

Guide for **Shared Society Organizations in Israel**

Executive Summary

Written By:

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Editor's Note

This executive summary draws from the comprehensive “Guide for Shared Society Organizations.” The recently published guide, in both Hebrew and Arabic, is the product of years of research and field work that contains the wisdom, insights, knowledge and experience of its authors, Dror Eytan, Fathi Marshood and Nancy Strichman, as well as that of the directors and co-managers of shared society organizations in Israel. It sensitively and honestly brings to light the unique challenges encountered by shared society organizations and suggests ways to deal with them. The guide offers no magic solutions. Rather, it offers strategies and methods of action for organizations to use with both their internal and external stakeholders.

As I started editing the Hebrew version of the guide, I realized the extent to which shared society organizations serve as a ‘laboratory’ for the creation of a shared society in Israel. These bold organizations are the spaces in which the tensions, contradictions as well as compromises that exist in Israeli society regarding relations between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority are examined and coping mechanisms are explored.

By sharing insights from organizations in the field, the guide reveals in full, the larger and more complex story of those who are involved in building shared society in Israel, often in an overall atmosphere hostile to the idea. I believe that the knowledge and insights gained in the process of the field research and the composition of the guide can serve as a resource for those outside of Israel who are committed to leading inclusive organizations. There is much to learn from these shared society organizations in the realization of a vision for a more just and equal society.

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Overview

We first began this research back in 2016, when we set out to investigate and to record the experiences of the many shared society organizations that we are familiar with here in Israel. Our journey with them started much earlier. Each of us has had the privilege, either through years of research or organizational consultation projects, to become partners with many of these organizations over time and learn from their experiences in countless ways.

We are well aware that every nonprofit has unique strategic concerns - as an organization it is challenged to handle multiple stakeholders, to raise funds and communal support, while of course primarily focusing on advancing its overall mission. Yet 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. Often operating outside of the general consensus, these organizations are faced with the significant challenge of promoting values of partnership, equality and mutual interests in two populations which are often at odds with one another. 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.

Our research and writings on the topic have sought 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. In the following pages, we provide an overview of a field guide that was developed together with many shared society organizations, and especially with our leading partners in a participatory process of action research.



One of our primary goals throughout the process of research and writing has been to record existing knowledge on managing Jewish-Arab organizations in Israel and to create new knowledge. We sought to articulate field tested approaches, concepts and tools that will aid shared society organizations as they work to achieve common goals, deal successfully with a complex and changing reality, and increase their ability to be leaders in their field. We also hoped to identify and share dilemmas that emerge from their work in an effort to enrich public discourse about shared society in Israel. The voices of staff from shared society organizations are in the quotes sprinkled throughout the document. It is our belief

that many of the insights and recommendations outlined below also apply to other social change organizations working to promote a more inclusive and just society.

What we will be presenting below in English is an abridged version of the guide, combined with insights from our research on the topic. First, we will be discussing efforts of shared society organizations to develop a shared vision, articulate a clear strategy and strengthen their social capital both internally and externally. We then will address efforts to ensure that organizational mechanisms and decision-making processes reflect the values of the organization.

We would like to thank the directors, activists, and board members of the shared society organizations who openly and honestly shared with us their challenges and questions, as well as their insights and experience as they acted on their deep commitment to the idea of a shared and equal society. In particular we would like to thank Thabet Abu Rass, Kher Albaz, Jaber Asakli, Mohammad Darawshe, Shuli Dichter, Ariel Dloomy, Ron Gerlitz, Paz Hirschmann, Rawnak Natour Svendsen, Yaniv Sagee, Sami Saadi, and Fida Tabony Nara for joining us as partners in this journey. We also want to express our appreciation to Prof. Barbara Burstin, Hamutal Gouri, Pamela Deutsch, Prof. Daphna Golan, Ghada Abu-Jaber Nijem, Oso Bayo, Sima Agam and Avivit Hai.

Dror Eytan, Fathi Marshood and Nancy Strichman

1 ■ Introduction to Shared Society Organizations

The term ‘shared society’ is generally used to refer both to Jewish-Arab relations and to efforts undertaken in the wider context of Israel’s multicultural and diverse society. We will be using the term ‘shared society organizations’ here 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. These shared Jewish-Arab organizations generally focus on issues relating to Jewish-Arab inter-communal relations, multiculturalism, state-minority relations, community development, equality and the economic integration of the Palestinian community into the general community.

The term ‘shared society’ (or similar terms such as ‘shared living’ or ‘shared citizenship’) in the context of Jewish and Palestinian relationship in Israel 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.¹ The term ‘coexistence,’ which generally referred to efforts in the 1980s and 1990s to address social inclusion and inter-communal relations, has gradually taken on a negative connotation and has been purposively replaced. 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 and institutional power relations aside. In contrast, the work of shared Arab-Jewish organizations today addresses long-standing problems of inequality, mistrust and the conflicting narratives between the two populations, both within the context of their organizations and in the larger society.

