Working Across and Working Between: A Theory of Innovation in Jewish Education

By Ari Y. Kelman and Maya Bernstein, with Aaron Katler

UPSTART

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It would be an understatement to say that, for the past decade, the word "innovation" has become part of the vocabulary of American Jewish communal life. The term has become over-used in marketing and promotional material, as the subject of convenings and white papers, and as a nearly ubiquitous modifier of any organization that is trying to establish its relevancy. It has penetrated virtually every sector of the Jewish world, from philanthropy to education, from food to synagogue life, and from media to social service organizations. It has even spawned a cluster of organizations committed to helping innovative organizations grow and thrive. Joshua Venture (founded 1998), Bikkurim (founded 2000), Slingshot (2004), PresenTense (2005), and UpStart (2005), were all established to provide support for the rapidly proliferating number of new Jewish organizations that emerged largely during the first two decades of the 21st century (Jumpstart et al, 2011, 31). For some the term has become something of a symbol of the ways in which start-up culture has infused Jewish communal life for good and for ill. We believe it is worth some reflection.

While the work of innovation often shimmers with youthful vigor and enthusiasm, the work of supporting innovation is decidedly less glamorous. In 2011, Jumpstart, which began as a "thinkubator for sustainable Jewish innovation" (Benor, 119), published the results of an international survey of "Jewish start-ups" in a report called "The Jewish Innovation Economy" (2011). The survey estimated the existence of over 600 organizations that catered to approximately 630,000 people, and it offered a quantitative portrait of the sector populated by a rising number of newly established organizations. Useful as this broad perspective is, the report did not provide much insight into the ways in which new organizations went about their work, and what

characterized this sector of American Jewish communal life other than "newness."

UpStart, one of the leading incubators for Jewish innovation, and now the "one stop shop" of Jewish innovation in the United States[1], provides an illustrative example of how to approach Jewish educational innovation. The authors, two professionals and one academician, leverage their respective expertise to develop this theory of innovation in Jewish education that is informed by both practice and analysis. Drawing on over a decade of experience and partnerships with more than 40 organizations, we have crystalized a few of UpStart's key learnings in an effort to offer some insights into the dynamics of innovation and entrepreneurship. Specifically, this paper will highlight the strategy of "working across and working between" to provide a more nuanced account of innovation in Jewish education. This approach, which represents something of a theory of change, deemphasizes the newness of innovations themselves and calls attention to the social aspects of change within and across this sector.[2]

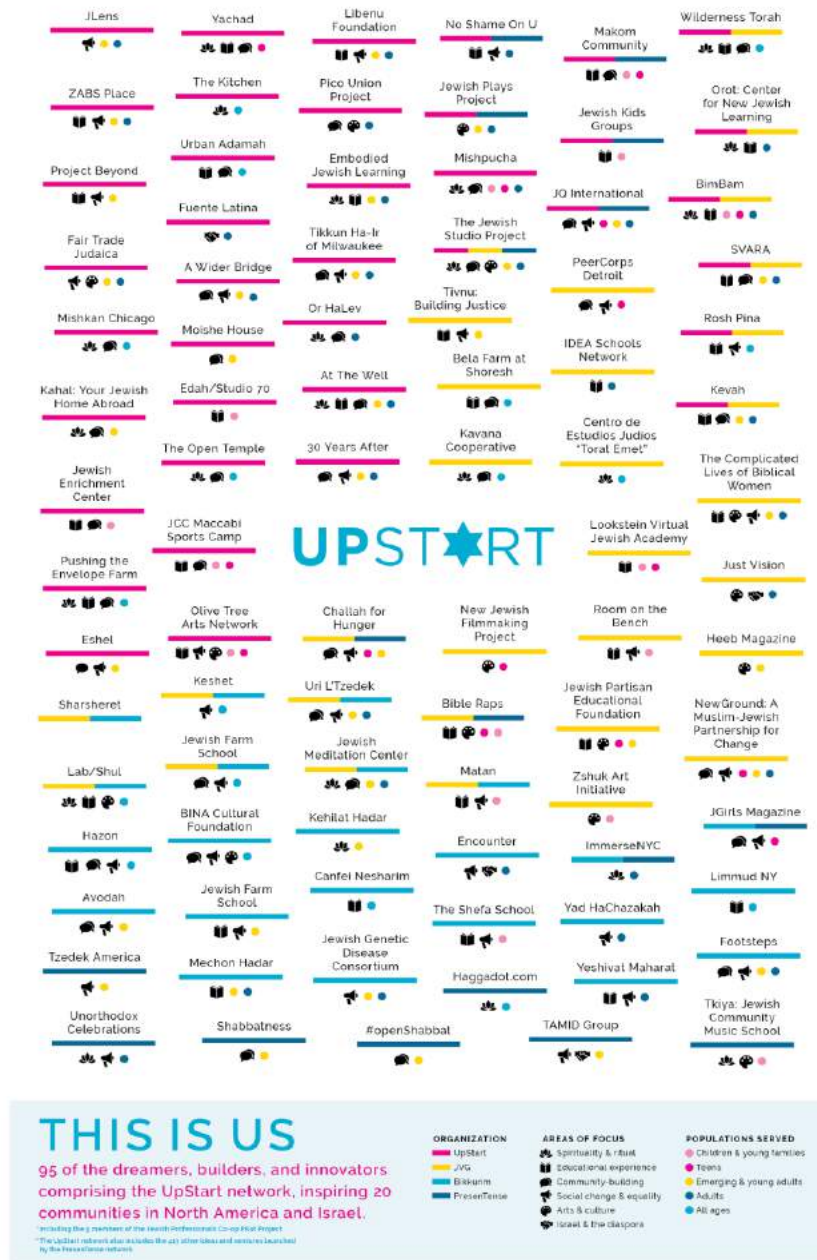**A Brief History of UpStart's Support of Jewish Innovation**

