The Networked Non-profit:
How Organizational Learning Occurs in Networks

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Abstract

In non-profit organizations driven by a crowded marketplace for ideas, resources and information, learning occurs as a process of creating new knowledge and understanding amongst individuals and groups networked throughout an organization. In order to increase opportunities for organizational learning, and its impact on organizations and their ecosystem, non-profits intentionally design and facilitate networks for individuals to connect and learn together. This study explored how organizational learning occurs within intentional networks, impacting the individuals and their relationships with each other. Additionally, this research identified the various ways network dynamics engender learning, according to the perspectives of those within the networks.

This qualitative case study utilized Organizational Learning and Network theoretical frameworks to guide the research’s questions, methodology, analysis and findings. The study focused on a single non-profit, the School Network, whose mission was to serve a membership base of schools within a sector of the field of Jewish education. The four study participants represented three of the non-profit’s network groups. At the time of the study, these groups had been in operation for less than one year, and each had been created by the School Network to serve a defined group of school leaders within its network of schools.

Findings of the research study concluded that networks formed around small groups of individuals were able to enact organizational learning when the networks addressed the individuals’ needs for connectivity and served their common interests. Participants in the network groups engaged in transactional relationships for their own individual growth and practice. As these network groups functioned as social networks, the knowledge transitioned from individual to organizational knowledge
through sharing and collaboration. The commitment levels a non-profit needed to generate commitment from the network’s participants depended on the trust participants had in each other and on the network’s design and facilitation.

*Keywords:* organizational learning, networks, network-learning, professional development, collective learning, social capital, learning process, sharing, best practices, problem solving
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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

A competitive marketplace for resources and ideas drives organizations to cultivate systematic approaches to meet constant demands for innovation and change. Organizations utilize structure, culture and process to generate and activate learning networks within their organization and between organizations in their ecosystem. Fostering learning within networks requires an understanding of how learning networks within organizations maximize information-gathering, knowledge-sharing and collaborative action.

Network-learning spurs transactional and transformative relationships between individuals, the foundation for innovation. To foster network-learning, non-profit organizations need to understand what must occur within their own organizational practice in order to foster network-learning (Knight, 2002). Beyond labeling their change outcomes as innovative, they must understand what drives learning in their unique context. In a digital age, driven by technology-fueled social media and communication tools, many non-profits adopt network models to drive growth (Scearce, 2012). Networked practices promote active participation, openness and collective action to attract new ideas, stakeholders and innovation (Nohria & Eccles, 1992). Beyond internalizing network models, the organizations must develop the capacity to be aware of the internal networks. Successful organizations must cultivate the networks in which they find themselves embedded.

Within organizations, an individual’s capacity for learning and commitment to learning can increase the organization’s overall focus on learning. Yet, to drive change through individual action, organizations must explore and understand how learning occurs for individuals, groups and within
networks Crossan, Lane, and White (1999). As network-learning occurs both formally and informally, understanding the learning process requires exploring behavioral learning patterns, attitudes towards learning and how learning translates to action. A better understanding of network-learning enables organizations to design and implement learning practices at individual and group levels. As individual and groups gather, share and interpret knowledge networks they impact their organizations’ capacity to innovate and transform their field as a whole. Networks exist in a range of fields that incorporate for-profits, non-profit and educational institutions. Yet, for the purpose of this research, the exploration of a non-profit, Jewish educational organization is the central focus. The changing nature of the field of Jewish education requires a systematic approach to horizontally organizing individuals to gather information, share knowledge and act collaboratively through networks (Woocher, 2012).

The purpose of this single, embedded case study was to apply organizational learning theory to examine how individual and group learning occurs among school leaders in a Jewish education non-profit organization. The problem responds to the need for a non-profit organization’s members to utilize organizational learning practices to foster stronger learning networks amongst its member organizations and individual. To address this problem, this study explored and described how a non-profit organization designed, facilitated and practiced organizational learning behaviors amongst networked individuals and groups.

Research Problem

In organizations, particularly, non-profit organizations, learning occurs as a process of creating new knowledge and understanding amongst individuals and groups networked throughout an organization. Facilitating effective learning amongst networked individuals requires understanding how members, both individuals and groups, think about their engagement in learning (Garvin, 1993).
Learning takes the form of interpreting, sharing and integrating knowledge. Affecting change demands understanding learning on individual and group levels, and contextually throughout networks within the organization. Exploring organizational learning provides insights into the connection between an organization’s networks and its learning processes. Understanding how learning occurs in an organization requires the insight provided by the stakeholders who have access to network connections during the learning process. Their attitudes, perceptions and activities reveal to what degree learning occurs within non-profits and how learning networks impacts the organization.

**Justification for the Research Problem**

Literature addressing organizational learning provided a lens through which to understand the research problem. An organization’s capacity to facilitate the organizational learning process and encourage learning determines its learning capabilities (Mat & Razak, 2011). Tran (2006) determined that successful organizational innovation occurs when the organization’s learning culture impacts the way the organization understands its development, environment and interrelationships, through both reflexive and critical learning behaviors. Kong, Jenkins and Ardagh (2009) interviewed employees from ten non-profit organizations to examine how governance structures enabled learning. They found that learning processes occur in the form of knowledge, decision-making, and benefits sharing, allowing for innovative practices to emerge. Salim and Sulaiman (2011) conducted an empirical study testing the impact of organizational learning on innovation and found that there was a positive relationship between innovation and performance. Yeung, Lai and Yee’s (2007) case study explored how senior management’s support of a learning infrastructure and culture led to organizational efficiency. Research conducted on the learning process within networks primarily focuses on the conditions necessary for learning to occur and the role of culture and leadership in innovation. The limited research studying the
role of learning in non-profits does not address how attitudes towards learning and specific learning practices enable network-learning and, in turn, that network’s impact on organizational leadership.

This study provides non-profit organizations a descriptive narrative to better define and understand their networked learning processes by examining a Jewish educational organization. The narrative describes the role learning plays in fostering relationships and encouraging individuals and groups to interact within a network. This research offers organizational leaders a framework for intentionally designing, structuring and facilitating group learning within networks. It provides scholars with findings that explore the linkage between organizational learning and intentional networks facilitated by non-profit organizations.

By addressing a gap in the literature, this study benefits both scholars and practitioners and has the potential to transform how organizations talk about and engage in networks. The study highlights network-learning as a valuable tool for organizational transformation and growth, and brings to the foreground an organization’s learning efforts. In practice the study expands the researcher’s capacity to empower his own organization’s members to utilize network-learning as a transparent organizational element for growth, innovation and change. Rather than being apathetic to learning, or assuming it occurs naturally, this study offers new knowledge to create models for effective network-learning within a specific context. By describing how non-profits can intentionally design and implement network-learning practices, this study can help leaders use learning to effectively increase connectivity, growth and change in their organizations.

**Significance of Research Problem**

As individual organizations share the marketplace with other established and start-up non-profit institutions, network-learning can establish value for those organization within their ecosystems and
industries. This study examines the Jewish non-profit ecosystem, and in particular, the field of Jewish education. In the current narrative of this Jewish non-profit ecosystem, great ideas, heroic leadership and perseverance are celebrated as the keys to growth (Woocher, 2012). However, the reality of transformative growth relies on the gritty work of ideation, collaboration, experimentation and feedback emblematic of learning. This process heavily depends on an organization’s capacity to learn, evidenced through effective knowledge acquisition, interpretation, and sharing. To understand the relationship between non-profit growth and learning, viewed through a network-learning lens, informal alliances and relationships between organizations and their individual members should be viewed as networks. This process requires data to provide leaders with ways to understand how learning within networks occurs and to develop new value for individuals and the organizations of which they are a part.

For non-profits, readiness for change depends on their ability to achieve their organizations’ mission and to deliver value to their constituents (Neff & Moss, 2011). The strategic planning effort required to prepare for multiple potential futures within a fluctuating environment necessitates capacity building for innovation on a consistent basis. Too often non-profits simply reactively respond to immediate needs and provide stop gap measures that may appear innovative, but only create short-term value. To generate long term meaningful change, organizations need to leverage learning within networks, a constant process of engagement, enabled by strong leadership, effective methods and effective feedback loops (Neff & Moss, 2011).

Within the specific sector of Jewish non-profits, several studies reveal rapid growth of start-ups and their innovative efforts within institutional organizations (Benor, 2011). Much of the extant research has focused on the degree of impact of smaller social entrepreneurship efforts. These start-up organizations impacted established institutional spaces through a network of relationships in a dynamic
“ecosystem” (Jumpstart, 2011, p. 1). Few, if any, studies address how the network organizations within this sector understand and actually progress through a learning process. Many Jewish non-profits have demonstrated through that they value learning, professional development and evaluation (Jumpstart, 2011). To promote network capacity building, there must be further exploration of the process of knowledge acquisition and creation in individuals and groups (Shevitz, 2011).

This empirical research describes the process that within an organization as it seeks to improve its individual and group learning. Understanding how stakeholders respond to and utilize learning should reveal the barriers to organizational learning and ways to improve performance (Schilling & Kluge, 2009). This research study explores methods for organizations to design and measure learning, and to correlate those learning efforts with innovation, using tools developed by Shahin and Zeinali (2012), Šebestová and Rylková (2011), Yeung et al. (2007) and Kong et al. (2009).

This research should lead to the implementation and evaluation of intentional. By focusing on learning at individual and group levels, this case study verifies theoretical connections between organizational learning and network engagement.

**Research Questions**

This research was driven by the primary questions: *How does a non-profit facilitate organizational learning to cultivate network relationships amongst individuals and groups?* This primary question was addressed through two sub-questions: (1) *What learning activities, on individual and group levels, facilitate and promote the sharing and interpretation of knowledge within networks?* (2) *How do individuals engage in network-learning?*

The impact of organizational learning within networks requires understanding how learning occurs on individual and group levels, and how these groups can be structured to address the needs of
the network-learning. These research questions sought to describe how organizational learning theory applies to non-profits engaging as facilitators of networks of individual learners. This study examined the relationship between the intuiting and interpreting process of knowledge creation and sharing to the network-learning process. These questions explored how an organization’s intentions to promote growth and change are translated into actual learning behaviors. Documenting how stakeholders respond to organizational learning practices provides organizations with the knowledge needed to create, facilitate and develop collaborative and learning relationships. This case study describes how networks enable individuals to transition from independent to group organizational learning. This will provide new means for non-profits to invest in cultivating learning networks systematically rather than superficially.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study describes how a non-profit uses organizational learning through network relationships to enhance learning and collaboration. Organizational learning theory provides an understanding of the type, process steps and evaluative criteria for organizational learning practices and its impact on individuals networked through groups. Organizational learning theory describes the systematic nature of how learning affects the people, processes, resources, structures and culture of an organization (Huber, 1991). Models of organizational learning address the impact of learning on an organization’s desire to innovate (Jelinek, 1979). This process determines how individuals and groups assimilate information, translate information into knowledge, apply the knowledge to real needs and revise and reshape the information and knowledge (Crossan et al., 1999). Network-learning theory posits a means of understanding how intentional and unintentional learning occurs in structured and unstructured network (Knight, 2002).

*Organizational learning.*
Ideas about the relationship between organizational performance and organizational knowledge, learning processes, and outcomes of learning vary a great deal in the literature (Levitt & March, 1988) (Huber, 1991) (Gill, 2000). Organizational learning addresses the process through which past organizational behaviors become routine due to their relationship between the perceived outcomes of the routines and the organization’s members aspirations those outcomes (Levitt & March, 1988).

Organizational learning theory views organizational learning in a similar manner as individual learning, but asserts that these learning processes are more complex when learning is a function of a collective (Kim, 1993). This theory posits how learning adds to, transforms or even reduces organizational knowledge. This theoretical framework attempts to understand the processes that lead to, or prevent, changes in organizational knowledge. Understanding this process brings light to the effects of learning and knowledge on behaviors and organizational outcomes.

Organizational earning processes determine the quality of knowledge, as utilized by the technologies invested in, as well as the effectiveness in how the knowledge garnered is utilized (Cross & Israelit, 2000) (Casey, 2005). Knowledge management, used to improve business performance, allows organizations to invest in infrastructure, support knowledge gathering, dissemination, and collaboration (Cross & Israelit, 2000). This investment often includes implementing systems and technologies, without developing the human infrastructure that formally and informally supports knowledge management initiatives.

In today’s marketplace, organizations strive to learn faster than the competition to secure a competitive advantage (Cross & Israelit, 2000). Learning from experience, at the individual, group and organizational levels, can be sporadic and over-emphasize present learning, rather than designing systems for the future. Effective learning processes depend on translating experiences into knowledge
for an organization’s members to act upon. This requires planning and resources to define the learning strategies, process and experiences. Garvin (1993) argued that any attempts at improvement or change require a commitment to learning. He outlined five activities that organizational participants learn through: 1) systematic problem-solving; 2) experimentation with new approaches; 3) learning from experience; 4) learning from other’s experiences and best practices; and 5) transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the organization. Organizational learning theory provides the framework for defining, understanding and developing the practice of organizational learning.

*Elements of organizational learning.*

Organizational learning depends on specific elements of the organization’s system and environment (Gill, 2000). For example, the culture of the organization, defined as the values, assumptions, beliefs, expected behavior and norms, either promotes or dismisses learning. Effective communication via instructions, feedback and encouragement influences how individuals invest in organizational learning (James G. March, 1991). Leadership models that reinforce stability over change struggle to support organizational learning (Calhoun & Starbuck, 2003). The lack of support relates to a lack of investment in open collaboration, distributed leadership and collective decision-making (Goldsmith, Morgan, & Ogg, 2004; *Leading organizational learning: harnessing the power of knowledge*, 2004). For organizational learning to impact the organization, leaders must be capable of linking desired outcomes and organizational processes to the learning engaged in.

With the appropriate culture, communication and leadership models functioning throughout the organization, an effective knowledge management process can serve the organization’s learning needs. Knowledge management requires both human and technological sources of information (Chakravarthy, McEvily, Doz, & Rau, 2003). By managing knowledge, the information can become knowledge,
distributed to the organizational members in the right place and time to be used effectively. By transferring information and best practices from one part of organizational to another, the entire organization benefits from the knowledge once contained in individuals or solitary groups (Vera & Crossan, 2003).

Nonaka (1994) established that knowledge takes the form of tacit and explicit knowledge. Nonaka (1994) considered tacit knowledge the informal learning that resides in the minds of individuals. Explicit knowledge becomes formalized by exporting the learning into documents and digital files, accessible to other organizational members. Sharing of both tacit and explicit knowledge enables individuals, groups and the organization to meet strategic goals through learning (Nonaka, 1994). This requires offering opportunities for sharing safely, and instilling responsibility within groups for the sharing of knowledge and best-practices without fear of embarrassment or failure (Larsson, Bengtsson, Henriksson, & Sparks, 1998). This process should not be assumed to be instinctual or intuitive, but rather should be developed through training and extensive practice (Gill, 2000). Individual and group participants should be trained to make information explicit so that others can test validity of their conclusion, and individuals should share subjective insights, intuition or hunches (Nonaka, 1994).

Effective evaluation provides feedback information about the effectiveness of learning processes to the achievement of further strategic goals, and collect information about the aspects of organizational learning that enable performance improvement (Gill, 2000). Within Gill’s model, evaluation identifies the organizational barriers to learning and increased performance, fostering increased organizational change and improvement. Therefore, evaluating organizational learning relies on measuring the interaction of each element of the learning process. This data offers insight into how the system affects learning and how the learning impacts enhanced emotional capacity. Evaluation is a powerful tool for
organizational learning, as it enables a systems thinking approach to understanding the entire process that facilitates individual, group and whole-organization learning (Gill, 2000).

The organization’s operating environment, whether physical or digital, can be conducive or restrictive to organizational learning. The space, ideally, should be designed to accommodate for the wide range of learning differences, specifically when operating to address the needs of small-group learning (Mat & Razak, 2011). Small-group learning interactions, whether in person or online, require cross-functional interaction between members. A variety of meeting spaces allows for the fluidity and speed of sharing and learning (Gill, 2000). The spaces where people work and learn should be a visible statement that reinforces the value of organizational learning, where people have access to people, information and technology (Yeung et al., 2007).

**Knowledge in organizational learning.**

Understanding knowledge in the context of organizational learning requires distinguishing knowledge from information. Knowledge management is a sub-function of organizational learning, and it occurs as a process of constructing and reconstructing knowledge in the organizational framework (Crossan & Apaydin, 2012). This social constructivist approach to knowledge follows a process through which individual knowledge becomes transformed into collective knowledge, and how this socially constructed knowledge influences individual knowledge (Huysman, 2002). Chakravarthy et al. (2003) found that organizations commonly treat that knowledge as a stock. Organizations utilize this stock in terms of the content and volume of understanding that exists at any given point in time. This knowledge derives from the beliefs that guide organizational action generated by individuals and groups within the organization (Chakravarthy et al., 2003).
Nonaka (1994) understood knowledge as true belief justified by its holder. In his model, information becomes knowledge through a dynamic human process of justifying beliefs out of aspirations for truths. Nonaka (1994) understood that knowledge cannot be equated with truth, and can be both superficial and deep. In contrast to information, seen as the flow of messages, knowledge anchors the organized flow of information with the commitment and beliefs of its carrier (Nonaka, 1994).

Researchers studying organizational learning have largely accepted a broadly constructivist view of knowledge (Tsoukas, 2009). Individuals construct knowledge through social practices within interaction through which new knowledge emerges (Tsoukas, 2009). Hargadon and Fanelli (2002) suggested that new organizational knowledge is generated from the interaction between knowledge derived from experience and study.

This generated knowledge exists within the organization in the form of routines that guide organizational actions (Levitt & March, 1988). Knowledge results from individual and collective processes that fall within the organizational context and practices (Crossan et al., 1999). The knowledge becomes shared through social interaction and narrative within the organizational setting (Tsoukas, 2009). Within the organization, people, both individually and collectively, determine what is or is not knowledge. Calhoun and Starbuck (2003) viewed organizational learning as a process that enabled the social construction of knowledge by the individuals within social networks. Individuals acquire information and make observations through social networks, and a portion of information becomes knowledge.

**Ongoing process of learning.**

Organizational learning occurs continuously, as a constant and ongoing process within the organization (Crossan et al., 1999). Organizational learning occurs as an ongoing process. Crossan et al.
(1999) provided a sequence of organizational learning progression. This sequence follows a progression of learning from intuiting, interpreting, integrating and finally to institutionalizing. Initially, individuals assimilate information gained from their intuition, independent discovery and experiences. Individuals translate that information into knowledge through interpreting the information independently and by sharing within groups. By applying the interpreting knowledge into the needs of the group, the information becomes integrated into their shared understandings and systems. The organization then receives the feedback, revising the information and reshaping the knowledge into new routines, rules and procedures.

**Link between individual and organizational learning.**

Organizational learning occurs at individual, group and organization-wide levels. The processes of organizational learning operates within and through the transitions that link these levels of learning, as seen in Table 1 (Crossan et al., 1999). As individuals learn, they acquire knowledge, develop skills, adopt new attitudes and beliefs, and foster greater emotional intelligence (Gill, 2000).

Small group learning occurs when individuals share goals and place a value on member interaction. In small groups, members learn from and about each other, fostering connectivity and bonds that enable greater degrees of learning and impact the organization. The members of the small group continuously engage with each other and learn to apply the knowledge shared and interpreted to achieve the purposes of the group (Gill, 2000). As group learning transitions to organization-wide learning, the larger groups make decisions about what actions should be taken to respond to newly shared knowledge. The group then determines which actions should be replicated in other groups and installs newly integrated systems into the organization (Crossan et al., 1999).
New systems, rules and routines facilitate individuals and teams' ability to learn, grow and change. Resulting from organizational experiences, this creates a cyclical sequence of learning and impact throughout the three levels of the organization. To enable this continuous sequence and smooth transition between levels, organizational leaders must facilitate and embed in the organizational culture and learning process periodic reflection and continuous feedback loops (Gill, 2000). Crossan et al. (1999) argued for a dynamic flow of information that includes both the exploration of information, as well as soliciting feedback as a means of exploiting the gathered, interpreted and integrated information.

Table 1

Levels of Learning in Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Inputs/Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interpreting</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conversation/dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>Shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>understandings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interactive systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>Institutionalizing</td>
<td>Routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rules and procedures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Barriers to organizational learning.

Organizational learning is prevented and slowed by elements of the organizational system and its design Piderit (2000). Piderit (2000) acknowledged that resistance and ambivalence to change and the learning process can be debilitating, but often the motivations for resistance are positive. When properly framed within the context of organizational learning, the process of learning can be utilized as a positive response to the resistance and ambivalence surrounding change. Group and organization level factors create humans errors that can lead to reduced morale and inversely affect the perception of learning or motivation to engage in learning (Edmondson, 2000). Resistance, often perceived as a breakdown in the learning process, can lead to further disengagement, and often leadership exerts exerting unnecessary control over the process in an ill-advised attempt to revise resistance (Gill, 2000).

As individuals enter groups, the group’s other participants can stall their learning. Participants bear an unwillingness to discuss areas of knowledge that they deem to not be appropriate, relevant or safe to discuss because of organizational culture issues (Schilling & Kluge, 2009). Learning participants will resist being fully forthcoming with sharing their knowledge based on their experiences that go against the norms of the organization. Often a participant’s lack of skills leads to a tendency to avoid embarrassment or confrontation with others, either because of a lack of knowledge or to prevent having to accept responsibility for past failure (Gill, 2000). To battle this resistance and apathy, participants must be open with group members. By creating a culture of collaboration, and embracing failure as an opportunity for learning, those with perceived lack of skills or knowledge will feel safer and less likely to avoid engaging in bilateral learning.

Satisfaction with short-term and simple solutions that maintain the status quo may provide immediate relief to difficult problems, but prevents learning. Difficult situations offer unique learning
opportunities to invest time, effort, resources and emotion in organizational learning. Through a systems
approach, learning about the organization’s structure addresses breakdowns in the system and invests
participants in the organization’s goals and objectives.

**Strategies for organizational learning.**

*Individual learning strategies.*

The individual engaged in organizational learning aims to discover how to work and learn most
effectively in order to attain a greater awareness of one’s own values and goals and areas of
improvement. As individual learning occurs formally and informally, individuals must balance personal
learning and professional learning, as fits personal interests and the direction of the organization.
Individual learning, as much as it may be driven by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, fosters a
realization of what contributions the individual can make to enable the organization’s success (Gill,
2000). By sharing the information garnered on the individual level, the organization’s member creates
new approaches to address the organization’s problems and gaps in the organization’s knowledge base.

The individual who effectively engages in organizational learning marries one’s personal values
to the organization’s values through a process of personal visioning aligned with the organization’s
goals. Through a process of self-reflection on learning experiences and organizational experiences, the
individual crafts an “individualized learning plan” (Gill, 2000, p. 42). This plan articulates specific
commitments to learning and performance, in order for the individual and organization to measure
achievement. Continuous self-reflection relies on systems of recording insights from experiences
through journaling.

Individuals further develop skills and advance conceptual knowledge through engagement with
experts and professional facilitators in seminars and workshops. These formats can effectively serve to
maximize learning when designed to achieve specific learning objectives that match the individual’s needs. To further promote the individual’s development and ambivalence to challenge, the organization can shift individual roles within the organization. This enables the individual to learn about processes from a different perspective and experience new encounters for learning opportunities. Transitioning into new roles or situations necessitates providing individual coaching and mentoring to support the learning process while transitioning, in addition to structured on the job training.

In the digital age, computer technology offers opportunities to facilitate timely learning. This provides the employee the control to create an individualized learning process that can be modified and enhanced over time (Gill, 2000). An integrated approach to technologically integrated learning includes, conferencing, computer-based training opportunities, networked information and collaborative platforms. Other in-person tools for enhancing organizational learning include: peer tutoring, self-instruction reading materials, online professional learning networks through social media platforms and written assignments.

Group learning strategies.

Katzenback and Smith, as cited by Gill (2000), defined small groups as teams made up of individuals whose skills complement each, and maintain a commitment to a common purpose, performance goals, along with mutually accountability. For group learning to occur, the organization must design and create an environment for optimal and continuous learning. For a group to be successful over time, connectivity should be cultivated amongst group members. Organizational leaders should facilitate the quantity and quality of interactions among group members (Garvin, 1993).

Groups achieve high performance through a learning process that promotes becoming a more effective part of the system and enabling the organization to reach its goals. The Drexler/Sibbet Team
Performance Model (see Table 2) provided stages for team development that each group must go through to make learning possible that each group must go through (Gill, 2000). Groups progress through these stages when individuals achieve the learning necessary to rise as a unit.
## Table 2

**Drexler/ Sibbet Team Performance Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Group members know why they are in the group, and why they are grouped with the others that are in there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Trust Building</td>
<td>Group members need to have trust in the other members of the group and need to feel trusted by them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Goal and Role Clarification</td>
<td>Group members need to know the specific task of the group and each person’s responsibilities as it pertains to those goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Group members need to know how decisions are made in the group and how resources will be used to achieve mutually dependent goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Group members need to know how overall group goals will be achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>High Performance</td>
<td>For group members to achieve high performance they need to become highly interdependent, interdisciplinary and creative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Renewal</td>
<td>At times, members of a group must decide whether to renew their commitment to the group, or no longer work as a team. For renewal to occur, members must still find value in the group’s work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Small group learning practices should be designed based on the group’s makeup, goals, the resources provided by the organization and the individual needs and desires of them group’s members (Huber, 1991). Collaborating to cultivate a shared vision amongst the group’s members provides a framework for group learning while building consensus and ownership by all involved (Gill, 2000). By engaging in active learning, the group puts their shared knowledge into use to address mutually determined challenges. For self-directed learning, group members have the opportunity to discover the difference between the espoused theory of practice and the theories actually in use (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Active learning in groups provides members the opportunity to collectively take action, reflect, learn and take action again, while supporting each other through the process (Gill, 2000).

Continuously measuring the performance of the team through surfacing and collecting data ensures that group learning occurs. The group uses the data to evaluate its progress and adjust its practices, methods and tools through self-regulation. Different methods of sharing enable the data to be created to determine the learning that has occurred. Tsoukas (2009) suggested the use of dialogue, as a means of direct social interaction between group members, enabling mutual influence over understanding and applied practice. Dialogue offers opportunities for group members to check the validity of their understandings, while garnering feedback on their learning experiences. Reflective practices offers group members a chance to learn from their past activity, to examine their current practice and to focus on what learning can be used in the future (Gill, 2000). Highly structured group reflections, such as learning histories, provide group members a chance to collectively learn from the group’s successes and failures.
Network-learning.

Any organization seeking to foster a learning system needs to consider the creation of a network-learning model for its members. Networks provide organizations with the framework to achieve a competitive edge in acquiring, assimilating and utilizing knowledge not always available (Baker, 1992). Network-learning systems reward organizations by gaining access to knowledge, facilitating learning processes, and to foster knowledge creation (Wijk, Bosch, & Volberda, 2003). Baker (1992) characterized networks as linkages between organizational members, which are created in a temporal or semi-temporal fashion, commonly centering on a problem or issues.