Given the majority/minority dynamics of Arab Jewish relations, there is an inherent tension in the organizational DNA of these shared society organizations. The strained relationship between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel is often thought of as an “intractable conflict”² and is a relationship that is characterized by asymmetric power relations with the Jewish majority controlling access to most resources including land and political power. Moreover, for the most part, Jewish and Palestinians citizens in Israel live in separate communities, study in separate school systems and do not often interact on a voluntary, recreational or familial setting. This reality plays out against the backdrop of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and regional tensions.

Shared Arab-Jewish organizations are thus taking on the task of directly confronting these tough issues while also addressing the asymmetric power relationship and inequality between the two communities. Our research and field work over the years indicate that these organizations appear to be very deliberate in seeking to understand what it means for them to define themselves as ‘shared’, with many shared society organizations proactively engaging in organizational processes of “sensemaking.”³ There is ample evidence of practices to strengthen organizational capacities as shared society organizations.⁴ These efforts to build a shared society require careful attention to the process of identifying mutual needs and shared interests while utilizing a more multi-dimensional approach to addressing complex realities.

Each of these nonprofits, whether focusing on issues relating to community participation, social inclusion or 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 society organizations, which like other nonprofits, rely on them for legitimacy, community engagement, partnerships as well as for funding and institutional support. These organizations continually balance multiple and often conflicting stakeholder expectations with their own organization’s capacities, goals, values and resources. The wider context of power relations between the Jewish and Palestinian Arab communities impacts on the more specific context of asymmetric relations that naturally exist among diverse stakeholders. 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.

In the following pages, we will explore how many of these organizations approach some of these complicated issues. As we know, a shared society in Israel does not happen by itself. The formation of shared society requires a vision and the commitment to its realization by public institutions, the private sector and civil society. While there is often complex dynamics and ‘messiness’, we see that it is these shared society organizations that are the ones leading the conversation and action on this critical topic.

2 ■ Articulation of an Organizational Vision

Perhaps not surprisingly, 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 Palestinian organizational stakeholders.

These nonprofits must carefully build some type of consensus around key issues in the midst of ‘intractable conflict’ and with staff and board often 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. Creating a shared agenda that helps to generate commitment among staff and organizational partners requires investment, ongoing vigilance and a commitment to finding the points of mutual interest that reflects the priorities of both the Jewish and Palestinian Arab communities.

Yet finding the balance and creating a shared agenda often can pose a variety of challenges. We see that many shared society organizations identify 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. For example, among staff members of shared society organizations, there can be a

lack of consensus regarding how full equality between Jewish and Palestinian Arab citizens should be legislated, or how Israel should define the character of the state. Given such possible discord, sometimes an organization's vision statement can be "deliberately vague" in order to maintain organizational cohesiveness.

“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.”

This negotiation takes place on a daily basis within the organizations in an atmosphere of division, mistrust and inflammatory political rhetoric on the part of the two key organizational constituencies. Shared society organizations, which are each promoting ideals that generally go against the current status quo, often have to weather periods of significant tension, sometimes following regional conflicts, mutual acts of violence and security crises.

“We can't write the ground rules from the beginning, so we always have to navigate how to deal with situations as they come up.... because there are constant minefields...”.

The shared vision is then built around areas of consensus to maximize support. With the necessity of compromise, shared Arab-Jewish organizations often must carefully determine how to translate the shared vision into a coherent organizational strategy that represents multiple stakeholders.

Practical Tips | Setting the content of the vision

 **Focus on the shared interest:** Shared society organizations should work hard to ensure that their organizational vision reflects the joint concerns of the stakeholders from both the Jewish and Palestinian communities. At the same time, each organization has to relate to the breadth of mainstream perspectives within each community, since sometimes the diversity within each community can equal or even exceed the difference between the two communities. The vision may subsequently be more limited by design due to the need to identify and focus on those issues of shared consensus. It also means it will be essential to distinguish between issues that are part of the core mission of the organization and those that are to be left unaddressed.

“Coexistence dialogue -often a priority for the Jewish community - is not enough. And empowerment among the Arab community - often a priority for the Palestinian population - is not enough. Shared society organizations have to find what is their added value, and 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.”

✔ **Open to possibility of being “deliberately vague”:** We are usually taught that the more clear and articulated the organizational vision, the better it serves its purpose. Yet, in the specific context of shared society organizations, it may actually be the opposite. It may make sense to postpone conversation until after the foundation of cooperation within the organization is strong enough or the general political context in the country is ready for such discussion. At the current time, there is little understanding or shared beliefs among the general public of what a future would look like based on the principles of full equality. Total consensus on every issue of a vision is likely to be impossible and insisting on it might lead to crises or paralysis within the organizations. As such, certain issues can remain deliberately somewhat vague.

Practical Tips | Formulating the Vision

✔ **Engaging multiple stakeholders:** How stakeholders conceptualize their relationship to the organization is largely dependent on the degree to which a sense of mutual ownership is established throughout. As such, especially for a shared society organization, representation and engagement of key stakeholders is essential in developing the organizational vision. Soliciting feedback and inviting input from both within and outside the organization should be a very intentional process.

