



How to Scale Institutional Change in the Next Decade and Beyond

By Aaron Katler and Eli Malinsky

Robyn Brenner was looking for a new way to grow the impact of her role at a local Federation. She was managing a program for parents with young children but struggling to deepen participant engagement. So Robyn joined a program for Jewish communal intrapreneurs: leaders who use entrepreneurial strategies to drive institutional change. Using insights gained from her experience, Robyn created a small working group within the Federation to analyze the parents' needs in her program and to imagine new possibilities for action. Then Robyn and her team took a risk: they invited the moms to attend a women-focused fundraising lunch for no fee and no minimum gift, something previously unheard of. The moms were so inspired by the lunch program and its message of tzedakah that they all contributed a gift. The risk paid off in multiple senses: they cultivated a new audience and they modeled a way to open up new possibilities across the Federation.

Robyn's story reflects an important trend: the increasing recognition that meaningful impact is best achieved with both entrepreneurial initiatives and large-scale institutional efforts. Her story demonstrates how institutional leaders can borrow insights and practices from entrepreneurs, such as a high tolerance for risk, a drive to create solutions, and the willingness to dream big. It also demonstrates the unique skills needed by intrapreneurs, like patience, stakeholder engagement and institutional savvy.

Social entrepreneurship has been an essential engine of change in the Jewish world in the past 20 years. Independent ventures have transformed the Jewish communal landscape, reimagining traditions like text study through the creation of queer Talmud camps or bringing a beit midrash (house of study) into an art studio. We've seen the emergence of visionary leaders and ideas that have become the hallmarks of Jewish life. Today, organizations like Moishe House, Birthright Israel, and Hadar are all firmly established as core Jewish experiences. Twenty years ago, none of them existed.

We're now starting to see long-standing communal institutions explore how to leverage this entrepreneurial mindset to tackle their own challenges. Several organizations have hired Chief Innovation Officers, while others are bringing in experts to run workshops for their communities. JFNA's recent FedLab was one powerful example of this emerging trend

toward institutional creativity and change: one of the cornerstone organizations of Jewish life upended its traditional convening model to explore new models for driving change. This simple change felt like a milestone in the field, and an indication of how much more is possible.

This increasing emphasis on institutional change is mirrored by secular organizations previously focused exclusively on social entrepreneurship. Ashoka, Skoll Foundation, and the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship have each turned their attention toward intrapreneurship, with the latter offering annual awards for the top corporate social intrapreneurs. We've also seen methodologies like design thinking and Lean Startup seep their way into corporate boardrooms. Lean Startup's annual conference has transformed from an entrepreneur-only space to an event that attracts an increasing number of corporate leaders.

It's clear to us, Aaron as the CEO of UpStart and Eli as the director of the Aspen Institute's First Movers Fellowship for corporate social intrapreneurs (and an UpStart Board member), that the Jewish community is full of potential for institutional change. We believe that the next decade calls for the entire community to double-down on its investment in that change alongside the powerful work of entrepreneurs.

Jewish institutions are ripe with potential.

Our Federations, JCCs, synagogues, camps, and day schools are still the first place many people go when they're looking for a Jewish home. Many of these buildings stand half-empty, with aging participants, a decreasing donor base and a waning interest in their offerings. Others are thriving, because they've figured out how to take the critical services they provide to a new place where they meet the needs of a changing community. They all have the potential to evolve, rather than succumb to an irreversible decline.

Within these institutions is a deep well of untapped human potential: there are 73,000 Jewish communal professionals, the vast majority of whom are passionate about building Jewish community[1]. According to Leading Edge's 2019 survey, 81% of respondents agree that the mission of their organization makes them feel like they're making a difference through their work. Yet, only 42% of respondents see opportunities for advancement within their organization.

