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Exploring the Adaptive Capacities of Shared Jewish–Arab Organizations in Israel

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Abstract Nonprofits have unique strategic concerns, including their dependence on external resources, the management of multiple stakeholders, perceptions about their organizational legitimacy as well as their primary focus on the social value of their organizational mission (Stone and Brush 1996). For shared Jewish–Arab organizations in Israel that are seeking to promote a ‘shared society,’ the obstacles in navigating these various challenges are particularly pronounced and require a very unique kind of adaptive capacity (see Letts et al. 1999; Connolly and York 2003; Strichman et al. 2007). Often operating outside of the general consensus, these organizations are faced with the significant challenge of promoting values of partnership, equality and mutual interests among two populations that are often at odds. This research seeks to shed light on how shared Arab–Jewish nonprofits are continually working to strengthen organizational capacities to more effectively carry out their particular organizational mission, given the myriad of challenges they face.

Keywords Adaptive capacity · Capacity building · Civil society · Israel · Peace building · Arab–Jewish

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Introduction

Nonprofits have unique strategic concerns, including their dependence on external resources, the management of multiple stakeholders, perceptions about their organizational legitimacy as well as their primary focus on the social value of their organizational mission (Stone and Brush 1996). Moreover, in order to address societal problems that are too complex to be solved by any one organization, effective nonprofits must work collaboratively to promote an active civil society by mobilizing every sector of society (DeVita et al. 2001). For shared Arab–Jewish organizations in Israel that are seeking to promote a ‘shared society,’ the obstacles in navigating these various challenges are particularly pronounced and require a very unique kind of adaptive capacity (see Letts et al. 1999; Connolly and York 2003; Strichman et al. 2007). With military and security concerns paramount, Israeli nonprofits regularly struggle to place social issues on a crowded public agenda. Shared Jewish–Arab organizations, often operating outside of the general consensus, are faced with the significant challenge of promoting values of partnership, equality and mutual interests among two populations that are often at odds. In addition to navigating relationships with multiple stakeholders, with varied if not conflicting objectives, these nonprofits need to operate in a rapidly shifting political climate characterized by uncertainty and tension.

Research studies that analyze the role of ideology in shaping the organizational structure, mission and practices of an organization cite the difficulties that can arise as a nonprofit becomes more institutionalized and situates itself within its external environment (see Galaskiewicz and Bielefeld 1998; Thomas 1999; Staggenborg 1988). Shared Jewish–Arab organizations indeed face a unique set of

challenges in establishing nonprofits that intentionally seek to disrupt the current status quo in Israel. With organizational stakeholders holding such disparate perspectives regarding the nature of the state of Israel and the conflict between Israel, the Palestinians and greater Arab world, these organizations have taken upon themselves the goal of working collaboratively with both communities and promoting a shared society within the internationally recognized borders of Israel. Their ability to navigate these strategic issues takes on even more significance, especially because they are often operating in an environment that can actually be hostile to the goals of a shared society (see Lune 2002). This research seeks to shed light on how shared Arab–Jewish nonprofits are continually working to strengthen organizational capacities to more effectively carry out their particular organizational mission, given the myriad of challenges they face.

Dimensions of Organizational Capacity

Research efforts represent an attempt over the past few years to define the dimensions of organizational capacity (Cornforth and Mordaunt 2011; Light 2004). Notably, a growing emphasis has been placed on the importance of organizations developing a capacity to continually adapt and ensure sustainability by meeting the demands of change (Letts et al. 1999; Crutchfield and McLeod-Grant 2007; Milen 2001). While leadership capacity, management capacity and technical capacity are considered critical, many consider adaptive capacity to be the most critical dimension (Letts et al. 1999; Connolly and York 2003). Adaptive capacity, which requires nonprofits to act as learning organizations and continually adapt to change, is considered crucial because it helps ensure long-term organizational stability and productivity (Garvin 2000; Argyris and Schon 1996; Senge 1990). In considering adaptive capacity, it is also helpful to consider each organization's respective stage of development, as organizational capacities and competencies will vary depending on the nonprofit's stage of organizational life (Stevens 2001). The key characteristics of adaptive capacity, as outlined in Strichman et al. (2007), include (a) shared vision, (b) inquisitiveness/openness, (c) systems thinking, (d) social capital and (e) external focus. Table 1 highlights key aspects of the five components, each of which are inter-related, overlapping and serve to strengthen one other.

Within this context, the research will explore key characteristics of the adaptive capacity of Jewish–Arab organizations that are seeking to promote the principles of a shared society, while navigating between two very different constituencies in a divided Israeli society.

Research Study and Methods

Context of the Research

The term 'shared society' is widely discussed and debated in the field and is used to refer both to shared society work that is specific to Jewish–Arab relation efforts and to that work undertaken in the wider context of Israel's multicultural and diverse society (Hai 2014). A deeply divided society, Israel, is characterized by national, ethnic, class and religious rifts (Al-Haj 2002; Smootha 1993), yet the division between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian Arab minority remains one of the most significant schisms in Israeli society (Golan and Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014; Orr 2011). The relationship between Arabs and Jews, which plays out against the backdrop of the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian political conflict and regional tensions, is often considered an 'intractable conflict'—one that is 'deeply rooted in each side's collective narrative, the story each side tells about itself, its identity, aspirations, perceived role in the conflict, and, mainly, its past and current history' (Kupermintz and Salomon 2005, p. 3; See also Bruner 1990).

In this study, we use the term 'shared society' organizations in reference to those nonprofits that are directly addressing issues of relevance both to the Jewish population and to the Palestinian Arab population that holds Israeli citizenship. The 'shared society' organizations are taking on the weighty task of directly confronting these tough issues while also addressing the asymmetric power relationship (Maoz 2000) and inequality between the two communities. These organizations, which include a diverse group of Arab, Jewish and Jewish–Arab civil society organizations, address a broad range of matters such as Jewish–Arab inter-communal relations, multiculturalism, community development, the economic integration of the Palestinian Arab community, and state–minority relations (Hai 2014).