Within a network-learning model, the position and degree network members are embedded in the network impacts the degree of their shared activity in the network (Nohria & Eccles, 1992). Wijk et al. (2003) identified three network perspectives to model how to position and embed members within networks. Social networks view networks as a tool to examine social relations and ties between individuals and organizations (Wijk et al., 2003). Social networks provide timely access to knowledge and information through direct and indirect referrals from network members, leading to increased innovation and creation of value (Calanni, Leach, & Weible, 2010). External networks serve to provide governance structure, and mediate markets and hierarchies amongst organizational members. This network model increases innovation of product development by a combination of complementary knowledge bases and internalization of external knowledge. Internal networks provide an organizing model different than the traditional multidivisional and functional organization models. By increasing internal knowledge transfer to foster internal knowledge creation and integration processes, the network increases innovation (Wijk et al., 2003).
Wijk et al. (2003) shared two primary theories explaining how information flows through networks. Structural hole theory emphasizes how information flow and how knowledge is brokered between members and smaller networks. This theory stresses that a network member benefits the most from a network when the member is central to the network. A member becomes more centrally important when the member plays a significant role in linking smaller networks to their network where no direct link existed before. This theory enables networks to consider how to adapt to environmental changes and market transactions. This relies on bounded networks that foster stability and produce cohesive ties.

In contrast, social capital theory views networks as spaces where members should be linked as much as possible, in order to increase their social capital. Social capital is defined as the “set of social resources embedded in relationships between network members”, as illustrated in Figure 1 (Walker et al., 1997). Network reproduction occurs only when the individual finds value in preserving their social capital. The emphasis on social capital underlies the network’s highest performance as an application to corporative relationships and collaborative learning.

![Figure 1. Closed Network With Cohesive Ties According To Social Capital Theory (Walker, Kogut, & Shan, 1997)](image)

**Origins and evolution of theory.**

**Classic works.**

The development of organizational learning theory represents a shifting paradigm over time. It represents a move toward learning occurring in organizational and workplace environments that must be
structured and instructor-directed and expert based, rather than informal and random (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003). Organizational learning theory finds its foundation in classic theorists, as far back as seminal thinker John Dewey. Dewey (1916) introduced a core feature of organizational learning by presenting the notion that learning occurs through facilitated social interaction. Hayek (1949) adopted the concept that organizational learning and knowledge should be understood from an economics perspective. He found that one of the fundamental challenges facing economic success is the capacity to utilize individual knowledge stored in individual dispersed from each other. By sealing the gaps between those individuals in an organization with knowledge, the organization can try to make effective decisions for itself and society. Penrose (1959) furthered the belief that knowledge plays a dominant role in the economic process, and the necessity of emphasizing the human recourse of the firm. It was Polanyi (1966) who distinguished between tacit and explicit knowledge, an evolution of Dewey’s concept of experiential learning, in understanding knowledge as coming from within the individual. His framework of understanding the role of tacit knowledge leads to later focus on understanding the roots of utilizing unexpressed knowledge and experiences of organizations to create a competitive advantage.

**Foundational works.**

Cyert and March (1963) work evolved beyond the classic works to introducing the idea that organizations could learn in a manner independent of the individuals within the organization. Their theory proposed that organizational learning serves a critical role in an organization’s decision-making model. The pair stressed the need for more structure, in the form of rules, procedures and routines to alleviate external pressures. They developed the initial processes and principles for organizations to adapt to the external environment.
Cyert and March (1963) understood that the organization should learn from experience through what later became understood as ‘single and double loop’ learning. They viewed organizational learning as being caught in a learning cycle, in which an organization responded to external disruptions by adjusting their operating procedures. The most effective operating procedures were used most often, thus creating multiple levels of procedures that enabled organizations to adapt as necessary (Cyert & March, 1963).

Argyris and Schon (1974) wrote a critical work that established a field of understanding for organizational learning. They presented models that distinguished between organizations that have the capacity to engage in substantial learning, and those that cannot. Their critique of Cyert and March’s (1963) work stemmed from their fundamental assumption that organizational learning is oriented around human behavior rather than rationalist economical assumptions. They found that human resistance to unpleasant learning experiences drove disruptions to individual and organizational learning processes.


_Popularizing works._
A special edition of *Organization Science* in 1991 popularized the study of organizational learning, setting the agenda of research and theoretical explorations for the coming decade (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003). The articles within this edition introduced the neo-rationalist tradition, which suggested maximizing the efficient use of knowledge in organizations, while realizing the mostly human obstacles that impede knowledge acquisition, assimilation, and sharing. In the same issue of *Organization Science*, Brown and Duguid (1991) emphasized social process over knowledge management in organizational learning, providing an alternative theoretical tradition to the popularized neo-rationalist approach.

Nonaka (1994) provided a unique notion of knowledge creation through transformation of tacit and explicit knowledge in his study and literature based on Japanese commercial organizations. He explored the importance of national culture and philosophy to understand the formation and communication of knowledge. He posited that most dichotomies, such as tacit and explicit knowledge are false, and that organizational learning depends on the transformation of tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge. His influence is manifested in current theories that address the dilemma of resolving policy and operational domain issues through the process of knowledge conversation via human social interaction (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003).
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This study explored how organizational learning theory applied to the examination of individual and group learning that occurs among school leaders in a Jewish education network non-profit. This chapter presents the background of organizational learning, relevant definitions and approaches to organizational learning. It outlines the different models presented in the extant literature, addressing the benefits and barriers to organizational learning for each. This chapter presents an evaluation and critique of the current research to establish the importance of this case study. Applying the theory and research behind organizational literature to this study's research required exploring how networks functions structurally and how learning occurs within networks. The study’s site, grounded within the field of Jewish education provided an opportunity to explore the systemic opportunities and challenges for facilitating network-learning within this context.

Elements Of Learning

The evolving literature about fostering organizational learning and knowledge management varies depending on approaches related to the focus on the process of learning or the outcomes of learning. Different models of learning engagement vary based on how they emphasize the structure, relationships and experiences of the organization and its groups and individual members. The literature provides a lack of clarity for how the dependent variables determine how and why organizations that learn see increased performance, cohesiveness and innovation.

Dynamics of adaptability.

Organizational learning explains how the dynamics of social and organizational elements enable both change and stability. Organizations showing this level of adaptability operate as a system able to
produce outcomes not simply determined by external constraints (Cyert & March, 1963). Organizational learning operating within a learning cycle responded to external pressures by adjusting the organization’s specific operating procedures. Systems of procedures provide multiple levels of operations within the organization’s system to adapt through learning and respond to internal and external pressures. While change is not regarded as a constant, it depends on time and the pathways undertaken for the change efforts. Stability, without growth, occurs as an outcome of limited and shortsighted learning processes (Schulz, 2001).

**Models for learning.**

Researchers have captured the complex ways that learning occurs within organizations. Huber (1991) identified four constructs related to organizational learning: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory. Huber (1991) emphasized the need for an investigation into the systemic nature of the organization, particularly by those who, with deep investment and concern improve, organizational learning and resulting decision-making.

Cohen (1991) focused on how individuals learn skills and utilize memory for learning. Cohen (1991) viewed an individual’s skills as the foundation for the design of organization’s structure. Cohen (1991) built on the understanding of a cognitive unconscious, as established by Rozin, asserting that organizational learning taps into the cognitive unconscious, a stock of memory and know-how not readily accessible to ordinary recollection and analysis. Other approaches include simulation models and the use of complex statistical models through the analysis of longitudinal data (Schulz, 2001). More recently, Casey (2005) advanced his understanding of individuals and organizations as learning systems, proposing the use of diagnostic questions to identify the needs of individuals and organization as they learn through adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and pattern maintenance.
Sources for organizational learning.

Addressing the sources for organizational learning requires an understanding of the difference between the impetus for learning and inputs for learning, such as raw materials. Processing these inputs, K.E. Weick (1979) emphasized thinking processes, while Huber (1991) and Levitt and March (1988) emphasized experimentation. Experiences provide opportunities for learning, whether the direct experiences of individuals that stimulate experimentation, or learning derived from the experiences of others. Huber (1991) argued that while much has been written about learning from experience, the research lacks the conceptualized and integrated thinking with other aspects of organizational learning. Levitt and March (1988) emphasized that institutional mechanisms and networks provide access to and the experiences of others, and thus enrich organizational learning.

Within the extant literature, applied and economic approaches to organizational learning often overlooked the impact of experience on organizational learning. Academic and behavioral approaches view experience as bearing ambiguity, which often disrupts learning cycles (Schulz, 2001). Levitt and March (1988) argued that experiences dependent on internal causes often dictate the degree of learning involved. Experience that results from past organizational learning involved, as impacted by external factors, results in a greater loop impact of learning on organizational responsiveness (Levitt & March, 1988). Jerez-Gómez, Céspedes-Lorente, and Valle-Cabrera (2005) provided a measurement scale for identifying the elements that form learning capability in an organization, in order to highlight its complex and multidimensional nature. Determining what conceptualization of organizational learning to rely on depends on what understanding of learning is utilized.
Learning as process.

Kim (1993) utilized ‘individual learning’ as a metaphor when describing organizational learning, building on operational and conceptual learning models, coupled with experiential learning derived from Dewey (1916). Kim (1993) developed a theory about how the process of individual learning, advancing the conception of organizational learning. This framework relies on the defining the role of individual learning and memory, and determining the different levels of learning and different organization types.

Crossan et al. (1999) established another model, the 4I model, to link the process of learning that creates feedback mechanisms. Crossan et al. (1999) described the process as evolution progressing from individual to group to organization-wide and back to individual learning (See Table 1). The learning process progresses due to the learning activities of intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalizing (the 4Is). Individuals intuit experiences by creating images and metaphors of their individual learning, leading to interpretation, first individually and then with others, through dialogue, conversation and cognitive mapping. Once groups acquire shared understanding, they mutually adjust to individual actions in order to foster systems for interaction, routines and diagnostics. Organization-wide learning facilitates strategic renewal across the whole organization, implements the repetition of routines. These new routines alter how individuals gather new information and being the intuitive process once again, but now with new understandings, thus completing the cycle (Crossan et al., 1999).

Schilling and Kluge (2009) viewed the organization as a social system, where a collective process of learning occurs. Schilling and Kluge (2009) suggested creating group-learning models, such as communities of practice, to more intentionally enable working groups to interpret and integrate knowledge. They argued that organizational development requires changing the way organizational members collectively share how they view the world. Information processing among organizational
members occurs through a sequence of acquiring, processing, and distributing shared organizational knowledge. Politics function as a barrier to learning when it disrupts the process of learning by preventing the acquisition, processing, and distribution of shared knowledge.

Learning as outcome.

Learning as improvement.

When learning becomes an expected outcome, it evolves from organizational culture, where culture serves both as a symbol and a reservoir of created, learned and distributed materials (Schulz, 2001). Learning becomes emblematic of organizational improvement, in which an increased behavior which results in favorable outcomes, and decreased behavior which results in unfavorable outcomes. Authors of applied literature, such as Senge (1990) argued that learning automatically improves organizations. Academic authors, such as Karl E. Weick (1991), revealed less confidence about the benefits of organizational learning’s impact on outcomes, and he focused more on the obstacles, complexities, traps and non-traditional aspects of learning.

Learning as recording.

To learn from the past, organizations create opportunities to retain, share, and re-use solutions that were successful. It can be inferred that this learning process increases efficiency and reliability. J.G. March, Schulz, and Zhou (2000) posited that learning instills lessons derived from history onto the organization. This learning requires both the process and technology to collect, sort, categorize and distribute historical learning.

Learning as evolution of knowledge.

Learning embedded within knowledge transactions requires an understanding of the connections between various knowledge elements. Mezias and Glynn (1993) described change in organization
knowledge systems as occurring through systemic forces that are self-induced. They can be accidental, chaotic, and non-intended. In order to enhance the knowledge properties, organizations connect new knowledge with relevant prior knowledge. This occurs through knowledge networks that enable knowledge combination and knowledge creation through the organizational community.

**Learning through structure.**

Cyert and March (1963) laid the foundation for structuring learning across a multi-level hierarchy of procedures, allowing organizational adaptation and growth. Garvin (1993) outlined three critical issues for adopting organizational learning structures. First, an organization must define organizational learning to cultivate meaning. Then, an organization should institute clearer operational guidelines for practice in the form of management. In order to assess the organization's rate and level of learning, they then need to create measurement tools.

Kim (1993) determined the need for a transfer mechanism between individuals and groups that included shared assumptions and routines for learning. Kim (1993) fostered the notion of creating learning and ‘action loops’ providing a means for individuals to act based on their own beliefs, so that individual action to lead to organizational action. This produces an environmental response that loops back to individual action. Kim found shared that building shared meaning amongst organizational members required utilized systems archetypes and further empirical research.

Nonaka (1994) addressed how organizational structure enables the transformation of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, building off of knowledge frameworks created by Polanyi (1966). Nonaka (1994) suggested focusing on a middle-up management approach that fosters internal entrepreneurs and collaborative work teams. In this model, top managers provide the vision and operate under a leadership model serving as catalysts rather than using charismatic leadership, while enabling
middle managers to self-organize. Nonaka’s model enables the organization to work and learn together cooperatively, and allows for the realization of the vision cultivated by leadership to be integrated throughout the organization.

**Learning through relationships.**

Emphasizing relationships to drive learning originates with Brown and Duguid (1991). Their studies determined that the ways we describe how people work is described differently from the ways they actually work. Brown and Duguid (1991) studied informal communities-of-practice generated significant learning and innovation. They stipulated that work, learning, and innovation must be understood within the context of actual communities and their actual practices. To facilitate their understanding required a new conception and design of the organization to achieve improved performance. Utilizing knowledge of networks to connect organizational members allows for a crystallization of social process at the collective level.

Nonaka (1994) suggested the use of dialogue to achieve interpersonal learning relationships. Tsoukas (2009) furthered the use of dialogue to engage organization members in further articulating their gathered and interpreted knowledge. Through dialogue, individuals create new knowledge for the organizations by drawing new distinctions concerning the tasks at hand. This leads to individual members altering their normative practices to embrace reflective practice. The level of productivity depends on the degree individuals relate to each other. This necessitates participants taking responsibility for their relationships and for their joint tasks.

**Learning through experience.**

Building on Dewey (1938) understanding that learning occurs through experience, Karl E. Weick (1991) found that organizational learning occurs as infrequent events, or frequently but takes shape in
nontraditional ways. These learning experiences operate under a set of conditions that occur rarely in organizations. Organizations learn through experience by generating performance feedback to learn when they experience problems (Schulz, 2001). These feedback mechanisms allow organizations to adapt their behavior when performance does not live up to expectations. The feedback enables organizations to adapt their aspirations for performance. Schulz (2001) argued that these rare and disruptive experiences offer the best opportunities for learning, citing a study of large-scale, strategic change and organizational failure by Amburgey, Kelly and Barnett (1993). Learning through experiences still requires the structure, process and relationships to enable the performance feedback to be looped in through the organization.

**Benefits to organizational learning.**

There are limited studies and literature discuss the precise benefits of organizational learning. Garvin (1993) defined learning organizations as developing the skill sets in five critical areas: problem solving, experimentation learning from past experiences, learning from others, and transferring knowledge. Organizational learning empowers organizations to engage in systematic problem solving. This experimentation in new approaches responds to attempts to learn from past experiences and the experiences of others, in order to transfer knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the organization. Emphasizing this culture of learning, enables organizations to achieve higher levels of innovativeness commonly associated with cultures that emphasize learning (Hurley & Hult, 1998).

**Barriers to organizational learning.**

While there is a gap in the literature in empirical discussions of the benefits of organizational learning, a good deal of the academic literature has focused on the barriers to learning in organizations consistently in practice. Kim (1993) identified deficiencies in the organizational learning process. Kim
(1993) claimed that organizational learning models either obfuscate the role an individual plays within the process. Kim (1993) also generated a simplistic model that extends individual learning to obscure the organizational complexities that make system wide learning possible.

Kim (1993) posited that incomplete learning cycles impact the cultivation of effective learning processes. Incomplete learning cycles occur in situational contexts, such as crisis management when responding to the situation becomes a higher priority than codifying learning for future use. In Kim’s model, fragmented situations decentralize organizations that have not cultivated strong networks, and thus prevent individuals from sharing expertise throughout the organization. In situations that promote opportunities learning, individuals or group's actions are not driven by an organization's values, culture or standard operating procedure. Kim (1993) suggested that groups operate similarly to individuals, in that they are influenced by organizational structures and management style. By making mental models amongst group members explicit, and fostering stronger organizational memory within groups, groups can begin to effectively learn as individuals more effectively.

A common finding in the literature is that individuals limit their own learning through certain traps (Schulz, 2001). These traps can be expressed in different ways. When individuals and groups progress through routines and perform at levels higher than expected, there is a lack of investment in learning. This high achievement prevents experimentation and leads to competency traps (Schulz, 2001). ‘Failure traps’ occur when low performance, and the ambivalence to failure leads to futile and desperate change efforts, without learning occurring to inform these efforts. When organizations continuously face new problems, the habitual application of old rules to new problems leads to ‘codification traps’. These traps eliminate the perceived need to create new rules.
Schilling and Kluge (2009) pointed to traps located in the sociopolitical process. They emphasize how elements of influence, force, discipline and dominance impact learning. This impact is felt at various points of transitioning between individual, group, and organization-wide learning with Crossan et al. (1999) 4Is progression learning model. Schilling and Kluge (2009) explored how these forces created barriers to learning at throughout each of these learning processes. On the interpretive level, organizational members often seek to avoid failure, along with either an extremely high or low degree of collective identity. This behavior causes a learning barrier by negatively affecting how team members accept new ideas, especially when the knowledge conflicts with existing thinking.

Schulz (2001) identified various detrimental behaviors of organizational learning on personal and organizational levels, further developed by Schilling and Kluge (2009). On the personal level, individuals who act based solely on self-interest limit their individual thinking, attitudes and behavior in the processes of influence and force. At the organizational level, the organization’s existing routines, structures and practices are expressed through technology, culture and formal regulations. Throughout these routines, the processes of discipline and dominance can limit learning. These behaviors impact not only the learning occurring on each of these levels, but the transitions necessary to link learning between levels that Crossan et al. (1999) identified as key to organization-wide learning.

**Critique of organizational learning.**

Throughout the literature, a primary area of concern remains divergent thinking about what constitutes the dependent variable for organizational learning. There appears to be no consensus about the field’s main focus. The literature presents a conceptual framework that organizational learning occurs because of the learning processes that facilitate, disrupt or direct the transformation, diffusion and use of organizational knowledge. While many organizations seeks to utilize these processes, Schulz
(2001) found that the routines developed and implemented within an organization function independently from the individual organizational members who execute them. However, since the routines rooted in organizational culture and habitual practices, they continue even after their creators have departed from the organization.

Routine-based learning operates at the organizational level, and above the level of individual learning. There is a disconnect between the aspirations of the organization and the behaviors of the individual when enacting organizational learning. For knowledge to truly disperse within an organization, the learning must occur simultaneously, in many places, with many subjects and at many speeds (Schulz, 2001). At this point, there needs to be further study, research and experimentation to discover how this process occurs, and how it can be facilitated throughout organizations of different shapes, sizes and structures.

**Network-Learning**

The study of organizational learning requires an understanding of the environment, organizational structure and field that individuals and groups learn within. To truly appreciate the how learning occurs in the specific site to be studied necessitates exploring the literature of learning in network structures and non-profit organizations. In particular, recent literature on the field of Jewish non-profits and Jewish education provide a lens to understanding how learning and networks have been utilized and studied. This provides a contextual understanding for exploring how to describe learning in these structures and environments.

**Networks.**

The study of networks originates in literature preceding the 1990s, but only in that decade did researchers start to explore definitions of networks, their structures and applications for organizations.
and learning. Karen Stephenson provided the early foundational literature synthesizing an understanding of defined networks. Stephenson (1997) turned away from the definition of network as a verb, as in the active form of ‘networking’. Instead, she proposed that ‘network’ be used as a noun, a form of organizational structure, and thus the idea that networks can be directed to affect change. Stephenson (1997) conceived that a network operating as a structured pattern of relationships in which there are patterns of reciprocal exchanges between members. Within the digital era, the reciprocation between members occurs virtually or through face-to-face interactions in an often-invisible web of connections.

Maintaining a network requires the cultivation of trust, expressed as social capital between members (Holley, 2012). Once members establish sufficient social capital, they can initiate a change process within a network structure. This entails identifying and incorporating those people who can maintain the culture of the network into the change process.

**Network structures.**

Stephenson (1998) identified various structures that form networks. Using metaphors from chemistry, Stephenson (1998) cited a model develop by Levi-Straus that related to the model of an atom, in which familial relationships in the structure become more informative than scale. The hub and spoke model, developed by Freeman as cited by Stephenson (1998), resembles the bicycle wheel and optimizes distribution of influence and resources from a central position, while maintaining stability in the network.

The kite model emphasizes the social relationships between different points and highlights the importance of certain culture carriers. The kite model provides a means of understanding the foundational nature of relationship built on trust with everyone in the network (Stephenson, 1998). Within this model, specific members of the network serve as culture carriers that hold tremendous influence and capacity for persuasion, but often are invisible and underestimated. This model contains a
hub, and from that hub extends critical pathways to connecting parts of the network structure. Gatekeepers operate at the margins of the network, serving to both broker entry into the network structure, and slow down access when necessary. Pulse-takers serve to control the flow of knowledge within the network structure, by knowing what everyone is thinking and doing. Networks provide the infrastructure that enables culture. The greater the degree that networks are invisible the greater degree that cultures resist change. To unleash the power networks to create powerful change necessitates revealing the culture carrier’s key pivotal positions within the network.

*Network learning practices.*

Networks provide members speedy access to knowledge. Integrating external knowledge requires constantly scanning the environment for expertise and recognizing the capabilities of others in the network, even if they are perceived as competitors or outside one’s field (Wijk et al., 2003). An activated network fosters pathways that deliver knowledge amongst its members and serves as a virtual research organization. By utilizing collegial knowledge networks, its members invest in expertise internally found internally within the network and work collaboratively to integrate externally obtained knowledge (Larsson et al., 1998).

Integrating external knowledge depends on openness to the knowledge from the outside and the intent to seek that knowledge (Hamel, 1991). This means that a culture must be developed within the network that embraces knowledge and ideas from the outside the network. Learning networks value the capability to absorb and use knowledge as much as to create it (Wijk et al., 2003). Salk and Simonin (2003) found that alliances and networks that reinforce the demand for outreach tend to invest in members, assuring they have the support, time and resources to go beyond member’s institutional spaces. This investment leads to members connecting, learning and sharing knowledge gathered from beyond
the network. In a network designed to support knowledge acquisition and sharing, there no longer needs to be present hierarchal processes for filtering of information. Unlike in many institutions, in learning networks, those who gather information are also ones to apply it (Knight, 2002).

Kogut (1988), Kogut and Zander (1992) and Mitchell and Sing (1996), who viewed learning and knowledge acquisition as key reasons that individuals and organization form collaborative alliances. These authors find that partners in alliances must invest in time and resources to allow for the interactivity amongst the partners to create a defined outcome. Salk and Simonin (2003) found how knowledge acquired from collaborative endeavors increases an organization’s competitive advantage. Collaborative alliances primarily serve learning by reinforcing acquiring knowledge rather than accessing knowledge. When forming alliances those members involved must understand and communicate strategic intentions for learning. Schein (1998) argued that learning, on all levels, requires motivation, even though the form and substance of such motivations will vary, across different levels of stakeholders within the alliance’s organizations. Much of the literature on network alliances assumes that different stakeholders signal learning intentions throughout the network overtly. Yet Salk and Simonin (2003) critiqued this assumption and argued that more research needs to be developed to confirm that while the intent for learning might occur on one level also is overtly understood by another.

Network-learning occurs on many levels within networks, and requires individual, group and organization, and inter-organizational levels of analysis. Creating sets of collaboratively organized explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994) depends on the capacity to direct relations across specific partnerships over time (Salk & Simonin, 2003). The mechanisms that enable structures and processes to operate at the organizational levels are often indirectly inferred in the literature, rather than observed directly (Salk & Simonin, 2003). More than structure, the extant literature emphasized the importance of
studying how individual’s influence and power, motivation and individual skills affect the relationship between the structure of the network and the learning.

The occurrence of network-learning must be framed with the understanding that network alliances evolve and change over time. In fact, over time, these alliances can be unstable over time, and the nature and content of the relationships should be expected to change, often dictated by the formalized nature of the alliances (Argote, 2012). Because network relationships are fluid, temporal studies of network learning need to accommodate for learning curves as individuals and organization join and assimilate into alliances (Epple, Argote, & Devadas, 1991).

A range of theoretical frameworks have informed an understanding of how network learning is understood to occur through the effective management of networks at inter-organization levels serves vital mechanism for knowledge acquisition (Salk & Simonin, 2003). Social network theory stresses the cohesion and strength of linkages between members of the network, and encourages that social capital be built up by developing trust in the network (Wijk et al., 2003). Structural hole theorists emphasize working within inter-organizational networks to limit redundancy and position members so that they have access to information and knowledge (Walker et al., 1997). These differing theories present a range of approaches used in both theoretical and practical applications of knowledge transmission in networks.

Hamel (1991), Inkpen and Dinur (1998) and Simonin (1999) provided limited empirical studies to explaining the variables of network learning as a process, and only partial understanding of network learning as a whole. To address the question of how learning occurs in network alliances, Salk and Simonin (2003) synthesized these studies to create a taxonomy of variables. The first block of variables pertains to alliance-specific variables that facilitate or impede the learning process, such as the form, scope, fit of partners, duration, location and orientation of the alliance. The second block is comprised
variables specific to the partners, including the reliance on absorptive capacity, prior experience, strategic intent and the ability to identify, assimilate and exploit knowledge. Hamel (1991) paid special attention to the issues of trust and protectiveness that might concern another member’s feelings of ownership of specific body of knowledge. Knowledge-specific variables determine what knowledge characteristics create value or even ambiguity for network learners. This supports determining what values stimulates intent for learning within the knowledge seeker. Last, the context-specific variables include the factors that motivate the intent to become active, focused and better learners and teachers within the network, as well as non-controllable variables that create noise that impedes learning.

Generally, Hamel (1991), Inkpen and Dinur (1998) and Simonin (1999) accept the benefits of the learning process within networks, but provides little study that informs the drawbacks of learning.

