, because of the many demands on their time, our lay volunteers also need to feel excited by doing something meaningful.

Currently, there is a crisis of leadership within the Jewish community. Structurally, we have not developed an integrated leadership succession model for lay volunteers that would enable board members leaving one board to join another and would identify the right fit between what an organization offers within its mission/vision and the passions of the lay person. Too often, we find ourselves recycling veteran lay volunteers, rather than investing in the potential of younger volunteers who have not tapped their potential.

Leadership goes beyond the necessary governance of our organizations; it is an influence process that guides people and resources to new and exciting places, based on eliciting that sense of "wow" that people want to experience. Our current Jewish communal structures tend to be characterized by a rigidity and resistance to change, unnecessary administration, territoriality, organizational self-preservation, and decision making that is too often confined to the few. Moreover, the business world where many of our bright lay people work has implemented successful re-engineering and change management principles. These principles do not find sympathetic resonance within our Jewish communal organization climate. This disconnect between the "real world" and the Jewish communal world challenges future volunteerism and overall membership and affiliation.

Today's lay leaders are largely mid-career, fee-for-service professionals and non-working women for whom a professional career was not a choice earlier in their lives. They have a lower level of wealth and giving and less experience in growing an organization or working with professional management than the past generations of givers (Solomon, 2001). In addition, the recent trend of lay leaders becoming professionals in the field unwittingly dilutes some core competencies required in professional practice.

Common Culture

In e-culture, shared understandings and a common language allow an interchangeability of ideas, one for the other. In contrast, within the Jewish community, there is a multiplicity of beliefs that are sometimes in opposition to one another. The spectrum of issues potentially divides us as much as unites us: religious pluralism, peace in the Middle East, patrilineal descent, the primacy of *Halacha*, to name but a few. The digital world reminds us that the "chosenness" of being Jewish goes counter to the interchangeability that exists in the larger community.

Collective Strength

Communities tap the power of many. The empowered individual consumer is simultaneously empowered with others, making the Internet a powerful voice for change. Witness the explosion of self-help, feminist, and disease-conquering web sites. People feel part of something larger than themselves and feel understood by legions of people they don't even know. The "we can change the world" approach is invigorating and stimulating.

The Jewish community has yet to tap the power of *klal*. Recently, one exasperated veteran federation lay leader commented at a meeting, "How many strategic plans do we have to have before we actually implement one for our community?" The strength in seeing the road where you are going can be invigorating and transformational, for both the professional and lay leader. The necessary interdependence of our communal structures only strengthens the case of *klal*.

Collective Responsibility

In the digital world, service to the community can be a unifying force, in addition to its pragmatic benefits as a workforce motivator, talent attractor, and brand builder. In the Jewish community, the traditional belief of "we are all responsible for one another" is a powerful opportunity to leverage the commitment that Jews have to themselves and to the larger community. Sometimes, not having the an-

swers but the passion to make a difference can unleash forces. Take for example the solidarity the Jewish community achieved during the Russian "Refusenik" era, or the rallying for Israel during her difficult times, such as the Yom Kippur War. The current reign of terrorism taking place in Israel and around the world has united the world in an effort both to defend and take responsibility for protecting basic human rights and freedoms.

BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNITY: PARADOX MANAGEMENT

The first element that must be built in order to achieve the goal of building community is trust among the component parts of federation, the local agencies, and synagogues. Being real with each other also means understanding that paradox is part of the fabric of organizational structure. A new term has been developed—*coopetition*—to describe the fact that the same organizations can both compete and cooperate with one another, making diplomacy among organizational leaders essential. Not only may any one partner also be a competitor but the connections of partners to bigger networks makes it highly likely that they will be working with each other's competitors (Kanter, 2001). Part of the human experience is the ability to recognize contradiction in our own and others' behaviors. Part of our ability to manage life's pressures successfully is premised on our ability to manage the contradictions we encounter (Barge, 1994).

Community leaders, both lay and professional, must grapple with several organizational paradoxes:

- *The Paradox of Creativity*: Having to destroy something as a result of creating something else
- *The Paradox of Organizing*: Developing an effective system of decision making, networking, and communicating, which may replace the status quo
- *The Paradox of Group Life*: Managing the competing demands associated with belonging to a group, participating in a group, and exercising influence in a group
- *The Paradox of Belonging*: Managing the emotional conflicts generated by affiliation and membership in an organization
- *The Paradox of Engaging*: Dealing with issues of authority, control, and creativity—How independent, creative, and powerful should employees be? Does the formal authority that rests within executives determine these issues?
- *The Paradox of Risk-Taking*: Dealing with employee competence, success, and avoidance of failure; an organization can be caught in the paradox of success, when the leader of the organization openly proclaims support of risk taking by encouraging others to take risks and later penalizes people for taking failed risks (Peters, 1987)

Finally, leadership means making the distinction between problems that can be solved and dilemmas that cannot, which are called *polarities*. There is always an either and an or, and leadership means understanding that there is a paradoxical relationship between the two poles and that they are interdependent opposites (Johnson, 1992). Current polarities in Jewish communal life are Israel vs. local services, the annual campaign vs. total financial resource development, resource dependence on umbrella organizations for fund raising vs. individual organizational fund development, collaboration vs. strategic alliances, centralized vs. decentralized operations, strategic planning vs. meeting unmet human social needs, and developing alternative futures for organizations vs. maintaining the core mission. We need to replace either/or thinking with both/and thinking, in order to effectively manage dilemmas.

The digital world embraces innovation and change. Within the Jewish community, we talk the language of change, but have too often fallen short of altering our behaviors to make that change occur. To compete and thrive in the next millennium, our Jewish communal organizations must employ the classic skills of successful innovation and change management: tuning into the environment (knowing

what to do based on the knowledge of trends), kaleidoscope thinking (stimulating break-through ideas), and having an inspired vision.

Our vision for an "inspired Jewish community" (Ruskay, 2000) should be predicated on the effectiveness of interlocking organizational structures. Our organizations must not see change as a decision, but as a campaign (Kanter, 2001). To implement change, organizations should be guided by six elements.

1. *Destination*—Where are we headed?
2. *Dream*—What will be different because of this goal?
3. *Prize*—What positive outcomes will be achieved?
4. *Target*—What deadlines do we have?
5. *Message*—What image or statement conveys the essence of the goal?
6. *First Step*—What tangible step can be taken that will give reality to the goal?

CONCLUSION

The Jewish community in the new digital world must have both a structure and a soul. Structure needs soul to produce effective work communities (Kanter, 2001). In constructing this community we must be mindful of having balanced governance within our organizations that clarifies responsibilities and includes those whose input will make a difference. We need to collaborate with one another, using a shared language. Like the World Wide Web, which is a tool that helps make routine things easy, our organizational structures need relief from the often-cumbersome redundancy and inefficiencies we have reified. We must do a better job at communicating and to more people who are in places that we don't even know.

Our future Jewish community will be built on multiple networks of people—some of whom are affiliated and committed and others who are disconnected—who can meet to share knowledge and values. More than ever, our organized Jewish community will need professional and lay people who possess strong network and social skills, who are team-oriented, and collaborative. We will have to figure out the roadmap for collaboration, in which each structure within the community sees the benefit in working together. Pride in a collective achievement can reinforce a shared identity and a pride in being associated with the other. The digital world reminds us that to be a community is about unity, not uniformity, inclusion not consensus, and communication, not decision rights (Kanter, 2001).

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