While the 'shared society' organizations address issues that are part of a wider strategic effort to promote social change and inclusion in the general society, a primary goal is to raise the status of the Palestinian Arab community in all facets of Israeli life. The marginalization and discrimination faced by the Arab community—geographically, socioeconomically and politically—have been discussed in the literature and acknowledged officially by the state of Israel in recent years (Hasson 2006). This acknowledgment has attracted more attention to this reality, widening the circle of both public and private partners actively involved, and generating support for initiatives by civic society actors (Hai 2014).

Table 1 Adaptive capacity: overview of key characteristics (see Strichman et al. 2007)

Shared vision	<p>Creating a shared understanding and collectively building a shared purpose by involving staff in the setting, owning and implementing a joint vision (Senge 1990; Bryson 2004)</p> <p>Articulating a clear strategy: ‘a pattern of purposes, policies, programs, actions, decisions, and resource allocation that defines what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it’ (Bryson 2004)</p> <p>Understanding how job tasks fulfill organizational goals, and recognizing how the organizational vision is integrated with the personal vision of organizational stakeholders (Senge 1990)</p>
Openness and inquisitiveness	<p>Embracing ‘dissension’ and diversity of perspectives. Willingness to question underlying assumptions and accepted wisdom (Argyris and Schon 1996; Senge 1990; Volpe and Marsick 1999; Garvin 2000)</p> <p>Rewarding curiosity, risk taking and experimentation, and establishing a ‘marketplace’ for new ideas. Nurturing a safe environment for ‘failure’ (Senge 1990; Garvin 2000)</p>
Systems thinking	<p>Recognizing interrelationships and patterns of change rather than static ‘snapshots’ (Senge 1990). Addressing underlying causes of events.</p> <p>Understanding how particular decisions and actions affect the ‘whole’ and how systematic change takes place (Senge 1990; Sterman 2001)</p>
Social capital	<p>Acknowledging that in the workplace, there are ‘the same social needs and responses as other parts of our lives: the need for connection and cooperation, support and trust, a sense of belonging, fairness and recognition’ (Cohen and Prusak 2001)</p> <p>Creating an environment of trust among staff, supported by organizational policies that nurture trust (Cohen and Prusak 2001; Garvin 2000; Putnam 1993)</p> <p>Encouraging group dialogue, communication and collective reflection, and supporting the creation of social networks (Wenger et al. 2002)</p>
External focus/network connectedness	<p>Awareness of interdependence with surrounding environment. ‘Sufficiently porous’ to information and ideas, and identifies resources and capacities from outside of organization (Sussman 2003; Galaskiewicz and Bielefeld 1998)</p> <p>Understanding of the potential to create systematic change through strategic alliances and joint efforts with other organizations (DeVita et al. 2001; Phills et al. 2008; Salamon and Anheier 1997)</p> <p>Navigating multiple organizational stakeholders and avoiding ‘organizational isolation’ (Galaskiewicz and Bielefeld 1998; Aldrich and Reuf 2006)</p>

At the societal level, relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel have been characterized by marked tension, as they continue to be deeply affected not only by the ongoing conflict in the region, but also by domestic political and social developments. The majority of Arabs and Jews tend to live in separate, homogeneous communities, follow separate career paths and send their children to different schools. Substantial gaps in almost all socioeconomic measures continue to exist between Arabs and Jews in Israel (Gharrah (2015), with the built-in separation between the two communities acting as a major obstacle to reducing these gaps (Hai 2014; Golan and Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014). Language barriers also exist as the majority of Jewish Israelis do not speak Arabic, and the level of Hebrew among Arabs is oftentimes insufficient for success in advanced academic studies and in the job market (Marom 2015).

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of public initiatives to stimulate economic development in Palestinian Arab society and close socioeconomic gaps. Yet, at the same time, various legislative proposals and other actions undertaken by the national government have run counter to these positive developments and have served to undermine progress in

promoting equality (see Hai 2014). In this politicized and tense environment, there is no agreement or formal blueprint that has been developed to set a clear vision of what shared society actually means for the Israeli government and society.

Civil Society Efforts to Advance Shared Society

Like their counterparts around the world, Israeli nonprofits are expanding the number of collaborations and partnerships with various sectors in an effort to address complex social problems and impact policy (DeVita et al. 2001; Phills et al. 2008; Salamon and Anheier 1997). As new needs are identified and the demand for collective action increases, more nonprofits are working to strike a careful balance between providing services and advocating for social change and democratic principles (Reichman 2010; Grønbjerg and Cheney 2007). In particular, there are a growing number of joint Arab–Jewish civil society organizations that are adopting a wide range of strategies and working with multiple stakeholders from the public and private sectors to address issues of mutual interest to both populations. These efforts are part of a range of initiatives,

both public and private, that have been developed over the past decade to promote social change and inclusion of the Palestinian Arab community into general society.