**Learning in non-profit organizations.**

What makes non-profits unique as organizations is that they are simultaneously accountable to numerous actors. Non-profits form a system of accountability and accountability factors that go beyond typical structures for commercial accountability (Ebrahim, 2005). These accountability relationships force non-profits to consider how they structure the flow of information. This flow impacts the organization’s various stakeholders on whom they depend on to fund, support and administer their mission and practices. In an effort to measure and report to various stakeholders that a non-profits is accountable to, Kaplan (2001) suggested utilizing tools, such as balanced scorecard. These tools serve as a performance measurement and management approach to the double bottom lines of finance and mission that non-profits answer to. Holton Iii, Hsin-Chih, and Naquin (2003) found that learning transfer systems vary across a variety of non-profit organizational types settings, training models.
Various researches have studied the impact of non-profit organizations engaging in network learning. Kong et al. (2009) studied the role of governance in member-driven non-profit organizations. They found that a link between organizational element (knowledge sharing, decision making and benefits sharing) and the learning process that supported growth and innovation. The manner in which non-profit alliances manage the collective learning process, determines the success and failure of the alliance (Kong et al., 2009). Larsson et al. (1998) responded to a learning dilemma present in inter-organizational alliances. They recognized that alliances rely on competing interests between individuals acting as good partners or competing for knowledge. Yet being in an alliance can lead to exploitation of those trying to maximize joint learning and opportunities learning that undercuts collective knowledge development within the network. A lack of motivation or absorption capacity and communication amongst partners hinders inter-organizational learning (Larsson et al., 1998). They suggested that alliances emphasize transparency and receptiveness strategies and that network partners have to address collaboration, compromise, competition, accommodation and avoidance.

**Field of Jewish education and communal service.**

Understanding how organizations and learning network operates within the field of Jewish education and communal service non-profits demands an understanding of the system as whole. At the start of the 21st century, the this broader Jewish ecosystem is marked by a mix of established institutions, new organizational startup initiatives and a wealth of independent operators (Jumpstart, 2011). Jumpstart’s report, edited by Avedon and Landres (Jumpstart) and Felecia Herman (The Natan Fund) described the network of organizations, people, ideas, media, organizational incubators, and funders that develops, promotes, and diffuses new ideas, technologies, products, and services. Within this specific context, this report highlight the importance of core elements, such as knowledge and human capital, in
understanding the impact of innovation on the economic model of the current Jewish ecosystem. The current wave of innovation, evolving in both the established Jewish ecosystem and the general non-profit world has been impacted by numerous factors. These factors include advances in technology, changes in how individuals orient around identity and shifts in communal priorities. In the Jewish innovation economy, an emphasis on the efficiency of production and adaptation through collaborative innovative practices takes precedence over traditional economic elements such as supply/demand considerations (Jumpstart, 2011).

Wertheimer and Chai (2005) argued that the field of Jewish education operates as a system of silos. In their view, the field consists of autonomous educational institutions, camps, congregational school, day schools, informal programs and independent programs. These institutions rarely connect and thus could not be considered a functioning network. The range of institutions and their isolated stores of knowledge operate as vertically organized centers of operation, separated from any constructive interaction as horizontal networks. Wertheimer and Chai (2005) called for further efforts at horizontal interaction and cooperation across institutional lines. In their estimation, alliances would enable each organization’s intended learners to benefit from by reinforcing their educational experiences and enabling families to better find their way through the wide variety of options presented by the field.

Shevitz (2011) made the case that as new understandings and ideas from general education influence the Jewish community’s approach to education, organizational learning becomes more intuitive within educational settings. She found that the organizational learning model for learning resonates with the rich tradition of Jewish learning, promoting questions, reflection, and probing as essential elements to the learning process. She argued that critiques of Jewish education, like Wertheimer and Chai’s, reflects the Jewish sector's dissatisfaction with the status quo.
Shevitz (2011) believed that understanding the field of Jewish education starts with accepting that much of what faces the Jewish education system also affects the wider system of education. Accordingly, before creating new responses to present problems, Shevitz (2011) believes organizations must first foster relationships with the general field of education, gathering knowledge and contextualizing Jewish education’s challenges. In her view, the communal system of Jewish education is comprised of different settings and organizations that serve Jewish education. She did not recognize any singular or identifiable ‘system’, but rather a set of autonomous and semi-autonomous organizations that relate to each other when they need and want to. This conception is similar to the fragmented ‘loosely coupled systems’ identified by K.E. Weick (1969). Finally, within each setting, Shevitz (2011) focused in on the individual organizations and how learning enhances their capacity for learning, both internally and beyond their own organization and setting.

Shevitz (2011) acknowledged that organizational and network learning might prove to be difficult for Jewish educational organizations to adopt. She recognized that Jewish educational settings are resource-poor environments, with little resources to invest in organizational learning models and processes. Organizational learning requires a change in the way individuals think and operate as groups. It requires continuous exploration of assumptions and the development newly shared understanding and goals, which in turn requires learning new ways of thinking and acting.

Summary

The chapter provided an overview of the extant literature that applied complex models and conceptions of how individuals, groups and organizations engage in learning through networked relationships. The literature provided a wealth of learning practices and evaluative tools to encourage and measure the behaviors that individuals and groups can utilize within a networks model to effectively
gather, share and interpret knowledge. The literature offered conceptual and practical structural models to utilize organizational learning. Learning occurs as a cyclical process to cultivate network relationships that enrich individual learning experiences and collaborative alliance that bolster the network and the individual's home organizations.

This study researched a single non-profit serving a diverse group of organizations in the field of Jewish education through the cultivation of network relationships and programs. By gathering the experiences and perceptions of the non-profits stakeholders and the networked individuals they facilitate, this research informed a descriptive case study. This study explored how an organization intentionally facilitate learning within a network in order to enhance the capacity of individual learning, the collaborative activity of groups of networked individuals and impact the field as a whole through stronger network alliances. By describing how learning practices and models become utilized within network models, a greater understanding of how the process and experience of learning impact the relational nature of organizational learning. This study aimed to enrich our understanding of how learning practices play a critical role in the intentional cultivation of formal and information networks. With this understanding, non-profits can amplify their facilitation of the individuals and organizations within their networks. This network-learning approach will enable them to achieve their goals of sharing knowledge and fostering collaboration. This will lead to increased value for the individuals, organizations and the field of Jewish education as a whole.

**Conclusion**

Fostering organizational learning through network models requires an understanding of how learning occurs within organizations. The combined application of learning theory applied and organizational and network systems offers new benefits for an organization cultivating networks. This
approach offers a model for supporting the growth of individual members of the organization and networks, as well as the organization and networks own growth and development. Organizations and networks function as complex systems of relationships between individuals (Stephenson, 1998). Within networks, these individuals serve their own intentions, motivations and purposes, while also trying to achieve greater efficiency for the organizations and networks as a whole. A structural understanding of networks and organizations provides a means to apply conceptions of the impact of learning. Implementing structures that facilitate learning has the potential to impact the individual members and the system as a whole through an understanding of the process, experience, outcomes and relational behaviors of learning.
Chapter Three: Research Design

Research Questions

The problem of practice responds to the need for a non-profit organization’s members to utilize organizational learning practices to foster stronger learning networks amongst its member organizations and individual. To address this problem, this study explored and described how a non-profit organization designed, facilitated and practiced organizational learning behaviors amongst networked individuals and groups.

The primary question was: *How does a non-profit facilitate organizational learning to cultivate network relationships amongst individuals and groups?* This primary question was addressed through two sub-questions: (1) *What learning activities, on individual and group levels, facilitate and promote the sharing and interpretation of knowledge within networks?* (2) *How do individuals engage in network-learning?*

The research documented varied approaches to facilitating learning amongst individuals in different network affinity groups of a networked organization, through a variety of contexts and use of methods. This research aimed to uncover the experience, process and relationships of learning within designed and intentional networks. Through the study of available documents, field level observations, and surveys and interviews with volunteer participants from the groups, the study described the dynamics of learning practices in a network structure. The complex process of transitioning between individual learning practices for knowledge gathering and interpretation and group sharing and evaluation required situated meaning. This meaning evolved from the experience of the individual participating in network groups to enhance their learning. In gathering a variety of perspectives, the
research provided a means of exploring multiple perspectives and meaning to determine patterns of practice and behavior. This enabled an analysis and description of how learning occurs in a networked non-profit in order to promote individual growth and impact on the organization.

**Methodology**

**Approach.**

The study’s research question required a qualitative approach within the post-positivist worldview. In this approach, understanding of causality existed within a framework without absolute truth, where network members constructed knowledge through individual and relational experiences (Creswell, 2007). This research aimed to test pre-existing experiences through the exploration of multiple views in search of patterns that can verify theoretical conceptions and explain situations within causal relationships (Creswell, 2007). By utilizing interpretive constructions, the research explored how the participants in a learning network view their formal and informal experiences from their unique perspective. Their shared perspective offered insight into how they created meaning and understanding out of their learning experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This research aimed to establish meaning out of a situation from the perspective of the participants involved. Collecting evidence through document review, observation and investigation provided the data for analysis and for interpreting findings to determine systemic patterns of behavior (Creswell, 2009). This resulted from the exploration of how the organization facilitated the design and implementation of learning practices, and how the participant learners utilized the relational experience within groups to foster network-learning.

**Research tradition.**

Using a case study methodology provided a detailed and complex description of how networked individuals achieved collective learning through networks of organizational learning practices. The
study’s goals strove to clarify the language and process of a non-profit networked learning, and the practices and attitudes that enabled it. This method offered an in depth exploration of an organization’s learning process, through the use of a variety of methods to collect data over a period of time (Creswell, 2009). By utilizing how and why research questions, this method focused on contemporary events, without needing to have control of behavioral events (Yin, 2009). This study sought to explore a singular non-profit fostering designed and intentional networks of professionals engaging in learning. The case study approach offered a means to describe, in narrative form, an articulated understanding of what thematically occurred in generalized terms, and inapplicable theoretical and practical forms (Creswell, 2007).

Using a singular site for research, the study provided a single-case with an embedded-case design (Yin, 2009). The case study captured multiple units (network groups) of individuals (network group participants) within a singular organization (the networked non-profit). Case study methodology enabled the exploration of organizational learning practices used to enhance individual learning. The methodology provided into the connection between individuals and others in the groups to collectivize knowledge and spur impactful activity. The non-profit organization served as the primary unit of analysis, with the smaller groups of networked individuals serving as the secondary units of analysis. The individuals within the groups served as the third set units of analysis. Specific network groups within the organization will be identified through purposeful sampling. Maximum variation were used to select up to four individual group members in order to provide diversity of approach, attitudes and meanings to provide a through and detailed analysis of the organizational learning experience (Creswell, 2007).
Through a descriptive case study, the study will provide a richly detailed account of the contextual experience of networked organizational members facilitated to extend their individual learning and practice to group level connections, sharing and action. The case served to document, systemize and communicate the investigated practices, for the use of the organization study, as well as other non-profits seeking to become more networked through organizational learning. The diversity of models, methods and practices emerging from the study provided a wealth of application to relevant contexts. The focus on the multiple perspectives from a variety of network-learning participants created varied points of reference for other organizational leaders to reflect on their own practice and consider new means to achieving their goals for using network-learning.

**Site selection.**

The case study centered on the “School Network”, a member-driven non-profit serving a network of Jewish community independent schools. This network organization has served historically as a peer-support network, utilizing a hub and spoke network structure to support its network activity. The organization sought to connect school leaders, on different levels such as head of schools, principals and lay leaders. The School Network hoped to enhance their relationships and engagement in the network so that they will learn together and from one another, with the hopes of fostering collaboration and activity that will positively impact the field. As part of their strategic plan, the organization sought to “both curate and weave networks, identifying those with particular talents and knowledge and allowing them to shine and share, as well as making connections and enhancing mutually beneficial relationships ("Strengthening [the School Network] to strengthen the field: a 5-Year business plan," 2012).”
To support maximum variation, member participants of three pre-existing network groups (see Figure 2) will be randomly selected (Creswell, 2007). The use of multiple unit groups provided differentiated perspectives and experiences of networked learning in the organization, and allowed for a wider group of the case study’s reading to connect with the study (Seidman, 2006). Within each group, maximum variation ensured a range of perspective and a rich description of the experience of the members of these groups (Maxwell, 2005) by selecting two to three group participants for each group to interview. To ensure a range of perspectives, participants were selected based on their degree of involvement, previous experience in learning network groups, and degree of comfort with the learning experience’s technology and methodology.

Purposefully selecting three groups, and several group participants, provided a range of perspectives to cull information from, these individuals’ attitudes and behaviors do not necessarily reflect the experience of everyone in their groups. Nor did they reflect all the participants in the organization’s other network groups. These individuals represented different levels of professional leadership in their field, and their voluntary engagement in the network groups varies across the
network’s participants. These participants represented those involved in organizational learning through networked non-profits.

The School Network provided an effective context to generalize findings due to its 25 years of operation. Its intentionality of practice resulted from a recent strategic planning process, and its mission to serve broad and diverse network of 122 member institutions. By collecting data from a variety of Sources (documents, observations and interviews) and from a variety of Sources in two or three embedded units enabled the assurance of validity and generalization for the case study.

**Recruitment and Access**

Based on a pre-existing professional relationship with the organization as part of its networks, the organization’s Associate Director approached the researcher to consult for the organization. The solicitation stemmed from a need for someone knowledgeable and well connected in the field to support its efforts to create and facilitate its network-learning strategy and implementation models. The organization enlisted the researcher to provide professional investigation, analysis and feedback that paralleled the researcher’s objectives for this case study. This research served as a means for the organization to more deeply explore its use of organizational learning for its strategic purposes.

The researcher’s professional service to the organization preceded the research. The researcher already built a relationship with the organization’s staff and stakeholders to understand the organization’s goals, objectives, aspirations and past attempts at cultivating its network through network-learning. The researcher was already introduced and engaged with the network group participants, in order to begin to investigate their motivations for participating in the network-learning process. The researcher provided strategic learning models and experimented with a variety of methods...
and technologies simultaneously to the study. The School Network will utilize the findings of the study to inform future implementation.

The organization and researcher’s professional relationship enabled the organization to trust the researcher to maintain necessary levels of confidentiality and to be fully transparent and provide full access to the organization. Through access to its leadership, the researcher garnered access to documented materials, pre-existing program and member participants, with their individual consent. The Associate Director served as the gatekeeper and offered the researcher access and introductions to the stakeholders and network group participants. Based on the Associate Director’s suggestion, the researcher focused the research efforts on three of the network groups, those incorporating Judaic principals/directors, head of schools and early childhood education directors. The makeup of these different groups consisted of individuals with a wide range of professional and organizational leadership backgrounds. These individuals also represented varied experiences with network-learning as individuals and groups, whether formally and informally and in online and offline platforms.

Access.

The Associate Director delivered and provided access to all internal organizational documents, which detailed strategy and communication regarding organizational learning and strategy. Access was provided to the researcher to observe group learning activities online and offline, upon notification to the network group participants. After observation of the group dynamics and individual’s patterns of engagement, the researcher and Associate Director identified one to two participants of each group to recruit for interviews, for a total of four interview subjects. In addition, the Associate Director facilitated access to the assigned volunteer group facilitators, if relevant. The Associate Director provided historical context for the organization’s learning practices. The organization’s executive director and
relevant staff, consultants and lay leaders provided context for the organization’s goals and strategy for implementing organizational learning within these network groups.

**Confidentiality.**

All access to information and interview subjects was predicated upon the organization’s right to disclose or not disclose its identity. All documents that were made available were marked as confidential information. These documents were kept private and contained by secure measures digitally. Because the nature of the network groups depends on trust in order to enable transparency and honesty, the researcher’s presences as an observer was disclosed prior to the investigation. All interview subjects were provided with an informed consent release, and provided the opportunity to share or conceal their identity in the case study. All transcripts of interviews, analysis of materials and notes were secured under two lays of digital security, along with back up storage. The organization’s staff, stakeholders and network group participants did not have access to research data and analysis during the process, unless provided to them for review or reflection.

**Issues of bias.**

The researcher operated within the same network and field as the participants, in addition to being hired as a consulting for the organization. It was critical to make clear the role of the researcher in gathering information, the manner in which the findings will be distributed and the benefit of the research to the participants, the organization and the field. Full transparency within the organizational space prevented unnecessary conflicts of interest and confusion, in terms of the researcher’s roles as academic investigator and as a paid consultant.

The School Network hired the researcher to study, facilitate and enhance the network’s learning experience. Prior to research, the network group’s participants were told that the researcher would
eventually be conducting academic research on their network-learning practices, and that the network group participants were notified when that time comes and they will have an opportunity to opt out of being included in the academic research. The researcher functioned to observe, intervene and connect with members of the network to enable them to reflect upon their goals for learning, their capacity for learning and investment in learning. To do so, the researcher has functioned as a thought leader for the School Network, and engaged in a hands-on facilitator’s role to extend conversations, provided resources in response to questions and made connections between members.

The researcher’s role as a consultant on the project stemmed from the researcher’s prior experience with the School Network’s programs, and knowledge acquired from the researcher’s scholarly research, as well as the researcher’s own experience facilitating professional learning networks. The School Network expected that the researchers extensive scholarly research and inquiry devoted to this doctoral study enabled the researcher to best serve the organization’s needs as a consultant. The School Network also realized that an eventual case study produced by this research provided valuable insight for its organization to use for its strategic growth and membership engagement. The researcher’s familiarity, comfort and experience as a consultant provided access and enabled trust between the researcher and the research subjects. In order to balance between the role of consultant and researcher, it was necessarily to create clear boundaries for interaction with the School Network’s group participants, and to separate any materials and notes created throughout the process. The researcher focused on the research questions, rather than on larger questions of implementation that may be fulfilled as a consultant. Through the process of obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), all documents used to solicit and obtain approval and consent were reviewed and modified as necessary.
The research ensured that the research site and all research participants are aware of the distinction between the role of researcher and consultant.

**Data collection**

In order to further triangulate data collection beyond the participants as sources of information, data was collected from pre-existing materials, including internal documents, such as memos, strategic plans, web-pages, guidelines for facilitators, etc. New data was collected through observations of ongoing network-learning programmatic efforts, such as online list-servs and webinars and interviews with network group participants (Creswell, 2007). Document review occurred throughout the process, based on historical documents collected by the researcher and newly created material provided by the organization’s Associate Director. Observations were made during live programming, for example online webinars or in-person meetings, and via email, discussion group and list-serv postings. Document review and observations were utilized to provide context, determine patterns of behavior and understand systematic approach to organizational learning in the network context.

**Interview structure.**

Interviews of key stakeholders and network group participants were central to developing an understanding of the organization’s learning practices. Using an initial survey, and two subsequent interviews, a structure modified from the three-interview series approach, participants were provided both an individualized background for their engagement, details of their experience and a reflection of the meaning of their learning experience (Seidman, 2006). Interviews were primarily conducted ideally via an online video interface, such as Skype or Google+ Hangout, and if necessary by phone. Background interviews with key stakeholders were conducted online, with follow up interviews
conducted in person. See Appendix for IRB Forms that include a list of recruitment materials, consent forms and participant survey and interview questions.

**Interview sequence.**

After completing an initial online survey to provide personal and professional background informational, as well as evidence of basic understanding of study’s concepts, each subject was interviewed twice. The first interview, over the phone or over an online video interface, occurred after initial observations and consent, and took take approximately 60 minutes. The final 30-minute interview, conducted over the phone or over an online video interface, took place approximately one to two weeks after the first interview. This allowed for time to pass for reflection and review of the initial interview’s transcript. This sequential interview process provided the advantage of developing a relationship between the researcher and the interviews subjects. This process also established a context for the conversations, while leaving opportunities for validation and reflection (Seidman, 2006). Notes and transcripts collected by the researcher from observations and interviews were culled from, email correspondence, online discussion groups, in person, phone, online video or audio recordings, which were transcribed into text via a word processor. Documents were received as or scanned into digital files.

**Data storage**

Maintaining a chain of evidences increased the reliability of data collected for a case study (Yin, 2009). In order so that the case study’s reader could follow the chain of evidence from the initial discovery phase to conclusive, the reader should be able to trace the steps and the evidence. All materials and files were collected properly, organized effectively, stored securely and fully backed-up (Creswell, 2007). All digital files, including digital audio recordings and transcriptions, were stored in a
password protected cloud service (Drop Box) and backed up on a password-protected external hard drive, using Apple’s Timeline software.

Digital materials, downloaded or scanned, were stored on a protected external hard drive using Apple’s Timeline software. All pertinent email communication, such as follow up clarifications, were removed from email server and backed up in an external folder on a hard drive and password protected external hard drive. Observation notes and journals were taken and transcribed digitally into word processor using a tablet or laptop computer, and stored on an external hard drive and in a cloud storage service.

All materials were destroyed after the conclusion of the study. Records of consent and confidentiality were stored following the study in a locked cabinet. Confidentiality will be maintained by using alternative names for individuals and organization that requested anonymity.

Data Analysis

Methodology.

A thorough approach to data collection, storage and retrieval enabled the systematic analysis of the significant amount of data (Creswell, 2007). Data analysis utilized the method of qualitative content analysis (Maxwell, 2005). The analysis on the data centered around categorizing information based on the theoretical frameworks that the case study’s objectives and research questions were based on (Yin, 2009).

Phases.

The data was collected in four phases: 1) Initial collection, review and analysis of organizational documents, along with contextual interviews of key stakeholders; 2) Observation of current network group programs, with analysis of learning practices and behaviors, and follow up questions with key
stakeholders for clarification; 3) Two stages of interviews with participants, with analysis of transcribed conversations throughout the process, enabling follow-up, probing and reflective questioning; 4) Reflective and Follow-up questions with key stakeholders to confirm interpretations develop shared understandings based on the practice that emerges from the research.

In order to organize the collected materials, Creswell (2007) suggests describing the case in summary form and in detail highlighting the major players, settings and activities. To do so required analyzing the multiple Sources of data to establish each step of the evolution and sequence of the case. Throughout the process of collecting the data, the researcher explained, clarified and annotated material.

**Coding.**

To enable effective analysis of the materials, several analysis tools were utilized. Analytic memos provided articulation and reflection before, during and after the process of analysis (Saldana, 2009). Before reviewing notes or transcripts, journal memos throughout the process of the investigation enabled the researcher to consider one’s perspective and stance and process the information as it was acquired. This study required reflection on the emergent patterns, categories, themes and concepts that became part of the classification system for later coding. Additionally, these analytic memos provided an opportunity to reflect and write about the linkages, connections and flow between the individual components of the study woven together. Through reflection and diagramming the network of relationships between and among ideas, causality and influences became clearer.

Creswell (2007) suggests an analysis process for case studies that includes data management and organizing the data into files and folders. When first reading transcribed interviews and observation notes, initially the researcher created memos of the transcripts based on patterns already identified in the original analytic-memos. After the initial reading of the materials and transcripts several times, the
researcher annotated the materials with short memos, reading over material while annotating and winnowing the data.

On a second reading of the transcripts, an initial notation and coding of documents and transcripts occurred via hard copy and digital documents, such as PDF writer. During the second reading, the first round of coding provided the basic descriptive information, including setting, participant characteristics, data format and time frame (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This led to a new set of summary memos that included notable quotes from the transcripts and documents. Following Saldana (2009) suggestion, the researcher used attribute coding to manage the data and provide such essential information by profiling the study’s participants and contextualizing the case situation. Through the use of descriptive coding the researcher identified the topic of the text within a transcript or document and ascribed coding to determine participant’s views, beliefs and attitudes.

A third reading enabled a second round of coding that labeled patterns of language and behavior from within the data based on pre-determined concepts and theory (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The codes utilized for pattern coding evolved from the previous round of descriptive coding (Saldana, 2009). Saldana (2009) describes methods of pattern coding, to develop major themes, theoretical constructs and processes to enable interpretation. The interpretation process aimed to establish patterns and meaning through pattern matching (Yin, 2009). Patterns revealed a relationship between learning practices and behaviors amongst the individuals in the different network group units (Creswell, 2007). This provided an understanding of how and why such outcomes occurred in different units (Yin, 2009). By looking for similarities and differences in the patterns of the individuals and the groups’ behavior, the research identified multiple meanings and themes. Using deductive analysis of the patterns and themes and the actions and attitudes proposed based on the theoretical frameworks strengthened the cases validity (Yin,
2009). By identifying commonality amongst prior codes, the researched developed a statement that described themes, patterns of action and networks of interrelationships, this coding synthesizing the data to inform the explanatory narrative of the case.

These cycles of coding were repeated as necessary to provide for a full analysis of the data for each of research question’s elements. Upon completing the coding process, classification organized codes into categorical groups and sub groups. Creswell (2007) urges coding on multiple levels, such as the multiple cases, contexts, themes and generalizations to increase validity in case studies with multiple embedded unites in a single study. Peer-reviewers reviewed the coded transcripts and notes, along with the memos to validate the analysis and interpretation.

Upon determining the patterns of meaning, naturalistic generalizations were developed to provide lessons to be learned from the case or applied other cases (Creswell, 2007). This provided the form and substance to describe the case as a narrative within the organized framework of the theories established when creating the research study. Creswell (2007) suggests using narratives and tables to present in depth portrait of case.

Initial coding, categorization and grouping were performed in computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, TamsAnalyzer (Yin, 2009). This software supported use on the Mac OSX platform and enabled coding and retrieving, building the analysis of data (Creswell, 2007), as a full-featured qualitative data analysis tool.

**Trustworthiness**

**Validity.**

The nature of qualitative research in the case study mode depended upon the extensive time spent on site with participants, relying on relationships built on trust. In consideration of validating the
study, the researcher accounted for the trustworthiness of process in consideration of themselves, the participants and the readers (Creswell, 2007). The procedures integrated into the research process protected the participants, brought transparency to the role of the researchers and communicated clearly any bias to the reader. Peer review provided review and feedback. These peers were selected from colleagues within the field of Jewish education and others familiar with network learning models from the general field of education and non-profits. This review extended to the data collection protocols, analysis and interpretation to ensure the validity of the researcher’s process and conclusions.

**Procedures.**

Utilizing two interviews, based on the three interview structure, presented by Seidman (2006), contextualized the gathered data to check for consistency, and allowed for idiosyncrasies within specific interviews. This process also allowed interviewees to better create meaning, by understanding their experience over time. Providing interviewees the opportunity to review transcripts ensured a check for accuracy, mission information or misinterpretation after each round of interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Creswell (2007) urges triangulation by using multiple methods to gather data from multiple different Sources, which in this study came from multiple participants from multiple embedded units. The triangulation corroborated findings to reveal a richer and more verifiable set of meaning, themes and perspectives.

**Limitations.**

Several aspects of this study’s design limited its trustworthiness. Accessibility to stakeholders and participants, preventing access to the fullest extent of data gathered from consistent Sources of information. Participants may not have been fully forthright and honest about their experiences, out of fear of repercussions, embarrassment to lacking the desire to disappoint the site organization.
Participants may have lacked a common understanding of key elements of study, such as organizational learning practice or network theory and functions. Due to the researcher’s role as a consultant for the host organization, participants may have been confused about the role of the researcher and the researcher’s desire to study versus fix problems addressed. As the researcher operated within the same field, and even operated in collegial and friend networks with participants, some may have felt compelled to treat the researcher with less transparency, or even expect a relationship beyond the one defined as interviewer and interviewee.

