



METHODOLOGY— THE GENDER GAP IN JEWISH NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP: AN ECOSYSTEM VIEW



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH: THE STARFISH INSTITUTE



This document lays out the research methodology behind the report, [*The Gender Gap in Jewish Nonprofit Leadership: An Ecosystem View*](#).

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GUIDING ASSUMPTIONS

We began this research process guided by six foundational premises:

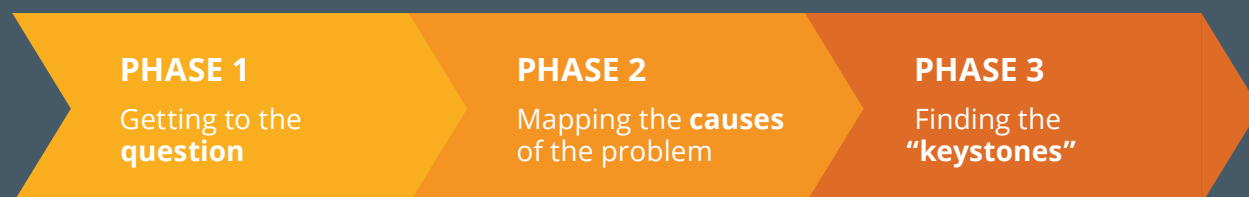
- 1. It's not about fixing the women, it's about fixing the system.** This echoes an analogous approach from [Race to Lead](#). While there may be actions that individuals can take to improve their chances of rising to leadership to some degree or another, the scope of our investigation focused on systemic, not individual, dynamics.
 - 2. We can't solve what we don't understand.** If we want to identify effective solutions, we need to map the problem in as much detail as possible.
 - 3. Anyone affected by the issue has important information about the issue.** Our process of understanding must be rooted not only in expert opinion and our own sources of information, but also in input from the full range of the people in our field.
 - 4. No one can fix this alone.** The problem is widely dispersed in our field, and only a broad coalition can meaningfully address it. We will need to mobilize many people both to understand it and to solve it.
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Guiding Assumptions

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- 5. The Jewish community is an ecosystem.** Each part of the community affects, and is affected by, other parts.
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- 6. Everything is connected, but not randomly and not equally.** Some parts of our community are influenced by many factors, and some are influenced by only a few. Some parts of our community affect many other parts, and some only affect a few. Understanding those connections will be valuable to understanding the problem and how to solve it.

THREE PHASES

Our exploration and analysis had three phases:



"Keystones" are the causes of the problem that have the most potential to make a big impact across the whole system. We'll explain more below.

A photograph of two women looking at a laptop screen, overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter. The woman in the foreground is wearing glasses and a white sweater, resting her chin on her hand. The woman in the background is also wearing glasses and looking down at the laptop.

PHASE 1

GETTING TO THE QUESTION

Getting to the Question

In order to get useful, specific insights and information from a broad range of people, we needed to define a **powerful, mobilizing question** to guide our work. A useful question would identify a problem whose solution would be not only audacious and ambitious enough to mobilize many people, but also achievable within a decade and specific enough to break into component parts.

Before formulating it, we immersed ourselves in many foundational sources—publications from experts and practitioners that enriched our understanding. ([Click here for a full list of sources.](#))

Beginning in Phase 1 and continuing throughout Phase 2, we also held individual interviews with 25 thought leaders and community members to raise up key ideas to consider when formulating the question and mapping the problem. Those experts included organizational leaders, academic scholars, consultants, executive coaches, DEI professionals, rabbis, and more.

After this process of research, interviews, reflection, and debate, we chose this central question:

Why is there a persistent gender gap in top leadership at Jewish nonprofit organizations?

We decided to focus exclusively on *the* top professional leadership role (CEOs, executive directors, and equivalent chief executive roles) because that's where the gap tends to be the most pronounced. These top positions are the ones that exert the most power in our field.

A man and a woman are looking at a laptop screen in an office setting. The man is wearing a dark polo shirt with Roman numerals and the text 'AC POLO CLUB' on the sleeve. The woman is wearing a dark top with a white collar. The background is blurred, showing office shelves and equipment.

PHASE 2

MAPPING THE PROBLEM

GATHERING CAUSES

Of course, this question doesn't have just one answer; it has many. We needed to know what the answers are and how they interact.

So in order to generate the answers, we went to the community. We mined the expertise of a diverse network, designing a range of opportunities for hundreds of people representing many segments of the field—from professionals to board leaders and from funders to academics—to share their perspective and expertise in meetings, half-day workshops, a survey, and more.