The term ‘shared society’ (or similar terms such as ‘shared living’ or ‘shared citizenship’) is a relatively new term that has been adopted in recent years to signal support for principles such as greater equality, partnership and active citizenship (Hai 2014). The term ‘coexistence,’ which generally referred to efforts in the 1980s and 1990s to address social inclusion and inter-communal relations between Arabs and Jews, has gradually taken on a negative connotation and has been purposively replaced (see Kupermintz and Salomon 2005; Abu Nimer 2004). Many coexistence or peace workshops in previous decades, for example, lacked long-term engagement and focused on cultural, identity, or interpersonal issues, leaving issues related to politics aside (Kupermintz and Salomon 2005; Abu Nimer 2004). A general reluctance to deal with political issues has been well documented; for example, in various research studies on Jewish–Arab encounters during the heyday of ‘coexistence programs’ in the 1990s following the Oslo accords (Maoz 2000; Abu Nimer 2004; Katz and Kahanov 1990), and even more recently on college campuses (Golan and Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014). Similarly, this process of ‘de-politicization’ has also been noted in the context of a social justice nonprofit in Israel, where concerns over discrimination or inequality raised by Arab staff were often skirted, if not rejected, by Jewish staff and/or framed as a ‘cultural issue’ (Orr 2011). In contrast, the work of shared Jewish–Arab organizations specially addresses long-standing problems of inequality, mistrust and the conflicting narratives between the two populations, both within the context of their organization and in larger society. To accomplish their mission, it is now generally recognized that efforts to build a ‘shared society’ require identifying mutual needs and shared interests while utilizing a more multi-dimensional approach to addressing complex realities (see Hai 2014; Maoz 2000). As part of an effort to understand the context in which the organization operates and its opportunities to create change at the societal level, many ‘shared society’ organizations are deliberately engaging in organizational processes of ‘sensemaking’ (Weick 1995). More specifically, for organizations promoting shared society that are also purposefully Arab–Jewish organizations, the process of ‘sensemaking’ is an essential skill as they navigate the dynamics of promoting partnership while also seeking to represent both sides of an ‘intractable conflict.’

Each of these nonprofits, focusing on issues relating to community participation, social inclusion and equality, works towards creating an organizational model that reflects the values it is hoping to promote to its external stakeholders. Yet with such diverse and often contentious

stakeholders, stakeholder ‘management’ is exceptionally difficult for shared Jewish–Arab organizations, which like other nonprofits, relies on stakeholders for external sources, for ‘legitimacy’ as well as for funding, institutional support, volunteers, and board members (Ospina et al. 2002; Balser and McClusky 2005). These shared organizations continually balance multiple and often conflicting stakeholder expectations with their own organization’s capacities, goals, values and resources (see Ospina et al. 2002). With the large number of nonprofits working in advocacy, this complicated situation can lead to a host of challenges including potential conflicts with external funders, governmental supporters, community leaders and coalition partners (see Stalker and Sandberg 2011; Haig-Friedman et al. 2010; Cohen 2010). In order to work with governmental organizations and forge relations with other nonprofits and agencies, nonprofits may be pressured to channel their efforts into issues with more mainstream appeal and change their advocacy tactics (Lune 2002). Payes (2003), for example, has argued that Palestinian Arab nonprofits in Israel have been limited in part due to their tendency to promote ‘technical’ rather than political solutions to problems and due to their dependency on external donors who sometimes dictate the organizational agenda. The joint Arab–Jewish organizations that are the focus of this research, many of which are funded by international donors that are often Jewish communal institutions, foundations, and individuals, are also required to navigate complex stakeholder relationships (see Orr 2011; Abu Nimer 2004). Indeed, the wider context of asymmetric power relations between the Jewish and Palestinian Arab communities impacts on the more specific context of ‘asymmetric relations’ that naturally exist among diverse stakeholders of any nonprofit (see Ebrahim 2005). As such, these nonprofits often have to be very conscious that they maintain equal accountability to their primary funders, partners and local supporters in both the Palestinian Arab and Jewish communities.

Research Sample and Methods

According to Hai (2014), there are approximately seventy organizations in Israel, including Arab, Jewish and joint Arab–Jewish organizations, that can be categorized generally as promoting ‘shared society’ in the broadest sense of the term, including those that are addressing specifically Jewish–Arab relations and issues related to a multicultural and diverse society. This categorization includes organizations that are focusing primarily on strengthening interpersonal and inter-communal relations among Jewish and Arab communities, as well as organizations whose priority for building a shared society is primarily related to

addressing structural inequalities, societal participation and social inclusion of Palestinian Arab citizens (Hai 2014).

The twenty nonprofits participating in the research define themselves as shared Arab–Jewish organizations that are seeking to promote ‘shared society’ in Israel by primarily focusing on the Arab/Jewish rifts in society. The research sample includes shared Arab–Jewish organizations that had been specifically identified by civil society actors and community leaders as nonprofits that met the criteria for ‘shared’ in a variety of aspects of the work. The selected nonprofits represent a purposeful sample of ‘information-rich’ cases (Patton 1990), and they have carried out deliberate attempts to create a shared organizational environment for both Palestinian Arab and Jewish organizational stakeholders (i.e., Jewish and Arab key staff and/or lay leadership, a shared agenda, internal dialogue on the topic of staff relations). The research sample purposively represents veteran nonprofits in the mature stage of development as well as those in the startup and growth stage of development (Stevens 2001). Moreover, the majority of the organizations in the sample have sought out some type of capacity building assistance over the years in an effort to strengthen elements of their organizational infrastructure (Table 2).

Fifty-five in-depth qualitative interviews were carried out with directors, staff, board members and consultants to the twenty organizations throughout the Spring 2016. The interviews addressed a variety of factors related to how each nonprofit seeks to build its resilience and adaptability while coping with the challenges of sustaining a shared Arab–Jewish organization. Data were analyzed using conventional content analysis, a method considered most appropriate when existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon is limited (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). The interview data were subsequently analyzed and coded to identify common themes and highlight important concepts (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Patton 2002). Based on the principles of participatory data analysis (Preskill and Torres 1999), two focus groups were then held with organizational directors and staff to elicit their feedback on the research findings and to subsequently integrate their insights into the analysis.