Moreover, for the organizational vision to be relevant and compelling, it is important to draw on as many ideological positions as possible. It is vital to consider the degree to which the mainstream of both communities is represented in the conversation. If it is only a vision that connects to a narrow set of stakeholders, then it is likely to produce a strategy that is not sufficiently relevant to the environment which it expects to influence. An organization that only includes in its discussions the opinions directly represented by ‘the usual suspects’ will necessarily limit its reach.

✔ **Identifying Shared Interests:** Shared society organizations should construct a shared agenda to the degree possible, articulating what the organization stands for, why it exists, and what it aspires to achieve. There are suggested questions to help in the facilitation of this process, and it is highly recommended that these types of discussions take place with the engagement of a broad range of internal and external organizational stakeholders.



Possible questions include:

How would we describe our organizational identity, and how do we stay focused on our added value?

How do we define ourselves as an organization? How can we create an inclusive vision that appeals to various stakeholders while holding true to our shared principles?

How do we engage more broadly with stakeholders to help us anticipate the most compelling issues in our field? Are we taking into account how future social and political trends will affect us?

And perhaps most importantly:

What are we prepared and what are we not prepared to do in order to influence and further the ideal of a shared society in Israel?

3 ■ Determining Strategic Priorities

Once a vision is somehow articulated, a shared society organization can begin to outline its strategic priorities. Following the question of ‘what?’ (“What is our common sense of purpose and our organizational direction?”), shared society organizations need to build consensus around the question of ‘how?’ (“How do we fulfill our organizational goals?”).⁵ It is here where organizations encounter the difficult work of ensuring that the shared agenda which has been made explicit is also reflected in day-to-day strategies and organizational infrastructure.

Strategies tend to be based on a combination of factors, including the vision of the organizational leadership, intuition, past strategies that have worked, as well as earlier efforts at strategic planning. The idea of strategy as a ‘pattern’ is key because it reflects a consistency in an organization’s behavior over time.⁶ Strategic decisions then serve to further overall goals by channeling organizational efforts in the same direction. While strategies are derived from various sources and developed from experience over time, one of the challenges is to clearly articulate the strategies so that they are fully understood by the community, board members, volunteer leadership and the professional staff.

Due to the nature of their work, shared society organizations have to be especially careful to make very clear distinctions between the day to day strategies at the organizational level in which there is consensus, and the larger, ideological issues in which full agreement between organizational stakeholders is unlikely. There is a need to carefully engage in prioritizing strategic concerns. These are challenges that are faced by any type of nonprofit, and certainly for shared Arab- Jewish organizations, it is particularly important.

“It is essential to distinguish on what level strategic discussions are taking place. We have to be clear that not every single issue becomes open for discussion each time a decision needs to be made.”

Building a consensus on the ‘how’ can help to nurture a common sense of purpose. This is the case even when the official organizational position may be seen as a ‘compromise’ to some. The focus on action and on specific organizational strategies, in spite of differences, allows shared Arab-Jewish organizations to set

an example for the outside world of what it means to reach compromises. It can model how to promote both internally and externally the values and goals of a shared society, especially during times of turbulence and divisiveness.

“The ‘shared’ piece of promoting a shared society by example does not ever get fully resolved...but 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...”

There is a constant balancing act between making sure to carefully make joint decisions while keeping up with the need to adapt quickly. In this especially volatile setting, shared society organizations are often required to constantly respond to external events, so a clear, articulated strategy is essential for maintaining shared consensus. Being strategic is about setting priorities which can be especially difficult during periods of strife, but this helps to ensure that organizational efforts remain coordinated and resources are allocated accordingly.

“We have to make sure that we are focused on the issue at hand and not get dragged into conflict that detracts from the core issues facing our organization.”



Questions that can be posed in order to facilitate these types of strategic conversations include:

Which approach is most likely to help us achieve our shared goals?
Which programs are considered as a main priority?

Are we doing what we are uniquely qualified to do?

Are our programs consistent with our organizational direction as articulated by the board and staff and agreed to by our stakeholders?

Are we defining broadly enough our partners and stakeholders?

Whereas the articulation of an organizational vision may necessitate some measure of vagueness, there is a need for clarity, accuracy and focus in the definition of strategy and the resultant work plans. For shared society organizations, this alignment of strategy is directly linked to internal organizational mechanisms that would help to ensure that there is a balance between the two populations in terms of decision making, staffing and program agenda.

Practical Tips | Determining Organizational Strategy

✔ **Maintaining flexibility within structure:** We recommend formulating an organizational strategy that, while informed by clearly articulated values, maintains a careful balance between agility and clear principles of action. With both organizational values and operating principles explicitly outlined, the organization will be able to be flexible and take advantage of opportunities as the external environment inevitably shifts. The organizational strategy can act like a backbone; it should be both flexible yet resilient.

✔ **Balancing realistic opportunism:** The organization should be highly skilled at identifying opportunities, calculating probabilities, adapting and acting as needed. Strategies will not necessarily be completely compatible at all times with the organization's vision, but often can help to push what is realistic or feasible in a difficult environment.

“It is a pendulum swinging between the two 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.”