Toby Rubin, UpStart's Founder and original CEO, realized that young Jewish entrepreneurs were creating exciting, meaningful offerings for the Bay Area Jewish community, offerings that were over-subscribed, but did not know how to grow these offerings into substantive programs and organizations. At the same time, many existing programs in established institutions were struggling to attract participants, specifically young adults. Rubin successfully secured a planning grant from the Walter and Elise Haas Foundation to explore this phenomenon. Among those she encountered, she found passion, dedication, and excitement. She also found loneliness and

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[1] http://upstartlab.org/OneStop/ In the Spring of 2017, UpStart merged with Bikkurim, Joshua Venture Group, and the US Programs of PresenTense.
[2] Disclosure. Maya Bernstein is a founding member of the UpStart team and Aaron Katler is the organization's current CEO.

feelings of isolation. Many of the new organizations had gathered impressive proof that their programs were reaching people that appeared to many synagogues and legacy organizations to be unreachable. They also demonstrated a lack of business experience and savvy. Rubin framed an opportunity: how might we nurture a community of Jewish entrepreneurs who were attracting Bay Area young adults that were otherwise unengaged in Jewish life, and teach these entrepreneurs the skills to turn their nascent programs into successful nonprofit organizations?

Following the model of Silicon Valley, UpStart focused on becoming an accelerator and, after its initial few years of working in this capacity, the staff realized that they could expand their impact if they expanded their effort to include both entrepreneurs and "intrapreneurs," people who worked within established Jewish institutions who sought to bring new ideas, programming, and methodologies to them.   The map on the next page indicates a slice of the wide variety of organizations that UpStart (now merged with Bikkurim, Joshua Venture Group, and the US Programs of PresenTense) has supported since its inception. Many fall broadly into the field of Jewish education, although there are a diverse set of fields represented across UpStart-supported organizations. Regardless, each and every one of the organizations with which UpStart has worked (both new and established) has programming that aspires to reach the overarching mission of engaging people in meaningful and inspiring Jewish experiences, which, we would argue, is at the heart of any Jewish educational endeavor. More formally, UpStart has supported intrapreneurs in Jewish Day Schools, synagogue after-school programs, JCCs, and Foundations, all of which which focus explicitly on Jewish education.

Who is an Innovator?

One of the persistent myths about innovators is that they always start in some scrappy garage somewhere. This narrative is particularly strong in Silicon Valley, where innovation and disruption have become both proven realities and much fetishized goals. Although UpStart grew out of a desire to support new initiatives that did not have institutional homes, it quickly realized

that the key qualities of an innovator do not necessarily mean that they are working in a startup or even in a new organization. Much innovation has come from within established organizations, and UpStart realized that there, too, much support and resources were needed to help develop their ideas. This freed the organization to focus on innovators, not innovations or organizations, and to expand access to resources beyond just those who seemed marginal to the Jewish community. UpStart could provide partnership and support to both intrepreneurs and entrepreneurs, but those people had to embody a set of dispositions that signaled a successful collaborator. UpStart identified the following qualities as essential:

1. **Bold Purpose**: Innovators must be clear about their purpose, and fearless in admitting what has *not* been working in the area in which they are striving to innovate. They must be willing and able to connect to that purpose and use it as a compass as they navigate the inevitable ups and downs of introducing new ideas into the community.

2. **Human-Centered**: Our innovators are in constant dialogue with the people for whom they are designing experiences. The people whose lives are affected b*y t*heir innovations are at the beginning, middle, and end of all of their work.

3. **Playful & Creative**: Innovators try things. They grow vegetables on school roofs. They make farms in the middle of urban areas. They realize that Hebre*w s*chools don't need to be linked to synagogues. They change parent-teacher meetings to parent-student meetings. There's a common thread of *chutzpah* – of being willing to break from the way things have been in the past for the sake of a better future.

4. **Risk-Taking**: We have seen so many phenomenal people start ventures and fail. Dedicated Jewish professionals leave their jobs to build an organization, pouring all of their personal resources into something that may not succeed. Entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs alike are willing to risk failure. There are many UpStarters that have not

succeeded in sustaining a stand-alone venture. They either created new programs that never took off, or that became a program of an institution rather than an independent organization. The focus of innovators is less on the success of the organization/program/institution, and more on the success of the *work* itself – back to the question of whether or not they are achieving their bold purpose in the best way possible.

5. ***Politically & Psychologically Savvy***: We have observed that even when our innovators are creating radically new offerings in the Jewish community, they are able to connect those offerings to core Jewish values. Innovators have a unique ability to connect the new to what is deep and true and old in our tradition. They must navigate this delicate balance politically, as they find their place within the constellation of Jewish institutions and funding-sources, and psychologically as they collectively push the community towards an awareness of where it is failing, and what losses it must absorb in order to adapt and evolve.