Research Findings

The research findings are presented according to various dimensions of adaptive capacity (Letts et al. 1999; Connolly and York 2003; Strichman et al. 2007), with a focus on the overall themes that emerge from the twenty nonprofits. Each aspect of adaptive capacity that is of specific relevance for shared Jewish–Arab organizations is

Table 2 Research sample of shared Jewish–Arab organizations

1. Abraham Fund Initiatives, Advocacy, Public Policy and Education
2. Akko Center for Arts and Technology (A-CAT)
3. Arab–Jewish Center for Equality, Empowerment and Cooperation—Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Development (AJEEC-NISPED)
4. Bet Hagefen—Arab–Jewish Cultural, Community and Youth Center
5. Collective Impact Partnership for Arab Employment
6. Dugrinet—Social Enterprise in the Galilee
7. Isha L’Isha—Haifa Feminist Center
8. Economic Empowerment for Women (EEW)
9. Givat Haviva: The Center for a Shared Society
10. Hand in Hand Center for Jewish–Arab Education in Israel
11. Itach-Maaki—Women Lawyers for Social Justice
12. Jasmine—the Association of Businesswomen in Israel
13. Kav Mashve, Advancing Employment for Arab College Graduates
14. Maapach—Tagrir, a grassroots, feminist, Jewish–Arab organization
15. Maarag Shared Society Organization
16. Merchavim—The Institute for the Advancement of Shared Citizenship in Israel
17. Moona, A Space for Change, through Advanced Technology Education
18. Open House Ramla, Peace Education Center
19. Sikkuy—The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality
20. Tsofen—High-Technology Centers

discussed in detail and is accompanied by sample capacity building strategies.

The findings from the study, as illustrated in Table 3, suggest that the shared Arab–Jewish organizations in the sample are required to display various components of adaptive capacity in order to navigate the dynamic, often turbulent Israeli environment. The following discussion addresses each of these elements in depth and explores the types of capabilities that organizations are emphasizing in order to remain sustainable as shared organizations.

Discussion of Five Components of Adaptive Capacity and Sample Capacity Building Strategies

Shared Vision

As indicated in the findings, shared Jewish–Arab organizations have to consciously and proactively work toward articulating a common sense of purpose and organizational direction that continually reflects the joint interests of both Jewish and Arab organizational stakeholders. These

Table 3 Components and capacity building strategies for shared organizations

Five components of adaptive capacity	Sample capacity building strategies
<i>Shared vision</i>	
Determining a cohesive vision for the work and ensuring that the organizational agenda reflects the shared interest of both Jewish and Arab organizational stakeholders. Understanding that full consensus on everything is not a likely possibility and instead focusing on what is shared.	Considering as needed the degree to which the organizational identity and vision continually reflects the ongoing shared interests of its Jewish and Arab stakeholders.
Distinguishing between issues that are part of the core mission of the organization and those that are to be left unaddressed. Determining how the organization continues to represent stakeholders, even when a necessary compromise might reflect mutual interests and not necessarily the individual stakeholder's interests.	After answering the question of 'what?' (' <i>What is our common sense of purpose and our organizational direction?</i> '), needing to build consensus on the 'how' (' <i>How do we fulfill our organizational goals?</i> ').
	Continually checking that the organization reflects a shared agenda in its day-to-day strategies, organizational infrastructure, norms and values. Building needed consistency throughout.
<i>Inquisitiveness/openness</i>	
Developing an environment in which feedback is accepted, challenging 'authority' is encouraged, and mistakes are recognized as an inevitable part of the learning process in building a shared organization.	Regularly working with outside consultants and facilitators who help support organization efforts for dialogue.
Encouraging an understanding of professional and multicultural differences as well as national/ethnic differences, and recognizing that there is an ongoing challenge in addressing these differences; that the organization is always a 'work in progress.'	Allocating time to reflect and exchange when individuals are encouraged to express feedback on all aspects of organizational work and the overall political climate in the country.
<i>Systems thinking</i>	
Recognizing that the organization has two 'sub-systems'—Jewish and Palestinian, and that the organization is required to proactively manage the 'chaos' within. Building up the organizational capacity to more effectively cope both with internal disputes and with a chaotic external environment.	Creating a shared organizational infrastructure that is fully representational of all aspects of the work (i.e., co-directors, board leadership, staff and contractors).
Setting in place internal mechanisms to cope with inevitable external political or security crises, mechanisms that set guidelines for the organization and help to ensure sustainability.	Checking the degree to which the organization is 'shared' on a regular basis—of staff and board, the distribution of power and decision-making processes. Ensuring balance not only in formalities but in all aspects of management.
<i>Social capital</i>	
Nurturing an environment that validates the multiple identities of the staff while creating a sense of shared connectedness. Ensuring a culturally sensitive approach to all aspects of organizational life.	Ensuring visibility and celebration, both in symbolic and in concrete ways, of the Arabic and Hebrew language, and of Muslim, Christian and Jewish holidays.
Transparency of policies and decision-making processes to nurture trust and reflect the balance of power throughout the organization.	Openness and formal policies regarding conditions of employment, salaries, reimbursement for travel, office space, etc.
<i>External focus/network connectedness</i>	
Navigating the diverse, and often conflictual needs and agendas of stakeholders and maintaining ongoing relationship with them. Identifying shared interests when possible and bringing networks together that can strengthen both communities.	Ensuring that there is outside feedback from the community. Taking steps such as establishing community advisory boards to ensure a connection to local community. Maintaining decision-making procedures that constantly involve the population through its representatives and direct connection through mediums such as social media.
Staying connected to each of the two constituencies and their agendas to ensure legitimacy and full representation. Considering how much the 'mainstream' is brought into the work of the organization and how to continually 'negotiate' and keep the 'mainstream' engaged.	Participating in like-minded coalitions and organizations.
Balancing the majority/minority dynamic, and resisting any tendencies to be more attentive to more powerful stakeholders (i.e., government, funders) who often represent the majority viewpoint.	