In each of these encounters we used a method of inquiry based on the ["Five Whys"](#) technique pioneered by Sakichi Toyoda and incorporated into the Toyota Production System. First, we asked the question—Why is there a persistent gender gap in top leadership at Jewish nonprofit organizations?—and for each answer given by participants, we asked, regarding that answer, "Why?" Each line of inquiry yielded not just immediate causes, but a cascade of causes—factors that started causal chains leading to the leadership gender gap. We stopped asking individuals for their input only once we stopped hearing any new causes.

Mapping the Problem

After consulting our partners and stakeholders about our preliminary findings and analyzing the demographics of participants up to that point, we created additional peer-led listening sessions for people in groups not yet adequately represented in our sample to share their perspectives:

- Jews of Color
- Men
- Orthodox women
- People with disabilities
- Transgender and nonbinary Jews
- Women in later stages of their careers
- Women in middle stages of their careers

These sessions contributed valuable insights that informed our understanding of the causes of the gap. To read more about them, see pages 42–45 of this document.



Mapping the Problem

Between all these conversations large and small, we heard from over 800 people during this “Mapping the Problem” phase.

January–April 2020

DATA COLLECTION: ROUND 1

- NYC workshop, ~100 attendees
- San Francisco workshop, ~75 attendees
- Leading Edge Board Meeting workshop
- 11 interviews
- Survey with ~550 responses
- Created first draft of the tree map

May–July 2020

DATA COLLECTION: ROUND 2

- Shared draft tree map for feedback
- Compiled bibliography of foundational sources
- Coded select literature
- 9 interviews
- 7 peer-led listening sessions
- Sessions with 15 lay leaders
- Created final version of the tree map

We synthesized the input from all these people into **71 causes** of the gender gap in top leadership.

ORGANIZING CAUSES

In order to make sense of the 71 causes we heard from participants, we grouped them into five broad themes. (While we observed *five themes* at this stage and found *five keystones* based on our quantitative analysis later, that numerical match of five and five is a coincidence. These themes do not map onto the keystones one-to-one.)

For each of the themes below, each bullet point represents a group of multiple causes. (The full map, which follows further below, lists all 71 causes.)

FIVE THEMES FOR THE CAUSES

1. **Systems to Diversify:** Jewish organizations and the Jewish community at large lack systems and motivation for diversifying their leadership and staff.

- Some Jewish organizations lack internal policies and practices to grow and nurture a diverse pipeline of leadership and staff.
- Some search committees and boards don't prioritize increasing the diversity of top leaders.
- The Jewish community lacks the structures and motivation to build and support a diverse pipeline of leaders across the sector.

2. **Deprioritizing the Problem:** The Jewish community does not prioritize solving the gender gap.

- Some members of the Jewish community do not believe the gender gap in top leadership is an important problem to solve.
- There is a perception among some that the gender gap in top leadership is a women's issue.



Mapping the Problem

3. Discrimination: Institutional and interpersonal discrimination hinder the diversity of top leadership.

- Those in power preserve the status quo.
- Sometimes people are held to different standards based on their identities (gender and otherwise).
- Perceptions about women (e.g., they are not effective fundraisers) sometimes get in the way of their advancement to top leadership.
- Workplaces can be hostile environments for people who are not male, or who belong to other marginalized categories of identity.
- There are persistent and deeply held ideas and biases among some about who is a leader.
- Sometimes male employees are more highly valued in the workplace.

4. Unsustainable Jobs: Top leadership jobs are unsustainable for any leader, regardless of identity.

- Top leadership jobs include too many stated and tacit requirements for any one person.
- The expectations and pressures associated with top leadership jobs in Jewish organizations can be undesirable.
- Starting and supporting a family can have different impacts on one's leadership trajectory, depending upon one's gender.

5. Traditional Gender Roles in Judaism: Modern Jewish life has inherited patriarchal beliefs and traditions.

- Jewish texts and traditions have patriarchal elements.
- There is sometimes a blurring between what is personal and communal versus what is professional in Jewish organizations.

FULL MAP:

CAUSES OF THE GENDER GAP IN TOP LEADERSHIP AT JEWISH NONPROFITS

Below are all 71 causes that we identified with the help of 800+ people. They are grouped by the five themes listed above. **Since they reflect input from so many different people, not every cause listed will resonate with every reader.**

Some of these causes relate to more than one theme; in those cases, when the connection to both is particularly close, the cause appears twice, under both themes as indicated.