Without these mindsets, innovators make less productive partners for an accelerator like UpStart. Alone, they may not ensure success. Even the most visionary people may or may not have the capacity to create sustainable organizations that can serve a community as complex and diverse as American Jewry. Conversely, even the most well-resourced accelerator or incubator cannot necessarily spin straw into gold. The innovative effort requires partnerships, and those partnerships require investment, effort, trust, and a certain amount of generosity of spirit on all sides. Inasmuch as partnership lies at the heart of UpStart's method, the search for partners has been motivated by identifying partners whom UpStart believes can succeed. This selectivity is not cherry picking; it is central to the theory of change.

Talking about Innovation in Jewish Education

Recent discussions about innovation in Jewish education specifically have tended to focus either on "newness" or on challenges to American Jewry and on the responses to them. In Jon Woocher z"l and Meredith Woocher's review of the "Jewish educational ecosystem" (2013), the authors identify three types of challenges facing the enterprise in the 21st century: institutional, pedagogic, and "most fundamentally, with regard to its fundamental purpose" (5-6). In each of these domains, they observe, American Jewish educators are struggling to re-calibrate their efforts around new sociological and demographic realities. These efforts have yielded significant new offerings across the range of Jewish educational settings, from supplementary schools to summer camps, and from early childhood education to adult-oriented programs. Looking at the variety of efforts to reinvigorate Jewish education, Woocher and Woocher conclude, "Most of the new programs in today's Jewish educational ecosystem seek to inspire Jews not just to identify as Jews (which they do anyway), but in one fashion or another to make their Jewishness an integral dimension of their lives, to use it to enrich and inform how they think and how they live" (28). They explain "Jewish education is moving from a focus on continuity to a primary concern with meaning" (28). Alongside this shift in content, they observed a dynamic in structure, claiming that transformations in Jewish education have often been initiated by those "marginal" to Jewish life, and that the programs on the margins slowly become "normative" (33). These two trends – a shift away from an emphasis on continuity and toward meaning, and a coincident movement from the margin to the normative mainstream – are certainly visible, but whether or not they constitute educational "innovation" remains to be seen.

In looking for definitions of innovation, there has been none more influential than that of Clayton Christiensen (1997), who differentiated between models of sustaining and disruptive innovation. Sustaining

innovation, he explains, offers improvements to extant systems. Labeled "additive" by other scholars of organizations, these efforts at transformation try to improve things but do not, fundamentally, change the dynamics of the larger structure in which those changes have emerged. In the world of Jewish education, the addition of specialty summer camps over the past decade or so can be understood as an example of sustaining innovation, as the camps are new entrants into the marketplace of summer activities. While they compete with other, longer-running camps, they do not fundamentally alter the landscape of Jewish summer camping or Jewish education.

Disruptive innovation, by contrast, changes the very makeup of an ecosystem or a marketplace by offering a new product or system that reorients the entire way that people conduct themselves within it. Christiensen's example of this is the Model T Ford. The introduction of the automobile did not fundamentally disrupt the market for horse-drawn carriages, but the Model T represented a disruptive innovation because it made the automobile affordable and basically rendered the horse-drawn carriage obsolete. Cell-phones have nearly done the same for land-lines, and MP3s have upended the way in which music is made, marketed, and sold. Not all technology is disruptive, however. CD's did not change the structure of the music marketplace, they just replaced older technologies while leaving the larger framework for making and selling music in place.

To be "disruptive" is not just to be a better version of an older technology; it is to change the ways that people fundamentally understand the technology's function and purpose. Innovation in Jewish education has been largely sustaining. This is not due to a paucity of new ideas or new ventures, and it is not due to the unwillingness of certain legacy organizations to change. Rather, it has to do with the marketplace for Jewish education and the needs and desires around which that marketplace has been organized. Creating a new and better religious school is not disruptive in and of itself, because it can be understood as an attempt to cater to a segment of the

community that is underserved. It does not fundamentally upend structures, organizations, or dynamics that have characterized the marketplace as it stands. These efforts may be organized around new ideas and these ideas might be revolutionary at their core. They might be better at delivering positive Jewish educational experiences than their competitors, and thus, they might survive while their counterparts may eventually fail. But this all happens within the space and logic of the existing Jewish educational marketplace (to use Christiansen's terms), which remains fueled by people looking for quality Jewish experiences that they might call "educational." New players in that field are not (yet?) reshaping it.

Perhaps one might argue that the very notion of a disruptive innovation in Jewish life is altogether threatening and antithetical to our purpose. Our community, by definition, seeks to preserve a tradition and convey an ancient set of texts, rituals, and beliefs to future generations. There have been moments of disruption in Jewish history, but often those moments are forced upon Jewry (a classic example is the destruction of the Temple, and the necessary disruption of moving from Temple-based rituals to early synagogue and study-hall Jewish life). Our community's structures are designed for preservation, and only when the status quo is clearly no longer sufficient do those structures begin to give way to adjacent possibilities. In this way, Jewish life is not that different from the horse-drawn carriage industry or the music business. Existing structures, whether companies or communal organizations, are loath to cede their place of privilege, and often it takes a new idea or product to introduce new possibilities into the system.