nonprofits have to carefully build some type of consensus around key issues, in the midst of 'intractable conflict' and with staff and board holding their own conflicting narratives and visions. Inevitably, the issue of one's national and cultural identity is part of how each stakeholder defines his or her own connection to the organization's identity and

purpose. In reflecting on what it means to promote a shared society, interviewees highlight the shared agenda as a critical and unique aspect of their work that helps to generate commitment among staff and organizational partners. This requires investment, ongoing vigilance and a commitment to finding the points of mutual interest that reflect

the priorities of both the Jewish and Palestinian Arab communities. As one interviewer summarizes: *'The Palestinian Arab community wants equality first and shared society second. The Jewish community wants shared society and only then equality. As organizations, we need to make sure that we don't bring only one of these two agendas.'*

Yet finding the balance and creating a shared agenda often can pose a variety of challenges. Many of the interviewees highlight the importance of identifying a shared agenda that is based on joint interests, while recognizing the likelihood that there will not be agreement on every issue. Making this explicit enables them to successfully promote those organizational priorities that are agreed upon while deliberately leaving untouched those issues that provoke disagreement and division. For example, there is the question of how each individual in the organization defines full equality between Jewish and Palestinian Arab citizens. Given such possible discord, sometimes an organization's vision statement can be *'deliberately vague'* in order to maintain organizational cohesiveness. The shared vision is then built around areas of consensus to maximize support. One interviewee explains, *'We all don't agree on many issues, but we work on the percentage that we do agree...We need to focus on what is shared and we know that everyone who works here believes in the principles of a shared society.'*

With the necessity of *'compromise,'* shared Arab–Jewish organizations often have to carefully determine how to translate the shared vision into a coherent organizational strategy that represents multiple stakeholders. One aspect of determining organization action is related to the issue of taking an organizational stance on external events. Indeed, many of the shared organizations working in advocacy are often required to formulate a public position, sometimes following regional conflicts, mutual acts of violence and security crises. Crises are created both due to external conflicts and acts of violence (e.g., a war in Gaza) and due to internal conflicts between the state and the minority (e.g., house demolitions by the Israeli police) or inter-community violence (e.g., rock throwing or vandalism). Inevitably, finding a common ground in this toxic kind of situation can be extremely difficult given heightened feelings of mistrust and mutual suspicion. The conflict between Israel and its neighbors is often accompanied by violent rhetoric that impacts on the relationship between Arab and Jews, adding to tensions related to historical narratives, views of the *'other'* and political identification.

For example, during the Israeli military operation in the Gaza strip in 2014, a shared Jewish–Arab organization that operates in Southern Israel was in range of rocket fire. During the two months of conflict, the offices and homes of staff members living in the Southern region—both Jews

and Arabs—were under constant threat of attack from the Gaza Strip. Safety concerns extended also to family members on both sides of the border, with Palestinian Arab staff members having Gazan relatives under fire, while Jewish staff and some Bedouin Arabs had family serving in the Israeli army. This highly charged and tense situation was a scenario that has repeated itself periodically over the past decade. Indeed, very few interviewees from the various nonprofits spoke of challenges to being involved with a shared Jewish–Arab organization without emphasizing the investment of time and effort needed to stay focused on what is *'shared.'* Interviewees spoke of the *'marathon sessions'* needed to formulate some type of public statement as an organization during times of conflict in a volatile political climate. One emphasized the difficulty in articulating a public position during the most recent Israeli military operation in Gaza in 2014: *'We spent four hours to compose one sentence.'* Indeed, this herculean effort to reach a compromise is not atypical among interviewees.

At the same time, as noted in interviews, shared Arab–Jewish organizations are often required, usually as a result of some type of crisis, to reconfigure and carefully consider how to continue nurturing a shared organizational identity. As one interviewee summarized, *'in the midst of such chaos when we are able to focus on the action, it can be a very good way for us to handle the craziness around us.'* Often building a consensus on the *'how,'* even when the official organizational position may be seen as a *'compromise'* to some, can help to heal wounds and nurture a common sense of purpose. More specifically, the focus on action also allows shared Arab–Jewish organizations to model how to promote both internally and externally the values and goals of a shared society during a time of turbulence and divisiveness. For example, one organization, in response to anti-Arab incitement on the streets during the Gaza military operation, initiated a social media campaign that profiled mixed Jewish–Arab workplaces as an important reminder to the general public of the largely peaceful coexistence between Palestinian Arabs citizens of Israel and the Israeli Jewish community.

With so much dissension surrounding seemingly intractable issues, shared Arab–Jewish organizations have to construct a shared agenda, articulating what the organization stands for, why it exists, and what it aspires to achieve. Ensuring that there is the open space to discuss the difficulties surrounding these issues and challenge the status quo if need be, is discussed below.

Openness and Inquisitiveness

Our findings indicate that among interviewees, there is a constant awareness, if not vigilance, regarding the need to continually refine and review how the organization adapts

its approach to being a shared organization. Many interviewees discussed the dangers when a 'spirit of inquiry' was not nurtured, affirming the need for openness and inquisitiveness as a means of survival. Not surprisingly, many of the organizational crises were during periods of external conflict, particularly during the four wars that Israel has fought in Lebanon or the Gaza Strip since 2006. But as one interviewee points out, *'we don't need a war as an excuse- we could have a blow up over the holiday calendar at the office.'* With *'potential minefields'* surrounding all types of situations (such as how to handle Israel's Independence Day, celebrated by the Jewish community yet generally seen as a day of *'catastrophe'* or *'nakba'* for the Palestinian Arab community), staff members note the careful navigation required. And indeed, many interviewees have organizational stories of past crises that exploded at the workplace, leading to abrupt staff resignations in protest, or the inability of Arab and Jewish staff to overcome tensions during regular work days as a result of political disagreements.