The researcher’s professional and network positioning resulted from his role as an educator colleague, a rabbinic authority and an active participant in formal and informal networks in the field. These roles required full transparency and sensitivity on the researcher’s part when engaging with the study’s participants. This is due both to potential bias, but also unintentional influence the researcher’s professional standing might have had on research subjects. The researcher’s position may have influence within the field of Jewish education. The researcher has demonstrated investment in the value of networks and network learning as positive constructs for the organization and the field. The researcher must place a greater emphasis on enabling participants to share honestly and directly about their practices and attitudes in regards to their experiences and aspirations for network-learning. As the researcher continuously engaged in practicing and studying organizational learning and its applications to networks, the researcher needed to be constantly aware and guarded to not over rely on any assumptions of knowledge and language. This applied when gathering, analyzing and interpreting data, but rather allowed the protocols outlined in this proposal to inform the process of analysis and interpretation.

**Delimitations.**
In selecting as a site an organization with a specific mission as a non-profit serving a network of Jewish community day schools, the study focused on a precise organization in a particular field serving a distinct group of member organizations. This enabled common features amongst groups and participants, including language, common goals and familiarity with the subject matter of the study. Despite the researcher’s presence in the field in which the site organization operated within, the researcher had interaction with the site organization and the network group participants. With no prior engagement in this specific area of service, prior to the researcher’s role as a consultant with and the researcher’s study, the limited exposure limited bias, and did not alter researcher’s perspective or affect the participant’s responses. To mitigate any concerns of bias, the researcher’s involvement were clearly articulated and framed in relation to the researcher’s role as a consultant. Throughout the research process, the researcher continuously reminded the site’s key stakeholders and the network group’s participants, of the researcher’s roles and intentions, as well as the potential benefits to the organization and the members of its network groups.

Positionality Statement

A positivist approach to a qualitative case study research relies on culling out the multiple subjective meanings of the experience studied and described (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In quantitative research, the role of the researcher is claimed by one’s attributes including, “age, gender, race, class, nationality, institutional affiliation, historical and personal circumstance, and intellectual predisposition” (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 115). Revealing my positionality circumvented any influence on my observations, interviews, analysis and interpretations.

Professional position.

My significant role, experience and training as a professional in the fields of Jewish education
and non-profit leadership provided me ample knowledge of the culture, vocabulary and players in these networks. While this knowledge provided me with strong contextual understanding to serve my research, it also positioned me as a colleague, and even as a potential competitor. As an educator, I maintained a stance of wanting to learn about the work of others in my field, to connect with new colleagues and develop professional relationships. As an organizational leader, I understand the value proposition the organization’s network group’s members face in investing time and energy into the learning experiences. As someone who leverages my own personal learning network to enhance my professional standing and knowledge, I recognized the value of understanding how individuals and organizations must improve and maximize their network-learning. My professional standing and integration into these networks provided me the stature that appealed to my site organization in allowing me access to their organization, its network and the network group’s members.

**Authority position.**

As a Rabbinic figure, I am in a position of authority that may influence potential interview subjects, who might not be as forthcoming with me or create Perceived bias towards institutions or a specific approach to learning. I created trust between myself and the site organization’s leadership, and the network group’s members, primarily made up of senior educational leaders, by identifying primarily as a fellow educator and organizational leader. As a parent, my investment in the field of Jewish education and practice goes beyond my role as a practitioner and scholar. With my own children attending Jewish day schools, I needed to limit my judgment of failed practices or ambivalence that I may perceive as negatively impacting my children.

**Networks position.**

My relationships evolved from connections between colleagues and leaders in the field that I
have developed through personal, communal and professional networks. In the case of pre-existing relationships with potential subjects of the study, my connection with them built trust, but will also require framing of myself as a researcher, rather than whatever role our prior connection stemmed from. I am invested in a variety of formal networks, such as alumni and professional associations, and informal networks, such as my online professional network primarily cultivated through social media platforms. This required that I was clear about my stance as a researcher and the motivations for my study. For those introduced to me in my role as a consultant for the site organization, I needed to be clear about my role when conducting observations and interviews when primarily serving in my research and scholarship.

**Generational position.**

My position within network platforms has been to educate and connect others in discovering means of disrupting status quo models of behavior around learning practices. I actively promoted ways of utilizing technology and progressive learning frameworks increase performance. My age and experience situated me as a bridge between baby boomer and generation X leaders, and the millennial generation they serve. This placed me in a position to create alliances and new understandings due to my familiarity and comfort with new innovative methods and tools. This position also located me as an outsider who appreciates the values and language of the past and current generation of leadership. I have also adopted many of value systems, practices and attitudes of a younger generation. This is reflected in my bias towards transformative leadership, disruptive innovation, network and systems thinking and a predilection for process over product measurements, developed as a result of my scholarly and practitioner work.
**Values position.**

My values system required transparency about my bias for enhanced network-learning on an individual, group or organizational level. My own network-learning provided me personally with growth and success, as well as enhanced the performance of the organizations I have worked within and led. My experience, education and training provided me with a comfort level towards relationship building through technology, and the capacity to use new media and digital technology to acquire, interpret and share new information. My use of Twitter, Facebook and other online platforms serve as an integral part to my individual learning process. As an organizational leader, I utilized technology to enhance how members of the organizations share knowledge cultivated internally and externally. Technology and learning practices enabled the utilization of this knowledge base of the group and inform organizational policy and action.

**Field position.**

I see my role in the field of education and non-profit management as a change agent to create thriving individuals, organizations and communities to benefit the Jewish people, community and society at large. I utilized innovation processes to create evolutionary and disruptive changes on the organizational and field-wide level in order enable continuous growth, and to create a sustainable model for an ever-changing world. This stance guaranteed a bias towards those within the organization’s network and the organization itself that prefer a survivalist approach towards assuring the health of the organization and the field. I was careful to listen with a non-judgmental stance to those I am observing and interviewing to not allow my bias to impede the information I gathered, rather than to inform my interpretation or analysis.
Consultant position.

In my relationship with the site organization, I paid special attention to the dual nature of my role as a researcher and a consultant. My knowledge, experience, skills and network reach encouraged the organization to enlist me to enhance their network-learning strategy and implementation. However, my capacity to offer expertise positioned me as an insider, both to be trusted enough with access and as an outsider able to study, evaluate and offer suggestions for future implementation. My consultancy put me in a situation to reinforced any susceptibility to bias, both because I was hired to further the organization’s growth, and because I wanted to maintain distance as a researcher.

I was continuously aware of how my interest in successfully fulfilling my paid role impacts my research. The organization needed to provide clear framing and constant reminders that my research provides ample opportunities for knowledge that enabled me to provide valuable models and create new learning strategies for the organization. Nevertheless, because I was paid to interact with my subjects and to utilize my knowledge, much of which was gained through my research, to improve the organization, I was clear that my professional role cannot impact my analysis, interpretation or ultimate case study of the organization. I utilized my case study research to provide a higher quality level model of organizational and network-learning for the organization to implement based on the findings and description of the research.

Leadership position.

Beyond the site organization, my research positioned me as a leader in the field of Jewish education and communal service, by providing expertise of the role and practices of network-learning on individual, organizational and field-wide levels. Because the case study provided a portrait of organization’s actual practices based on sound theoretical frameworks, organizations and individuals
valuing network-learning. This was provided as a means for describing, measuring and eNatanancing their own network-learning processes. For those resistant or ambivalent to network-learning, this case study provided them a much needed narrative to better understand its value and the means to introduce this approach to organizational improvement and growth. This study will affect my relationship with the 150+ schools in the site organization’s network and their respective individual members who operate within the formalized and facilitated networks.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the results and analysis of the study’s research. It also provides the contextual background for the study, and an in-depth analysis of the data collected, taking into account the relationship of the data to the research questions used in designing the study. Summary findings address each research question.

Research Questions

This research addressed the primary question: How does a non-profit facilitate organizational learning to cultivate network relationships amongst individuals and groups? This primary question was approached through two sub-questions: (1) What learning activities, on individual and group levels, facilitate and promote the sharing and interpretation of knowledge within networks? (2) How do individuals engage in network-learning?

Study Context

This qualitative study aimed to describe how organizational learning occurs within a network operated by a non-profit in service of its affiliated members’ needs. Over a six-month period, this study explored the School Network’s extended network groups, and spoke with group participants to understand and describe their learning behaviors and patterns in the context of organizational learning. The School Network, a non-profit, serves member schools that make up its network of private schools. The School Network cultivated these network groups to strengthen both the member schools and the overall field of Jewish education. The network groups provided participants from member schools with
a network to cultivate relationships, share knowledge, and collaborate with others having common affinities and interests.

**Data Collection**

At the outset, the researcher obtained information through an initial survey (see Appendix D) followed by interviews (see Appendix E) with the network group’s participants. Providing contextual information for the School Network and its network groups required the researcher to collect formal documents from the organization. These background documents included business plans, strategic memos and correspondence between the School Network and group participants (see Appendices F and G). Additionally, the researcher engaged in background conversations with organizational stakeholders. Further triangulation occurred through observation of the network group’s online activity via the group’s Google Group list-serv. All data were collected between June 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2013 and November 30\textsuperscript{th}, 2013.

**Study participants.**

**Survey**

A total of four members, each of them participants in three of the School Network’s network groups, participated in the study. The survey enabled the participants to provide background information on their schools and their roles within their schools. The survey also provided participants a forum to address their general understanding of networks, network learning and professional learning. Participants also responded to questions about their personal engagement in social media, online learning and professional learning experiences.

**Interviews**

In initial interviews, conducted individually via the phone, Skype and Google+ Hangout, each participant was given an opportunity to describe their engagement in organizational learning, and
particularly their learning behaviors within the School Network’s network groups. In secondary interviews, participants were able to share reflections on their first interview responses and to describe in more detail their engagement in organizational learning within the network groups. The background information and observations provided a means to correlate and contextualize the data provided by the study participants.

Data Coding and Analysis

Data collected from the materials, observations, contextual conversations, surveys and interviews were initially processed through research memos. These memos provided initial reactions and reflections on the materials, while encouraging the creation of sorting categories and keywords that provided the basis for coding the interview data. Each interview transcript was provided with attribute coding to designate its set of data based on particular information (Saldana, 2009). This information included the name of the study participant who provided the data, that individual’s role within their school, and the type and date of the data provided. Coding was completed using the TAMSAnalyzer software on the imported digital files of the transcribed interviews. Initial codes were entered prior to analysis, while additional codes were added through the coding cycles.

The first cycle of coding involved an initial review of the transcribed interview, and the use of in vivo coding techniques that discovered codes within the language of the text (Saldana, 2009). Descriptive coding utilized these terms, along with terms from the literature review of network-learning and organizational learning. The codes themselves correlated with the keywords provided by the research memos. During the coding process, additional sub-codes provided a greater amount of specificity and details for later analysis. The second cycle of coding evolved out of the analytic memos and utilized pattern codes to identify emerging themes. These codes identified patterns of relationship,
the causes of certain learning behaviors and processes that defined constructs of engagement. The second cycle of coding also reduced redundancies, omissions and incorrect codes applied during the initial cycle of coding. See Table 4.1 for a breakdown of codes developed through the use of pattern and categorical coding. Analytic memos of the coded transcripts identified thematic categories to organize coded material. These themes guided the inductive process that provided the theoretical model for addressing the research questions.

Table 3
Coding: Themes and Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern Coding (Theme)</th>
<th>Final Coding (Category)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking Questions</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitation</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to Questions</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Value</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal to Professional</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sake of Learning</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Practices</td>
<td>Organizational Learning Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimentation</td>
<td>Organizational Learning Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning From Experience</td>
<td>Organizational Learning Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Organizational Learning Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferring Knowledge</td>
<td>Organizational Learning Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalizing New Routines</td>
<td>Learning Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalizing System Changes</td>
<td>Learning Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Sharing</td>
<td>Learning Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Learning Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Learning Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Interpretation</td>
<td>Learning Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuiting Experiences</td>
<td>Learning Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Discovery</td>
<td>Learning Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Others</td>
<td>Learning Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to Share</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectivity</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult Decisions</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Term Solutions</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructed Through Experience</td>
<td>Knowledge Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructed Through Study</td>
<td>Knowledge Type</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The primary research questions and subsequent sub-questions guided the process of analyzing the data. In reviewing the coded interview excerpts from study participants, a descriptive narrative unfolded which addressed the research questions’ exploration of a networked non-profit’s members engaged in organizational learning. The learning behaviors that members described correlated with the observed patterns of learning occurring within the network group’s list-serv exchanges. These behaviors occurred within the context of the design and facilitation of the School Network’s staff and stakeholders, some resulting intentionally from their design, and others unintentionally. The observed communications and interactions within the exchanges served to provide context and correlation for the themes that developed out of the study participants’ learning behaviors and their resulting actions. Each of these thematic constructs directly responds to the study’s research questions.

**Organizational Learning in Networks**

The non-profit described in this study functioned as a network that aimed to provide basic needs and resources to its member organizations. The School Network’s desire to facilitate organizational learning is rooted in its central aim to cultivate network relationships amongst its member schools’ individual leaders. According the School Network’s Associate Executive Director, the organization has long provided means for its member organizations to grow, develop and secure stronger stability in the field. The School Network sought to expand its impact by creating network groups to achieve its overall
goals through the distinct approach of network learning. The School Network communicated this in their promotional materials, including their strategic plan ("Strengthening [the School Network] to strengthen the field: a 5-Year business plan," 2012). The School Network’s staff, and even some of the study participants, affirmed that the recently created network groups provided a developing space for learning and relationships. The study participants expressed that the organization’s stated intentions and goals did not always correspond to their own motivations, which impacted their learning experiences.

To understand the capacity for these network groups to promote learning practices required an appreciation of the participants whom the School Network included in the groups. Focusing first on their relationship to the School Network, and second on their relationship to other network participants, helped to define the parameters for involvement in the network groups. Each participant offered different degrees and sources of motivation for engaging in the network group, which in turn provided a window into their perception of the value of the experience. Ultimately the extent of participants’ investment in the relationship building and organizational learning practices depended more on the value proposition these experiences offered them, and less on the real value of the learning.

**Participant profiles.**

In an initial email distributed to the members of each of the network groups, the School Network created network groups to “launch … a series of focused, curated professional networks, each with a unique focus” in order to “explore and advance the broad range of issues facing Judaic leaders in Jewish community day schools” (see appendix F). The Associate Executive Director explained that these groups were intended to foster stronger network relationships amongst the leadership of their school network’s member schools. Each of these networks addressed different leadership roles in their member schools: 1) Heads of Schools; 2) Judaic Directors; and 3) ECC Directors. The participants in this study
included individuals from each of these groups. Participants also represented a range of levels of professional experience, and years in their role. Participants’ schools varied in size, location, city size and size of Jewish population. See Table 4.1 for a breakdown of the participant demographics. The study participants are:

**Rabbi Clayton**

Rabbi Clayton serves as a Judaic principal of a mid-size K-8 community school in a small Jewish community. He actively engaged in social media for online learning, primarily on Twitter and social bookmarking. He crafted a Professional Learning Network (PLN) and utilized list-servs to connect with professionals in the field, appreciating the directness and ability to ask questions and respond to other peoples’ questions that interested him. Rabbi Clayton sought out online learning opportunities that provided him the opportunity for deep commitment and involvement with a group. His learning goals included personal interests and a professional awareness of what is going on in the field. He understood learning engagement in two modes: "Actively- by participating in a variety of ‘programs’ with a specific goal or purpose. Passively - by monitoring and following a variety of list-servs.” He liked to experiment with new modes of engagement and recently began to add Diigo and Twitter as part of his PLN “tools." He defined networks as "[m]eeting and connecting with members of the profession." He placed his trust in closed networks due to the screening process involved in becoming a part of those networks, and the presumed commitment their participants have to learning within their adopted network.

**Natan**

Natan is the head of school of a mid-size K-8 community school in a large metropolitan city. Natan supported his professional learning and efforts to connect with others by being active in social networks, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Pinterest. Natan defined a network as a "group of
people that are linked by common interests, goals, or circumstance." He engaged in online and hybrid networks in order to locate and read articles and engaged in consultancies (either via video conferencing or in person). He preferred closed networks because “those I belong to are generally more focused and directly related to my work.” He found social networking easy, and he appreciated the vast networks at his fingertips that enabled him to connect to others who used such sites for professional learning purposes. He liked to frequently engage with Facebook groups, such as JEDLAB, the email digest e-Jewish Philanthropy, and other sources to gather new knowledge and ideas.

Natan perceived network-learning as being important for his own personal growth, growth in his role in his school and for the organization itself, but, most importantly, for his professional growth. Natan defined learning in networks as the opportunity to "share ideas, resources, experiences, and advice." Network-learning offered him the capacity to satisfy professional goals, but he needed his efforts to be personally fulfilling as well, so that he didn’t get weighed down by the day-to-day. His efforts fulfilled his purpose to engage with others in order to collaborate, share ideas, gather feedback and further his own inquiry. He wished to use his time engaging in network-learning to develop new ideas and to gather knowledge from outside sources.

Rachel

Rachel serves as the principal for an elementary school (K-5) in a suburb of a large metropolitan and heavily Jewish populated city with a variety of Jewish schooling options. Rachel engaged sparingly in social networks, limiting her participation to content sites, such as You Tube, Pinterest and the School Network’s list-serv for her network group. She said that her inability to find a useful network has prevented her from further engagement. She engaged in online webinars as well as in in-person opportunities for learning, such as workshops, seminars and conferences.
Rachel defined a network as "a formal way to collaborate with like-minded professionals." The content of the networks was more critical to her likelihood for engagement in them than whether the boundaries of the network were open or closed. She viewed learning in networks as a means "to connect with others and to learn from one other". Her primary purpose for engagement was to further her own inquiry and to gather knowledge from outside sources. She felt it is very important to engage in network-learning for personal and professional growth, for the benefit of her school as much as for her own benefit.

**Diane**

Diane serves in the role of Head of School for an Early Childhood Center in a small urban city with a very small Jewish population in a region with few Jewish schooling options. She engaged very frequently in social networks, particularly Facebook, but limited her engagement to personal rather than professional purposes. She perceived social networks as best serving social interactions or promotional purposes, and not for learning. She defined networks as "a group of people sharing ideas on a common field".

Diane viewed network-learning as a means to "to find out things I was not aware of or to learn more in areas I already knew something about." Diane engaged in network-learning because it provides the opportunity to collaborate, share ideas and gather feedback with others. Diane engaged in connecting with others to learn through participation in a community of practice, in online seminars, as well as in in-person engagements, such as workshops, seminars and conferences. She found it important to learn within networks for personal and professional growth and increase her school’s ability to achieve its mission and grow.
## Table 4

Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Community Type</th>
<th>City Size</th>
<th>Network Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rabbi</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>Small Jewish Community</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Judaic Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clayton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natan</td>
<td>Head of School</td>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>Large Jewish Community</td>
<td>Large (Suburbs)</td>
<td>Head of School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>Large Jewish Community</td>
<td>Large (Suburbs)</td>
<td>Judaic Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Head of School</td>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
<td>Small Jewish Community</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Head of School &amp; Early Childhood Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Network groups defined.

Figure 3
Themes and Sub-themes: Organizational Learning in
Intentions for engagement.

In early 2013, the School Network’s staff and leadership, as part of its strategic business plan, initiated the network groups examined in this study. The Network’s Associate Executive Director provided insight into the strategy outlined in "Strengthening [the School Network] to strengthen the field: a 5-Year business plan" 2012) which set goals for establishing these groups. The School Network viewed their purpose as fostering relationships amongst network members in a manner that developed real connections, while allowing the organization to depart from its primary mode of serving exclusively as a central hub for its members. Before the network groups were created, acquiring new knowledge was predicated on members having access to staff personnel. According to the Associate Director, network members relied on staff to share knowledge gathered from the staff’s own knowledge base or from their connections within the network. Developing a more diverse network would make knowledge more easily identifiable and findable within network. The network groups were created as a place for members to share resources, and provide access to larger and more diverse bodies of knowledge and experience. In addition to expanding the membership’s knowledge base and diversifying connectivity, the School Network sought to increase opportunities for collaboration between schools, and to enhance awareness of their member schools’ achievements and strengths. Ultimately, the School Network aimed to deepen the value of the field of education and improve their member schools through the cultivation of learning throughout their own network.

Network group structure.

The School Network’s endeavor to create network groups with an intentional purpose of cultivating learning and collaboration necessitated defining the boundaries for participation. Rather than
creating a single group for individuals from member schools to participate in, they decided to administer separate closed groups for individuals from different member schools who filled the same specific leadership roles. As these were closed intentional groups, organized and facilitated by the non-profit, the organization, rather than the participants, determined its boundaries and structure. In addition, rather than opening up the groups to voluntary participants, who may or may not have had the qualifications to enhance the group, the School Network opted to utilize its own rosters to define who would be involved. The School Network opted to automatically include in the network groups’ online list-serv and Google Group only those educational leaders it deemed worthy, based on their professional titles and roles with the School Network’s affiliated schools. The Associate Executive Director outlined these parameters in an initial post to each of the network groups. The initial post to the Judaic Director’s network group can be viewed as Appendix G.

All members were initially opted in without their consent or stated interest. They received an email from a staff person notifying them of the School Network’s intention to form the network group, and some were invited to join in an initial conference call. School Network staff members emailed members of the various network groups, identifying the purpose of the group and which volunteer participants would engage in facilitation, and explaining how to participate. (See Appendix F for the letter sent to the Judaic Director network group.) Other staff members or participants who volunteered as facilitators followed up these emails. (See Appendix G for the initial post by the Associate Executive Director to the Judaic Director network group.) Each participant had already received information on how to technologically best access and utilize the group online platform. While this approach quickly populated the network groups with the School Network’s targeted participants, study subjects shared that this approach prevented the School Network from triggering the participant’s latent motivation to
engage and establish value from their network group experience. Without the participants’ own motivation being the primary reason for their inclusion, the School Network needed to demonstrate how this new network group would be valuable to them. The School Network’s Associate Director shared that the staff presumed that the members themselves would generate activity that would produce identifiable value, through some form of direct or indirect facilitation.

_Facilitation of network group._

The Staff described the process through which the School Network aimed to facilitate the network groups. Initially the Network assigned staff to develop the network groups. These staff members worked with a consultant, through a third party network development program, to establish the new intentional closed network groups. The consultant explained that she encouraged the School Network to enlist either a staff consultant or self-initiating participants of the network groups to provide stewardship and facilitation for the groups. These individuals were tasked with demonstrating to the groups’ participants the value of engagement and identifying those individuals with the necessary motivation to participate in a fulfilling manner. For each of the initial network groups, School Network staff enlisted participants with whom they had prior relationships to serve as group leaders and facilitators. Additionally, the School Network hired outside consultants (including the researcher) who were insiders to their network of schools and had familiarity with the participant groups. These consultants were tasked with amplifying the volunteer participants’ efforts and determining the best ways to facilitate each individual network group’s participation.

Effective facilitation of the network groups required a clear and direct approach that highlighted the development of the relationships between group members and of the concept of the network group itself. The initial process of creating the new network groups involved School Network staff inputting
all the member’s emails and sending an initial email to the group welcoming participants. This initial email, found in each network group’s Google Group’s list-serv (see Appendix G), described the group’s purpose and the intentions and aspirations for the network.

By reviewing the series of emails archived in each network group’s Google Group, the researcher identified the processes of facilitation and subsequent engagement. Facilitation later took the form of key participants engaging in the conversations that played out on the network group’s Google Group list-serv. The volunteer facilitators initiated conversations amongst the groups’ participants to encourage new engagement and sharing. When a participant initiated conversation through sharing or asking a question, the facilitator intervened only if the conversation went cold. The facilitator also extended the conversation for greater depth or breadth. In order to expand involvement, the facilitator also invited participants to join in conversations that might be of interest to them and motivate them for further engagement.

The facilitators extended their role beyond the exchanges of information on the Google Group’s list-serv. Facilitators were also described by study participants and staff as making connections between individuals who were seeking knowledge and those who had knowledge, by utilizing their familiarity with network group members. Facilitators also encouraged participants with similar interests to form offline conversations and even to engage in potential collaborations to address problems and create new projects. As a means of maximizing the new knowledge created from the network groups’ conversations, the facilitators organized the information for archival purposes. The facilitators thus shared the new knowledge with group participants in a more organized and accessible manner.

*Participants’ goals.*

The activity of the network group participants in the Google Group revealed engagement focused
on their efforts to address specific opportunities, problems or day-to-day issues they faced in their administrative roles. Participants engaged others in the group in order to best strategize and take action in their own settings. Those most motivated to engage in the group’s list-serv wanted to share knowledge with other members and received feedback to modify their own application or understanding of their knowledge. Their activity in the network group provided them the means to develop collegial professional relationships from within both their network of schools and the larger field. Participants wanted the space to reflect on their individual learning and the time to evaluate their network experience.

**Factors for engagement.**

For participants to be motivated to achieve their own goals or even identify goals for engagement, they needed to recognize or at least perceive participant ownership of their group. At first, this needed to be enacted by the School Network’s staff leadership. The staff leaders delivered a clear message to network group participants about the intended goals for participant engagement. One of the study’s participants noted that his engagement was dependent on his ability to “find out what is the goal of this and who are they here to serve.” Clarity from the School Network built trust amongst the network’s participants and motivated them to self-organize. This was evidenced in the network groups, where participants took on roles as facilitators, such as Diane with her early childhood network group.

While School Network staff at first selected potential leaders from their prior connections, the initial enthusiasm of these volunteer participant leaders eventually waned and their degree of ownership and facilitation declined. The volunteer leadership required a greater degree of commitment to the group and the process than even the staff leadership, who were motivated by their jobs. According to Rabbi Clayton, “they need to realize what is their role and how much responsibility they have to either move the [network group] forward or just be passive for what it is.”
Commitment to participation in the network first and foremost depended on the participants’ willingness to devote time to connecting with others and sharing in the conversations on the list-serv. Several study participants noted that time can be a barrier to further engagement, but the more time they invested, the more they expected to see reward on their investment. Taking a leadership role in the network groups required even more time to follow all the conversations, reach out to other participants and organize information to share with others. The extent of participants’ needs for learning was attributable to their roles in their respective schools and to the particular features of their school, such as size and location. One study participant who initiated the creation of her network group and served as a volunteer facilitator found that her commitment resulted from the isolation she felt in both her school’s setting as an early childhood director and its geographic isolation in a city with a small Jewish population.

Several study participants acknowledged that their commitment to their specific network group also depended on their ability to access other network options. Some referenced other online list-servs, including one for a Jewish education leadership program’s alumni group. For others, social media outlets, such as Twitter or Facebook, provided the necessary network for gathering new knowledge and exchanging ideas. One participant preferred the benefits of a direct engagement with a professional coach. The more these other options provided participants with better alternatives for acquiring knowledge and meaningful connections, the less likely they would be to commit to engaging in the School Network’s network group.