Here is an example of an innovation that UpStart supported with the sense that it might, in fact, become disruptive in Christiensen's sense. In 2007, UpStart welcomed an organization called Jewish Milestones as a fellow. Jewish Milestones was the brainchild of Rachel Brodie and Julie Batz, who wished to respond to a need they saw in the community for people who were seeking meaningfully-led Jewish lifecycle rituals without involving a

synagogue or congregational rabbis. Given that many people join synagogues out of a desire to have access to a rabbi for precisely this reason, and that not having access to Jewish ritual leaders outside of synagogues made it difficult for non- member families to engage in such rituals, Jewish Milestones seemed like an organization that could both fill a need and, potentially, upend the synagogue-based structure of Jewish life. American Jews had already sent a clear message rejecting the institutionally-based structure of Jewish life. This was not only a realization of the organization's leadership; some local clergy resisted referring inquiries to Jewish Milestones because of the disruption it seemed to represent. A lack of viable alternatives to meet the demand ultimately resulted in the marketplace not being ready for such wholesale disruption. As an innovation slightly ahead of its time, the organization also faced major challenges in a funding environment that was going through its own disruptive moment in 2008. While the organizations' leadership chose to shut down its core business, many echoes of their work live on today in both the innovation sector and the wider Jewish community.

Disruptive innovation requires more than a good idea. It requires a context in which its ideas can become popular enough to destabilize the existing structures of the marketplace. In the American Jewish community, there is no shortage of good ideas. There is, however, a strong and densely populated network of communal organizations, as well as a population that is not always transparent about their desire for quality Jewish experiences. There are also a number of financial institutions including Federations, foundations, and funds that are willing to support new organizations, even as some of those institutions may seem less excited about the change that new organizations might promise. This might seem like a rather unfavorable setting for innovation, but, in fact, this landscape lays the groundwork for innovations that could be transformative over the long term.

The shift of emphasis in Jewish education toward meaning and the tendency of marginal figures to provide increasingly normative educational

experiences represent sustaining innovations, but they fall far short of Christiensen's definition of "disruptive." They are valuable and they contain the seeds of some significant improvements to Jewish education across North America, but have ultimately not transformed the marketplace in fundamental ways. Synagogues remain the primary delivery system for both ritual and education, day schools seem to be doing well (Schick 2014), and summer camps are thriving (Cohen et. al, 2011). Each contributes to a robust Jewish educational marketplace, and many new endeavors fill much-needed gaps by providing for different kinds of learners. But even the most innovative of these (and there are some wonderfully creative and unique offerings), have not managed to transform the field of Jewish education in fundamental ways akin to the MP3 or the Model T Ford.

Disruptive Collaboration

Although people lust after disruptive innovations, it may be that the Jewish world is better served by sustaining ones. This does not make the innovations in the field of Jewish education unimportant or unsuccessful. To take one of the earlier examples, automobiles with higher gas mileage or lower emissions are great sustaining innovations because they improve upon products in an existing marketplace. The same might well be true of streaming music sites that are trying to figure out how to remonetize recorded music. These are, in Christiansen's terms, "sustaining" innovations. It may well be that the desire for quality Jewish experiences is a broadly agreeable baseline for Jewish educational endeavors, such that it may not require disruption, but rather, it may need more thoughtful, creative efforts to sustain innovations within it.

We realize that this is far less entrancing than the story of two people working in a garage, or the allure of a technological solution to make our lives easier, more manageable, or more meaningful. It may be that people are busily looking for the next MP3 or the next iPhone, and they overlook the

successes and promises of sustaining innovation. Moreover, they might, as a result, overlook or undervalue the cumulative effects of these kinds of innovations. Christiansen's distinction did not hang on the quality of the innovation but on the effects that the innovation had on the market itself. Therefore, instead of focusing on specific projects or particular people, UpStart developed an approach to innovation in Jewish education that focused on a different aspect of innovation altogether: the power of collaboration. This approach shifted attention away from specific efforts and particular people and toward the social dynamics that help new initiatives to emerge and succeed. Rather than looking for a disruptive innovation in a product, UpStart invested in the process and in the people involved in it.

While many of the most notable new initiatives have been associated with their founders, very few initiatives in Jewish education exist on their own. Even those that start as marginal or radical often seek out partnerships with larger organizations who might provide funding or in-kind exchanges that allow the organization to grow. For this reason, we feel that the "ecosystem" metaphor favored by organizations like Jewish Jumpstart (2009a, 2009b, 2011) does not capture the intentionality of partnerships or the prevalence of relationships that exist among and between organizations and their leadership. Jewish Jumpstart defines an ecosystem as "A complex set of relationships of living organisms interacting within their physical environment" (2011, 3). This definition imagines a rather passive set of interdependencies, in which the viability of the larger environment derives from the contributions of each organization to it. These partnerships do not exist *within* an ecosystem -- they are the ecosystem (Moskowitz, 2007). Moreover, partnerships are neither byproducts of, nor incidental to, the success of the overall effort. They play a central role in fueling the creation of new organizations and promoting new ideas, as much as they do in reinvigorating larger, older organizations that seek infusions of new ideas and new energy.

Innovation in Jewish education, therefore, should be understood as a distributed process in which no single organization can take unilateral credit for success for instigating meaningful change in the field. In this way, the organizations that comprise the Jewish education sector – schools, camps, synagogues, Federations, Israel-focused outfits, media creators, and so on – can be thought of better as a network than an ecosystem in which the creation of something called "Jewish education" can best be understood as the result of what Roy Pea calls "distributed intelligence" (1993). He writes, Activity is enabled by intelligence, but not only intelligence contributed by the individual agent. When I say that intelligence is distributed, I mean that the resources that shape and enable activity are distributed in configuration across people, environments, and situations. In other words, intelligence is accomplished rather than possessed (50).