When you add in the challenges that institutional leaders face when trying to enact change – risk-aversion, isolation, and lack of support or resources, not to mention their own lack of skill or confidence – the potential to lose talented leaders is high. As Adina Frydman and Lyn Light Geller of UJA-Federation of New York recently wrote in eJewish Philanthropy, “Now, it is

true that many exceptional colleagues still do work in legacy organizations, often because of their commitment to the organizations' missions and despite their frustrations with the stasis within their organizations." FedLab showed us that these professionals are hungry for tools to change the conversation – and that they want to be able to continue these conversations once the convening ends.

Fostering intrapreneurship is about two things: leaders and culture.

To move the needle, we need to borrow from the best of the entrepreneurship and institutional spaces, as well as fuel collaborations between them.

When we started this work at UpStart five years ago, we placed our bets on two things: that we could adapt the tools we've been using in our Venture Accelerator to large institutions; and that there would be institutions who would willingly partner with us in that work. Today, there are approximately 700 institutional leaders and 400 institutions per year going through UpStart's institutional change programs.

These programs include community-based Change Accelerators, which equip aspiring intrapreneurs with the practical skills needed to launch initiatives that meet their constituents' evolving needs – the very program that helped Robyn Brenner open up new possibilities at her Federation. And every year, we partner with forward-thinking institutions like UJA – Federation of New York and Teen Initiatives across the country to run internal Change Accelerators for promising professionals, as well as programs designed to lift up fields like teen education.

After five years, we've learned that investing in intrapreneurs pays dividends for their organizations by:

- Promoting experimentation and learning.
- Putting the needs of their communities first by encouraging a human-centered approach.
- Driving effective internal and external collaboration.
- Open up possibilities for mutually beneficial partnerships between institutions and funders.

Perhaps most importantly, intrapreneurship programs train cohorts of our most dedicated professionals to become more creative, adaptive, and resilient – the very qualities we need to lead our community into the future. But how do we get from a smattering of cohorts to the large-scale change we need to better serve our changing community?

Driving systemic change will require deeper investment over the next ten years.

With nearly 150 Jewish Federations across North America, 350 JCC properties, and 192 Jewish overnight camps – among many other institutions – we have countless opportunities to connect more people to Jewish life. As we move into a new decade, we want to call on our community to deepen its investment in institutional change work using the following approach:

- **Find and support intrapreneurs.** Make more immersive training opportunities available to professionals across the country, whether that's within organizations, local communities, or in fields like Jewish education or camp.
- **Leverage the best of what's out there.** Create partnerships and collaborations that draw on existing experience and knowledge about how to drive change. When you need to try something new, start small with an experiment to test your assumptions instead of starting big and getting lost in red tape.
- **Listen to – and lift up** – more voices to accurately create experiences that expand access to Jewish life. FedLab was inspiring, but it was also a striking example of how many of our Jewish spaces – UpStart's included – still reflect a narrow subset of our existing leadership potential. It is on all of us to listen to those voices and then to invest both internally and externally in their ability to drive change in Jewish life.
- **Advance and measure models of collaboration** that link entrepreneurs at new ventures with intrapreneurs at established institutions. There is incredible opportunity waiting at the intersection of these two worlds.

If we make the dramatic shifts that are called for, we'll see more adaptive and high-impact Jewish services and programs in more communities; more creative and resilient staff and lay leaders who are ready to build the Jewish community of the future; and more people finding Jewish experiences that speak to the diversity of our ever-changing community. The next ten years demand that we accelerate our investment in this critical work.

Aaron Katler is the CEO of UpStart, which partners with the Jewish community's boldest leaders to expand the picture of how Jews find meaning and how we come together.

Eli Malinsky is on the board of UpStart and is the Associate Director, Business & Society Program at The Aspen Institute.

[1] Leading Edge 2019 Report, Are Jewish Organizations Great Places to Work?
<https://leadingedge.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/LPTW2019web.pdf>

<https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/how-to-scale-institutional-change-a-necessity-for-the-next-decade/>