**Impact of prior relationships.**

Relationships provided a key to participants’ willingness to commit to and benefit from their network group involvement. For many of the study participants, their involvement offered them a unique
opportunity to connect with others. Diane shared, “I think I hope to connect a bunch of people together that otherwise had no idea who each other are.” The common affinity amongst participants in these closed network groups made relationships possible. Rabbi Clayton explained that,

when you're in the Jewish Community Day School [network], which is what the [School Network] is, no two schools are the same and no two Jewish communities are the same, but you need to know and to have a feel of what is the so-called standards or the standards that are out there of what Jewish Day Schools are doing.

Rabbi Clayton further explained that he would have joined the School Network’s network group no matter what, but familiarity with others in the group meant that he was “not going into unknown territory,” and provided him extra incentive to be engaged. Upon entering into the group, the typical time that he would have been spent silently observing the group’s activity was cut shorter because he knew some of the people in the group. His preexisting familiarity with others in the group enabled him “to weigh in and give credibility to what people are saying.” Natan claimed that he most appreciated the networks that contained colleagues with whom he had previously shared experiences. He said that he would be more likely to reach out to a colleague whom he had a relationship with than to someone in a specific network group with whom he had no other connection.

Various offline means of engagement provided sources for cultivating relationships prior to or during participation in the School Network’s network groups. All of the study participants referenced School Network conferences that provided in-person opportunities to engage with others in the field. The participants were exposed to new ideas from outside experts and to best practices from others working in similar schools or even different ones in the field of Jewish education. All the participants cited engagement in networks that served other constituencies than the one served by the School
Network as being critical to their fostering relationships in the field. Networks that served alumni of leadership development and academic programs provided unique resources and connections for Rabbi Clayton, Rachel and Natan. Other affinity groups oriented around Jewish denominational groups provided learning and relationships for Diane and Rabbi Clayton. The School Network’s own programs for heads of schools provided Diane with many important relationships with other leaders in similar schools, as well as strong ties to the School Network staff. Each of these opportunities had helped study participants foster prior relationships with others in the network groups. These other networks had also provided them the experience in navigating the network dynamics and associated technology that were critical features of the network groups.

**Participants’ motivation for engagement.**

*Intrinsic motivation.*

The motivating factors for a participant’s engagement greatly impacted the quality and degree of their involvement in the learning process. Several study participants revealed that their initial involvement in the network groups directly resulted from their personal drive to learn, while recognizing that any personal learning affected their professional learning. Rabbi Clayton acknowledged that his investment originated in his drive to do better and be more knowledgeable so as to be more fulfilled in his professional capacity. Rachel recognized that beyond the learning she did for the benefit of her role and her school, she was also “just working on myself to be patient and tolerant.” Her learning process originated in her personal desire to improve and grow from learning, so as to be better able to support her colleagues and school. Rachel’s search for growth led her to participate in online learning experiences and networks that did not address professional needs, but rather was “ongoing work …all your life to improve the self of who you are as a human being [which is] not practical at all. It's far from
being practical. It's more reflective, being [a] reflective human being.” This led Rachel to participate in an online seminar through the author Parker Palmer which introduced her to other like-minded people looking for growth through Palmer’s teachings, whom she met through discussion groups provided by the class.

**Learning for learning’s sake.**

Participants’ motivation to engage evolved out of their desire to seek out independent opportunities to be better educated in their areas of interest, be it general education or Jewish education. Rachel explained that the goal of her efforts to further her studies was to learn more about general education. She reflected, “[S]ometimes if I feel like I don’t know enough, then I will do anything to get the information, right. So, I will take a class. I will buy a book.” Rabbi Clayton’s motivation to learn originated in the very reason he endeavored to be an educator. He explained that,

I need to be learning in order to feel fulfilled in what I’m doing. So, one of the reasons I ever went into Jewish education, or education in general, was because … I would be in a learning environment, like a formal learning environment, every day.

A general love of learning motivated the participants to be open to engaging in the network groups and other sources of online learning. As Rachel said, “I like to learn online. I like to learn with a friend. I like to take a class. I like to go to conferences. I like to learn by myself as well. I'm into any kind of learning.” Natan participated because he saw his participation as providing a model for the love of learning. Natan explained,

I like to be able to say, and it’s important to me, I like to be able to say to my teachers and my students that I also am engaged in learning regularly. Whether it’s on-line, or whether it’s with the going to seminars or classes around here, or to DSLTI retreats, those kinds of things.
**Feeling of connection.**

The desire for connection with others in the field that share familiar experiences motivated them to enter into opportunities for building new relationships. Rabbi Clayton noted that involvement in the School Network’s network group “expands and gives you the connections.” Natan found motivation in his desire to be aware of what other people are dealing with:

I wanted to be part of it because I had such positive experience with networks like that in the past especially because again this was a specialized one. It wasn't just Jewish education, but it was [the School Network] community schools and it was community school’s head of school. It's an even more specific cohort. Positive experiences with networks made me feel like this would be a worthwhile thing to do.

While many participants said that their personal satisfaction in learning and growing was critical to their motivation, so too was their desire to share with others and enable them to grow. Yet, as Natan explained, his desire to share the knowledge he gained with others, and ultimately his motivation to learn, was about “my own fulfillment and my school’s fulfillment.”

**Extrinsic motivation.**

Rachel considered anything that would improve her work to be worthy motivation for engagement. Participants recognized that filling the gaps in their own knowledge proved to be a critical extrinsic motivator. Rabbi Clayton sought out new knowledge and skills that would help him write curriculum, adapt pedagogy for different groups of students. He explained that his need for knowledge came down to “whether [I was] able to take something home from it, whether [I gained] something practical, realistic, something that I could have used and applied either in my classroom or in my
administrative work.” Natan felt motivated once he identified new areas that he knew little about. Learning through network groups allowed him to continue to keep aware of new areas of interest.

Many gaps in knowledge originate when professionals change roles within a school or transition to a new school. Rabbi Clayton described his transition from being a teacher to becoming an administrator as an essential shift that caused him to seek new sources of knowledge. He explained these knowledge gaps as:

one of my biggest worries, because as a teacher I, so to speak, relied on my supervisors, administrators to come up with all these workshops and seminars and ideas that they think I should work on, and I would follow through on them. As an administrator, I would be the one that's responsible in finding my own professional development plan.

Natan realized that “there's so much that I don’t know even in terms of content, but also management, human relations.[It’s j]ust so complex. I latched on to whatever learning communities I could and I accepted all the invitations that I could.”

Diane sought learning opportunities not just to fill the gaps in her knowledge, but also to validate or invalidate her own assumptions. She reasoned, “I might decide not to do something because I’ve also heard other schools say, 'Yeah, that’s really difficult,’ so I might find that that might happen also, which is ok.” Similarly, Rachel identified dilemmas in her work, such as developing curriculum for her teachers about how to teach Israel. Rabbi Clayton identified a goal or an issue he was struggling with, and strove to engage with others to see how other schools might have been handling that goal. Doing so provided the opportunity to take knowledge he gained from others and then “learn and help me put it in context of my school.”
Perceived value from engagement

The value of the participants’ network-learning experience must be considered both in terms of the value they perceive and the actual value they received in reality. The participants were motivated to seek perceived value within the network groups. Rabbi Clayton saw the network group as offering him access to peers and a knowledge base. He shared,

[W]hat I'm looking for is hearing, being able to use the [network group] as a resource that taps into the years of experience, the knowledge base that is there as a resource for when I have a question [or] problem or just want some insight or get a feel for what's going on out there, so that when we talk about different situations within our school I could say, “Well, in other Jewish day schools they're either struggling with the same thing, or this is a norm,” or like anything else. Rabbi Clayton’s anticipation of what the network group could provide him compelled him to engage.

For Rachel, engagement in the network group was seen as an opportunity to access a new pool of potential teacher hires. She was also looking for new resources, such as books, articles and magazines. Beyond just new information sources, Rachel perceived the groups as being a valuable resource for developing her skills. She explained that she anticipates being able to develop the skills she needs, such as “collaborative learning, intrinsic motivation, questioning, critical thinking, and stuff like that.” She perceived the groups as being able to provide the skills and common practices that will improve her professional expertise.

Knowledge found in network.

The acquisition of real knowledge provided great value to each of the study’s participants. Rachel benefited from gathering knowledge relevant to any Jewish day schools. She saw value in the group’s ability to pool good questions and good answers to help everyone involved. She viewed the
assembling of people who can share case studies, concerns, ideas and projects as being the greatest value of the group. Rabbi Clayton recognized that the process of finding valuable knowledge is like “mining for diamonds, you've got to go through a lot of stuff before you find the one thing that you find that can be useful. You just never know when you're going to find it.” He viewed it as critically valuable to find knowledge to affirm what he was doing within his school. He viewed the global knowledge derived from the conversations within the network group as enabling him to better understand the field of Jewish day schools, and to extrapolate best practices from those conversations for his own school. Diane found value in getting to hear what colleagues were working on. She explained that she wants to hear about “ideas I might not have had, or … an idea that I do have, perhaps done in a different way that I didn’t think of.”

_connectivity with other participants._

Beyond the acquisition of knowledge, participants found value particularly in the network group’s capacity to provide a space for making meaningful connections. Rabbi Clayton found value in the School Network’s particular network group because “there are many well-meaning Jewish Study Directors that have a lot of passion for what they do, are very committed to the Jewish Life of the school.” He felt better connected when he engaged with others who actively participate in their school’s growth and improvement in areas of pedagogy. He wanted to be connected to those leaders that raise up the image and the practice of Jewish education, not only in their school, but in this country, because if one of us is strong, we all become strong, and I think that is something I'm still hoping to get out of it or put into it or be as a result of it.

Natan wanted to see his involvement as enabling his school to be connected to the bigger conversations taking place about education in general and Jewish education in particular. He viewed this
valuable resource as reducing his own school’s isolation. He provided an example, saying that “when there was that conversation about admitting non-Jewish students I connected with a couple of people.” While this critical conversation provided him with connections, he admitted, “it hasn’t continued but when we met in person it did take the connection to another level that I am now more comfortable with them.” Natan explained that the group provides value because when you connect with multiple people who can provide a pattern of thought amongst them, then “[y]ou can move forward with more confidence.” He expressed value in being connected to others in the group because “the more smart people who either have been in similar situations or who can just be more objective because they haven't been in those situations, the better I can learn from it.” He remarked, 

This kind of network for me is a good place to learn that because it can be quick. It can be quick and easy and I can either get validation because 10 people answered the same way within five minutes, or I can get validation that it's actually not so black and white and I need to be careful about thinking it's a quick fix.

For him, the ease of access to multiple points of connection and a diversity of knowledge made his engagement worthwhile.

Diane opted to facilitate her network group primarily to serve her need to connect to other people in her network. Her motivation paid off, as she explained: “I found value in the network through lots of interactions with others that I would never have met otherwise.” Her appreciation for the group as a source of community comes from the value she placed on human connection, which she saw as “incredibly important and significant for anybody.” She noted the value of the group in providing her "the opportunity to meet other people that I now might call upon to talk about, that I might not have otherwise met or connected with.” The breadth and range of connections were equally important, as she
explained “I think it’s really valuable to hear what people do across the country that are in the same position that you are in.”

**Network Participants’ Learning Behaviors.**

![Diagram](image-url)

*Figure 4*
Themes and Sub-themes: Network Participants’ Learning Behaviors
Process of learning.

The network group’s participants engaged in particular learning behaviors that operated as a sequential process of learning engagement. Each of the participants’ learning behaviors functioned to further their learning along a continuum that allowed them to better intuit and interpret knowledge. Natan articulated that his own process depended on first being able to continuously learn about new areas of knowledge. He said, “I like the learning process, but I realized there's so much that I don’t know . . . Just so complex. I latched on to whatever learning communities I could and I accepted all the invitations that I could.”

Intuiting knowledge.

The study participants individually sought out information to help them confirm or construct behavior patterns in their work and in their understanding of the field. The study participants described seeking to understand how other participants in their network achieved success, utilized other models of behavior, or even designed new systems and policies. In doing so, the participants were constructing new ways to intuit their individual knowledge to gain insights into their own work.

Independent discovery.

Initially participants engaged in learning to independently discover new knowledge. Rabbi Clayton utilized his network opportunity to learn about different ideas that he could gather for his work. He used the network group as a resource that taps into the years of experience, the knowledge base that is there as a resource for when I have a question problem or just want some insight or get a feel for what's going on out there, so that when we talk about different situations within our school I could say, “Well, in
other Jewish day schools they're either struggling with the same thing, or this is a norm,” or like anything else.

He illustrated his discovery through an example of gathering knowledge about a Friday school-wide *Kabbalat Shabbat* program. He needed the network group, he explained, to learn more about this program so as to “have that information on hand.”

Natan’s initial level of engagement involved following the network conversations in order to see what ideas other members might post or what articles they might share that could provide useful knowledge. When he found it worthwhile, he would go further and reach out to others directly to follow up or gather information. He sought out new knowledge based on what resonated with him and fit within the culture of his school. He understood that the more formal the learning opportunity, like a class or a webinar, the more likely to result in substantial expansion of his knowledge.

Rachel pursued new knowledge because, “Sometime if I feel like I don’t know enough, then I will do anything to get the information, right. So, I will take a class. I will buy a book.” One example she gave was her eagerness to read a book on teaching about Israel that she learned of when someone in the network group asked for a volunteer to write a book review on it. While she didn’t offer to write the review, she was eager to discover what the book had to say on this topic she was interested in.

*Understanding others.*

Beyond gaining new knowledge from their network engagement, the learning experiences offered the participants the opportunity to intuitively develop a better understanding of others. Rachel explained that her engagement in the network group made her less judgmental. By listening to the questions other people had about their work and the challenges they faced, she became more attentive to the needs of others.
For Rabbi Clayton, the time spent observing the network group, and paying attention to conversations was as critical for his learning as his attempts to secure specific pieces of knowledge. As he explained,

Just watching what was going on, how does it work, what are the protocols, so to speak, not so much the official protocols, but the unspoken protocols of how the network works, how people respond, how fast they respond, how long are their answers, just to get a feel of the people, of the so-called players involved with it.

By first taking the time to learn how and why other people in his network group engage, he was better able to enhance his learning and engage more meaningfully with his network group.

*Interpreting knowledge.*

Once the study participants achieved their intuitive understandings, they began to interpret this knowledge into language and models they could communicate with others. This involved fitting their individualized understanding into their own domains, and the context of the school sites that they were leaders in. They interpreted knowledge in order to best be able to share it in group domains through shared learning activities.

*Independent interpretation.*

Once network group participants gathered information from each other, they needed to interpret the knowledge they had acquired. This occurred through careful consideration of the knowledge, as Rachel shared, “if I hear of something I might consider it.” This consideration required an analysis of the information and its application to the participant’s context and personal knowledge base and experiences.
Rachel’s participation in the Parker Palmer online classes helped her to better interpret her sense of meaning and actions as an educator and supervisor. She used this process to effectively engage in independent reflective practice on issues such as her struggle with deciding how to teach about Israel. Rachel viewed reflective interpretation as key to her evolving educational practice. She explained, “in order to be willing to look at new ways and innovation and education, two things have to happen within the self. One, we have to be reflective on our practices.” For Rabbi Clayton this meant that once you have independently sought out new ideas, and started to use them, you must “think about it, play with it, modify it, do whatever you needed to do with it and take it home to do something with it.” Natan found it essential to take new knowledge and see how to apply it to his new scenario as a head of school. He recognized that in his new position, where he would need to shift the culture within the school, identifying and interpreting new ideas and approaches was essential for his learning process.

Diane looked for practical information about areas in which she questioned whether her school performed at high enough levels. For example, she talked about focusing her attention on network conversations about school security issues. She described her intent as looking “to evaluate whether I thought what we were doing was too much, not enough, disproportionate to other schools, disproportionate to other specific Jewish schools. And so, that was a really good concrete thing to look at.” Once she gathered this information, she could interpret how the data corresponded to her own school’s policies and practices. She found that:

- some people were doing things that were more complex than us, and I look at that and thought, “Do I really want to get into that,” and so, in some cases the answer was no, and then in some cases the answer was, “Oh yeah, but I think they don’t do this, but they live in a different place
or a different make-up of their school”, so it’s always good to hear what your colleagues are doing.

This interpretive process enabled Diane to consider what she was learning from other people and determine how this knowledge related to the ideas she already had. She could then either dismiss the new piece of knowledge or decide how this new knowledge made her reconsider what she knew.

Feedback.

Soliciting and receiving feedback provided an essential method for participants to interpret the knowledge they gained from their own experiences and their network-learning. Natan shared an example regarding teacher evaluation. As he explained,

I learned about a certain process and instead of me just coming back and saying, “All right, we’re doing this now,” it is “Here’s what I learned about this. Here’s what I think about it and how it might benefit us. How might this fit in? Will it fit in? What are your thoughts on it? How should we tweak it to make it our own?”

By gathering feedback before implementing a new idea Natan was better able to understand and interpret the knowledge according to his own needs.

Rabbi Clayton recalled a question he had for the network group when looking for feedback on a new program had been implemented for weekly bible study, *Parashat Hashavua*. He wanted to generate a conversation, not about the technical aspects of the issue, but on the philosophical concepts that underlay the topic. After having success getting feedback on this first topic, he tried again for an adult learning program he was considering bringing to his school. Upon soliciting feedback on the program, he received a response from another group member who was also implementing the program. He found
great benefit in the opportunity to talk to someone and share ideas about how each of them proceeded with the program.

Often participants wanted feedback to broaden their perspectives on an issue. Natan preferred using a case study mode through which he could “read through a case and then talk through it with people and learn from their experience and ideas.” Diane found that when considering new programs, she just found it “nice to hear more people’s opinions.” While soliciting or receiving feedback proved beneficial, each participant preferred different approaches to gathering and receiving feedback. Some preferred to do so openly, while others preferred to engage smaller groups, such as Natan’s case study model.

**Process of sharing knowledge.**

Part of the interpretive process involved sharing knowledge, which allowed participants to clarify their own understanding while communicating their knowledge to others. Rabbi Clayton remarked, “It's very interesting that even though I'm coming here officially to learn from them, how much we do share in information, how much I can share of what we're doing here.” By sharing those issues he was struggling with, Rabbi Clayton was able to see how other school leaders may have been handling those same issues. Through sharing and exposing his weakness, he believed he was creating an setting in which more people would be open to share what they were doing.

Rabbi Clayton cited an experience he had when visiting another day school in the San Francisco Bay area. He originally went there to learn about their programs, but ended up interacting with a Rabbi in charge of Jewish Life who had to supervise teachers for the first time in her career. He explained, “I sat down with her and explained how we do things by us, what normally is done in a regular school, if you will, or a non-Jewish school, how [we] do the same things, as far as teacher supervision or how
curriculum is set and all that, how it's done in a Jewish Day School.” This was an example of how sharing his experiences allowing others to extrapolate best practices.

Natan shared with others, but not just for the sake of sharing. “I share with others in a more targeted way. So, if I learned something specific that I think someone else, or my school, might benefit from, admissions let’s say, then I definitely share it with the admissions person.” While he did share this information directly with someone in the group, he didn’t necessarily share it with the ground globally in public conversation. Instead, he fostered sharing amongst his own staff. He described his approach in which he started a yammer group, well, like multiple groups, but a yammer environment. So I’ll do a lot of sharing on that, and it’s starting to catch on and other people sharing also. Which I think is a major accomplishment for our school. Even if nothing comes of it immediately, the fact that we’re talking publicly about the things that we're learning and discovering, that's huge.

Natan utilized sharing publicly to get the conversation started and to try to see if patterns resulted from the variety of people who responded to the sharing. Rachel instead preferred to prioritize sharing in the form of case studies where people participating can share concerns, ideas and the projects they are involved in.

Diane found a conference call to be a more effective space for sharing than the list-serv. On the list-serv she could ask questions, but she did not necessarily know who was responding or just reading her questions. On the conference call, she was able to get some perspective from a broader base of people. The conference call became “an information exchange which then develops from there.” She described a call during which members of her group discussed emergent learning that some of their schools engaged in, including the merits and drawbacks of this method. She followed up on this
discussion by reaching out to another network group participant in Ohio, saying, “Hey Cathy how did that program go that you [participated in]. I was thinking of doing something similar.’ And we set up the time to talk?” By connecting with other participants more directly, she found more effective ways to share.

Sharing knowledge internally.

Sharing occurred internally was a by-product of the learning within the networks. Rabbi Clayton shared with his teachers when they asked questions or needed information. When Diane came up with an opportunity or an idea, and she would typically go back to her staff and say, “Hey this is something interesting. What do you think about this? How are you feeling about it?” Just as Diane found that her staff benefited, so too did Natan find that when he had something specific to share, he would share it with the particular person who would find it relevant. For example, he said, “if it related to admissions let’s say, then I definitely share it with the admissions person.”

Questions.

Asking questions.

Most questions posed by members of the network group, primarily on the list-serv, addressed technical issues related to policy, programs or pedagogy. Rabbi Clayton offered, “I put up very specific questions that I needed advice for or just wanted to hear people's feedback, how they handle situations.” Diane explained that when on list-servs she asks questions because she wants to know how people are engaging in their own practices. For topics she was most concerned about, she would set up the conference call and, “put some forethought into making sure that the topic got on an agenda if I wanted to discuss it.” Rachel shared, “I might post a question. For example, I wanted to know what siddurs are
there available for early childhood or for first, second, third grade students. I post the question, ‘What kind of siddur are you using?’” Similarly Natan shared,

   A small time random sort of technical things[:]what do you do when a kid brings in non-kosher food or how big is your board? Thing[s] like that[, ]that help me learn and help me put it in context [of] my school, but also aren't putting everything on the line.

Technical questions could easily be responded to and framed within their specific context, providing for more efficient sharing and learning.

Rabbi Clayton described making an effort to ask more broad and conceptual questions to the members of his network group:

   I asked very theoretical, theological questions that I thought maybe would stir the pot a little bit, get things going. Some of those questions included[:]what do you do with non-Jewish children, things like the kosher policy, things that I thought would stir the beehive a little bit and get things going a little bit.

He even described putting on a big question about a challenging topic area once a month just to be able to stir up the group to see if they would respond to a philosophical question. He hoped to “at least get the discussion going.”

**Responding to questions.**

Responding to questions depended on responders finding their engagement to be worthwhile. Rachel shared, “when my response cannot help everybody, I would not send it to everyone. I would send it just to the person who wrote something.” Natan responded privately to members’ questions. He said, “I don't think I have ever responded to the whole group but when … I feel like I contribute something, I definitely will connect directly with the person who generated the conversation.” Rabbi Clayton noted,
“I will sometimes follow up rather in a phone call than in … an actual email.” Rachel also found that waiting for others to respond can provide her with useful knowledge. She explained,

Somebody posted a question, "How do you assess Hebrew proficiency at school?" and different participants responded and I said, "Here, this is something I can use." What I did, I compiled their responses from everybody and I created a file of their responses that I got, and I have a file now.

**Types of organizational learning content.**

**Best practices.**

The network conversations, exchanges and sharing provide various types of organizational learning content. All of the study participants considered the sharing of best practices to be an extremely important type of content for their network-learning. An example for Natan was teacher evaluation. His approach to learning a new best practice meant going beyond just dictating its inclusion into his program. Instead first he preferred to study the practice and its applicability to his environment. As he explained,

[W]hen I learned about a certain process… instead of me just coming back and saying, “All right, we’re doing this now,” it is “Here’s what I learned about this. Here’s what I think about it and how it might benefit us. How might this fit in? Will it fit in? What are your thoughts on it? How should we tweak it to make it our own?

He recognized that a best practice elsewhere may not prove to be useful everywhere, but that the network gives him a space to learn best practices quickly and efficiently.

Like Natan, Rabbi Clayton appreciated that the network group gave him access to the best practices being enacted in the Jewish day school field. He did acknowledge that in this smaller field, best practices likely evolved out of educators’ experiences in problem solving, more than from scientific
research. According to him, the sharing of best practices occurred when “people have gotten together and said, ‘These are the issues we’ve tried, these are our experiences.’ From these we can extrapolate what are best practices." Between members of the network group, the sharing of best practices allowed others to avoid or navigate problems.

In Diane’s experience in the network group, best practices provide more than a safety net for problem solving, but also offer a means to learn more about big topics. She referenced a conference call during which an extensive conversation evolved about emergent learning, “which is a really big topic right now on early childhood.” She explained,

[T]here is a lot of conversation about how they do that in Italy, which is where that theory comes from or that philosophy with working with kids comes from. They said some really insightful things about it and its very child directed.

Although she benefited from this extensive conversation, she recognized that this best practice might not be appropriate for her school. “Some place’s [sic] families really embrace that, other places not so much. For my community[,] not so much.” Learning about this best practice provided a better understanding of a big topic in her field, and a way to better appreciate and articulate why it would not be appropriate in her school. Nevertheless, her learning of this practice could lead to further learning, as she explained,

I might follow up with that person and ask her to walk me through the specifics of how they put that together at their school. Did they get any resistance to that? Do they have any suggestions for somebody starting out new?

Learning best practices allowed participants’ to expand their knowledge bases and opened them up to new possibilities that otherwise would not have been considered.
Because sharing best practices offered a positive means to learn, Rachel would like to see a more formal sharing of best practices on a regular basis in the form of case studies. She would like the network to invite outside experts in the field to share their best practices. She wanted these experts to share best practices on critical areas, such as teaching biblical text, or Hebrew, or Israel. She believed this would enable participants to be better exposed to new ideas relevant to their teaching and help bring those ideas into practice at school.

**Problem solving.**

Beyond learning from the best practices that other network group members shared, the participants sought to share and solve their own problems within their network. Rachel knew that her own dilemmas often weren’t common within her school, but that others in her network might share these same dilemmas. Rachel explained, “I'm just trying to use my life experience, my knowledge, and my ability to solve the problem. It would be nice to know … if there is a better way to solve this problem.” In her work, she experienced serious dilemmas that she might better be addressed in discussions with others. She shared an example of such a dilemma,

How do you deal with new students who are coming to … [a] Jewish day school with no background in Judaism, no background in Hebrew, no background in anything? How do you deal with this problem? We have no budget for [a] teacher in the school. What do you do? How do you deal these students? How do you welcome the family to this community? How do you welcome the students to the community? What have you done that helped you, okay?

She found that these types of questions that addressed problems relevant to any Jewish day schools were a critical component of her learning in the network group. “I want to hear good questions and I want to hear good answers that can help everyone.”
Rabbi Clayton found that when faced with a problem, such as how to execute a specific program, he benefited from having the network group as a resource. He explained, “To have that resource, to have that backing, to have that information on hand is what I'm looking for.” He found that the network provided information useful in solving particular problems. However, he didn’t just present the specific need and ask the group to solve his problem. As he shared, “I didn't put the schedule out there and say, ‘Who can help me with the schedule?’” Rather, he needed to frame the problem in order to learn from the network group’s experience, present it as a case study, and discover how different people responded to their unique circumstances.