The same could easily be said of innovation. An individual with a good idea might initiate an innovation, but it cannot be accomplished without building relationships, creating partnerships, and investing in collaboration. This is true in Jewish education as it is in business, even though the tendency is to focus on the character of the creative innovator or on the specific innovative product, and less on the web of investments, partnerships, and infrastructure that made the innovation possible.

This is not to say that the evolution of Jewish education is entropic or that it leads toward homogenization, but rather that the very notion of Jewish education as it has developed in the United States (Krasner 2011, Ingall 2010, Graff 2008), has emerged from partnerships between organizations which, at one moment in time, appeared to be innovative. The establishment of bureaus of Jewish education, the creation of age and grade-segmented classes, were, at the moment of inception, innovative ideas designed to modernize and replace the *melamed* and the *heder*. Over time, they became normative and they remain so despite well-documented challenges (Schoem 1984, Heilman 1983). The same could be said about the development of

media products for American Jewish children, day schools, Jewish summer camps, and many other venues for the delivery of Jewish education that have become normative. Yet, few of these exist without partners. Camps and schools partner with movements; media producers need both distribution platforms and audiences. Samson Benderly's vision for the Jewish version of centralized Jewish education was, itself, a model that emphasized connection and coordination. The collaborative efforts that make innovation possible may also domesticate them, but within the context of sustaining innovation, that may be the best available option.

Though he was not talking about innovation, per se, this is what Jack Wertheimer meant in his influential call for Jewish educational efforts to "link the silos" (2005).

Precisely because of these important interconnections in the actual lives of average Jews, leaders concerned with Jewish education must find ways to build institutional linkages between various formal and informal educational programs, between families and schools, between educators in various venues, between the key communal agencies engaged in support of Jewish education…. The current challenge in the field of Jewish education is to link the silos, to build cooperation across institutional lines and thereby enable learners to benefit from mutually reinforcing educational experiences and to help families negotiate their way through the rich array of educational options created over the past decade and longer (2).

Organizations like UpStart emerged to address this challenge by fostering partnerships between organizations. Though Wertheimer, it seems, was speaking more to long-standing institutions of Jewish education and less to newly emergent ones, the impulse is similar: tending to partnerships will strengthen the entire field. Wertheimer is not calling for a specific intervention beyond that which may derive from a more intentional approach to building relationships between institutions, though he seems to suggest that

increased institutional interactions would, almost by necessity, enhance educational offerings. That may not have come to pass, but his emphasis on interaction and partnership may have been the most innovative dimension of his call to educational arms.

UpStart is a case in point. As an incubator, its strength comes from its ability to nurture relationships between individuals and organizations, and to help them develop into sustainable endeavors. Where UpStart has had a significant impact is in helping to facilitate connections between smaller, more nimble, and less well-resourced organizations, as well as with others that are either peer or power organizations. The innovations UpStart has helped to foster have come from both younger and more established organizations, and it has succeeded where partners produce generative relationships. This commitment to "disruptive collaboration" may be UpStart's most important innovation.

This is particularly visible as the Jewish "innovation ecosystem" has begun to merge with established institutions, while at the same time continuing to push those institutions in ways that are healthy for communal growth. At the Collaboratory, an annual gathering of the Jewish innovation sector, the rooms and halls, which originally attracted only entrepreneurs, are now attracting leaders from Federations who are beginning to drive an innovation agenda into their community's educational institutions. Similarly, the annual conference of the Jewish Funders' Network has come to rely on a steady stream of innovators to present their work to those whose financial investments make much of Jewish education possible.

Working Across and Working Between

Just as UpStart recognizes the traits that suggest an innovative disposition, it also recognizes that educational innovation is, fundamentally, a social phenomenon and that it takes place in communities both real and imagined. As with the example of Jewish Milestones, an innovative idea and a

talented educator are not necessarily sufficient to ensure success if the larger community has not been primed for change. Fostering innovation, then, does not mean investing in talented people with good ideas. For UpStart, it has also meant identifying opportunities and recognizing where conditions for change are present. UpStart learned this through partnerships with organizations like Jewish Milestones, as well as with other organizations that have had longer lasting impacts on the field of Jewish education.

Considering the social dimension of innovation required that UpStart work both across the Jewish community and between individuals and organizations. Applying this approach to Jewish education meant looking beyond schools, synagogues, and camps, though it did not mean neglecting those sites, either. UpStart understood that what makes new educational ventures powerful is a desire to serve new segments of the Jewish community, complemented by an understanding that they are serving the broadest sense of the Jewish community, and not a single congregation or movement. These efforts are not necessarily upending learning or Jewish education, per se, but they are doing a bit more than linking silos, as they are actively (to extend the metaphor) building more silos in more places, and inviting more people in.

BimBam is perhaps one of the most illustrative examples, as it embodies "working across and working between." Founded by Sarah Lefton in 2008, BimBam[3] (formerly G-dcast) began making content that she thought would speak to her twenty and thirty-something peers. She discovered that the content was also connecting with grade school students, via their religious-school teachers. So BimBam became "traditionally" educational, supplementing its digital content with curricular material for use in schools. In this way, it works "between," appealing to the needs of educators for more suitable media products. Yet, BimBam also works "across," forging partnerships that span the American Jewish community. In spite of (or

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[3] http://www.bimbam.com/

perhaps because of) its origins, BimBam now partners with a variety of organizations both young and old. These collaborations make the distribution of BimBam's media possible within Jewish educational frameworks, which is crucial within the context of the rapidly expanding and relatively unstructured media landscape. Its website currently lists 19 partner organizations including Kevah and Moishe House (young) as well as the Union for Reform Judaism and the Hebrew Free Loan Association of San Francisco (old). Perhaps even more innovatively, BimBam lists the URJ, NCSY, and Interfaith Family among its partners, indicating that BimBam can partner across even the most well established divisions in the American Jewish world. 50 years ago, such promiscuous collaboration would have been almost unthinkable.