✔ **Actively engage with stakeholders:** As with the articulation of an organizational vision, our recommendation is to shape organizational strategy in a highly participatory manner, involving a maximum number of organizational stakeholders:

- Directors and staff members who are responsible for implementing the strategy in dynamic and complex conditions;
- Members of the board who support the organization, assist in mobilizing resources and act as the public face of the organization;
- Active partners and public opinion leaders whose engagement with the organization can raise their commitment to the strategy;
- Public representatives who can increase the organization's ability to perceive to what extent its strategies have the potential to be an influence.

All of this will require ongoing negotiation -the organization will have to continually balance the ongoing challenge of representing multiple stakeholders, often with contradictory goals. This will be especially challenging in situations when needed compromises may sometimes reflect mutual interests and not necessarily the individual stakeholder's interests.


Practical Tips | Articulating organizational strategy amidst volatility

While it is easier to react to events and respond with immediate action (the mentality of ‘putting out fires’), it is critical for shared society organizations to thoughtfully reflect not only on their organizational position, but also on how the context of a particular event fits into a larger pattern. As such, it is necessary to develop organizational infrastructures to anticipate unintended consequences and to create internal coping mechanisms to better survive the inevitable external political conflicts or internal disputes. Having mechanisms in place will allow an organization to better manage the potential fallout from occasional crises and enable it ‘to steady itself’ in determining day to day strategies. It will also equip organizations with the ability to navigate challenges while staying focused as needed on the articulated strategies of their work.

“The political conflict and our differences in perspectives are always in the background whether we are talking about it or not, so you need to know how to handle it even if it is not an explicit focus. We don’t want it to spill over into every issue...”

Not surprisingly, many of the organizational crises in the lives of shared society organizations came during periods of external conflict, particularly during the four wars that Israel has fought in Lebanon or the Gaza Strip since 2006. Yet, issues can always come up, as there are always potential ‘minefields’ surrounding all types of situations (i.e., 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).

Stories of past crises are part of the landscape- well-cited instances of tensions or political disagreements that exploded at the workplace. There is always the ‘the elephant in the room’, but there is also the 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 so that organizational efforts and strategic priorities are not derailed.

 **Adapting in strategy and tactics:** Effective management of any organization requires a proper balance between being proactive (i.e. activities based on annual work plans), while demonstrating the ability to be flexible and respond to external events that may require adjustments to pre-determined strategies. If the organization’s responses to its external environment are not within the framework of its articulated strategy, it may threaten the organization’s ability to influence and build shared society.

The reality of external events influencing the organization’s working methods, challenging its ideology and requiring it to re-consider its tactics are all too

frequent occurrences in the lives of shared society organizations in Israel. As a result, organizations should establish and maintain internal mechanisms to handle the inevitable external crisis, political or security-related, and set procedures in place to act accordingly in the aftermath.

✔ **Handling internal influence of external events:** Due to the likelihood that outside crises may challenge an organization's internal resilience, it is important to have a structured mechanism in place to handle tensions as they arise, especially in the face of events such as an escalation in violence and political incitement. Our recommendation is to formulate methods and put into place practices for dealing with crises in a pre-emptive way.

We have seen that shared society organizations invest regularly in building the resilience of the organization to handle conflict including the establishment of a 'response team' made up of diverse staff members. Many organizations have also relied on outside Palestinian and Jewish co-facilitators who are trained in conflict resolution and/or have facilitation expertise. Planned activities include facilitated discussions and open dialogue that are purposeful about creating a safe space for respectful communication and the sharing of differences in attitudes and perceptions, even if they are profound and difficult. Creating the ability to handle constructive and respectful discourse is a critical tool in building organizational resilience, and in allowing staff to stay focused on shared priorities and articulated strategies.

4 ■ Nurturing Social Capital

In the workplace, we have "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."⁷ An organizational culture and infrastructure that helps to facilitate cooperation and goodwill with both internal and external stakeholders, promotes the idea of 'social capital'. With all the challenges inherent in the DNA of a shared society organization, we see that these organizations take this mandate very seriously. The social capital of a shared society organization is internally reflected in the organization's cohesion and ability to conduct an open, courageous and respectful dialogue. An organization's external social capital relates to how the organization is perceived by the public and to the extent it is representative of and relevant to both the Jewish and Palestinian communities.

We know that for individuals to work together collaboratively in any setting, there must be a level of trust. And certainly, for shared society organizations, it is important to be especially purposeful about continually promoting practices that help nurture trust and build an environment in which both Jewish and Arab staff members can meaningfully contribute to the work. Recognizing this, shared society organizations that seek to foster internal social capital signal to staff that they place a high priority on cooperation and the value of diverse perspectives.

Interaction, teamwork, and community building are increasingly recognized as vital for moving and institutionalizing knowledge throughout the organization. And for shared society organizations, this is essential. It is important to be intentional about providing regular opportunities, both structured and unstructured, for meaningful interaction and teamwork. Part of this is figuring out how, when conflicts do arise, they are dealt with in productive ways and that staff can have an honest dialogue. The social capital that is nurtured creates both strong professional and personal relations and often serves as a needed 'buffer' on these tense occasions. Without this, divisive issues and uncertainty can easily strain and even corrode the fragile bonds of the organization. At such times, it is essential to acknowledge mistakes and keep going- all the time seeing the organization's efforts as a "work in progress."