Rachel recognized that often she would encounter situations that required her reaction, and that her work depended on her ability to problem solve. As she shared, “there are problems that if I don’t solve them, I’m ignoring them. So, on a daily basis I solve problems.” Often she didn’t have time to address the problems with the network that other people in her school had brought her to solve. She also realized that there were problems that others in her school might not yet be aware of. She found the network to be critical in helping her learn to address the problems no one in her school was ready to anticipate, in order to prepare herself to address them internally in her school.

Transferring knowledge.

Often the participants utilized the network to just exchange knowledge, without purposefully intending to share best practices or to solve a problem. Rabbi Clayton noticed that:

these are things that I share with other people out there who, when they ask questions or they need some information, I share with them things that basically worked for me[.] [T]his is how I use it. It may work for you; it may not work for you. We can always talk about what your specific needs are.
For him, often what a participant viewed as a best practice was less consequential for other participants in their settings. However, in Rabbi Clayton’s view, this exchange of knowledge was valuable both for understanding what other people were doing and because it might prove to be useful knowledge for a later situation. Natan shared that sometimes knowledge that did not prove to be necessary for him could still be useful for others. He often found new methods or exercises that he could do with others, as he shared, “I did with my teachers, the whole damn professional development. I did it with the board. I did it in the Chatter series with adults. I've blogged about it.”

Diane viewed her network group as evolving in the sophistication of its organizational learning from “an information exchange which then develops from there.” For her, transmitting information is “unemotional and just ‘these are the facts’.” While a network group’s participants may initially just engage in transferring knowledge, she said, “when there’s engagement in conversation, I think they turn into more best practices and experience.” For Rabbi Clayton, the learning that occurred within the network groups occurred as the transferring of knowledge. “Those are the other things. They're transferring what is the best practices[,] what experiences … they had[,] what are the problems that we could solve[,] what are some of the things we tried, worked or didn't work.”

**Strategies for engagement.**

**Dialogue.**

Beyond the content of their network learning engagement, several of the participants described the strategies they used to accomplish their learning goals. Diane described going beyond the exchange of information to directly reaching out to other participants to engage them in direct conversations about specific topics. This involved asking people questions, or showing specific interest in areas they expressed involvement in. For example, Diane described reaching out to a colleague, “I reached out to
Cathy in Ohio and said, ‘Hey Cathy how did that program go that you did[?] I was thinking of doing something similar[.] Can we set up the time to talk?’”

**Reflective practice.**

Engagement in network conversation and learning from others often catalyzed the network group participants to engage in reflective practice. When Natan heard a presentation from another head of school, although the idea was not new, it made him reflect. He shared,

It wasn't a new idea but now that I was in the head of school position and trying to shift and build a culture around that kind of learning, it resonated with me in a completely new way and I brought it back.

As a facilitator, Diane’s engagement made her consider how other people were engaging in their practice and she reflected on the questions she could ask them to help them talk more about their work.

Rabbi Clayton believed that being reflective and having a global perspective made network group participants better able to extrapolate from the best practices and apply them to their schools. In Rachel’s perspective, being reflective allowed one to be one step ahead of the problems that lay ahead. She shared,

Being proactive is just taking time to say, “I’m isolating myself.” “I’m thinking what’s ahead of me.” “I’m thinking about, “What are the big ideas that I need to deal with and how am I going to deal with that?”

In her pursuit of innovation in her practice, she determined that reflective practice opened her up to new perspectives and opportunities.
**In person engagement.**

While much of the learning in the network groups occurred individually or in online space, when possible, in person engagement proved to be very fruitful for several participants. If they did not get the opportunity to benefit from in person learning encounters, they at least aspired to. Rabbi Clayton felt that for network relationships and learning to evolve, participants would need to take their conversations offline. He shared that in his own learning practice, when he encountered an interesting idea or person, he liked to follow up with a direct email or phone call. He explained, “I think that's where a deeper level of learning takes place, offline. . . it probably works better offline, but unfortunately it's offline so that everybody else does not benefit from it.” For those who found ways to meet up with or find members of their network group at conferences, those encounters enhanced relationships and often opened up new conversations that could be shared in other network group spaces.

**Acting Upon Learning**

![Diagram of Acting Upon Learning](image)

**Figure 5**
Themes and Sub-Themes: Acting Upon Learning
Process.

The network group’s participants mostly limited their learning efforts to their own independent efforts at gathering new knowledge. They also interpreted knowledge they acquired in order to learn new ideas and best practices and to solve their own problems. To some degree, several of the study participants elevated their learning within the network group to bring their process from their network and back in to their schools. This process included integrating their knowledge with their school colleagues and stakeholders through sharing, collective problem solving and collaborating on new projects. Once the network group participants integrated their learning within their own settings, they could then utilize their network-learning experiences to create new routines and systems for their schools. This process then cycled back to the network group when the participants shared those new routines and systems with their network group participant partners.

Integrating knowledge.

The process of transitioning from intuiting and interpreting knowledge for one’s own use to making that same knowledge accessible and usable by others required both the proper motivation and methodology for integration. Rachel described her process of internalizing the knowledge she learned and then preparing to share it with others. Recognizing that the teachers she supervised would require a learning experience that would enable them to interpret the shared knowledge, she preferred to create immersive experiences, such as workshops, to share new ideas and practices that could improve their collective efforts. Once the workshop introduced the knowledge she hoped to integrate, Rachel believed that

the point is to do the leg-work. To work with each teacher, individually, how to implement in the classroom and to make sure that you are part of the process all the time and helping the teachers
all the time. You don’t just say, “Go ahead and do it,” because it’s not going to happen. The follow-up and the collaboration and the daily work with each teacher is part of the process. Otherwise, you present something and you go home.

*Internal sharing.*

Sharing knowledge internally within one’s school often required defining circles of influence. The network group participants found the new ideas, practices and ways of thinking to be very valuable to share internally with others. Rabbi Clayton explained his sharing process as follows:

a lot of stuff that I brought in, really only applied within my work[,] within my so-called department, but otherwise, as things grew, I began to share this, both within our school community, right here at PJ, Portland Jewish Academy, working with other teachers.”

Rabbi Clayton found that integrating knowledge with new teachers to be especially easy because they did not have as defined a knowledge base within the culture of the school. For others, he described his approach to sharing his newly acquired knowledge as,

these are things that I share with other people out there who, when they ask questions or they need some information, I share with them things that basically worked for me, this is how I use it.

It may work for you; it may not work for you. We can always talk about what your specific needs are.

He hoped that the knowledge they gained would “eventually spill over into the rest of the school.”

Natan found that sharing occurred in less sophisticated ways, but by using email and other social media he was able to share knowledge with the teachers at his school. When he learned new material in the group or at a conference, that contained novel ideas or affected his thinking on an idea so much that it would positively affect the culture of the school, he found ways to communicate it to others. “I've
blogged about it. I posted a video about it.” For him, internal sharing occurred randomly when new knowledge crossed his path. Diane found that her staff gained a good deal from her involvement in the conference group, simply by her willingness to bring to her staff the ideas and say, “Hey this is something interesting[.] [W]hat do you think about this? How are you feeling about it?”

Rachel extended her sharing beyond ideas. After being so inspired by a book she read after she discovered it through her network, she asked her colleagues to read it as well. “I shared the book with the administration of the school. I inspired them to buy the book and read the book and we got together to see how we can teach the teachers about that.” This sharing process led to extensive workshops during the teachers’ professional development in-service, and new ideas for their classrooms and the school.

Rabbi Clayton described how sharing new ideas and practices with other teachers impacted the school culture as well. After first investing in his own efforts to engage with other educators in his network through site visits, he brought his own teachers into this process:

I'm working on something that I'm going to turn over to a team of sixth-grade teachers to work with a team of sixth-grade teachers in another Jewish Day School, so I'm in the process of preparing them to make that, for the hand over thing.

This effort further extended he own practice of network engagement, but it also opened up others in his school to the culture of visiting schools. Rachel felt that for integration of new ideas, practices and resources to be success “you need to have people that think like you in an institution. If you have people that think like you, it’s easy.”
Problem solving.

Rachel’s own motivation for seeking out and acquiring new knowledge was her need to problem solve as part of her role. She realized that in her capacity she also needed to encourage those around her to problem solve as well. This required using the knowledge she gained from her own problem solving to engage other teachers in this progress. She wanted them to be more accountable for their processes of intuitive and interpretive learning.

When they go visit the other classes or they go on to a seminar or a workshop, whatever, they've read a good book they think is useful to actually spend time discussing it, not just a one-time presentation, but something we could refer back to over time.

Sharing proved to be especially important when facing big issue dilemmas, such as Israel or Hebrew education, when the teachers within the school must pool their knowledge and experiences to cultivate greater responses to these pressurized issues.

Collaboration.

Rabbi Clayton’s efforts to integrate the culture of sharing in his school led to eventual collaboration amongst his teachers and with teachers from other schools. “I created a collaboration with two other Jewish Day Schools for grade six level students.” Rabbi Clayton acknowledged that collaboration takes time to develop, as he explained, “that was after I put it on a couple of times, two people responded towards the individual phone calls and follow-up emails to really get the ball rolling on that one.” Often collaboration required a “cold call”, as was the case when he attempted to collaborate through the network group to create a project between different middle schools. This required him to make several phone calls to people he knew and others he didn’t know.

Collaboration required an alignment of goals that exceeded the integration of ideas. Rabbi
Clayton said that he would share his intentions and what he “wanted to accomplish by this collaboration and basically hear back from them, you know, are we aligned in our goals?” Collaboration requires flexibility, as Rabbi Clayton explained, “It's interesting, what I wanted, changed. Or rather, what I wanted did not change, but as a result of who I was speaking to and what my reality was, it did change.” When he set out to foster relationships with middle schools for an eighth grade project, he found himself changing the project to satisfy the relationship. He explained:

The two schools that I contacted to potentially work with, actually only go up to sixth grade. Instead of working with an eighth grade, I brought it down to sixth grade. We talked about a program of where and how our students could collaborate together, and they pitched it to their teachers[.] I'm actually going to speak to our teachers tomorrow and hopefully create the momentum to move forward with our teachers[. Our group of teachers will come together to develop this and eventually trickle down to the student level and they will be working with members of other schools in different teams and groups.

Rabbi Clayton’s willingness to integrate new knowledge, relationship and ideas into his learning efforts reflected his feelings on how best to support collaboration in the School Network’s network group. “If you really want collaboration to work through a process like the [network group], it has to be organic. It has to be from some participant that wants to accomplish something and wants to accomplish it through a collaborative setting.” Those who will be engaged and impacted by the collaboration needed to be self-motivated. This way they will be invested in the project and ready and flexible to adapt to their own interests. Rabbi Clayton cautioned, “to put [it to the network group] like we have to collaborate will be very artificial and will turn people off. Seriously, it has to be organic.”
Diane recognized that while collaboration among the network group’s participants must be organic, it must be supported through online communication. She explained,

I think our collaboration would have to probably be more online, although, I would also argue that if the idea gets up and going, . . . we started talking about a travelling mitzvah bear that would go around the country.

She recognized that these efforts have a positive impact beyond the collaborative activity. For instance, she shared,

my school could learn about other schools, or children could learn about other children and other schools. So that would be a really great way we could collaborate and learn about things without having to geographically be near each other.

Institutionalizing knowledge.

Once network group participants shared problem solving and collaborated within his or her school and broader network, they could foster new routines and systems that embedded themselves into the culture and operations of their organizations. On the classroom level, new routines affected the ways students learned and teachers taught and impacted the culture of learning. Rachel made this a focus of her own learning process:

I work with the teachers on how to incorporate it into their classrooms. To work with each teacher, individually, how to implement in the classroom and to make sure that you are part of the process all the time and helping the teachers all the time. You don’t just say, “Go ahead and do it,” because it’s not going to happen. The follow-up and the collaboration and the daily work with each teacher are part of the process.
Rabbi Clayton’s middle school collaborative effort and site visits enabled him to “create the momentum to move forward with our teachers, our group of teachers will come together to develop this and [it will] eventually trickle down to the student level and they will be working with members of other schools in different teams and groups.”

Rabbi Clayton found himself engaged in a continual process of learning through the network and his connections about communal T’fillah. He shared,

It's something that we didn't have until this year in our school. It's something that through not only [the network group] but my connection with the other day schools and to other organizations, I have come to see. I've visited schools and seen it, I've heard about it as both. . .

[I]n of itself [it] is important for students to have that experience, and the experience of bringing the school together creating community and such is important.

Despite the great impetus to learn from his network about this program, he found that

the particulars and how to work it into our schedule . . . took a little fancy footwork to get everybody lined up in the right places and the teachers committed to it and everything else, that I . . . did more or less in-house with the thing.

This required institutionalizing what he had learned about the program and making it fit into his school’s needs.

Diane found herself trying to institutionalize a project that worked in another network to the School Network’s network groups. She explained:

Having put together this travelling bear thing, with a different group, and being the one who put that into place[, i]t immediately took off, and got so big so fast, I could barely keep up with it. This is just the opposite. Would I have thought that this would have been harder? Not really. I
had no reason to have thought that, so now I have to step back and think, “Ok, all right? Now, this is a problem, and now I have to have a little plan[. D]o I continue to pursue it, or do I not pursue it. And if I am going to pursue it, how do I pursue it.

Rachel cautioned against an overeager approach to institutionalizing new ideas within a school. In her own attempts, she shared, “I need to be very careful not to confuse the staff.” She recognized that institutionalization often incorporate a level of experimentation that not all educators may be as ready for. While a particular network group participant may have assimilated a new idea and embraced it, this could prove challenging for those still integrating new ideas, practices and frameworks. She explained,

if I am not 100 percent sure that this experimentation is going to improve learning at school, I’m not sure I would do that because then I’ll turn off the staff. They get very upset and I don’t think it’s fair for the children, I don’t think it’s fair for the staff.

If the experimentation can be rolled out gradually, without disrupting the whole school, she was open to it. “I am very open to that. I’m open and I’m very careful.”

Trust.

For each participant, trust proved to be critical to one’s willingness to engage in organizational learning through network engagement. As Rabbi Clayton observed, “trust . . . is very important. Without the trust you won’t be able to get anywhere with it.” Building trust in the network environment manifests on multiple levels. In Rabbi Clayton’s view, “the more people are involved, . . . the more that people participate and they get to, so-called, know each other. Whether it’s on-line, or in other circumstances, then the idea is that this is what builds trust.” Rabbi Clayton understood that trust occurs on an individual level and on a professional level. He felt that trust results both from a level of intimacy
with the source of knowledge, and also with the substance of the network itself. Participants needed to trust not only the members of their network, but also that the network provided them access to the right sources at the right time. They needed those in their network to not only to be able to provide trustworthy knowledge, but to also to be available to contextualize the knowledge for their needs.

**Willingness to share.**

Network group participants’ degree of trust greatly impacted their willingness to share. Resistance to sharing originated in a person’s apprehension about negative responses to their requests. As Natan shared “I don't know what the reasons are but I also am hesitant because I'm afraid of it turning into something other than a yes-and.” For Natan, network conversations that did not lead to positive and constructive ideas diminished his trust in the network.

Diane and Rabbi Clayton both found that the presence and role of a facilitator impacted participants’ willingness to share. Diane felt that facilitators must be as objective as possible, and “not have an opinion and try and stay really open with whatever the conversation is.” The facilitators’ ability to model openness and not insert their own opinions about topics built trust amongst the participants to be more open and willing to share. Rabbi Clayton believed the facilitator should be someone “who we all know and owns it and lays out the ground rules or even just says out loud, "We all know implicitly that this is confidential." The trustworthiness of the facilitators and their capacity to construct a safe space, engendered a network where trust makes participants more willing to share.

Network-learning required participants to rely on others for acquiring new information and even for collaboration. This reliance became obfuscated because of the impersonal and somewhat disconnected nature of the online medium. Rabbi Clayton believed,
In an on-line environment you’re going to need a lot of trust and on one hand people might feel safer to say or do things because there’s not that face-to-face connection. But on the other hand, because it’s not face-to-face, people might be a little bit more apprehensive because we really don’t know who we are.

Rabbi Clayton thought that for there to be across the board trust amongst members of the network group, the people that are involved need to be “committed to the style, the process, the medium, if you will, of being . . . on-line in a learning space.” Because of the limited nature of the online medium, the participants relied on others to reveal themselves and reduce their anonymity. To rectify this issue, Rabbi Clayton suggested that increased participation across the board would reduce any fear or lack of trust.

The fear of vulnerability, driven by the lack of exposure that a participant has to others in the network, greatly impacted their trust in the network. Rabbi Clayton shared,

If I'm asking a question about how to work with my board on something or if I had a challenge around a board member and I put that out there, then I feel like I'm making myself . . . I'm putting a lot at risk by putting it in writing and sending it to people I don't know.

Natan expressed concern in not being able rely on others responding thoughtfully to his questions. “I am afraid of asking a question that sparks the kind of response that is unintended but also redirects the question into something else.” To Natan, his network engagement depended on his ability to get a sense of the tenor of the conversations, and that his instincts for who and what conversations to trust are critically important. “If I am not comfortable with the tenor of it, I completely disengage or I don't even engage in the first place.”
Context of source of information.

Developing trust depended on the network group participants’ awareness of the source of the information they seek. Rabbi Clayton described his process of getting to know who he was engaged with in the group. “That's why when people ask questions or such, it's helpful for me to understand, a little bit, their background or to get to know some of their background information.” In the context of his own school, when he engages in organizational learning, he knows who he is engaging in learning with. He explained,

So working within our school, at Portland Jewish Academy, it was very easy for me to make that transition, because I know the culture of the school, I know the teachers, I know what kind of students they have so I could work with them and help them adapt a type of work for their own need.

When engaged with others, he shared that it “takes a little bit longer to have a better understanding, and, I think, being helpful is a little bit more of a … more work needs to go into it.”

When Rabbi Clayton did engage the group and asked a question or opened up a conversation, he put trusted that:

when the person actually answers the question, that the person is talking knowledgeably and not just answering because they have an extra 10 minutes and it seems like they have a good idea.

But to trust that whoever is going to answer the question will actually be able to know what they’re talking about.

He found that not knowing the person he engaged with in conversation prevented him from fully valuing the knowledge being shared. Accordingly, he maintained a level of distance from a question or idea expressed within the network group’s list-serv until he knew the source of the question and their context.
“I would like to know who I'm talking to and a little bit of background of the situation as well, because a question is a question.” He put the onus on himself, “The person at the receiving end has to be discerning enough to know and understand what could be applied to them and what cannot.”

For Rabbi Clayton, knowing the context of the person sharing or answering his questions allowed him to best appreciate how to ascertain the value of their knowledge and its applicability to him. People willing to open up enough to present a question needed to be able to trust that the network group was a safe environment. As with Natan, Rabbi Clayton indicated that participants need to know “that they won’t get jumped on, they won’t be judged, others won’t be dismissive of them.”

Rabbi Clayton considered the context of the participant who shared the question:

I think it's very important to know the background of the questions as well: Why you're asking it, what's the school like, what is the environment like, especially when you talk East Coast/West Coast schools. We could use the same words but have totally different meanings. That's why some of these questions, I will sometimes follow up rather in a phone call than in an actual thing, in an actual email.

*Source of connection.*

An appreciation of the other participants’ context and the source of their information depended on the participants’ connection to others in their network group. A shared experience, whether a prior learning experience or mutual contacts, fostered trust. Diane referenced her prior engagement in the School Network’s leadership development program. Her willingness to facilitate the new network group originated in her trust in people she had been immersed with in her learning experience. Natan had connections with members of the cohort from a different leadership development program. The network group made up of alumni of that program offered him a group he is “more comfortable saying lots of
bigger things on there than I would be on the [School Network].” Rachel belonged to the same alumni network as Natan, but even when she saw their names in the network group’s list-serv she did not necessarily feel more connected. She shared, “I know that I know them, but it doesn't make me relate to them more or less than to relate to somebody else. I relate more to the ideas to the person.” For Rachel, the connection “could come as a recommendation or from meeting the person, for real.”

Prior engagement outside of the network group could be critical to network learning. Natan shared, “It's hard to build that trust, especially if you've never even met some of the people or seen their faces.” He relied mostly on his professional coach, and otherwise preferred to rely on colleagues who may or may not be in the School Network’s network group, but that he had a prior relationship with. Rabbi Clayton found that the ability to meet face-to-face with members of the network group even after they interacted with one another in the group’s online environment helped establish trust. He shared that he hoped offline interaction will “create a little bit more activity and build the commitment of individuals to the [network group].”

The participant’s interest in the commonality in their roles, problems and in the field of Jewish education motivated them to build relationships and trust. Natan found himself able to relate to others in the group:

because we're all in more or less the same boat, new or perspective [sic] heads of school. That is to me to be able to relate on that level because it's different from anything else I’ve ever done. To be able to relate and whether it's commiserate or celebrate, there's a connection there that is definitely meaningful.

Rabbi Clayton often found his role as Judaic Studies director to be isolating, especially while working in a small community. He explained that
there are many well-meaning Jewish Study Directors that have a lot of passion for what they do, are very committed to the Jewish Life of the school, but [are equally committed] to organizing the pedagogy of the school in a formal way that raises the image and the practice of Jewish education, not only in their school, but in this country, because if one of us is strong, we all become strong, and I think that is something I'm still hoping to get out of it or put into it or be as a result of it.

**Impact of trust.**

An abundance or lack of trust could greatly impact the nature of the network group and the participant learning experience. Without trust, participants lose their commitment to engaging in the network group and its learning efforts. According to Rabbi Clayton, “Knowing some of the people is helpful because I'm not going into unknown territory, so I have an idea.” Participants were willing to participate, share and be part of the conversation if they find creditability and commitment in those they are engaged with. If the learning experience has proven to be valuable, they are more likely to trust those they engaged with and are more open to learning again.

For his own engagement, either Natan looked to people he knew, maybe from conferences or other networks, or he relied on patterns of responses in the conversations he observed. If participants he did not know were critical, he became turned off from engaging “because it was questioning whether this is actually experiential education or is it really something different. That shut me down.”

Rabbi Clayton appreciated the opportunities to connect to new people in the network group who proved credible, even if the knowledge they shared was not particularly useful to him at the moment. He reasoned, “it didn't cost me anything, and I've made another connection and connected another dot. Where will that go I don't know, but why not is really one way of looking at it.” Rachel shared that she
benefited from the relationships that she trusted even when the knowledge was not useful because it affected her perspective. In her own words:

I can say it makes me more a holistic person, maybe more being tuned to people's need [sic], maybe more attentive to people's needs, being less judgmental. This is what I strive to be and I strive to do, so that's what I do. This is how I use it.

While Rabbi Clayton’s experience enabled him to gain this awareness of his network-learning experience, the other participants’ experiences didn’t result in the same level of reflection or realization, likely due to their lack of a continuing reflective process.
Overview of Findings

1. A non-profit mobilizes small network groups of professional colleagues to address their individual needs, and via the sharing of connectivity and common interests, to create organizational learning.

2. Network group participants engage in transactional relationships to express ideas, and to exchange and evaluate knowledge for their individual growth and practice.
   a. Individuals engage in forms of collective learning to solve problems, learn from the best practices of others, experiment with new approaches, and transfer knowledge quickly.

3. Knowledge acquired through social networks transitioned from individual knowledge to organizational knowledge through sharing and collaboration.

4. The commitment required to foster organizational learning depended on the trust participants had in the network and the other participants.
   a. Prior relationships and common interests engendered the participants' trust in the network and its members.
   b. The most significant barriers to engagement in network-learning were a lack of trust in the value of the network and a lack of connection to participants.

Summary

The data collection and analysis process provided a detailed description for this qualitative case study research. The descriptions resulted from a coding and analysis process during which themes emerged that addressed the research questions. These findings provided an understanding of how a non-profit utilized a network to promote learning amongst its members. The participants in the organization’s
network groups initially engaged in independent learning for their own purposes, gradually evolved to address intrinsic and extrinsic needs by sharing their knowledge with others in their own organizations. Some participants were motivated to collaborate and act as change agents to create new projects and new routines to benefit their organizations. The participants’ commitment to their engagement in their network groups depended on the value they perceived the other participants offered them, according to their particular needs. The more they felt a common interest and strong connection with the other group members, the more they were willing to commit and invest in engaging in network learning with them and to value the knowledge they shared.
Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings and Implication for Practice

Introduction

As non-profits strive to utilize networks to foster connectivity and growth amongst their stakeholders, they seek a greater understanding of how learning occurs within intentional network groups and platforms. In this case, a non-profit network, serving a network of schools, aimed to create opportunities for knowledge acquisition, sharing and collaboration amongst network participants, in order to strengthen its member schools and stronger field. This research describes how the participants in this School Network’s network group engaged in organizational learning, and the factors that impacted their engagement.

Research Questions

The research responds to the primary question of: How does a non-profit facilitate organizational learning to cultivate network relationships amongst individuals and groups? This primary question will be addressed through two sub-questions: (1) What learning activities, on individual and group levels, facilitate and promote the sharing and interpretation of knowledge within networks? (2) How do individuals engage in network-learning?

Overview of Findings

This qualitative case study aimed to describe the learning engagement cultivated by a non-profit, the School Network, striving to foster connectivity, knowledge sharing and collaboration amongst the educational leaders of the schools that belong to its network of Jewish private schools. Through the observations of three of the School Network’s network groups and surveys and interviews with four
educational leaders representing the three network groups, the researcher gathered their narratives and understanding of their network-learning experience. The research showed the impact the specific way the network group’s design had on the members of the network groups, as well as the process by which they became motivated to learn and engage. Through this study, the researcher uncovered several key findings. These findings, listed here, are described in full detail below.

1. A non-profit mobilizes small network groups of professional colleagues to address their individual needs, and via the sharing of connectivity and common interests, to create organizational learning.

2. Network group participants engage in transactional relationships to express ideas, and to exchange and evaluate knowledge for their individual growth and practice.
   a. Individuals engage in forms of collective learning to solve problems, learn from the best practices of others, experiment with new approaches, and transfer knowledge quickly.

3. Knowledge acquired through social networks transitioned from individual knowledge to organizational knowledge through sharing and collaboration.

4. The commitment required to foster organizational learning depended on the trust participants had in the network and the other participants.
   a. Prior relationships and common interests engendered the participants' trust in the network and its members.
   b. The most significant barriers to engagement in network-learning were a lack of trust in the value of the network and a lack of connection to participants.
Discussion of Findings & Connection to Theoretical Framework

This research study relied on frameworks from organizational learning theory and network theory to inform the construction of its research interests, parameters and analysis. Cyert and March (1963) provided an understanding of an organizational learning system as one able to adapt to its participants’ needs and produce outcomes not determined by external constraints. They formulated organizational learning as a cycle of learning within multiple levels of procedures that enable individuals to integrate new knowledge and adapt their organizations.