In a similar fashion, Adam Berman, in his work as an UpSart alum with Urban Adamah, brought new rigor and focus into the field of Jewish outdoor education by focusing deeply and partnering broadly. Jewish outdoor education was not new (for a survey of the use of classical texts in environmental literature, see Gindi 2011), but Berman's work was born from the observation that "there was a deep desire for Jews to be in community and grow more deeply in the three areas of Mindfulness, Social Justice, and Farming/Nature." For Berman, the focus on ecology and the environment transcended the divisions within the Jewish community, and drew on his sense of people's fundamental desire for "being in community with like-minded/hearted folks, connecting to the earth, participating in meaningful social action, learning how to grow food…" Berman is always asking: "Does Judaism have anything to offer in these realms that can make their experience richer, deeper, more alive and connected? When the answer is yes, in comes Jewish tradition. When the answer is no, we don't force it." His desire to connect people to one another and to environmental values has worked "between" to turn Urban Adamah into an unusually pluralistic Jewish center. Perhaps even more innovatively, Urban Adamah works "across," as well, building partnerships with public schools and non-denominational urban

farming initiatives in its area. Where Urban Adamah has clearly met a need for ecologically oriented Jewish education, it has also broadened the parameters of Jewish education to include connections with other educational and environmental efforts beyond the Jewish community.

Two other UpStart affiliates, Kevah[4] and Jewish Kids Groups, focused their efforts on two more traditional sites of Jewish education: adult education and supplementary school. Both have worked across and between to expanded the Jewish community's conceptualization of who has the authority to teach and to attend, and the environment in which the learning occurs. When she was first starting, Kevah's founder Sara Bamberger observed that "people like customization and crave authentic, personalized experiences, whether it's in the way they order their coffee, take transportation, or buy local organic food. In our increasingly technological world, people also really appreciate having a safe space for timeless conversation about ideas that matter." Bamberger wanted to create opportunities for adults to self-organize around Jewishly-informed, uniquely customized conversations about issues that really mattered to them. Her idea was to bring Jewish learning for adults into their homes, capitalize on extant social networks, and allow the learners to drive their own learning rather than having it broadcast from a JCC or a synagogue. Focusing on self-directed learning rather than place-based programs, Bamberger allowed learners to find the subjects and teachers they sought, and Kevah groups formed that drew on people who were members of different synagogues or who were not members of anything at all. In this way, Kevah worked across and between available offerings of adult education and took advantage of both extant social networks and a desire for self-organized, self-motivated learning that crossed formal boundaries of all kinds.

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[4] https://kevah.org

Jewish Kids Groups[5], which defines itself as "more than just a ridiculously cool Hebrew school" similarly wanted to open up the array of Jewish learning accessible to children and adolescents. Ana Robins, Founder and Executive Director, observed that Hebrew Schools were largely "not fun for kids; only available to synagogue members; and, wasting resources – operating independently and reinventing the wheel." And so she strove to design a Hebrew school experience that was "amazing" for kids, widely accessible to families, and replicable for the community. She worked between to create an experience that focused on neighborhoods but not on synagogue or JCC communities, and she worked across to build a program to reach families who are not affiliated and who are interfaith and thus might not find community in congregations. Robins shared that "since launching in 2012, Jewish Kids Groups has influenced other Jewish supplemental education programs in the Atlanta area to provide better, more experiential programs. This has resulted in overall increased quality of programming, aiming to meet the modern needs of Jewish families in our region."

The innovations here are not necessarily "disruptive" in Christiansen's language, but they have certainly had significant effects on the broader landscape of educational institutions. By expanding the array of offerings to urban farms, online, and outside of synagogues, these organizations have worked across and between to build communities of learners, and to build partnerships with other organizations that can positively benefit the larger Jewish community.

Across, Between, and Within

These case studies should not lead one to conclude that innovation is happening only outside of educational institutions, nor should it lead readers to believe that only new organizations have the capacity to affect change. Innovation, as indicated earlier, can happen almost anywhere, depending on

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[5] http://www.jewishkidsgroups.com/

the investments of individuals and the capacity of the organizations to work across and between. It is not uncommon to see synagogues housing alternative early childhood education programs, or Bureaus of Jewish Education sponsoring innovative entrepreneurs, intrapreneurs, and large-scale innovation projects. These sector-specific adaptations reflect a more recent trend in the maturation of the innovation sector and portend a healthy future for those organizations who realize it will take all elements of the communal infrastructure to support vibrant and sustainable Jewish education for their community. Yet, these changes rely on people working within those institutions who have the capacity, creativity, and will to pursue new directions for those organizations.

UpStart realized early in its existence that if it wished to truly impact the field at large, it also would have to work across and between. Partnerships with the establishment and funders are critical to the success of embedding innovations and new ways of thinking into the Jewish educational system. Given the tendencies in Jewish communities toward sustaining innovation, focusing only on entrepreneurs would not have allowed UpStart to have the broad impact that its founder, Rubin, imagined it could. To have that kind of effect, it would have to cultivate relationships with creative, agile, risk-taking professionals within establishment organizations and empower them to work like entrepreneurs, and to introduce innovations into their system. As with entrepreneurs working in smaller organizations, the innovative orientation of intrapreneurs came to be even more important, in some cases, than the innovations themselves. UpStart noticed that innovating within established institutions comes with its own dangers; the very way of working can be threatening to the system. This meant that intrapreneurs must grapple not only with the design and implementation of the new ideas and programs and

content, but also with leading cultural change within their institutions by working across and between (Bernstein and Linsky, 2016)[6].