The term *'the elephant in the room'* was used by several interviewees, and many of them talked about their hard-earned understanding of the dangers in ignoring underlying national and political tensions. As distinguished from coexistence efforts in the past, shared organizations generally recognize that it is necessary to address these tensions openly, albeit in a structured and facilitated approach. While no interviewee commented that this was an easy process, they often did emphasize the understanding that their work could be undermined if scant attention was paid to feedback and criticism. An interviewee explained, *'There are too many nuances, too much baggage, and too many suspicions, and in the end we had to address this in order to find what the mutual shared interests are...'* Interviewees often emphasized the importance of providing a platform for multiple perspectives and divergent narratives, including the most challenging type of criticism (i.e., the organization is mirroring the asymmetric relations prevalent in the general society or reinforcing the majority/minority dynamic; the organization is not creating a safe space that legitimates and respects differences of opinion). While there is certainly not a consensus on how and whether to raise these sensitive topics, it is often the discussion of these challenges that is perceived as inextricably linked to effectively building a shared society.

At the same time, there are a myriad of difficulties in addressing these challenges, and there is no guarantee that discussions lead to shared understandings as opposed to greater alienation among the staff. Indeed, what surfaced from the findings was not only that there is an expectation of significant challenges, but also that mistakes are viewed as an inevitable part of the process of learning and experimentation. As such, many organizations representatives

discussed the need to cultivate an openness about offering ideas that may contradict current practices or draw attention to critical problems. Openness is required both for disagreements that are strictly professional and for differences that may come up when 'national' factors enter into a conflict. Navigating potentially explosive topics can be tricky, yet many veteran organizations recognize that the political conflict and the politics of identity must be given the needed space, as it is an integral part of their work and life in Israel. As one interviewee explained, *'the conflict and national differences are always in the background, - whether we are talking about it or not - so you need to know how to handle it, even if not an explicit focus. We don't want it to spill over into every issue...'* Another explained, *'we have to make sure that we don't have skeletons in our closet. We address issues so that they don't fester, and it allows us to get back to focusing on the work.'*

The majority of organizations have undergone some type of capacity building or have received external support to create structured engagements where Arab and Jewish staff members are encouraged to inquire or even challenge the organization's strategic decisions and performance. The external team generally includes Arab and Jewish co-facilitators who are trained in conflict resolution and/or have facilitation expertise. Many interviewees spoke of facilitators who were brought into mediate for extended periods, especially during times of heightened tensions or conflict. Often storytelling and personal experiences are shared as part of the effort to increase understanding, raise awareness, and expose staff members to the reality and importance of hearing conflicting narratives. These types of facilitated sessions are generally seen as critical in providing a safe space to share, nurture a sense of respect for multiple perspectives, create learning opportunities for participants, and handle conflict as needed. Creating internal mechanisms to address the inevitable challenges of a shared organization is a key element of systems thinking, as addressed in the next section.

Systems Thinking

As indicated in the findings and in the discussion above, the majority of interviewees generally experience some type of ongoing organizational struggle that they deal with as a shared Arab–Jewish nonprofit. Certainly, promoting ideals of equality and democracy in a turbulent political climate is not easy for any organization, nor is representing an alternative model in a divisive and largely segregated community of Jews and Arabs in Israel. An important learning for numerous organizational stakeholders was to recognize that the 'shared' piece of promoting a shared society by example does not ever get fully resolved. One interviewee remarked, *'We have to remember that we are*

not going to bring peace to the Middle East here. We can't resolve everything, but there is still a lot that we can do...' As noted above, interviewees often emphasize that when underlying tensions were ignored and left unaddressed, accumulated resentments gradually came out at a later time. For many of the nonprofits in the sample, a systematic approach gradually developed in response to an awareness that their organization is part of a 'complex system' in which there is interdependency between both the Arab and Jewish components. The separate Arab and Jewish components are part of the larger organizational system that influences the entire organizational dynamic, and in essence is their added value as an organization.

Many of the interviewees describe their efforts over a period of time to create some type of organizational infrastructure that addresses the unique dynamic of being in a shared Arab–Jewish organization. A large number of interviewees highlighted the challenge associated with developing internal organizational mechanisms that would help to ensure that there was a balance between the two populations in terms of decision making, staffing and program agenda. Interviews emphasized this with comments such as: *'There is no manual for what we do'; 'There is no guide for how to be a shared organization'; 'There is no one right way, or way to guarantee our success here.'* Interviewees see their organizations as *'works in progress'* that have to experiment and learn over time to develop the internal mechanisms that address organizational dynamics in a systematic way.

While it is easier to react to events and respond with immediate action (the mentality of 'putting out fires'), many of the organizational stakeholders in these shared organizations have thoughtfully reflected on how the context of a particular event fits into a larger pattern. As such, they are developing organizational infrastructures to anticipate unintended consequences and to create internal coping mechanisms to better survive the inevitable external political conflicts or internal disputes. The commitment to develop these sub-systems allows them to better manage the potential fallout from occasional crises and to enable the organizations *'to steady itself.'* Importantly, as one interviewee explained, sharing organizations have to recognize an ongoing dynamic: *'It is a pendulum swinging between the different communities and an organization is always seeking to find the balance between the interests. A shared organization takes turns in terms of where the pendulum is.'*

There are a variety of organizational mechanisms that are employed, as noted by interviewees, that represent a systematic approach and help ensure that multiple perspectives are brought to the fore. One example is the adoption of some type of variation of a co-management model with Arab and Jewish co-directors, co-board

directors and/or co-coordinators for projects. Such efforts can be reflected in the organizational infrastructure and staffing decisions, and they can also be part of an overall effort to nurture goodwill and communication among the staff. For example, co-directors of an organization explained the system they put in place as an effort to smooth relations during the last war when coping with an ongoing conflict clearly threatened the safety of their staff and their families on both sides of the border. Throughout the extended period of violence, the Jewish director called the Arab staff daily to check on their safety and that of their family, and the Arab director called the Jewish staff as well. Numerous interviewees also spoke of the establishment of 'daily check-ins' during particularly tense political times, wherein an open forum is created in which staff members are given the opportunity to share their thoughts. Nurturing social capital among staff, as discussed below, is a central component of the organizational coping mechanism and the organization's capacity to weather both internal and external challenges to their mission of a shared society.