“There is no instruction manual on how to do this... and how to navigate the Jewish- Arab dynamics. There is no one right way to guarantee our success. So all the time we have to focus on building a community here, while bringing in new ideas, considering our next steps, and determining our direction together.”

Nurturing social capital for shared society organizations is also inevitably about setting in place practices that reflect “symmetric relations”, thereby carefully ensuring that internal organizational dynamics do not mirror the asymmetric relations so prevalent between the Jewish and Palestinian communities in the wider Israeli society. Part of this effort is to consider carefully how each organization is purposeful about creating the time and space for its members to exchange knowledge, facilitate dialogue, learn collectively, and work cooperatively.

“Building an organization that focuses on balancing a sense of mutual ownership is like a muscle. You have to be conscious of the need you have to strengthen it all the time.”

Encouraging decision-making processes and engagement

In work environments characterized by high levels of social capital, each staff member knows 'what's going on.' There is open access to information about what the organization is doing. In recent years, collaborative leadership models where the skills and abilities of the collective leadership are pooled, have been highlighted as better able to respond to organizational environments that are increasingly characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty. And without doubt this is the case for shared society organizations that must regularly consider their own ability to nurture trust, foster inclusion and create constructive engagement with various stakeholders.

In order to create this type of environment, a guiding principle to keep in mind is 'distributed responsibility,' whereby feedback is accepted, challenging authority is encouraged, and staff has the flexibility to create new initiatives on the basis of a close reading of the situation on the ground. For all types of organizations, there is a growing acknowledgement of the need to move away from authoritative, hierarchical framework and the "charismatic heroes" approach.⁸ Increasingly there is much greater emphasis being placed on inclusive leadership that is grounded in collective learning processes, team building, and inquisitiveness. For shared society organizations, this skill set is essential, as organizations are immensely dependent on the ability of their staff members at all levels to identify public trends and opportunities and build strategy as needed.

“If we don't have a coordinated strategy based on openness of discussion, then we are not building on the strengths of our organizational structure...This has to be deliberate.”

In order to be responsive and adaptable while also strengthening its social capital, the organization needs to promote an organizational culture of openness and curiosity. Participatory discussions help to create better engagement and a sense of ownership by both Arab and Jewish staff members raising the level of staff involvement in decision-making processes. This becomes all the more essential in volatile political contexts. Shared society organizations have had a learning curve over the years regarding the need to engage the staff in the process of getting to key decisions. The value in having staff understand how compromises are hammered out, taking into account the views of both the Jewish and Palestinian community, has become clear.

“The staff can't just be the 'audience' to organizational decisions of the leadership. It has to see what the disagreements are, what their concerns are and how to bring everyone to compromise and to more engagement. Presenting decisions without discussion does not work.”


Certainly, leadership has struggled with this issue over the years, and is still always trying to find the right balance. It is a conscientious effort to carry out daily strategic choices that are reflective of multiple perspectives as rooted in the ideology and values of these shared organizations. Yet it is through this kind of hard work of building engagement that we see that social capital is strengthened.


Practical Tips | Provide a platform for multiple perspectives and divergent narratives


For shared society organizations, we have seen the struggle over the years to address tough issues with honesty and genuine engagement. Many organizations understand the importance of providing a platform for multiple perspectives and divergent narratives - even when doing so can provoke harsh criticism (i.e., the


organization is mirroring the asymmetric relations prevalent in the general society, reinforcing the majority/ minority dynamic or is not creating a safe space that legitimates and respects differences of opinion).

While there is not a full consensus on how and whether to raise these sensitive topics, it is often the dialogue itself that is perceived as inextricably linked to effectively building a shared society. Of course, there is a myriad of difficulties in addressing these challenges, and there is no guarantee that discussions lead to shared understandings as opposed to greater alienation. Mistakes should be viewed as an inevitable part of the process of learning and experimentation. This relates back to 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 shared society organizations recognize that the political conflict and the politics of identity must be given the required space as they are an integral part of their work and life in Israel.

 **Nurturing a 'spirit of inquiry':** We recommend that organizations have a constant awareness, if not vigilance, regarding how they ensure an openness to input from all organizational stakeholders. The ability of stakeholders to identify new opportunities and trends will differ, and it is essential to hear the perspective of those organizational stakeholders working in the field. Each member of the organization has the ability to contribute by helping to focus and implement decisions, and, at the same time, to ensure a more diverse and creative thinking process. Alternatively, if staff members lack a sense of ownership and feel excluded from the decision-making process, there is a likelihood that this will affect their level of commitment to organizational strategies.


 "We need to bring out different narratives and have the hard discussions and show how we get to a compromise. We have to continually engage everyone. This is critical because the staff needs to be on board with us."