Between 2012 and 2015, UpStart partnered with the Jewish Education Project on the Day School Collaboration Network[7], which was funded by UJA-Federation of New York. The purpose of this project was to train Jewish day school educators and administrators to work more like entrepreneurs, and to provide support to them as they introduced meaningful innovations into their schools. UpStart designed a curriculum that combined Design Thinking – a human-centered approach to designing creative solutions to the problems students and families in schools have – and Adaptive Leadership – a set of tools to help the intrapreneurs navigate the inevitable push-back they would receive when they began working in this way. Examples of the innovations designed as part of this project included:

- Re-designing parent-teacher conferences and turning them into student-teacher conferences, to help students take more responsibility for their own learning
- Designing new programs to engage parents in the school
- Re-thinking morning prayer offerings
- Re-designing physical classrooms to be more inclusive of students with different learning styles
- Empowering students to design their own learning experiences, to "hack" school assemblies and events

Perhaps more importantly than these outcomes were the changes in attitude and orientation that DSCN participants reported. They observed that the process of engaging partners in designing and implementing interventions

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[6] See "Adaptive Design" https://ssir.org/articles/entry/leading_change_through_adaptive_design by Maya Bernstein and Marty Linsky
[7] http://upstartlab.org/2016/01/uncategorized/day-school-collaboration-network/

made them feel more excited to work in their schools, and that this method of working was engaging and contagious – they were eager to spread it across their faculty and even train their students to think and work in these ways. None of these were the result of individuals working alone; they all drew on the strengths and assets of the school community.

Adam Tilove was a member of the first year of DSCN. As a member of the network, he helped re-design afterschool offerings at Rodeph Sholom in Manhattan, where he was employed at the time. He went on to become the Head of School of the Jewish Community Day School of Rhode Island, where he took the core ideas of Design Thinking – the notion of radical collaboration between teachers, administrators and students, empathy for students' needs and learning styles, creativity and playfulness, and a spirit of experimentation – and slowly began transforming his school into a place that incorporated these elements into the rhythm of school life. Students in the school have built Rube Goldberg machines in the hall to light a Menorah; have re-designed their Friday Kabbalat Shabbat program; have taken over a room and turned it into a Design Lab. And Tilove and his colleagues have built a robust STEAM program that includes a partnership with Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design, which has resulted in the development of an innovative curriculum for students that combines Design and Jewish values, helping to prepare students for the 21st century.

The changes that Tilove helped bring to his schools were neither the result of his efforts alone, nor were they the product of a few good ideas that provided "fixes" for the school. His approach helped encourage a cultural shift in the way his school approached its commitment to and practice of education. Like the examples given earlier, the specific innovations (adult learning groups, urban farms, videos) are only one part of a much larger cultural context in which innovation can happen. Focusing only on the outcomes neglects the social dynamics and cultural and institutional contexts in which change takes place. Among UpStart's key learnings over the past

decade has been the importance of context, as only the can the power of disruptive collaboration be observed and felt.

Funding Innovation

Thinking about context means appreciating the broader settings in which all of this innovation takes place. To be sure, it comes from people trying to implement good ideas, and it comes from a sense of what American Jewish communities need for their education, as well as from assessments of where those needs are not being met. Insofar as all of this happens in the context of the American Jewish community, very little of it can happen without the financial support of funders, and failing to account for philanthropy would result in an incomplete portrait of innovation. In a sense, philanthropic support is a partially visible force that sets the context for all this other work.

Over the past two decades, Federations and major private foundations have grown increasingly cognizant of innovations in American Jewish life. In some cases, this has become something of a fetish, leading some to focus *solely* on innovative programs that strive to reach those individuals otherwise disengaged from Jewish life. As a result, the opportunities for funding have been significant. Though never easy, funding has become more robust from major institutions to smaller organizations. At the same time, the funding models of major institutions are not always ideally suited for younger, smaller, start-up organizations. Extensive grant processes, short runways for traction, demands for quick results, and an emphasis on scale and growth can sometimes push innovative organizations in directions they might not otherwise have gone.

For established organizations, these changes can feel threatening, as newer entrants appear to challenge their financial stability. Dollars once flowing their way are now being subtly redirected to the innovation organizations, making the funding process more challenging. Adding to that,

the explosion of new wealth, as it has expressed itself in NextGen funding, has resulted in additional challenges to central agencies. Young(er) independent funders have an interest in directing their philanthropy to nonprofits that operate in similar ways to their own business experience. With the predominance of start-up culture, NextGen funders tend to be attracted to familiar models like VC and angel investors, and often times have a greater risk tolerance for ROI.

In this sense, philanthropy is evolving in a deeply collaborative way as well. Younger, more independent funders are attending established conferences like the Jewish Funders Network as well as participating in giving circles like the Slingshot Fund and the Natan Fund. Similarly, funders who want to operate lean models of grant making often migrate to using some of the same intake and measurement tools as their more established counterparts. In the philanthropic sector, as in the innovation sector itself, the effort to work across and between is leading to more opportunities for collaboration and learning.