Social Capital

After years of experience and reflection, interviewees of veteran organizations in the sample often cited the importance of continually promoting practices that help nurture trust. Recognizing this, both new and veteran shared organizations are purposefully trying to foster internal social capital, signaling to staff that they place a high priority on collaborative work and the value of diverse perspectives. As indicated in the findings, many carefully consider the questions of how to create welcoming work environments and how to determine the role of each staff member's culture, collective narrative and history. How each staff member conceptualizes his/her own development and relationship to the organization, as noted by interviewees, is largely dependent on the degree to which a sense of mutual ownership is established throughout the organization. Through interviews, it is possible to point to a range of strategies that have been employed in varying degrees over the years in a conscious effort to build an environment in which both Jewish and Arab staff members feel connected and can meaningfully contribute to the work.

As multiple organizations that have worked for years on shared society can attest, there is a symbolic and practical message that is conveyed to stakeholders when language and culture are given equal weight. The celebration of holidays, Muslim, Jewish and Christian, is of great importance. As summarized by one interviewee, *'It is impossible to overstate the importance of symbolic gesture and ceremony. We take steps to ensure that the respect is*

conveyed regarding issues such as holiday celebration and cultural markers.’ Another interviewee explained, ‘We carried out acrobatics in every direction to make sure that our calendar reflects the diversity of our staff and honors as needed the significant dates during the year that should be considered as vacation days.’ There are also complicated questions regarding political protests and strikes. Organizations frequently have to determine whether to take an official position and/or whether to grant a vacation day to those who wish to participate in various protests that may come up, especially given Israel’s often volatile political environment. Questions of the spoken and written language also present challenges to developing equally shared working environments. With Hebrew as the dominant language in the country, it is an ongoing question how to ensure the visibility of the Arabic language in the day-to-day work of the nonprofits. Efforts are undertaken to help the Jewish staff learn Arabic, and most organizations are increasingly publishing organizational materials in both languages, but there are no easy solutions. And indeed, failing to reach a balance on these types of issues can easily upset the fragile bonds that nurture social capital. These ties can be fractured, as according to many interviewees, depending on the organization’s ability to ensure that its practices create ‘*symmetric relations*,’ and do not mirror the asymmetric relations so prevalent between the Jewish and Arab communities in the wider Israeli society.

While acknowledging the inherent challenges as noted above, interviewees at numerous organizations spoke of regular opportunities, both structured and unstructured, for meaningful interaction among staff. The range of efforts could be as simple as holiday parties with families, to more challenging encounters such as tours of Palestinian Arab villages destroyed after 1948 or visits to a Holocaust memorial. There is a deliberate effort among the majority of organizations, as reported by interviewees, to try to strengthen a sense of community and connection among staff. The ‘social capital’ that is nurtured creates both strong professional and personal relations and often serves as a needed ‘*buffer*’ when conflicts do arise. One interview articulated the importance of connecting in various ways: ‘*We all have multiple identities, not just as Jews or Arabs. We have to make sure that there is room for each of us to bring our different identities to the organization, and not limit ourselves to defining each other only by our “national” identity.*’

The importance of transparency in the work of shared Jewish–Arab organizations, a central aspect of nurturing social capital in any type of organization, was highlighted by interviewees as well. For example, an issue that was raised by several interviewees was the question of how salaries, transportation costs, office space, etc. are negotiated. Having these issues formalized by the organization,

as some respondents noted, helped to ensure consistency and avoided any suspicions that ‘nationality’ played a role. Even seemingly minor issues can easily become politically explosive if there is not the necessary organizational transparency required. Others spoke of organizational efforts to explore how to ensure that there is equality among Jews and Arabs in all aspects of the work, from organizational staff to board members, to contractors, suppliers and external consultants. Interviewees also raised the issue of transparency in decision-making processes and the importance of signaling to staff members how decisions get made. Several directors spoke of a learning curve with regard to this and understood that it was critical for the staff to see how compromises were made regarding organizational decisions that valued the perspective of both the Jewish and Arab communities.

While the difficulties posed to shared organizations are many, interviewees also emphasized the importance they place on their respective organization and what it represents to them, especially during turbulent times. Interviewees used terms such as ‘*safe haven*’ when referring to their organizations and as a place that offers ‘*comfort in being with like-minded people*,’ and of granting needed ‘*stability amidst chaos*.’ The stability that is provided offers staff with a sense of connection and commitment that helps to energize them when dealing with the challenges of navigating the needs of such diverse and often adversarial stakeholders, a topic that is discussed in the next section.

External Focus/Network Connectedness

As reported by interviewees, becoming adept at maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the multiple stakeholders of a shared Arab–Jewish organization is a critical organizational capacity. Indeed, navigating the conflicting needs of diverse stakeholders is identified by interviewees as one of their most significant challenges. Seeking to be representative of both the Arab and Jewish communities, shared organizations need to be particularly responsive to what is happening outside of their organizational boundaries. It naturally falls to these organizations in their efforts to promote the principles of a shared society to proactively identify shared interests when possible and bring networks together that can strengthen both communities. In addressing complex issues such as reducing socioeconomic gaps, integrating the Arab community into high tech, and advancing partnership among Arab and Jewish municipalities, collaborative efforts are vital to success. Strengthening overall networks and investing in building allies around shared interests are a key piece in advancing the organizational agenda. Ongoing engagement with each

of their constituents becomes essential and is of critical concern.