 **Awareness of power dynamics:** We recommend that organizations stay cognizant of the possibility that they are reinforcing inequality and/or mirroring the asymmetric relations prevalent in the general society. A priority needs to be placed on creating a safe space that legitimates and respects differences of opinion. The connection and the balance between initiatives and activities that come from both Arab and Jews is essential. It is therefore important to cultivate organizational norms that encourage initiatives to come up organically from the field and establish organizational practices that allow field staff to influence the organization's strategic thinking processes.

 **Ensure transparency of policies and decision-making processes:** In a shared society organization, we recommend paying careful attention to the issue of transparency in decision-making processes and to the importance of signaling to staff members how decisions get made and compromises reached. Transparency should be maintained and formal mechanisms established regarding the terms of employment: salaries, reimbursement of travel expenses, office space, etc. This will help to ensure equality between Jews and Arabs in the organization that is visible. Efforts should also ensure that there is representation of Jews and Arabs in all aspects of the work from organizational staff to board members, contractors, suppliers and external consultants.


Practical Tips | Building a sense of mutual ownership and an inclusive approach to organizational life

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 the language and culture of each group are given equal weight. For example, the celebration of holidays, Muslim, Jewish and Christian, is of great importance as part of a conscious effort to build an environment in which both Jewish and Arab staff members feel connected.

 **“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.”**


It should be noted that questions of the spoken and written language within these organizations 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 day-to-day work. Efforts are often 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 an agreement on these types of issues can sometimes upset the fragile bonds that nurture social capital.


As we know, ties can be either fractured or strengthened depending on the amount of deliberate effort made by a shared society organization to build a sense of community and connection. One important example to highlight are planned opportunities, both structured and unstructured, for meaningful interaction among staff. Those efforts could range from simple holiday parties with families to more challenging encounters such as tours of Palestinian Arab villages destroyed after 1948 or visits to a Holocaust memorial.

 **Strengthen organizational ties while recognizing that there is an ongoing challenge:** Shared society organizations often set in place internal mechanisms to cope with the inevitable external political or security crisis.

One such mechanism is allocating time, as needed, to encourage individuals to give feedback on all aspects of organizational work and to talk about the overall political climate in the country. We recommend that organizations consider the degree to which there is a platform or some type of structured engagement so staff members are able to share perspectives. For example, there are organizations that have instituted ‘daily check-ins’ during particularly tense political times and violent conflicts where an open forum was created in which staff members were given the opportunity to share their thoughts.

Often organizations have created opportunities for their staff members to reflect on current events, especially during times of heightened tensions. Storytelling and personal experiences are shared as part of the effort to increase understanding and empathy, raise awareness, and expose staff members to the reality and importance of hearing competing narratives. These types of facilitated sessions are generally seen as critical in providing a safe space to share views, nurture a sense of respect for multiple perspectives, create learning opportunities for participants, or if necessary, deal with any acrimony.

 **Nurturing an environment that validates the multiple identities while creating a sense of shared connectedness:** Shared society organizations that pro-actively work to create welcoming work environments signal respect and appreciation for the team. It is our recommendation that organizations cultivate an awareness of both the symbolic and practical messages that are conveyed to stakeholders and the importance of celebrating the culture, collective narrative and history of staff members. In addition, organizations should not forget the importance of giving individuals an opportunity to connect on all aspects of their lives and promote practices that help build good will and a feeling of collegiality at the workplace.

 “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.”

5 Organizational ‘Infrastructure’ and Leadership Models

There has been a growing awareness in recent years that collaborative leadership models are especially effective for civil society organizations, and certainly this is the case for shared society organizations as well. It is the organizational management structure, together with efforts to build vision, strategy and social capital, that allows any organization to effectively balance multiple organizational goals, reach diverse constituencies and be responsive to the continually changing environment. Shared society organizations require a unique kind of capacity in this regard as

they must ‘negotiate accountability,’¹⁹ developing organizational approaches that build on the unique dynamic of a shared Arab-Jewish organization.

An organizational approach that seeks to represent the shared agenda of the Palestinian and Jewish communities has to be about both the ‘principles’ and the ‘technique.’ The shared piece of their work is, in essence, their added value as an organization. As such, the organizational infrastructure should ideally reflect the principles of shared society with diverse representation at all different levels of organizational hierarchy including higher management.

With organizational histories that span over decades and more, many have invested considerable effort into developing organizational infrastructures that support shared interests. These organizations have thoughtfully considered how to guarantee a balance between the two populations in decision making, staffing, and program agenda. As previously addressed, shared society organizations must be particularly careful about weighing the majority/minority dynamic when it comes to their diverse stakeholders. There is the constant risk of giving greater attention to more powerful stakeholders (i.e., government officials, funders) who may represent the majority viewpoint of the Jewish community.

“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. 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.”

Part of this process is acknowledging that a shared organization likely has two kinds of ‘subsystems’-Jewish and Palestinian- and that the organization is required to proactively manage the potential chaos within. Certainly, the need to build a strong organizational team including the board is of utmost importance when there is instability or conflict. We have already addressed the role of building social capital among the team as a central component of organizational coping mechanisms. In the following section, we explore other aspects of this broader effort to develop internal coping mechanisms to better survive the external political conflicts or internal disputes that are an inevitable part of the work.