These are not disruptive innovations, but sustaining ones. The hope and optimism of the philanthropic sector in directing funds towards innovation in Jewish education is still motivated by a desire to reach a broader array of the Jewish community and to deepen their connections to things Jewish. The desire of today's population to engage actively in the educational process and not merely sit back and consume content has affected the sensibility between funders and grantees. As young philanthropists move through their own Jewish journeys, their experiences tend to inform their philanthropic choices. Often, they do not wish simply to write checks, but to commit to organizations in which they believe. If they have been touched by the types of experiences offered in the innovation sector, they may seek to fund new and engaging offerings. Similarly, partnerships between grantees and their funders are often more than mere patronage, and they often aspire to partnership or at least participation in the process.

For funders, this means working across and between, as well, to develop and sustain relationships that transcend traditional barriers and reimagine not only the products or venues of Jewish education, but the possibilities of Jewish life that such education might foster. For these endeavors to succeed, partnership across communal divisions and between new parties will be required.

One of the best examples of a successful disruptive collaboration that UpStart has helped facilitate is between UpStart itself and the San Francisco-based Jewish Community Federation. UpStart originally had a tentative relationship with Federation at best. Participants in early UpStarter organizations were unwilling to come to UpStart events that took place in the building *adjacent* to Federation (not even in the Federation building itself!), for fear of becoming associated with the establishment. UpStart organizations originally positioned themselves as entities in stark contrast to the Federation. They saw themselves as nimble, creative, unorthodox, and young – as compared to the Federation, which they saw as stiff, establishment, formal, and old. Ten years later at the Upstart anniversary, Danny Grossman, the CEO of the San Francisco Federation[8] signaled that the relationship had arrived at a more collaborative phase. This marked a transformation from two entities that saw themselves in competition for the same population to two sectors that complement and learn from one another. During the ten years in between, the Federation steadily became a major funder of UpStart and many UpStarters. The evolution of the relationship between the establishment Federation and the start-up culture or new organizations is a result of the combined efforts of both parties to focus more on their shared values and desired outcomes, to cede some turf, and to commit to working across and between in the service of a more robust Jewish community.

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[8] Disclosure: Grossman is married to Linda Gerard, UpStart's Chief Program and Innovation Officer

For this, funders must orient themselves around the principles of innovation, as well. It does no good when the field and the funders are working at cross purposes, or when the they do not share a conception of desired impact, however that may be defined. Specifically, UpStart has learned that success comes most readily when funders allow grantees to ask the right questions about their efforts. Simultaneously, a philanthropically innovative orientation would focus on working across and between, contributing to the American Jewish community broadly understood and internally diverse.

The history of ideologies that has defined the structure of American Jewish life religiously, culturally, educationally, and philanthropically hardly resonates with innovators in the 21st century. Whether they work across, between, or within organizations, the emphasis seems oriented toward more flexible structures, more porous boundaries, more varied offerings, more diverse people. An innovatively philanthropic orientation will take advantage of this new context to effect broader and deeper change in the American Jewish community.

Conclusion: Across Purposes, not Cross Purposes

Over the past decade, we have seen Jewish innovations in education move from the margins to the mainstream. Even some of the most established of Jewish institutions are now striving to create "Innovation Labs" and to work like innovators. Meanwhile, some of the most radical Jewish innovators are partnering with Jewish educational institutions that have been around for over a century.

The conditions that have created this convergence are broad and complex, but the orientation toward innovation traverses the efforts that are improving the lives and learning of North American Jews. This is the result of a convergence of approaches, not solely from the emergence of new educational products. UpStart has been fortunate to be near the center of

these developments, helping build connections and deepen commitments within and beyond organizations, in partnership with supporters big and small. This happens, in part, because of a shared sense of innovative purpose with respect to Jewish education's role in Jewish life. This articulation is neither innovative nor particularly novel, but it stands in for the shared ways in which people approach the process of innovation not as a way of upending or besting the market, but as a means toward improving the lives of people and communities.

If UpStart has learned anything, it is that the best innovations thrive because they understand the power of disruptive collaboration with professional staff, peers organizations, funders, and learners. Further, they share a value in working across and between. They appreciate the value that Jewishness can offer. Perhaps ironically, the wisdom of Jewish traditions, perspectives, practices, texts, and values has only increased in relevance in the 21st century, as we struggle to make sense of a rapidly changing world, dizzying technological advances, and major shifts in the way we live and relate to one another. When Judaism is presented as a feature of community in an increasingly fragmented interpersonal landscape, a set of practices that celebrate family, social justice, care for our planet, and purpose in the world, it resonates profoundly.

Therein lies the "secret sauce" of innovation in Jewish education, from UpStart's perspective. There is wisdom in the tradition, but its evolution has resulted in structures that divide and distinguish instead of inviting collaboration and partnership. Innovation is slow, careful work and it should begin and end with the people whom those innovations are imagined to serve. If anyone offers wonderful Jewish opportunities that preserve Judaism but that do not meet the needs of 21st century Jews, we will ultimately not succeed in our efforts to keep Judaism and the Jewish community thriving. If, though, innovators can consider the social dynamics of their efforts, endeavor to work collaboratively with others, and strive to keep the needs of the

people they serve at the center, then the American Jewish community might well live up to all the hype lavished on promises of innovation. The challenge is to not be distracted by the novelty of new initiatives and to remain attentive to the slow, social work of collaboration – working across and between.

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