THEME

SYSTEMS TO DIVERSIFY

Jewish organizations and the Jewish community at large lack systems and motivation for diversifying their leadership and staff.

CAUSES

Some Jewish organizations lack internal policies and practices to grow and nurture a diverse pipeline of leadership and staff.

- Many Jewish organizations have no talent strategy for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).
- Some Jewish organizations don't provide sufficient professional development opportunities to prepare staff for internal advancement, including both broad opportunities and those targeted for specific marginalized groups, including women.
- The tools and protocols used in performance reviews sometimes reflect biases about what makes a qualified leader.
- Women sometimes miss opportunities and experience a negative impact on their career trajectory when they use accommodations, such as part-time work or time off, that are offered to but not used by all employees.
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: UNSUSTAINABLE JOBS]
Those primarily responsible for child care, most often women, may have less flexibility to pursue top leadership jobs when organizations have inadequate policies around child care or parental leave.

CAUSES CONT.

Some search committees and boards don't prioritize increasing the diversity of top leaders.

- Some search committees and boards are disproportionately composed of men.
- Search committees and boards can be risk averse and may hire men out of an assumption that this will preserve the status quo.
- Some members of search committees and boards hold biases about what makes a qualified leader.
- Search committees and boards sometimes pass over qualified internal candidates (often female) in favor of external (often male) candidates.
- There is a perception among some that there is a dearth of qualified diverse candidates for top leadership jobs at Jewish organizations.

The Jewish community lacks the structures and motivation to build and support a diverse pipeline of leaders across the sector.

- Boards, funders, or other constituents do not always hold Jewish organizations accountable for or incentivize them to address the diversity of their top leadership.
- There are not sufficient processes, practices, or people to proactively mentor, advocate for, or act as allies to women and other diverse members of the Jewish community, both inside and beyond individual organizations.
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES IN JUDAISM]
Jewish people's collective trauma from the Holocaust may manifest as existential fear about future potential crises and the reliance on dependable and known leaders—those who fit cultural stereotypes of leadership.
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: DISCRIMINATION]
High-profile, powerful Jewish organizations sometimes do not model diverse leadership.

THEME

DEPRIORITIZING THE PROBLEM

The Jewish community does not prioritize solving the gender gap.

CAUSES

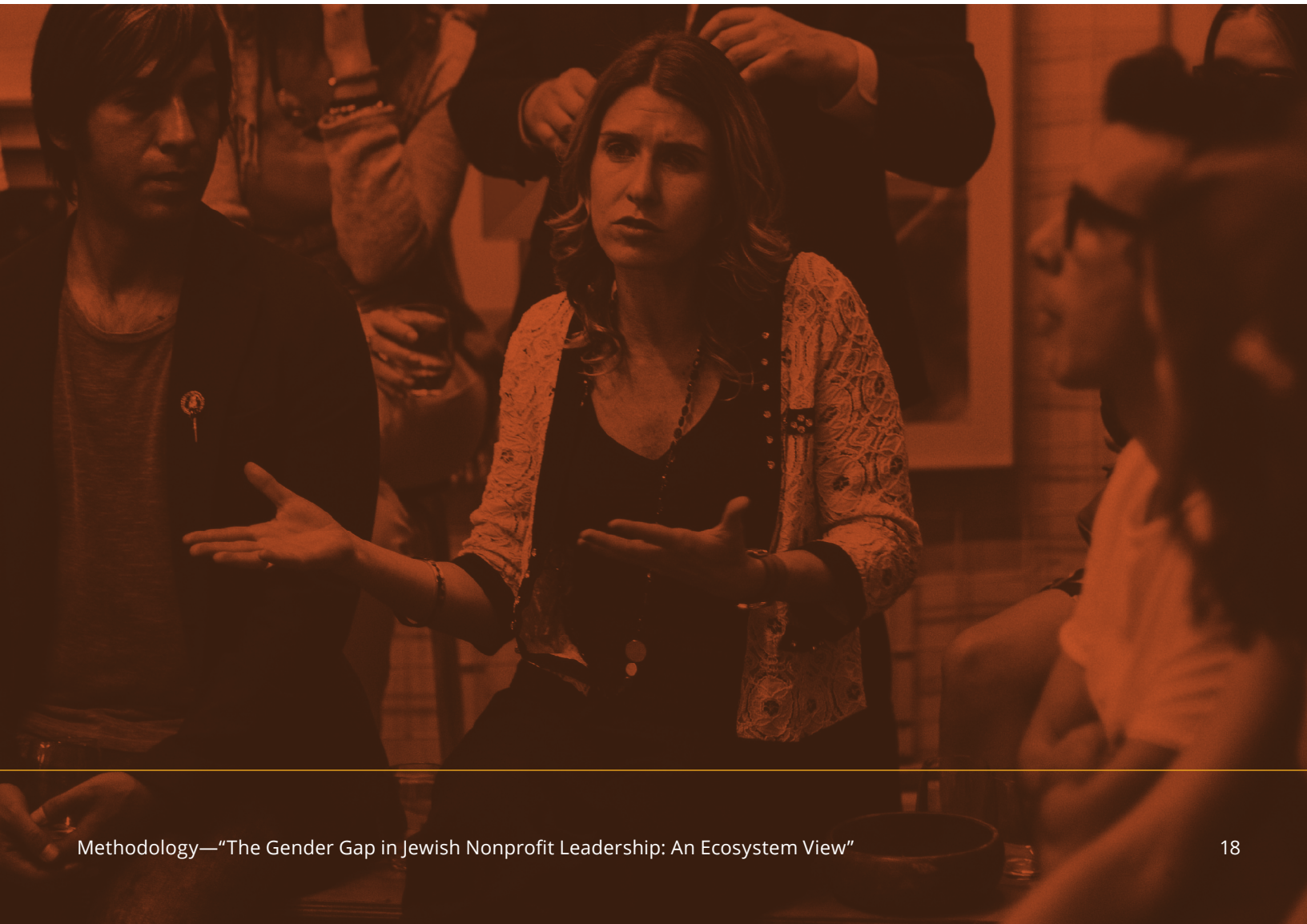
Some members of the Jewish community do not believe the gender gap in top leadership is an important problem to solve.