Shared Management

There are a variety of organizational mechanisms to employ that can help provide a systematic approach to ensuring multiple perspectives are brought to the fore. Creating a shared organizational infrastructure that is fully representational of all aspects of the work (i.e., co-directors, board leadership, staff) helps to promote a balance not only in formalities, but in all aspects of management and decision-making processes.

“We are always exploring how to signal shared ownership. Having co-directors is one way, but it is not the only one. It is essential to show that there is also shared decision making, a shared agenda and equality throughout.”

Such efforts can be seen 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. Being aware of the degree to which the organization is ‘shared’ on a regular basis- between staff and board, in the distribution of power and decision-making processes- helps reflect the added value in a shared society organization.

Negotiating the ‘Accountability Environment’

As we have discussed throughout, a shared society organization should make every effort to represent both symbolically and functionally, multiple viewpoints and agendas. Operating in a highly charged political environment, there is a need to be especially responsive both to the internal organizational infrastructure as well as to what is happening outside of the organizational boundaries.

Shared society organizations, often viewed with skepticism and considered as outliers in their communities, are also faced with the danger of losing connection to the ‘mainstream’ of their societies. This arises from the fact 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 run counter to the general modus operandi in Israel - they are models of shared society in a mostly segregated society. As such, they can appear as exemplary or inspirational or, alternatively, might seem naïve or disconnected.

Therefore, their position as shared society organizations requires constant negotiation, and it is an enormous challenge when there is such a diversity of opinion as well as significant cultural and religious splits within each of the Arab and Jewish communities. When these organizations are perceived as genuinely representing a mutual partnership characterized by joint ownership, they have much more credibility with a variety of organizational stakeholders. When they are not perceived as being truly shared or fully representative of both the Palestinian and Jewish communities, there is greater suspicion regarding the general notion of a shared society.

“It’s complex. We are in the Middle East and here you are blamed until proven otherwise... So, we hold ourselves to a high standard. Otherwise it is easy to come to the conclusion- ‘see, even in shared Arab-Jewish organizations, they don’t get along, so how can anybody?’”

Becoming adept at maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the multiple stakeholders of a shared Arab-Jewish organization is a critical organizational capacity. 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.

Experiences of Co-Directors

Due to the increasingly common use of the co-leadership model for shared society organizations, we will briefly explore it here as an example of a management structure that seeks to represent perspectives of diverse communities. We are choosing to address this model, as there is much to be learned from the experience of these co-led organizations that is of relevance for all who are seeking to build more collaborative leadership models.

The co-leadership structure, a process by which two individuals share executive responsibilities, is considered as a form of collective leadership. There are many examples of co-led organizations, such as hospitals, educational institutions and cultural organizations that manage and coordinate multiple goals. The collaboration between leaders at these pluralistic institutions helps to guarantee that multiple perspectives are factored into strategic decision making. Specifically, for co-led shared society organizations, we have seen the most common model that two leaders -one Jewish, one Palestinian- perform the job together as top executives and are held jointly accountable for the results.

Not surprisingly, the success of the duo is highly dependent on the relationship between the leaders, with trust playing a key role. While the wider political conflict between the Palestinian and Jewish communities always serves as a backdrop to the organizational work, there also could be battles between the leaders related to role ambiguity, personality clashes and different management styles. On the other hand, this type of leadership often creates more accessible organizations that are better coordinated and responsive to their external environment.

From the experience of many current and past co-directors, there is an awareness of the need to conscientiously work towards articulating a common sense of purpose that reflects the joint interests of both Jewish and Arab organizational stakeholders. Often the co-leadership model acts as a “checking-in mechanism” in terms of setting the organizational strategic direction. As discussed above, identifying the points of mutual interest that reflect the priorities of both communities requires a very careful decision-making process. Indeed, by its nature, a functioning and constructive co-leadership model seems to require a more conscious strategy “of constantly convincing each other.”

“The co-leadership model slows us down- it teaches us to stop, think carefully about our goals, and then move forward... You can't just dream up an idea and go. You have to wait and make a joint decision.”

Connecting with External Stakeholders as Co-Directors

The co-leadership model, as representative of these dual agendas, in itself is also held up to exacting scrutiny, if not downright mistrust, by the two communities. It is especially problematic when a co-led partnership is not seen as genuine or not working.

“When people first hear of the co- model they may ask, isn’t one director enough? Then the suspicion starts... It is not so simple, so it always feels like a bit of a test... The danger does not just affect our external stakeholders, but these hesitations enter into the organization itself.”

Yet in spite of these challenges, it has become apparent over the years that the co-leadership model is increasingly being accepted and is being perceived as effectively striving to build a mutual partnership characterized by shared ownership. It has earned more credibility with its diverse organizational stakeholders with organizational leadership generally reporting a notable shift for the better once a co-leadership model was instituted.

“My only regret after we moved to a co-model is that we had not done it earlier. It eased so many tensions and was such an obvious solution. We were working with a population that needed to see the equality in the leadership, period.”

Indeed, with the majority of the organizations that have been employing the co-leadership model in their second or third round of co-directors, there has been a distinct evolution in positive perceptions over the past ten years.