Huber (1991) presented four constructs for organizational learning: 1) knowledge acquisition; 2) information distribution; 3) information interpretation; and 4) organizational memory. Levitt and March (1988) described sources from which organizational learning is derived, including experimentation and the experiences of others. Crossan, Lane & White (1999) offered a model to understanding the process of learning as four linked stages, called the “4Is”: intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalizing. Schilling and Kluge (2009) described how organizational learning occurs amongst a collective of individuals in small groups. Nonaka (1994) and Tsoukas (2009) identified how relationships foster a social process at a collective level through the use of dialogue.

Stephenson (1997) identified networks as an organizational structure that can be managed to affect how change occurs. Stephenson understood networks as a structured pattern of relationships that responds to patterns of communication and exchange. Stephenson identified the importance of trust as a critical form of social capital needed for participants in a network to engage and affect change. Nohria and Eccles (1992) identified external networks as being able to provide individuals a means to combine a knowledge base and internalize external knowledge.
Stephenson (1998) described learning practices of integrated external knowledge from collegial networks. Salk and Simonin (2003) asserted that collaborative learning alliances in the form of networks rely on an investment of time and resources of all partners interacting, and that full levels of network productivity require a defined output.

In this research’s context, the School Network established network groups to create collaborative learning alliances and foster connectivity amongst participants in its member schools. By applying organizational learning theory to understanding the collective efforts of those in a defined network, this study developed findings of how learning occurs. The study portrayed a specific network in its early stages of defining its intentions, boundaries and process. The academic literature of organizational learning and network theory guided the formation of the survey and interview protocols. The use of these theoretical frameworks grounded the research and data analysis and lent validity to the findings.

Findings

Culture of learning.

Hamel (1991) articulated that fostering learning networks depends on developing a culture of openness to outside ideas, one that placed value on using newly absorbed knowledge as much as creating it. The development of such a culture depends on the organization’s capacity to not only mobilize professional colleagues into small groups, but to foster common interests in learning amongst these colleagues.

The data analysis provided a clear description of the importance of constructing and defining networks as small groups of colleagues with common interests and vested relationships in each other. Establishing small group learning networks depended on the non-profit cultivating shared goals and placing a value on the interaction of members (Crossan et al., 1999). This required the facilitation of a
culture in which the network group participants learned from each and had the opportunity to learn about each other.

**Cultivating networks for sharing knowledge.**

**Shared goals.**

A defining characteristic of the network groups in this study was that they were comprised of leaders from Jewish as “community schools”, not affiliated with a specific movement or denomination of Judaism. These network boundaries appealed to participants, like Rabbi Clayton, who explained,

When you're in the Jewish Community Day School [network] which is what the School Network is, no two schools are the same and no two Jewish communities are the same, but you need to know and to have a feel of what are...the standards that are out there of what Jewish Day Schools are doing.

Despite their common school environments, the school leaders did not opt into the network groups, but rather the School Network placed them in the groups, the School Network did so without making them fully aware of the larger purpose of the group and without vetting their interest in or capacity for network-learning. In its introductory post (See Appendix G) to the network groups, the School Network’s staff described their goal as follows:

> to better network the professionals at [the School Network] schools and enhance individual learning and collective knowledge. The [Network Group] JD Google Group, is a new opportunity to connect the lead Judaic educators and administrators at [the School Network] schools on a more ongoing basis.

**Motivation for engagement.**
Irrespective of this invitation, those participants who chose to engage did so for personal reasons rather than to satisfy group needs. Rabbi Clayton clarified that his increased involvement reflected his commitment to Jewish education and that his interest in gaining access to other Judaic directors overrode his lack of understanding of the network’s common purpose and goals. Diane’s motivation stemmed from her desire to facilitate the group, but she expressed frustration that the School Network limited the boundaries of the network groups in a limited manner, which she felt restricted them from enticing the right participants to engage. When the School Network established the various small network groups, limited effort was made to establish who was in the group. Rachel and Natan explained that their passive engagement stemmed from a lack of understanding of whom they were engaging with.

The School Network needed to create an environment for continuous learning and quality interaction amongst group members to enable network participants to be a more viable part of its overall system (Gill, 2000). This environment necessitated facilitation, which was provided by Diane in her network group. Rabbi Clayton shared that other participants in the group, who volunteered their time, originally facilitated his network group. However, according to Rabbi Clayton, their motivation to take on a greater role in the group had waned over time. In Rabbi Clayton’s view, for the others to sustain their initial level of engagement, they would need more than common interest to motivate them. He felt that continued involvement would only take place if the School Network had a clearer understanding of the network group participants’ learning methods of learning, which colleagues they are interacting with and what the intended outcomes would be. He wanted the School Network to “maybe survey everybody or specific people and find out what works, what doesn't work, what will work, what will not work. Find out what is the goal of this and who are they here to serve.”
Each network group formed around common school leadership roles, such as Head of School and Principal, rather than learning objectives or needs. Access to other colleagues who shared similar roles motivated participants like Diane and Rabbi Clayton to fully engage, but this was because their school’s geographic location left them feeling isolated, with a need to learn from others. However, other leaders like Rachel and Natan, who had access to other networks, such as a leadership program’s alumni group, and worked in communities with other similar schools, had other leaders to learn from beyond those in the School Network’s groups. These leaders required increased incentive and demonstrated value from the School Network in order to be motivated to engage beyond passive observation and occasional responses to colleague’s technical questions.

The network group participants who were motivated both intrinsically for their own growth, and extrinsically by the needs of their schools, showed more interest in and willingness to engage with others in the networks, and more patience with the School Network’s approach. Those participants who did not have a particular extrinsic need to engage, and whose intrinsic need for personal growth could be met elsewhere, often engaged less, showed less interest in supporting the network groups and had less hope that it would provide increased valued in the future. Rabbi Clayton and Diane, who shared the most need for involvement to benefit themselves and their schools, spoke of the value of connectivity, and showed a willingness to pursue relationships with others. Natan found value in engaging so that his school could be associated with the School Network. He was willing to stay involved in the network group, even if it didn’t solve any of school problems or lead to new relationships, because his involvement required little energy and made access to others more efficient and expedient. Rachel, on the other hand, found little value in connecting with others, and thus invested little energy in the network
group’s learning process. She preferred to limit her engagement to those colleagues that she shared a common practice and educational setting with

**Forming social relationships for growth and collaboration.**

The School Network created a network group dynamic within an online environment to foster relationships between participants from affiliated schools. These relationships were formed through exchanges between members primarily on a list-serv housed in a private Google Group. At times these exchanges transitioned to other learning environments, such as conference calls, phone calls, in person meetings and conferences. Exchanges operated as part of an ongoing process allowing participants to assimilate information, translate that information into knowledge, share knowledge with others and apply that knowledge to the participants’ real individual needs and their school’s needs (Schilling & Kluge, 2009).

**Transactional relationships.**

Participants utilized the network group to share knowledge. The network group provided Rabbi Clayton with a resource that taps into the years of experience, the knowledge base that is there as a resource for when I have a question [or] problem or just want some insight or get a feel for what's going on out there, so that when we talk about different situations within our school.

As he knew that the network group participants all led schools similar to his own, Rabbi Clayton expected that the challenges they faced paralleled his own. Beyond the responses a particular participant would receive to a specific question, he believed that participants could learn about the challenges, successes and practices of others in their field by paying attention to the network group exchanges.
The primary form of exchange occurred when a participant addressed a question to the group, and then relied on others in the group to voluntarily respond. These questions were primarily technical and occasionally involved conceptual or philosophical issues. Diane shared that when she engaged in the network group’s list-serv she was “asking questions and wanting to know how people do things”. For more complex conversations or deeper learning she would facilitate a conference call for a smaller group of people to discuss the issue at hand. Natan claimed that technical questions “help me learn and help me put it in context my school, but also aren't putting everything on the line.” Rabbi Clayton admitted, “I asked very theoretical, theological questions that I thought maybe would stir the pot a little bit, get things going.”

**Building learning alliances.**

For participants to be willing to effectively communicate, they need to build effective learning alliances. Participants were less likely to respond to others’ questions if they feared being misunderstood or were uncertain whether their knowledge would be received well by the person asking. Natan and Rabbi Clayton pointed out that they had responded to questions, but not necessarily through the list-serv, where others might benefit from public sharing. Once network group participants showed a willingness to communicate with each other, it became a matter of knowledge management to find the best ways to transfer information and best practices from one member to another. The list-serv primarily served to share this knowledge with other members through email. Diane convened conference calls to review topics and deepen conversations. The School Network shared highlights from several groups in their monthly newsletter.

Yet, the School Network primarily depended on the participants’ own willingness to identify, read and act upon emails that arrived in their inbox from the Google Group’s list-serv. This required
participants’ readiness to volunteer their tacit and explicit knowledge in the form of subjective insights and particular policies and documents (Tsoukas, 2009). Participants assessed the knowledge they gained in terms of its ability to improve the quality of their experience in their home schools. The more engaged the participant, the more likely they were to identify barriers to their learning and performance. Rabbi Clayton and Diane acknowledged the limitations of the Google Group’s List-serv. Rabbi Clayton recognized that the network’s reliability depended on whether he trusted that other participants were taking the time to not only reply, but to consider the context of his needs when providing knowledge.

**Elements of learning.**

Collective learning within the network group took the form of systematic problem solving and learning from the experiences and practices of others (Garvin, 1993). This transfer of knowledge proved essential to many of the participants, whose engagement waned when the knowledge did not efficiently and quickly move through the network. In Rabbi Clayton’s experience, “People have gotten together and said, ‘These are the issues we’ve tried, these are our experiences. From these we can extrapolate what are best practices.’” Best practices offered Natan the opportunity to both learn new ways of doing things and to evaluate existing methods to be sure that he was addressing his school’s needs in the best manner possible. Diane gathered best practices to learn of new ideas and models, and, like Natan, to be certain whether she had made the right choices for her school setting. Natan explained that his engagement in the group fulfilled his needs for acquiring and sharing best practices, even if the best practices he learned of were not always relevant to his setting. “I'm sure it's possible that a best practice somewhere may not necessarily mimic [one] somewhere else, but this kind of network for me is a good place to learn that because it can be quick.” From Rabbi Clayton’s perspective, “best practice is really the result of the
experiences of others in problem solving,” particularly in the smaller and less sophisticated field of Jewish private school education, in which the School Network and its affiliated schools operate.

Rabbi Clayton and Rachel highlighted the importance of problem solving in their administrative roles within their schools. The network group offered them the opportunity to address their own problems as well as to learn from the problems others face. Rachel stressed that the network group afforded her the chance to extend her own independent attempts to solve the problems she faced in her school. “I'm just trying to use my life experience, my knowledge, and my ability to solve the problem. It would be nice to know … if there is a better way to solve this problem.” Especially when she was faced with a dilemma, such as Israel education, which could not be solved alone internally with her teachers, she wanted to utilize the network group to solve her problem. Rabbi Clayton saw this unique subset of colleagues who shared common interests and school settings to be a particularly appropriate audience for his case studies. He sought the opportunity to “get a handful of people that can do a case study on all of these different circumstances and extrapolate best practices from them.” School leaders often faced the challenge of reacting to daily challenges while also foreseeing larger systematic problems. They took advantage of a network-group to cull ideas, feedback and expertise.

The network group participants utilized the list-serv to exchange knowledge quickly, although the exchange frequently did not extend beyond technical details. These exchanges did not often entail a deeper investigation into the setting and needs of the participants who asked the question. Nor did the participants often share with the group any new approaches or direct outcomes of the conversations. Several study participants cited specific examples of how they shared knowledge, practices or materials with others outside of the network group, However, none of them mentioned sharing these outcomes with those inside the group.
**Transformation of knowledge.**

Knowledge is socially constructed within the organizational learning framework of the network groups. Participants acquired information through networks of relationships (Tsoukas, 2009). Knowledge resulted from individual and collective processes, in which participants determined what information being shared was useful knowledge to interpret and integrate (Calhoun & Starbuck, 2003). Diane and Rachel addressed the importance of independently evaluating the value of shared information. Diane provided an example from her involvement in the head of school network group:

I was able to look at what they’re doing for security, and compare it to what I’m doing for security. To evaluate whether I thought what we were doing was too much, not enough, disproportionate to other schools, disproportionate to other specific Jewish schools.

Natan and Rachel discussed the process of “lurking” in order to be able to “follow someone and look at articles that they might post or ideas.” This process allowed them to independently review information as it was provided to the network and determine its value.

A social constructivist approach to knowledge understands organizational learning as a process of integrating and institutionalizing knowledge from the individual to the organizational level (Huysman, 2002). Initially, social interaction between network group participants enabled new knowledge to emerge. Tsoukas (2009) described the process as occurring through the use of dialogue, which leads individuals to depart from engaging as practitioners and to begin acting reflectively together. All the study participants described the importance of reflective practice as a means of removing themselves from the isolation of their work environments.

Dialogue was productive depending on the extent to which participants engaged relationally with one another (Tsoukas, 2009). Diane described her involvement in her network group’s conference call as
an opportunity to dialogue about emergent learning, in which she could remove herself from her professional role and instead talk about an important new concept affecting her area of interest. Rabbi Clayton, Diane and Natan found that dialogue requires disembarking from the list-serv environment and engaging with others either through phone calls, site visits or at conference. Rabbi Clayton shared, “I think the learning that takes place, some of it, or the next level of learning of it[,] takes place offline.” Natan stressed the limitations of the list-serv, “I think important conversations[,] like the adaptive conversations[,] those need to take place either on Skype or a Google Hangout[,] if it good for [it,]or even on some sort of closed system where it's facilitated[,] not just sort of a free for all.” The medium in which the participants engaged with others impacted the productivity of the knowledge construction process.

Once the participants gathered and interpreted knowledge, they sought ways to share their knowledge with their organizations to add new practices, change systems or routines and foster new collaborations. These took the form of internal sharing, modifying their school’s learning culture, collective problem solving, and collaboration, both internally and with other schools. Fostering innovation meant incorporating new routines into the classroom, instituting new school wide projects, and creating professional development opportunities for faculty. For Diane, her engagement not only offered her an opportunity to facilitate her network group, but also the impetus to “reevaluate everything in our program and our mission statement, based on the new knowledge and perspective” she acquired and shared.

**Developing social structures.**

The network groups relied on the operating assumption that networks function as tools to provide participants with social ties with timely access to knowledge and information (Nohria & Eccles, 1992).
Social capital theory contends that participants in a network should be linked as much as possible to increase their social capital. In the context of the network groups in this study, this social capital can be understood as the social resources embedded in each relationship. The reliability and efficacy of information a particular participant can provide serves as the primary value each individual bears as social capital. Social capital theory posits that participants will coordinate with those who have congruent beliefs, with those they trust, and with those who hold critical resources (Calanni et al., 2010). Within the networks groups, this research indicates that trust and resources are more important than shared beliefs when participants opt to engage in learning and collaborative relationships.

**Beyond affinity.**

Initial involvement in the groups was predicated on participants sharing affinities with each other through the type of schools they belonged to and their school’s affiliation with the School Network. Rabbi Clayton and Natan acknowledged that entering into previously unknown learning relationships with colleagues proved to be difficult. They found that those colleagues with whom they had a prior relationship had greater credibility when providing information. They also found themselves more likely to weigh in on a conversation if they had preexisting relationships with the participant, or if they had previously engaged them successfully within the network group. Rachel stressed that her lack of engagement was likely due to the fact that she did not know anyone in the network prior to her inclusion in the group.

**Building familiarity.**

The lack of information the School Network provided the network group participants about other group members limited the social capital shared amongst participants. Rabbi Clayton commented on the importance of reversing this trend and generating social capital. “That's why when people ask questions
or such, it's helpful for me to understand, a little bit, their background or to get to know some of their background information.” Because the list-serv prevented participants from knowing who interacted with their postings, this limited the participants’ awareness and development of social capital with others in the network group. Rabbi Clayton blamed the lack of active participation in his group on the limited awareness and social capital within the group. “I don't know who's reading them, but I think active participation is what's missing in it.”

Shared experiences and common interests motivated members to generate the social capital needed to sustain their learning relationships. As a new head of school, Natan understood that members of his network group were “all in more or less the same boat.” He appreciated the social capital they could offer because they were “able to relate, whether it's to commiserate or celebrate, there's a connection there that is definitely meaningful.” Diane valued the experience she shared with others in her head of school network. Natan and Rachel cited the importance of a shared experience when discussing their involvement in an alumni group for a leadership program in which they both participated.

Dependence on trust.

Individuals failed to share their experience and knowledge through the network when network learning was limited to providing short term solutions and did not address the larger values and purposes of the network (Kim, 1993). Generating exchanges that extended beyond short term solutions depended on participants trusting each other and investing time and resources in the network group. Natan said that he preferred to share his biggest questions and challenges with his coach or a colleague with whom he already had a relationship. He explained, “It's hard to build that trust, especially if you've never even met some of the people or seen their faces.” Rabbi Clayton added, “I don't know who the people are, I
don't know how they'll react to that question. They don't understand from my perspective, where I am coming from with that question, type of thing.” He suggested that for the School Network to generate this level of familiarity and trust, it needed to orchestrate opportunities where “people actually get to meet each other face-to-face, get to know each other a little bit.”

Developing increased commitment to the network group and its participants depended on increasing their trust. According to Rabbi Clayton, this made the participants more “willing to participate, . . . to add, to share, to be part of the conversation, to be engaged in it.” The greater their commitment, the more likely they were to be open to one another and responsive to other’s need and suggestions. Future engagement relied on past engagement in a circular manner. As Rabbi Clayton explained, “The thing that brings it to a screeching halt is lack of engagement. That's number one.” Diane noted that the more participants perceived other members’ investment in the learning process, the more they trusted them. "My assumption is that those people are equally invested, so I might ask them to reach out to call some other people to get them more invested.” Diane discovered that to increase engagement and commitment, she needed to find other outlets to engage the participants in her network group, including phone calls, conference calls and in person meetings.

**Context and findings.**

The findings of this study need to be considered within context. The School Network developmentally functioned as a young network. The non-profit was just developing its culture, boundaries, facilitation practices, and learning behaviors. Establishment of the network groups presented a shift in the School Network’s operational procedures. Leadership and staff, which had previously only engaged in “hub and spoke” network practices, now shifted to a “cluster” approach. This shift encouraged the School Network to develop, innovate and refresh their approach to network-learning. As
such, this study represented only a window in time onto the School Network’s process of developing their network groups to support affiliate school leaders and their interests in the larger field of Jewish education. This study only focused on three of the School Network’s network groups; Consideration of the operation of several of the other groups may have presented alternative portrayals. The participants in this study also engaged in other outside networks, and their behavior in the particular groups studied does not necessarily represent their behaviors in these other groups. As a non-profit, the School Network not only operated according to its mission, but also had to answer to its board of directors and affiliate members. The degree of their investment of these stakeholders directly correlated with their interests, and with their appreciation and understanding of the importance of network-learning.

**Implications and Recommendations for Organizational Practice**

This study’s findings generated implications and recommendations for the practice of cultivating networks to aid connectivity and learning.

**Design of network group.**

The School Network’s success in establishing functional network groups depended on participants identifying themselves as members, opting to participate, and elevating their participation in order to develop meaningful relationships and sharing. The design of the networks groups greatly impacted the extent to which members were motivated to identify as members. The more a group creator or facilitator, could make participants feel as if they had opted into the group, rather than being co-opted in by the network, the more members were motivated to engage in the group and be open to its facilitated learning processes. In addition, the more that group members were familiar with, and had information about, other members, their backgrounds and interests, the more they were likely to engage and risk exposing themselves and their needs to others. To create this environment, the network
organizers needed to collect and share information about who is in the network group with all the members of the group. This information needs to extend beyond the common roles they share and the names and location of their school, and their membership in the School Network. Natan explained that without knowing who the people in the group are, he could never be sure if a question he posed to the group was being read by people who could even address his problems or dilemmas. Because the School Network determined group boundaries based on the role a person played in an affiliate school’s organizational structure, a person’s title alone was insufficient for determining their value to another person in a network. Rabbi Clayton explained that even the title of Judaic Director could be misleading. The title could reflect someone who is involved in supervision or just the coordinator of student life programming. In future efforts, if members’ actual roles, interests or responsibilities defined membership in network groups, rather than their titles, members would be more likely be motivated to engage in seeking new relationships and participate in group conversations.

The limitations brought about by the School Network’s design of the groups’ parameters affected members’ capacity to increase their social capital in the group. Study participants reported that in order for them to invest their time and energy into developing network group relationships required for learning to occur, they needed to be motivated by perceived value, together with preexisting relationships.

The School Network established these network groups to fulfill a strategic need, and thus defined particular parameters for their groups. Other organizations should consider how they understand network dynamics and network learning, so as to best align the network model to their strategic needs. As with any network group, no matter what the organization’s needs are, a network group’s effectiveness will be impacted by its initial design. Even so, the participants’ own needs and interests have more of an impact, than those of the network’s creators. The more thorough and complex the
design and facilitation, the more likely the network can provide both extrinsic and intrinsic incentives for participant engagement, as well as foster a culture that supports the organization’s strategic interests.

The School Network’s approach was limited by their decision to only include members they selected. Another limitation was that group facilitators were selected based on prior relationships. For instance, Diane served as a volunteer facilitator for the ECE network group. Rabbi Clayton noted the weakness in this approach. He pointed out that the volunteer facilitators in his Judaic Director network group initially engaged in the group’s process, but gradually decreased their engagement. In order to maximize the participants’ feelings of inclusion and ownership, organizers should have made efforts to reach out to participants, to uncover their motivation for engagement, and then share it with other members. By offering ways for members to participate and interact on their own terms, and by showing an interest in the needs of the members beyond those they originally anticipated, organizers could heighten the sense of the value that participants derive from their group experience. Organizations fostering network groups should consider utilizing a performance model, like the Drexler/ Sibet Team Performance Model suggested by Gill (2000) (see Table 2), in order to determine the level of performance of each network group.

Motivating network group participants depends on the participants’ own willingness to invest in any particular group. While the network groups offered access to other people working within similar schools, this opportunity was not exclusive. Instead, most participants had access to other networks and resources by which to gather and share knowledge. Rabbi Clayton explained that the School Network needed to clarify their goals for the network as a whole and its members, in order to better align their statted goals with those of the network group participants. Beyond the trust members needed to have
with each other in order to participate, all the network group participants had to trust in the School Network and their stated and unstated interests as well.

Trust in the School Network directly correlated with the participants’ perceptions of the value the network groups provided for them. Network group participants, such as Rabbi Clayton and Diane, who functioned as early adopters, demonstrated for other participants the value of their learning and relationship building experience. The more these early adopters engaged in meaningful sharing, both through theoretical and technical questions, the more other members saw demonstrated value in the group. The School Network’s Judaic Director, Head of School and ECE networks had already begun to establish value for some of their members, by providing access to both pragmatic resources and ideas.

To cultivate value for participants beyond early adopters, network facilitators need to create multiple access points for participants to become involved and engaged in their network groups, as well as multiple modalities for engagement.

**Facilitation of learning activities.**

The School Network’s original approach to facilitation relied on volunteer network group members and staffers. Rabbi Clayton commented that for the network groups to really develop, there would need to be an investment in facilitators who could foster relationships and develop systems for managing the shared knowledge in the group. He asked, “The people that are officially the moderators or the facilitators, what was their instruction, what training did they have, what is their role in all of this?”

Organizations should consider hiring or training staff members as trained facilitators who would enable network group participants to foster relationships, drive the conversations and manage the network systems. Each different network group requires a different level of facilitator engagement, and a greater emphasis on the specific roles that need to be played. Based on the varying needs of specific
network groups, an organization’s staff may need to bear the weight of the facilitator roles, with one or more staffers taking on these roles. Secondary tasks can be performed by core participants of the network groups, based on their personal motivation and commitment to their specific group.

The facilitator has the job of overseeing a group’s overall needs, structure and vision. He or she observes the group participants’ interactions and reflects upon their needs. As a connector, the facilitator’s gets to know the particular characteristics, skills and desires of the participants as they enter the group and form relationships with other members. The facilitator acts as a matchmaker between members, both to further sharing and learning among members, and to deepen and enrich relationships. To enable and empower the network group’s members to foster and deepen their connections within the network’s framework, the facilitator organizes various system elements (communications, training, support, resources, etc.) to support group members.

Rabbi Clayton recognized that the School Network could rely on network group participants to organically organize themselves in collaborative efforts. Diane attempted to do so with the Teddy Bear project. In lieu of organic efforts, a facilitator should be tasked with fostering collaboration. The facilitator would organize collaborative opportunities initiated by participants or attempt to foster collaboration around areas of common interest. In this role, the facilitator recruits collaborators from within the group, gathering project partners from behind the scenes and providing lines of communication and needed resources.

Facilitators should provide group members with opportunities to foster more meaningful relationships and to create better understandings of their common interests. They should act as conveners to gather participants together. Facilitators connect participants to develop stronger relationships, foster new conversations and stimulate subgroups for collaborative action and learning.
They promote opportunities for gathering online in spaces other than the list-serv, such as Google+ Hangouts or webinars, and offline at events, and conferences, such as the School Network’s own annual conference. These efforts are designed to create opportunities for new people to meet and for offline relationships to flourish. To accomplish these goals, conveners may work with third party organizers to create specific time and spaces for group members of the group to connect, and for potential new members to interact. Conveners also effectively gather new members when a new group is created (Holley, 2012).

The School Network’s initial designs for their network groups impacted their growth. Yet, as its experience cultivating network groups develops, and its own network grows, it can change and still flourish. At the time of this writing, the School Network has hired a staff person to focus its energies on cultivating and supporting these network groups, as well as others the School Network has created. This new staff person already has initiated several of the recommendations above. These include actively engaging with network group participants to identify their skills, areas of interest and motivations for engagement. In addition to these efforts, the facilitator has intervened more regularly to support the conversations on the list-serv, set up conference calls and webinars around topical issues and organized members to collaborate. The presence of a trained and motivated facilitator greatly increases the impact of the School Network’s efforts, overrides many of the challenges arising out of its initial design, and should be a model for other organizations looking to foster network groups.

**Implications For Personal Practice**

**Engagement in networks.**

For my own engagement in network learning, this study has prepared me to better practice learning within networks. This involves fostering greater awareness of how I develop and sustain
relationships as a central component of network-learning. I also recognize the importance of balancing one’s own desire to gain knowledge for others, with one’s ability to share knowledge reciprocally.

As I have shifted professional roles and settings since beginning of this study, I have become even more motivated to utilize networks to learn and gain support from. Some of these have been informal personal learning networks, cultivated in social media platforms. I have also searched out professional networks, motivated by the need develop new connections for sharing knowledge and interpreting what I learned from my new experience. This parallels Natan’s desire for network learning. Through this study, and Natan’s narrative in particular, I understand the importance of weighing the value of a particular network learning experience. In order to find value in the networks I choose, I need to be aware of the context of the network, the motivations of other people in these networks, and their trustworthiness as sources for information, as Rabbi Clayton expressed.

