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**Karen Mossberger**

*Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age*, by Allison H. Fine. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006. 220 pp. $27.95 (hardcover).

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*Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age* is an engaging and highly readable book about the changing opportunities and demands for nonprofit organizations in an era of network technologies. It aims to provide organizations with a roadmap of possibilities rather than a blueprint or how-to manual for technology use. Indeed, although there are recommendations for practice, the central argument of the book is perhaps less about technology solutions than about the way in which technology use in society is changing relationships with members, funders, and others, creating new expectations and a need for more networked organizations. Information and communication technologies serve as a medium for maintaining relationships and opening up organizations.

Fine's book offers advice for practitioners in what she calls "activist" organizations, by which she means all nonprofit organizations, not just political ones. She argues that nonprofits are inevitably involved in promoting some type of social change, and this conceptualization is a foundation for drawing parallels to technology use in recent political organizing, such as the Howard Dean campaign, Moveon.org, and get-out-the-vote drives. An underlying theme is that nonprofit organizations need to think like activists and work toward social change through participatory networks.

The role of technology is to provide new "social media," which include handheld devices such as mobile phones and Blackberries, as well as laptops and PCs. The social media of the connected age are two-way and interactive, in contrast with the one-way broadcast capabilities of media such as radio and television. Interactivity increases the participatory potential of the Internet and other social media. E-mail, instant messaging, blogs, wikis, online surveys, chat rooms, and other tools allow organizations to gather input. Web sites are often thought of by organizations as online brochures where information is simply posted, but there are opportunities to increase two-way communications or to allow users to share information. One memorable example of the latter given by the author is that rather than providing downloadable

how-to instructions for program planning, her organization's Web site offered the software tools so that anyone could create their own project plans online at their site. Sharing information requires a shift from proprietary thinking about membership lists and expertise as well as software, and it requires more transparency and listening in order to gain from the interactive dimensions of new technologies. Greater input also requires that it be recognized and taken into account rather than merely solicited.

Networks facilitated by technology are broader and more diffuse than traditional social networks in communities. The low marginal cost of extending networks (by disseminating a message on multiple listservs, for example) has considerable advantages in comparison with direct mailings for fundraising or other appeals. The Internet also makes it possible for individuals to participate by forwarding e-mails to their own personal networks, thereby multiplying the reach of messages beyond formal organization lists. Hyperlinks on Web sites and blogs can create connections between organizations, activities, and information sources and, in fact, can add to the stature of referenced sites as information sources. The decentralizing tendencies of social media, according to Fine, shift the conversation from a top-down one within organizations to a sideways discussion spread throughout networks of participants.

As a result, there is greater need for transparency and for leadership willing to share control. She recognizes that this is not likely to occur without organizational change toward more decentralization and participation and devotes a chapter to the discussion of such change. Foundations and grantmakers have tended to reinforce top-down and business-oriented models of organization and accountability, writes Fine, and so she encourages groups to move toward a more networked model of fundraising and participation rather than reliance on a few large donors.

The picture of the future that Fine portrays holds both promise and difficulties for nonprofits. She counters Robert Putnam's view of declining social capital by arguing that we are experiencing a change in what participation means, rather than declining social capital. Instead of maintaining membership and participating in more visible activities, individuals express their concern and involvement by forwarding e-mails, giving a donation online, joining listservs, or responding to events (such as Hurricane Katrina). The optimistic side of this development is that new forms of participation have been made possible. According to Fine, however, this also means that participation in the future is likely to include this type of low-intensity and sporadic participation as well as high-intensity commitment. The trick is to make a variety of participatory opportunities available and meaningful. Because participation is often sporadic, maintaining the breadth of networks and appealing to new constituencies through alliances are even more critical for volunteers, donations, and other resources.

By focusing on needs for the future, Fine encourages organizations to recognize shifts that are occurring, but these are not perhaps as simple or

sweeping as she suggests. This is a common hazard in predicting changes based on technology, because its effects can be varied and complex. For example, it seems early to predict that the future generation will be less loyal to organizations and causes based on some recent surveys and trends. Perhaps, there will still be core joiners, but the less-engaged will find it easier to participate at times. In a similar manner, she is too dismissive of the issue of digital inequality and its effect in low-income communities. She cites surveys conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project that show that 70% of Americans are online, but Pew defines this as having used the Internet at least occasionally. Not all of these individuals have regular access or the skills to fully participate using this reading-intensive and writing-intensive medium. Even among those younger than 30, there are still statistically significant disparities in Internet use based on education, race, and ethnicity (Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2007). This doesn't mean that we should neglect the promise of technology but that we should be sensitive to providing access and support or to offering multiple ways to participate. There will also likely be greater variation among nonprofits and their organizational needs than is suggested here. Hospitals and universities, for example, will continue to look very different technologically and organizationally than the networks of activists that Fine depicts. Technology use and organizational adaptation may follow more divergent paths.

Despite these small caveats, Fine has produced a book that is both thoughtful and thought provoking, which addresses technology strategies, relationships, and organizational change within the nonprofit sector. Far from a technical manual, it raises compelling issues that deserve consideration by all nonprofit organizations.

## Reference

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**Mark A. Hager**

*Arts Marketing Insights: The Dynamics of Building and Retaining Performing Arts Audiences*, by Joanne Scheff Bernstein. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007. 294 pp. $27.95 (hardcover).

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Here is a party game: name people who produced work that propelled them to the top of their field early in their careers and then spent the rest of