Based on years of experience in the field as representatives of shared Arab–Jewish organizations, of which are often viewed with skepticism and considered as outliers in their communities, interviewees spoke of the dangers of losing connection to the ‘mainstream’ of their societies. This arises from an understanding that the role of shared organizations is often to challenge mainstream views in order to stay true to their core mission. The shared Jewish–Arab organizations are actually a counterexample to the general *modus operandi* in Israel—they are models of shared society in a mostly segregated society. As such, interviewees noted that they can appear as ‘*exemplary*’ or ‘*inspirational*’ or, alternatively, might seem ‘*naïve*’ or ‘*disconnected*.’ Their position as shared organizations requires constant negotiation, and certainly it is an enormous challenge when there is such a diversity of opinion as well as significant cultural and religious rifts within each of the Arab and Jewish communities. As noted by interviewees, they have to be particularly careful about balancing the majority/minority dynamic in terms of coping with their external environment of such diverse stakeholders. This is especially the case when an organization can be perceived as reflecting of the asymmetric power relations between the Jewish and Arab communities. An interviewee explained ‘*if a supposedly shared organization is not really shared internally, then it creates even more cynicism and disillusionment that shared living is not a possibility.*’ There is the constant risk of greater attentiveness to more powerful stakeholders (i.e., government officials, funders) that may represent the majority viewpoint of the Jewish community. One interviewee explained, ‘*we have to watch very carefully to make sure that we do not mirror within our organizations the power dynamics that we see operating in mainstream Israeli society.*’ Moreover, there is the question of the degree to which the organization ‘*is acting outside the general consensus of society.*’ While all organizational stakeholders have to deftly manage the issue of maintaining legitimacy, the research findings indicate that the Arab staff has a much harder time because they are susceptible to being dismissed by their community for ‘*selling out to the establishment.*’

One strategy that shared organizations have employed to ensure that there is outside feedback from the respective communities is the establishment of local community advisory boards in addition to the formal nonprofit board. Other efforts include direct connection through mediums such as social media and community representation on organizational boards. Interestingly enough, many representatives of veteran shared organizations point to a shift in perspective on the part of key external organizational stakeholders. For example, there is a much greater

acceptance of the co-management model with a Jewish and Arab director. As one interviewee noted, ‘*in government circles, it is now taken as a given.*’ Likewise, several interviewees noted how much things have changed among funders who now specifically inquire about the degree to which there is a shared agenda and community participation, keeping tabs on a variety of factors that serve to strengthen the work of shared Arab–Jewish organizations. When these organizations are perceived as genuinely representing a mutual partnership characterized by joint ownership, there is much more credibility that is granted to them by a variety of organizational stakeholders. As one interviewee explained, ‘*coexistence dialogue is not enough and empowerment among the Arab community is not enough. It has to be about promoting the values of a shared society both to the outside and in the way that they operate internally as an organization.*’

Conclusion

With growing emphasis on the ability of a nonprofit to effectively engage its external environment and work collaboratively, the leaders of social change organizations are required to cope with ‘*ambiguity, differences, and conflict in their daily routine*’ (McCormack 2010, p. 137). Certainly, for the organizational leadership of shared Jewish–Arab organizations operating in Israel, there are inevitable challenges to their work as natural ‘disrupters’ to the status quo. Overall, these shared organizations appear to be very deliberate in seeking to understand what it means to define themselves as shared Arab–Jewish organizations. Whether it is in creating a shared purpose, nurturing a sense of openness, institutionalizing systems thinking, fostering social capital or strengthening external connectedness, many of the organizations in the sample are creatively promoting their adaptive capacity as shared organizations. Their experiences underscore the fact that while there are no guarantees, what is of great significance is a commitment and flexibility to building a genuinely shared space that represents the values of partnership and equality. These shared organizations tend to view themselves as ‘*works in progress,*’ staying flexible and open to the idea that they, by necessity, will continue to evolve. There is ample evidence of practices that support the learning process such as continually scanning the environment, systematic reflecting on goals, nurturing a culture of collaboration and trust and soliciting diverse perspectives (see Volpe and Marsick 1999; Preskill and Torres 1999). As indicated in the diverse range of capacity building strategies employed, the nonprofits in the research sample are purposefully addressing the inherent tension in their organizational DNA (see Young 2001), investing time

and energy to determine how their values are ultimately reflected throughout the organizational infrastructure in aspects such as decision-making mechanisms, staffing decisions and program agendas.

For nonprofit organizations in the midst of transformation, it is ultimately the complex interaction of a variety of factors, including internal organizational dynamics and the external political and economic environments, that determines the organizational direction and the nature of structural change (see Galaskiewicz and Bielefeld 1998; Pietroburgo and Wernet 2004). Like nonprofits around the world, the shared organizations in this research sample invest a great deal of effort in navigating their complex ‘accountability environment,’ which is based in part on efforts to achieve organizational goals, to meet public expectations and to be responsive to their internal and external stakeholders (Kearns and Scarpino 1996; Ospina et al. 2002). Yet the findings also underscore the particularity of the Israeli political and cultural context, and the fact that so many of the social change nonprofits in the country are coping with the challenging dynamics of creating shared Jewish–Arab organizations. As the research indicates, there is an ongoing learning curve about creating productive working environments with multiethnic, multicultural staff made up of Arab and Jews who are working together to promote democracy and equality in a politically heated and divisive environment. If the challenges faced in the sample can be generalized to this growing sector, then there are significant implications for funders and entities directly involved in enhancing the organizational capacities of such nonprofits. At this critical juncture, as more and more services and programs encompass both the Palestinian Arab and Jewish populations in Israel, it is essential for Israeli nonprofits to consider how they might benefit from more systematic, sector-wide planning and coordination. Recognizing the importance of improvisation to ensuring organizational sustainability (Stone and Brush 1996), nonprofits that are able to create transparent and inclusive decision-making processes are well positioned to enhance impact by remaining both flexible and strategic. Ultimately, the goal must be to strengthen the adaptive capacities of these social change organizations as they grow and evolve to more effectively contribute to the creation of a civil society in Israel.

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