Adaptation Continuum

What it Means

- Adaptation contrasts with replication.

    —If we believe every congregation, school, and community in which it operates is in some ways unique, then replication is unlikely to succeed.

    —Yet, ignoring all past innovations would be terribly inefficient. Studying what others have done, but mindfully adapting to one's unique situation, provides an effective balance.

- Continuum implies that adaptation of educational models can take various forms. These forms range from:

    —Making minor modifications, adjustments or variations on a model, to

    —Mixing and matching, i.e., combining design elements from several models, to

    —Designing a new model based on what you've learned from examining others.

- ECE calls this range the Adaptation Continuum. It could be illustrated like this:

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Modification   **Mix and Match**   **Inspired Redesign**

- A corollary of the adaptation continuum is that the focus moves from the innovation itself to the *process* of innovation and the *capacity* to innovate continuously. Stanford University's Professor Jeffrey Pfeffer puts it this way, "Don't copy what great companies do, copy how they think!" The goal becomes more to *create innovators*, than to replicate innovations. The goal of learning about innovations elsewhere is not to copy them but to learn enough about their context and application to inform and fuel one's own innovative capacity and process. This includes learning about:

    —The thinking and creative process that gave rise to the innovation,

    —The vision or goals to which it was aligned,

    —The unique circumstantial challenges it was designed to address, and

    —The impact it produced.

How/Why It Is Critical To Innovation

How congregations typically think about it

Conventional wisdom focuses on adoption of the programmatic, structural, or curricular innovation rather than on using others' innovations as a wellspring of understanding about how to innovate.

RE·IMAGINE

Adaptation Holds Greater Promise than Adoption

- Numerous efforts at disseminating Jewish educational innovations—in hopes that they would be replicated—have met with mixed success. These efforts usually involve publishing information about the innovative program, not about how the idea developed, the vision and contextual challenges to which it responded, or the passionate advocates who made it happen.

- People must feel ownership of innovation if it is to succeed; simple replication removes people from the *process* of innovation; thereby reducing their sense of ownership.

- While invention is still very much needed in our field, it often sets an exceedingly high bar. A range of adaptation possibilities puts innovation within reach of more congregations with a wider range of innovative capacity.

How We Enact/Model it in The RE-IMAGINE Project of NY

- The Adaptation Continuum is introduced at the very outset of the project as a critical philosophical underpinning. The message to congregations is that ECE is not imposing an answer or advocating for choice among limited options. Rather, The RE-IMAGINE Project is a journey through which each congregation will develop its own vision and its own innovations.

- The primary vehicle is the ECE's Online Learning Experience on Alternative Models of the Religious School. This interactive, flexible experience takes Task Force members on virtual visits to congregations that have created mold-breaking models of Jewish education. Through interviews and "day in the life" documentaries, Task Force members not only learn about each innovative model but "crawl behind" the model to learn how its originators and participants think about it.

Examples

- Westchester Reform Temple adapted aspects of Beth Am of Los Altos Hills' Shabbaton program to create Sharing Shabbat.

- Congregation Sha'ar Zahav in San Francisco mixed and matched elements of several models in creating its own tailored model.