“The co-model helped to change the identity of the organization, and quickly gave us a fast track to pull mega power to our board of directors from the Arab sector and gave us a fast track to ‘walk the talk’, not just in representation but also in implementation.”


Certainly, the co-leadership model has become more accepted, and often it can strengthen the organization’s position vis-a-vis government officials and other community partners. Funders who were often first introduced to the concept years ago of co-directors, now also value its importance and its role in building a shared organization.


Practical Tips | Developing an organizational approach that represent a shared agenda

We have discussed throughout the challenges that shared society organizations face in articulating a coherent organizational strategy and in building engagement around key issues. These are obstacles faced by the leadership with regard to the

organization's work which requires very high levels of coordination and consensus building. Navigated in a meaningful way, it is exactly these difficulties that become the added value of their work as shared society organizations. The management team must be deliberate about setting a tone for the organizational culture that creates a spirit of inquiry and ensures openness and transparency about decision making processes.

 **Continuing to ask tough questions:** By reflecting the principles of shared society in their organizations, the co-executive leadership model and other collective leadership models is one way that these organizations seek to promote egalitarian principles and shared access to resources. We emphasize here the importance of continuing to have open and challenging conversations about the organization to make sure that it stays on track in creating some type of shared management model. Many of the shared society organizations we know rely on external coaches to help address these issues. Often coaching plays a role in helping to mitigate conflicts, mediate critical discussions and prompting communication between the leadership and staff.

 **Building an engaged and diverse board of directors:** In reviewing an organizational approach for ensuring input from a variety of sources from both communities, it is essential to keep in mind the role of the board of directors. Our recommendation is a collective leadership model for the board to better guarantee equal representation in the decision-making processes. We suggest being particularly careful about balancing the majority/minority dynamic, noting the risks of leaning more towards the majority viewpoint of the Jewish community. In thinking about the organizational approach and the organizational team, efforts should be made to have equal representation at all levels of management.

 **Constant engagement with stakeholders:** As we have emphasized throughout, becoming adept at maintaining an ongoing dialogue with multiple and diverse stakeholders while staying true to their core mission is critical for shared society organizations. The role of shared organizations in a largely segregated society is often to challenge the status quo. Yet, it still falls upon shared society organizations, even if they are considered as outliers in their communities, to continually reach out to the mainstream of their societies.

We recommend that organizations continually work to strengthen overall networks and invest in building allies around shared interests. It is essential for shared society organizations to see this as a key piece in advancing their organizational agenda. Ongoing engagement with each of their constituents is of critical concern. When these organizations are perceived as genuinely representing a mutual partnership characterized by joint ownership, a greater degree of credibility is granted to them by diverse organizational stakeholders.

6 ■ Conclusion

Our research over the years and the recently published guide in Hebrew and Arabic have sought to shed light on the unique dynamics of shared society organizations. We have seen many shared society organizations creatively build organizational capacities and grow in their impact and influence. Every day as they fulfil their mission, they take on the challenges of working to forge a model of shared strategic decision making, of nurturing a sense of openness, of fostering social capital and strengthening their links to the community.

As we know, there is an ongoing learning curve for shared society organizations in terms of how to foster a productive organizational environment with a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural staff made up of Arabs and Jews who are promoting equality in a politically divisive environment. A great deal is riding on these organizations' ability to develop a constructive working relationship, establish supportive organizational mechanisms and negotiate a sustainable balance between competing goals. Past experience teaches us that unresolved conflicts and unbalanced power relationships can be damaging to the organization. Yet, in contrast to other settings where it may not be advisable to highlight internal disagreements, we see that given the experience of shared society organizations, it is far more productive to openly address problems than to ignore them. Conflict is recognized as an intrinsic aspect of Arab-Jewish relations, and shared society organizations feel it is incumbent on them and most helpful as well to deal with conflicts in the framework of organizational decision-making processes.

As we have discussed throughout, recognizing diverse stakeholders and multiple objectives is critical to organizational performance. Effective collaboration requires a capacity for balancing potentially conflicting forces in the decision-making process and for making possible trade-offs and compromises given the strong likelihood of competing demands made by their constituencies.

The insights outlined here have the potential to enhance our understanding of the particular challenges in managing shared society organizations and other types of organizations that are operating in multi-ethnic settings. It is our hope that the issues we have examined and the responses to those issues will encourage more collective leadership models and point the way to a greater participatory organizational culture and stronger organizational capacity. The shared society organizations, many of which have experienced significant growth in recent years, illustrate for us the advantages in cultivating multi-cultural external relations and cooperating with varied and diverse stakeholders.

We have had the great privilege of seeing first-hand the improved organizational resilience and stability in these very pluralistic organizations with multiple goals. As a result, we have been convinced of the importance of continually opening the conversation to different perspectives in a complex environment. This experience has also underscored for us the value of heterogeneity in leadership structure for increasing exposure to diverse sources of information, in strategic thinking and in decision-making processes. Given the nature of their work, shared society organizations are able to embrace "conflicting frames of reference"¹⁰ and by so doing, are furthering the possibility of more positive change in Israeli society.

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