## The Four Change Boosters of Innovation: Communication

## Strategic Conversations and Building Understanding *based on **Moments of Impact***

*This guide serves to help your congregation as you move ahead in your work of designing and implementing a new educational model. Based on the approach presented in **Moments of Impact** (webpage), by Chris Ertel & Lisa Kay Solomon, the guide focuses on essential conversations which help us to build a better understanding of our own team, of our clientele (the learners, their families, and the congregation at large), and of our shared purpose.*

When thinking about making change, we need to plan strategically so that we make the best use of our time and resources. "Strategic Conversations and Building Understanding" is based on the approach presented in Moments of Impact[1] and outlines three main types of conversations that bring about change. This guide focuses on conversations which help us to build a better understanding of our own team, of our clientele (the learners, their families, and the congregation at large), and of a shared purpose. These conversations that build understanding set the groundwork for innovation.

### Significant Change Takes Time

It may require years to make significant, needed change. And before these changes can take place, we need to thoughtfully plan how to set the stage for change. We need to build a shared understanding and a shared purpose among our team and our clientele. At UJA-NY's *CommUnity Conversation with Malcolm Gladwell,* Gladwell (a proud Canadian) described how when Canada created their health care system, they first set about finding a common ground, a shared purpose, among a diverse group of stakeholders. Ultimately, this diverse group of Canadian stakeholders agreed that they are all committed to health care that has "comprehensiveness, universality, portability, public administration and accessibility." With that shared purpose in mind, Canada was able to develop its national health care system.

### Two Kinds of Challenges

There are two main kinds of challenges: technical challenges and adaptive challenges. Technical challenges involve applying "well-honed skills to well-defined problems." A technical challenge can be complicated and it can require a lot of experts and research to address the challenge. When an educational team, for example, recognizes that students are not acquiring the necessary Hebrew skills, the team may ask: What are the best texts, methodologies, and class structure to support Hebrew learning in our congregation?

The team will need to research and test out different approaches to teaching Hebrew and assess student progress. It is a great challenge, but the challenge is defined and the team can turn to skilled Hebrew teachers, experimentation, and data to help address this challenge.

Adaptive challenges, unlike technical challenges, are "messy, open-ended, and ill defined. In many cases, it is hard to say what the right question is."[2] In 2009 Temple Beth Shalom (TBS) of Needham, MA, conducted a survey looking at all areas of congregational life; there was a good return rate of surveys from congregants. Most areas got "A's." In contrast, the religious school - grades K-7 - was basically viewed as "B-." The leaders recognized that the religious school was not up to their standards, that they needed to rethink and redesign learning; simply changing teachers or curriculum was not the answer. Fixing their learning model would be an adaptive challenge that was going to take time.

In response to the "B-", TBS engaged in a long, 2 ½ year, change process. After extensive research and reflection, TBS gathered a task force of parents and educators from the community to develop a new model, which they named **Mayim** (webpage). Based on the research which underscored the importance of a learner's relationship with a caring adult, Mayim was designed so that a mixed age group of children learns with the same teacher (called a Jewish Learning Guide – JLG) for two consecutive years. What came out of that process was a new exciting multi-aged, project based learning model; there was a major restructuring of what learning looked like at TBS.  Like that of Temple Beth Shalom, the heart of our work as we innovate and change models of Jewish learning is in answer to adaptive challenges.

## Responding to an Adaptive Challenge
Our work in responding to an adaptive challenge takes place in three stages:
1. Building Understanding
2. Shaping Choices
3. Making Decisions

In their book, *Moments of Impact*, Chris Ertel and Lisa Kay Solomon describe each of these stages in depth and provide tools and tips to use in each stage. This particular resource is focused on Stage 1: Building Understanding and its three major aspects.

**Stage 1 – Building Understanding**

The first steps of working on an adaptive challenge involve building understanding: Understanding **your team**, **your clientele**, and **your shared purpose**.

**Understanding Your Team**

Think about the members of your team. Do you know what brought people to be on the team; why they are devoted to this work; what their personal vision is; what they are willing to do; and what they are not willing to do?

To build your team and their commitment to your work, hold individual "interviews" with each member of your team. Before you even begin your work together, take the time to listen to the team members individually so that you know the answers to the above questions. Learn about their personal passions and visions. Provide opportunities for team members to share personal stories with one another. You might ask, for example, for team members to tell about an experience or person that connected them to your Jewish community. Team members will feel more valued, more listened to, and more ready to share their ideas.

**Understanding Your Clientele**

As you work in developing your model, moving from prototype to pilot to model, it is essential to use a variety of tools for gaining understanding of your clientele: your learners, their families, and the congregation at large. Our resources, such as Hopes and Dreams conversations (webpage) and Engagement: Transparency in Communication (PDF), allow you to have deeper conversations that give you greater insight into the lives and values of your families.

**Shared Purpose**

The shared purpose must be stated clearly, well defined, and believed in by your team. Identifying your challenge and phrasing it correctly are essential. Ertel and Solomon write that a "problem well stated is a problem half solved" (p. 85). Once your problem is well stated, you can work on how to phrase the right question. Keep in mind that the right question begins with "What *should* we…," not with "What *could* we…." The right question also frames the problem; and "good frames for strategic conversation turn your attention to what matters most while lighting up your peripheral vision at the same time" (p.80).

**Application**

What are some actions you can take to build understanding among your team, among your clientele, and towards a shared purpose?

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[1] Moments of Impact, How to Design Strategic Conversations that Accelerate Change, Chris Ertel & Lisa Kay Solomon,
[2] Moments of Impact, How to Design Strategic Conversations that Accelerate Change, Chris Ertel & Lisa Kay Solomon, p. 10