In studying these selected networks groups, I realize the importance of understanding the motivations of the creators and facilitators of the networks. Their construction of the network, its boundaries, mechanisms and frameworks, determine the nature of the learning experience. At times I will not be able to control the design of the networks I engage in, or even the choices the facilitators make. Rather than allowing myself to become frustrated, or simply dismissing the networks I find least valuable, I can choose to focus on identifying and fostering relationships within those networks, thus increasing their value for me and overcoming their limitations. The true value of networks to serve my needs over the long term can be found in the active cultivation of relationships with others in the networks I opt into. This will depend on my ability to carefully select what networks to cultivate on my own or opt into.
**Facilitation of Networks.**

I had previously found few personal or professional networks with the ability to provide a space to offer the collaboration and knowledge truly needed to transform my own professional growth and work. During the time I was engaged in this study, I collaborated with members of my online professional learning network to address this need. Together we created a more formal network, which we called JEDLAB, to foster a network space that would function online and offline. This network was constructed to serve our needs for sharing and interpreting our work in the field of Jewish education, and to develop opportunities for collaboration. I co-founded this group while I was in the midst of reviewing literature for this study and constructing the research methods to apply to the School Network’s network group. I utilized my developed understanding of network and organizational learning to design the network constructs and facilitation approach for JEDLAB.

To a great degree, the ongoing design and facilitation of JEDLAB operates within a framework driven by the findings of this study. Together with the other founders and volunteer facilitators, we emphasize the importance of relationships as the central value of the network. I try to facilitate space and time for conversations, the sharing and exchange between participants in the network, whether offline or online, which lead to greater understanding and appreciation of the new and developing relationships between network participants.

We constructed the network as an open network, which anyone could join and participate in at their will. We promoted the ethos in social media platforms, and through essays and articles we shared publicly. We also engaged participants through small groups and one-on-one interactions to discuss the ethos of the group and how to foster increased participation and engagement. While this approach proved successful when the group first started as a group of individuals on Twitter and those in a
Facebook group, it has now grown to over 2,500 members, with over 100 participants actively engaged in online conversations and exchanges of ideas.

This study provides a model to consider new ways of facilitation and engagement for the next stage of JEDLAB’s development. The study indicated that the network groups provided participants with access to those most likely to share common interests and with an appreciation for each other’s backgrounds and settings. To further efforts to support collaboration amongst network members, I, along with the other facilitators, will need to establish small sub-networks to better achieve this goal. These sub-networks can operate within the larger, thriving network. Each of these sub-networks may only serve a small percentage of the overall network’s members, but should be better able to match motivated participants, to find value in collaboration, and to improve their professional learning, growth and desired transformation for their own professional sites and work.

**Recommendations for Research**

The findings of this study reveal several areas for further exploration, either to expand the current research, or deepen its findings.

**Types of networks studied.**

This study involved a limited participant pool selected from four network groups within a single site. Future studies should expand the research with an increased participant pool from a single network, or a wider variety of network groups. An increased participant pool would produce findings that could be more generalized to other networks and non-profits. Further study of networks should include those designed with more permeable and open boundaries.

While the School Network’s groups were based on participants’ common roles, future research could study affinity groups organized around common interests or shared experiences. Future research
could also address the manner in which volunteerism has an impact on networks across the stages of creation and development. As participants play significant volunteer roles in the groups, future study could describe those roles, how they change over time. Further research could explore the need to intentionally develop volunteerism in network groups in order to sustain the network’s relationships and activity. Such research could investigate the differences between networks made up of members who purely volunteer to be involved, and those, such as the School Network, which determine who can be in the group and limit the group to leaders within their member schools.

Within these different types of network groups, the particular elements of the groups, including the typology of conversations, facilitative approaches and relational structures could be reviewed. These could include both quantitative and qualitative studies of network groups, to better describe the construction, design and process of networks. In addition, future research could utilize descriptive studies to develop criteria for evaluating the efficacy and impact of network groups and network-learning.

**Impact on schools and field.**

This study focused on a non-profit committed to supporting schools in its network and the larger field of Jewish education. Further research could focus on the qualitative impact of network-learning. Using the descriptive narrative of this study, criteria could be created to determine the effectiveness of network learning on the participants in their institutional roles. Additional research could focus on evaluating the impact the network participants have on other learners, including their colleagues and even their own students.

By focusing on the impact of organizational learning, future studies could address the effect that participants’ efforts to seek external sources for network-learning have on collaboration and innovation
within their own sites. Other topics for future research include the impact of network-learning on a particular school’s culture for learning, and innovation, the extent to which networks foster inter-organizational collaboration, and how such collaborative efforts impact the larger field of Jewish education.

**Participants.**

Future studies could examine the long term impact of network group engagement on individual participants. Such studies could attempt to correlate the degree and duration of participants’ engagement in the network with their learning efforts both within and outside the network. Additional research could see if there is a correlation between network-learning efforts and other approaches to professional development.

**Nature of online community.**

This study looked into the experiences of participants in a network group who interacted primarily in an online environment. Further study could explore the nature of online learning environments for network-learning, and how they differ from offline engagement. Furthermore, research could examine more closely the role that technology plays in affecting participants’ motivation and engagement. For the network groups studied in this research, technology played a critical role in participants’ willingness to enter the group, and their technological literacy affected participants’ capacity to fully utilize the group’s platforms. Further study should be directed to examining how different platforms affect network-learning, and to what extent different platforms prove valuable for differing types of network groups and learning experiences.

Additional research could consider how particular participant’s responsiveness, adaptability and master of technology impact their willingness and capacity to engage in the network group. As trust
proved to be a critical factor for many participants in terms of their willingness to engage in the network group, further research could explore the impact the online environment has on trust between network group participants.

**Areas of Study Vulnerability and Limitations**

The design and execution of this research aimed to maintain the integrity of the research study. Areas of vulnerability and limitations of this study include:

**Limited pool.**

This study utilized a limited pool of four participants, from a single network having multiple network groups. It did not address the variation in these groups. Additionally, the research was limited to a network group in which only school leaders were involved, thus restricting the examination of network-learning to participants with a specific range of responsibilities and interests.

**Ability to generalize.**

As this research studied a specific network, with a limited pool of participants, all of whom shared similar roles from a specific field, the ability to generalize findings may be limited. The role of learning within networks may well be similar in other contexts and fields beyond the non-profit studied here. However, the limitations of this study do not allow for full substantiation of that conclusion.

**Limits of confidentiality.**

The researcher made great efforts to place upon the research and reporting the necessary parameters to protect the confidentiality of the site and the participants of the network groups. However, due to the relatively small nature of the field of Jewish education, and the limited number of non-profits who serve networks of Jewish private schools, the School Network and references study participants may be identifiable. Study participants may be recognizable due to the provided descriptions of the
School Network, the participants’ schools and their participants’ described learning activities and work settings.

**Researcher bias.**

This study’s positionality statement recognized areas of potential bias, which the researcher strived to avoid throughout data collection, analysis and reporting. Beyond the researcher’s interest in networks, for both personal and professional reasons, the researcher also played a role within the network itself. The researcher previously engaged with the site as a teacher in its network of schools, and maintains collegial and professional relationships with its staff and other participants of its network. Additionally, prior to the period of observation and data collection, the researcher served in a consultant capacity to review and provide feedback on the School Network’s efforts to create their network groups. The researcher engaged peer reviewers to substantiate this study’s finding to best avoid the researcher’s personal bias from affecting the research.

**Conclusion**

As non-profit and education professionals face increasing challenges in their professional capacities, technology also creates greater opportunities for connectivity and knowledge sharing. Non-profits seek to capitalize on innovative technologies to develop new networks to support their membership and affiliates. To encourage these efforts, the design, facilitation and support systems must be intentionally organized to enhance the organizational learning processes and experiences within these networks.

This research aimed to describe the interaction between organizational learning and relationships within networks. This descriptive analysis provided insight into how organizational learning occurred within networks defined by distinct parameters, and operated primarily within online environments.
Additionally, the research described the process of learning within these collegial networks, and the subsequent function of sharing and collaboration.

Using a qualitative case study approach, the researcher explored the experience of participants of several network groups within the larger endeavors of a non-profit functioning as a network of schools from within the larger field of Jewish education. This study investigated the participants’ experiences, attitudes and reflections about their overall experience in network learning and their particular experience in the network studied for this research. Together with observations of the group, the participants’ narratives provided the necessary data about the occurrence of network-learning in the School Network’s network groups.

Within the provided space for network engagement, network participants primarily limited their engagement to independent information gathering and interpretation. These learning processes served the purpose of generating new knowledge for their personal and professional use. Some participants engaged in more developed learning practices to share knowledge with their own organizations, to foster collaborative efforts and to develop new routines. However, these more developed efforts were limited due to the participants’ lack of motivation to invest more deeply in engagement in this particular network or to develop more meaningful relationships with other network group participants.

Increased motivation and deeper engagement were directly tied to participants’ trust in the network’s perceived value, and to the degree of trust participants had in the efforts and reliability of other members. Overall, participants found value in utilizing networks to connect with others, and to gather knowledge to help solve problems and increase awareness of best practices. Noticeably, when participants found value in other participants’ capacity for sharing reliable information and willingness to reciprocate in forming relationships, their investment in their network group grew. Despite any
perceived limitations in the network groups, the groups showed increasing levels of investment and engagement, which provided a foundation for further development and growth for their host, the School Network.

The findings derived from this study’s research were consistent with the literature reviewed on how people engage in organizational learning and within networks. This case study provided a descriptive analysis of the role organizational learning plays within networks to aid professional relationships and growth. The researcher identified several implications for the practice of cultivating and engaging in network-learning, as well as recommendations for future research.
Postscript

My role within this study was impacted by the participatory role I played in the research and the narrative that described it. Because of my relationship with the research site prior to initiating this research, I played a role as a consultant in reviewing and exploring the development of the network groups. This allowed me both an insider’s position within the organization’s network groups system, and trusted relationships with the study participants. That insider knowledge and trust allowed me to know the right questions to ask, and how to contextualize the participants’ responses.

My efforts to establish a new network model, called JEDLAB, concurrently with my research, offered me continuous insight into the process of developing and facilitating a network. This informed both the nature of my investigation of this study and new ways of thinking about networks and learning that impacted my analysis. My involvement in creating JEDLAB also provided me with legitimacy with the study participants.

The study of this specific site’s network provided me with new understanding that went beyond the construction and facilitation of a network group. By focusing my narrative on the particular perspectives of the study participants, I was able to get better grasp the nature of their experiences and to appreciate of how different the participants’ subjective encounters with their learning experiences could be. The study emphasized for me the importance of taking into account the individual experiences of each participant. The focus on these individuals helped me to realize how the context of their past experiences and relationships informed their motivation and trust in any particular network group encounter.
My role as a practitioner and a scholar exploring network-learning provided me with a means to iterate throughout my process as I cycled between engaging in networks and studying this particular one. This process will continue to inform how I engage in studying the networks I cultivate, and inform that work with the theory and literature that drove this study.
References


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Appendix A: Recruitment Email to Potential Participants: Google Group Post

Hello, my name is Yechiel Hoffman. As some of you know, I am in the process of earning my Doctorate in Education from Northeastern University. I am very excited about the opportunity to study the School Network and its network groups. I bring my expertise in network “weaving”, organizational learning, and group facilitation to studying your network groups and your learning experiences.

The purpose of this research study is to look at how professionals engage in a network of professional to learn through sharing knowledge, gathering new knowledge and collaborating together, while developing.

To meet this study’s goals, we are looking for four to six study participants from amongst the network groups to participate in the study. I will also be reaching out to contact members of the network groups directly, based on the suggestion of the School Network’s associate director. Your participation will include taking part in an introductory online survey, and two subsequent interviews.

The study will take place over the course of two months, leaving time for follow-up after the initial interview. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes. The first interview will be longer, around one hour, occurring about a week after the first interview, via phone or online communication, and if possible in person. The second interview will take place approximately one week after the second interview, and will take approximately thirty minutes, allowing for time for you to review the initial interview’s transcripts, and reflect on the conversation.

All the information I receive from you, whether by phone or online communication, including your name and any other identifying information, will be strictly confidential and will be kept under lock and
key or password protected. I will not identify you or use any information that would make it possible for anyone to identify you in any presentation or written reports about this study, unless you prefer otherwise. If it is okay with you, I might want to use direct quotes from you, but these would only be quoted as coming from “a person” or a person of a certain label or title, like “one woman said.”

If you would like to volunteer to be a part of this study, or would like more information you can contact me at hoffman.y@husky.neu.edu.

You can also call my advisor, Karen Reiss-Medwed, at 617-310-4072 with questions about the research study.
Appendix B: Recruitment Email to Potential Participants: Direct Email

Dear ____,

Over the last few months I have truly valued my experience consulting for [The School Network] to better support its efforts to develop and grow the network groups. As some of you know, I am also in the process of earning my Doctorate in Education from Northeastern University. I am very excited that [The School Network] has given me permission to study its network groups to study the role of networks in enabling your individual and learning experiences.

I am reaching out to you to see if you would be willing to participate in this study by completing a survey and partaking in a couple of interviews. To meet this study’s goals, we are looking for four to six study participants from amongst the network groups to participate in the study.

The purpose of this research study is to look at how professionals engage in a network of professional to learn through sharing knowledge, gathering new knowledge and collaborating together, while developing. My consultation provided [The School Network] with a better understanding of the nature of the network structure and process of engagement for its groups, and how best to structure its facilitative approach. My research may inform [The School Network’s] future efforts in cultivating the network group’s learning experience, but the focus of the study aims to describe the experience, rather than evaluate or improve it.

The survey will take approximately 15 minutes. The first interview will be longer, around one hour, occurring about a week after the first interview, via phone or online communication, and if possible in person. The second interview will take place approximately one week after the second interview, and will take approximately thirty minutes, allowing for time for you to review the initial interview’s
transcripts, and reflect on the conversation.

To meet this study’s goals, I will be continuing to observe the network groups to look for thematic and behavioral patterns in the learning experience, as well as gathering background information on this specific network’s goals, structure and activities. If you wish to opt out of participating in this research, please email me directly.

If you choose to participate, all the information I receive from you, whether by phone or online communication, including your name and any other identifying information, will be strictly confidential and will be kept under lock and key or password protected. I will not identify you or use any information that would make it possible for anyone to identify you in any presentation or written reports about this study, unless you prefer otherwise. If it is okay with you, I might want to use direct quotes from you, but these would only be quoted as coming from “a person” or a person of a certain label or title, like “one woman said.”

If you would like to volunteer to be a part of this study, or would like more information you can contact me at hoffman.y@husky.neu.edu.

You can also call my advisor, Karen Reiss-Medwed, at 617-310-4072 or k.reissmedwed@neu.edu with questions about the research study.
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form: Unsigned

School: Northeastern University, Department: College of Professional Studies, Ed.D

INVESTIGATOR: Karen Reiss Medwed (PI) Yechiel Hoffman (SI)

TITLE OF RESEARCH: The Networked Non-profit: How Organizational Learning Occurs in Networks

The following informed consent is required by Northeastern University for any person involved in a research study conducted by investigators at the University. This study has been approved by the University's Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects.

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

You have been asked to participate in this research study because of your role as a member of the School Network’s network group. As a member of the network group, you are engaged in practices, behaviors and attitudes related to networks, network relationships and network-learning. Your engagement in sharing ideas, group learning and collaboration makes your perspective on how you learn and how your network engagement enhances your learning.
The purpose of this research is to explain how learning occurs within an intentional network of professional.

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in the study in the following stages:

- An initial survey-in order to explore your role in Jewish education, your experience in networks and your understanding of network-learning. The survey will take around 15 minutes to complete.
- Two Interviews
  - The 1st interview will be focused on your professional role, learning experiences and network experiences. You will describe how your experiences in your specific network group and associate learning experiences (60-90 minutes).
  - The 2nd interview will be an opportunity to follow up on questions asked in earlier interviews and to reflect on some of the ideas explored in the impact of learning in your network experiences (30-60 minutes).
- Review
  - Participants will review transcripts in order to make sure everything is accurate. This will take approximately 15 minutes.

The study will take place of the course of two months, leaving time for follow-up after initial survey and each of the subsequent two interviews. The initial contact to secure consent, either via email or over the phone or online, will take approximately 5-10 minutes. The first interview will be longer, around one hour, occurring about a week after the first interview, via phone or online communication, and if possible in person. The second interview will take place approximately one week after the second interview, will take approximately thirty minutes, and allowing for time for reflection and review of
initial interview’s transcripts. Participants will be provided with a digital, password protected, copy of their transcript to review and provide any necessary feedback via email.

There will be no foreseeable physical harm, discomfort or risks as a result of participating in this study. There will be limited inconvenience due to the time taken to participate in the study.

There is no direct benefit for you to take part in the study. However, you may benefit from reflecting on your practices and attitudes towards your involvement in your networks, and network-learning, as well as the organization’s approach to cultivating networks to promote learning and facilitating that learning. The information learned from this study may help you and your networks better understand how everyone in the organization understands the role networks play in promoting relational learning and collaboration that can improve you, your organization and the field in general.

Your identity as a participant in this study will be kept confidential. That means only the researcher will see the information about you. No reports, transcripts or publications will use information that can identify you in any way. All audio and video recordings will be kept locked up, with only the researcher having a key. All the transcripts and reports will use coded pseudonyms and all identifiable information will be removed.

No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research.
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as an employee.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact:
Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115
tel. 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu.
You may call anonymously if you wish.

You must be at least 18 years old to participate unless your parent or guardian gives written permission.

I agree to take part in this research.

____________________________________________ ________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the Date participant above and obtained consent

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

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2. Anticipated circumstances under which the subject’s participation may be terminated by the investigator without regard to the subject’s consent.

3. Any additional costs to the subject that may result from participation in the research.

4. The consequences of a subject’s decision to withdraw from the research and procedures for orderly termination of participation by the subject.

5. A statement that significant new finding(s) developed during the course of the research which may be related to the subject’s willingness to continue participation will be provided to the subject.

6. The approximate number of subjects involved in the study.
Appendix D: Participant Online Survey

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study and to be interviewed to explore the learning experiences within the network-groups your belong to. This survey will provide important background in advance of our interviews.

Your participation, and the information you share will remain confidential. Any mention of you or your role will remain anonymous, unless you signify otherwise.

1. What is your name? (Will be kept confidential and only for internal sorting purposes)
2. What is your role within your organization? (choose one)
   a. Head of School
   b. Staff
   c. Faculty
   d. Educational Leader (Principal, Department Chair, etc.)
   e. Other
3. What type of school do you work for? (Check all that apply)
   a. ECC
   b. Elementary School
   c. Middle School
   d. High School
4. Do you use social media or online networks to connect with people? What platforms do you use?
5. How would you define the term network?

6. What does it mean to learn in a network?

7. What is the role of self-directed individual learning in your professional development?

8. What are ways that you engage in learning activities as part of your job?

9. What other experiences, such as conferences, or seminars, do you use to learn with others?

10. How important is it to your organization to have you engage in a learning network? (1-4 Scale)
   a. 1=not important
   b. 2=somewhat important
   c. 3=Important
   d. 4=Very Important

11. How important it to you to engage in a network to advance your learning? (1-4 Scale)
   a. 1=not important
   b. 2=somewhat important
   c. 3=Important
   d. 4=Very Important

Thank you for participating in this online survey. Your responses will help guide the in person interviews to follow. All information provided will be kept confidential.
Appendix E: Participant Interview Protocols

Thank you for taking the time to provide your valuable information for this research project on your learning experiences within the network-groups you belong to. Your participation, and the information you share will remain confidential. Any mention of you or your role will remain anonymous, unless you signify otherwise.

The first interview will be longer, around one hour, occurring about a week after the first interview. The second interview will take place approximately one week after the second interview, will take approximately thirty minutes, and allowing for time for reflection and review of initial interview’s transcripts.

Participants will be provided, via email, with a digital, password protected, copy of their transcript to review and provide any necessary feedback.

These interviews will likely occur via online communication (e.g. Skype), and if necessary by phone, and if geographically permitting, in person. We can take a break for any reason during the process. You are encouraged to share openly and honestly about your experiences, perceptions and attitudes towards the learning and relationships developed through your network group.

Interview I-Background and Experience within Network Learning
1. What are ways you engage in learning? For your personal interest in your career and field? For your professional development? For your job and organization’s benefit?

2. Who do you share your knowledge with, and how?

3. Who do you develop relationships with in order to learn from or with?

4. What learning experiences have you encountered individually or with others have had great value for you?

5. Can you describe when your learning has impacted your role within your organization and your organization itself?

Networks

6. What experiences have you had interacting with other professionals in your field? In what areas? Were they formal or informal experiences?

7. What groups do you engage with to advance your learning?

8. Do you engage in learning with others offline or online? How frequently do you engage with these groups?

9. Are these groups formal or informal? Do they connect to a bound group (like an alumni association) or an unbounded group (like an interest group)?

10. How do you use the Internet to connect with others in your field or to find new Sources for learning?


12. What does your involvement in networks have on your professional work?

13. What impact does your participation in your network groups have on your organization?
The School Network

14. In what capacity did you start engaging with the school network?

15. Can you reflect upon experiences you have had with the organization before you joined the network group?

16. Can you share experiences within this network that were valuable to you and why? What experiences have not been valuable to you and why?

17. Why did you first opt into joining this network group? What did you expect to gain?

18. What relationships did you have with others in the group before joining the group? How did those relationships impact your decision to join? How do those relationships impact your involvement?

19. Can you describe your active involvement with members in this network group outside of the organization’s formal platforms?

20. What have you learned or done within your network group that you shared with others in your organization or others in your field? Skills, concept, best practices, etc.?

21. Can you describe how learning occurs in the network group? What is the process? What are the key factors that progress or impede learning?

22. Can you describe your involvement in the network group? What motivates you to be involved as much or as little as you are involved?

23. What value do you place on the network group? How have your aspirations been met?

24. What do you gain from your involvement in the network? Can you share specific examples?

25. What relationships have you developed and what new connections have you made through the network group?
26. What collaborative activity results from your engagement in the network group?

27. What challenges or barrier to your involvement have prevented you from engaging in the network group?

28. What particular experiences stand out from engaging in the network group?

29. What particular new knowledge or understandings resulted from learning in the network group?

30. What contributions do you make to the learning of the network group?

31. In what ways have you felt your experience in the network group been facilitated or designed?
   How has your network experience been supported by the school network organization?

32. How has learning been framed and modeled with your network group experience?

Interview II-Reflection on Network-Learning

1. What do you think makes an effective online learning space? How does it different from an effective offline-learning environment?

2. How do you build trust with others in your network group? What might prevent you from being open with others in the network group when sharing?

3. How has your involvement in the network opened you up to other network experiences?

4. What other experiences would you want to have to advance your learning in the network group?

5. How would you like to enable your learning experience to lead to collaboration with other members of your network?

6. How do you evaluate whether your engagement in the network has led to you advancing your learning?
7. When you experience discomfort or a barrier to your learning in the network group, are you more or less likely to try again?

8. What are ways you would modify your experience with the network group to remove any barriers to your increased learning?

9. How do you think learning within the network group enables you to be more innovative and creative as an individual and as a leader?

10. The following are five ways in which you may engage in organizational learning: problem solving, experimentation, experience, best practices, transferring knowledge. Can you describe which of these do you engage in? Which ones would you like to engage in?
Appendix F: The School Network’s Introductory Email to Network Group

Dear Judaic Professionals,

*The School Network's new business plan* maps out a catalog of emerging and continuing networking opportunities to strengthen the day school field. At the very heart of the plan is the launch of a series of focused, curated professional networks, each with a unique focus. Each network, or [Network Group], is facilitated by peers who themselves are deeply engaged in the topic at hand.

It is with great joy that I invite you to join [Network Group] JD: the network of Judaic Directors. [Network Group] JD will gather the lead Jewish studies professionals from [The School Network] schools across North America and beyond for regular conversations (by phone, by webinar, via online chat, and in person) to explore and advance the broad range of issues facing Judaic leaders in Jewish community day schools.

[Network Group] JD is co-chaired by four extraordinary educators: Sharon Freundel (Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital - Washington DC), Tzivia Garfinkel (Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School - Chicago), Rabbi Stuart Light (Jewish Day School of Metropolitan Seattle - Bellevue, WA) and Rabbi Jack Nahmod (Abraham Joshua Heschel School - NY).

We at [The School Network] are honored and humbled by their leadership and on their behalf, I encourage you to join them in this emerging community of practice.

We look forward to working with you as together we strengthen and sustain Jewish day schools in order to ensure a vibrant Jewish future.

All the best,

Executive Director, [The School Network]
Appendix G: Introductory Post to Network Group

Dear [Network Group] JD:

Thank you to those who were able to join us on our first [Network Group] JD conference call a few weeks ago. Attached, please find the notes from that phone conversation.

You should have gotten a message alerting you that you have been subscribed to [Network Group] JD, a new Google Group organized by [The School Network] as part of its activities to better network the professionals at [The School Network] schools and enhance individual learning and collective knowledge. The [Network Group] JD Google Group, is a new opportunity to connect the lead Judaic educators and administrators at [The School Network] schools on a more ongoing basis.

The [Network Group] staff is currently researching various technological platforms for sharing resources and information, but in the meantime, we can all use this Google group to send and answer questions or start discussions of relevant interest to our schools. Included in [Network Group] JD are those educators and administrators at [The School Network] schools who have Judaic Studies supervisory responsibilities. To post a question or respond to the discussion thread, just hit reply. We have set the preferences for this Google group to send a digest of emails once each day. While we hope you won’t, you can also unsubscribe using the link at the bottom.

As a way of getting discussion started, we’d like to pose a question. This month’s upcoming [RAVSAK] newsletter will focus on Hebrew language acquisition. The [School Network’s] staff has asked if we could generate a list of “quick and easy ways to increase Hebrew use at your school.” Please share with the group some ideas that you use in your schools.

As always we and the [School Network] team are eager to hear your feedback about this new [Network Group] and to hear from you ways to make it useful to you and your school.

All the best,

[Network Group] JD Co-chairs:
Sharon Freundel,
Tzivia Garfinkel,
Rabbi Stuart Light,
Rabbi Jack Nahmod,
Idana Goldberg, Ph.D
Associate Executive Director
Appendix H: IRB Approval from Northeastern University

Northeastern

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: June 20, 2013

IRB #: CPS13-06-02

Principal Investigator(s): Karen Reiss Medwed
Yechiel Hoffman

Department: Doctor of Education Program
College of Professional Studies

Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University

Title of Project: The Networked Nonprofit: How Organizational Learning
Occurs in Networks

Participating Sites: School District Superintendent’s Permission Letter on file

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7

Informed Consents: One (1) unsigned consent form

Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: JUNE 19, 2014

Investigator’s Responsibilities:

1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when
recruiting participants into the study.

2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.

3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.

4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must
be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.

5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month
prior to the expiration date above.

6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any
other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection