

CONNECTIONS

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The Work of the Kettering Foundation: Challenges and Changes Ahead

By Sharon L. Davies p. 2

On the Formation of Citizens

By Elizabeth Gish and Camryn Wilson p. 18

Breaking the Mold: Journalism Reimagined

By Paloma Dallas and Paula Ellis p. 62



INNOVATING FOR DEMOCRACY

The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering's primary research question is, what does it take to make democracy work as it should? Kettering's research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through interrelated program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. The foundation collaborates with an extensive network of community groups, professional associations, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation's website at www.kettering.org.

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Executive Editor
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Maura Casey

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Amy Dragga

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The Citizens' Accord Forum: Building a Shared Society in a Sustainable Democracy

By Phillip D. Lurie and Udi Cohen

Conflict among social identity groups presents a fundamental threat to democratic self-governance. These identities reflect how people see themselves, and how others see them, and can vary in differing social contexts. Social identities include gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, economic class, and political ideology, among others.

The Kettering Foundation has been working with the Citizens' Accord Forum (CAF) to convene Israeli citizens, both Jews and Arabs, around issues of universal interest (e.g., education of youth, youth at risk, domestic violence, and abuse of religious beliefs). The idea is that the



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sense people have of identities—of themselves and of others—will expand *as the recognition of the nature of the issues they share* expands. Recognition of the interconnections among different but related interests can drive the development of constructive exchange among people—even among groups with a history of conflict.

This point was illustrated in a powerful way one day in 2017, when Rabbi Shmuel began the closing discussion of a deliberative dialogue between Jewish rabbis and Muslim clerics by saying, “As you are aware, we, the rabbis in our group, prohibit Jews from visiting the Temple Mount until the Messiah arrives. However, it is still important for us to know that you, the Muslim clerics in the group, at least recognize that our Temple once stood in that spot—the location today of your mosque, Haram al-Sharif.”

The rabbi spoke hours before the meeting’s conclusion, when time was set aside for the participants to sign off on the final draft of a joint working paper. The paper was the result of several days of a deliberative dialogue on the shared problem of at-risk youth who are disconnected from their communities.

How did Rabbi Shmuel’s statement relate to the topic? It seems strange to have a question so difficult

and complex arise at that point in the process, especially one apart from the topic at hand.

Rabbis and clerics had worked together for several days. They had reached the point of publicly committing to joint action on an issue of shared concern, one that both groups had been grappling with within their own communities. They had much in common and had learned a great



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deal from each other through the deliberative process. It was clear that working together going forward would help each side.

Why was it so critical then, for Rabbi Shmuel and the group of rabbis, immediately before the truly groundbreaking move of ultra-Orthodox rabbis and Muslim clerics publishing their first joint working paper, to raise one of the root problems of the Jewish-Arab conflict? Despite knowing that he would not receive the answer he was looking for from his Muslim colleagues, Rabbi Shmuel was willing to risk the outcome of the hard work he had contributed to so significantly.

What about the Muslim clerics? They were immensely proud of the joint efforts and the progress they had achieved, yet they were unwilling to let go of their beliefs and perceptions even slightly. Why? What is the mechanism by which these contentious issues can be addressed?

As facilitators of dialogues, CAF understood that if the group did not ask itself these questions, it would not be able to end the week of discussions with the commitment of all participants to continue on a common path. Most likely, we would have concluded the meeting in the same manner as many other dialogue meetings—talk, energy, but no shared commitment.

Instead, we facilitated a difficult and tense discussion involving many concerns and fears on all sides. It was evident that we would not be able to reach a consensus. However, we did observe a fascinating phenomenon here: unlike other dialogues, this group concluded that we needed “to agree on how to disagree” during this intractable discussion. Ultimately, this agreement allowed the work to continue. The week ended with the creation of a joint document that codified their interest in joint work and joint ventures.

As this example shows, there are crucial design-related aspects to these initiatives, particularly the explicit focus on *issues*. When initiatives are focused on group *identities*, people can reduce themselves to a single identity, and in so doing, public issues inevitably become reduced to simple binary (zero-sum) negotiations. But seeing issues as simple binary problems ignores the complexities involved and ultimately leads to poor decision-making and unsustainable solutions. Moreover, this approach denies the reality that people often have many concerns related to a particular issue. These concerns are each equally valid and they overlap. Public concerns are dynamic, changing depending on local contexts, individual perceptions, group interactions, and other



factors. The key is to both raise and reconcile these interrelated concerns.

CAF's efforts are motivated by a desire to convene people who share an interest and have the capacities to deal constructively with issues of shared concern to those who live together in a region. People share the tensions inherent among the multitudes of interests they all represent. This explicit approach in design has been critical to CAF's work and a distinguishing feature.

FROM THE WAR OF IDENTITY POLITICS TO A DIALOGUE BETWEEN IDENTITIES

Again, this is not to say that identity is unimportant, should be ignored, or is a nonstarter when addressing shared problems. Rather, as the

discussion stemming from Rabbi Shmuel's provocative question illustrates, CAF's approach recognizes the multitudes of identities we each bring into a space and the need to reconcile the tensions among the concerns that they represent.

In a world taken over by the polarizing discourse of "it's not what is said but who said it that matters, and whether we are for or against the speaker," we need to move from the war of identity politics to a dialogue between identities. It is important to develop tools for dialogue between identities so that these multitudes can be identified and their overlapping nature understood and reconciled. Conducting these dialogues of identities remains the central challenge in CAF's work.

CAF has learned that the ticket to meaningful dialogue is based on a balanced approach that recognizes the group has a “language” through which it can address the topic under discussion. Without such recognition, the dialogue is usually reduced to the classic question of, “What don’t we agree about?” rather than the more important question, “Why don’t we agree?” Unfortunately, most of the groups CAF is working with do not feel that they have such a language.

In the course of building this missing language, CAF has learned that the language sought by most of the groups is based on competing values, and so what is needed is a way to convert values that are held as absolute into competing values, allowing a balance between them to

be found. Dialogue must be aimed at finding the balance between these competing values by considering the trade-offs and examining the price that we, as a group and as a society, are willing to pay for the desired change.

To do this, CAF combines the dialogue that addresses the individual with a dialogue that also addresses the community structure, the social issues, and the resulting identities. This combination enables developing the consciousness of partnership—not just participation based mostly on shared interests. The consciousness of partnership is the starting point of the construction of a common civic ethos, and it guarantees the consciousness of sharing over time in a viable and stable process.



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A DIALOGUE THAT ALSO ADDRESSES THE COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

Dialogue between individuals with a distinguished identity (such as Jew, Arab, religious, secular) generally includes a review of each individual within themselves, including how they feel about the issue. In most cases the individual turns outward to the dialogue with the other group as part of a specific group. In many cases, dialogue groups based on the dialogue between individuals with a distinguished identity find it difficult to maintain that consciousness for long. For example, people who position themselves as a close-connected identity group are more apt to engage in a dialogue of identity, not a dialogue around shared issues and the trade-offs inherent in working through the problems at hand. The difficulty stems from, among other things, the lack of productivity that comes about when focusing on the root problems of the conflict. In many cases, when the groups are asked to develop a deep and long-lasting commitment, they will prefer to return to the “comfort zone” of identity politics and binary choices. Thus, for example, CAF learned that Jews and Arabs will return to the question of “who initiated the conflict in 1948,” which is a familiar topic in Israel: the language is familiar, and



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one can return to the argument in a friendly atmosphere without being too committed. Arabs, Jews, liberals, and conservatives in most cases come to the dialogue as one particularly defined group. In these cases, the dialogues result in the usual “politics of identity” discourse. To avoid this, CAF allows each group to first run

dialogues among themselves so that they can work through the different approaches (including the trade-off questions). Only after this can they begin to coordinate dialogues with other groups.

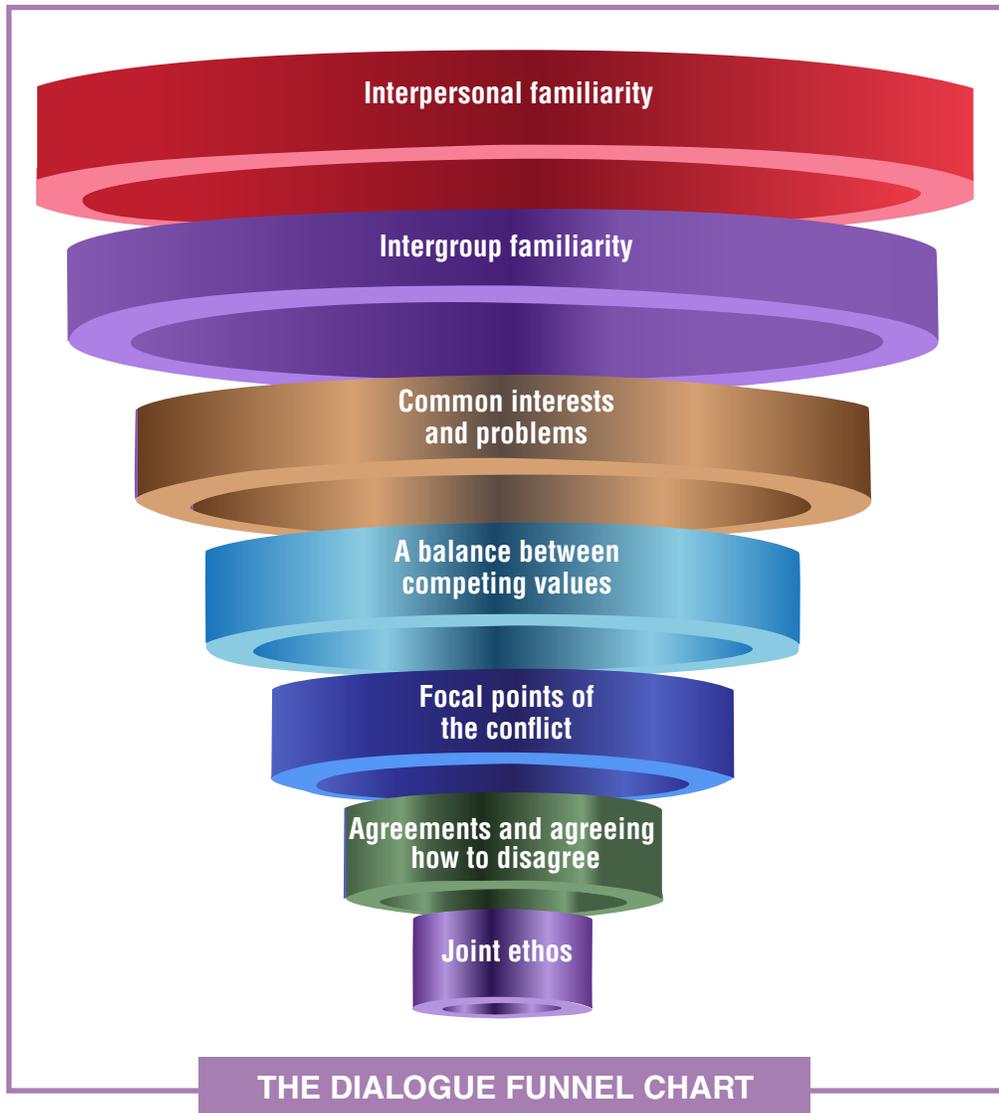
In addition, dialogue between identities—in which attention is turned to social and communal elements—simultaneously kicks off

an interesting process of dialogues within each reference group as well as between different groups in each population. For example, between liberals and conservatives, liberals will discuss an issue among themselves while simultaneously discussing it with conservatives. Here, the turning outward from an identity politics approach often appears coupled with the willingness to develop cooperation on the level of civic agendas. The minimum required here is on the level of “agreeing how to disagree.” From here onward, one can build a consciousness of viable partnerships and greatly contribute to the possibility of developing a shared civilian ethos.

THE TRADE-OFF QUESTIONS

Deliberative dialogue is based on trade-offs: questions that ask what price we are prepared to pay in order to balance competing values. CAF has learned that focusing on competing values enables participants in each group to develop their own unique language, a language through which people can begin to address shared public problems. Deliberative dialogue also enables the different groups to reduce the number of absolute values over which they are prepared to “go to war” in their work with each other. This reduction is enabled by the translation of these

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absolute values into competing values. The competing values create the ability for “agreeing how to disagree,” as did the rabbis and Muslim clerics. This is an essential element in building a common civic ethos in a polarized society.

The ability to agree to disagree is built upon tolerance. Group participants developed the approach, “I am willing to tolerate your choice when I understand that you are choosing one competing value over another,

but I understand that this is your way. You are mistaken, but let’s be tolerant and find the way to progress together. There is no other way. Let’s agree how to disagree.” Considering this, CAF drafted a dialogue funnel chart, creating a type of program model for group work. ■

Phillip D. Lurie is a program officer at the Kettering Foundation. He can be reached at plurie@kettering.org.

Udi Cohen is the codirector of the Citizens’ Accord Forum. He can be reached at udi@caf.org.il.



200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459; (937) 434-7300
444 North Capitol Street NW, Suite 434, Washington, DC 20001; (202) 393-4478
www.kettering.org

Kettering Foundation
200 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459



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