- There is a perception among some that the gender gap in top leadership is an unfair or inaccurate generalization because the Jewish nonprofit sector is vast and some top jobs are held by women.
- The number of women currently in top leadership jobs leads some people to believe that the gender gap in top leadership is either not a systemic problem or a problem that has already been solved.
- Some people believe that they can assess who the “most qualified” person is in unbiased ways and without regard for gender or other forms of identity.
- Some people believe that the focus should not be on increasing diversity in top leadership, but instead on strengthening the quality of top leadership in Jewish nonprofit organizations more generally.
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: SYSTEMS TO DIVERSIFY]
Many Jewish organizations have no talent strategy for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: SYSTEMS TO DIVERSIFY]
Boards, funders, or other constituents do not always hold Jewish organizations accountable for or incentivize them to address the diversity of their top leadership.

CAUSES CONT.

There is a perception among some that the gender gap in top leadership is a women's issue.

- The gender gap in top leadership is not always seen as a Jewish communal priority.
- Not enough men speak out about or prioritize addressing the gender gap in top leadership.
- There is a perception among some that the gender gap in top leadership is an issue for women to address and solve.



THEME

DISCRIMINATION

Institutional and interpersonal discrimination hinder the diversity of top leadership.

CAUSES

Those in power preserve the status quo.

- Those in power sometimes feel more comfortable around those who look and act like them.
- Those in power sometimes exclude or undervalue diverse voices and opinions in discussions and decision-making.
- Those in power are sometimes resistant to changes that they perceive would decrease their own power.
- Major donors and institutional funders sometimes favor organizations with men in top leadership.
- Boards and top leadership of Jewish organizations are too rarely introduced to the importance of gender equity.
- Traditionally male activities, such as golf and poker, sometimes manifest in conversations and connections in the office that exclude those who are not male.
- High-profile, powerful Jewish organizations sometimes do not model diverse leadership.
- Women in power in Jewish organizations sometimes do not support the advancement of other women.

CAUSES CONT.

Sometimes people are held to different standards based on their identities (gender and otherwise).

- Men are sometimes given more latitude to make mistakes than others.
- Those who are not men sometimes have to go above and beyond to gain respect and recognition.
- There can be different expectations and interpretations of behavior, such as what is considered assertive versus aggressive, depending on a person's gender and/or other identity group.
- Search committees and boards sometimes take into account men's potential to do a job during the hiring process, while others—women in particular—are sometimes required to prove their qualifications through their previous experience.
- Men sometimes overestimate their qualifications and assume they can learn new skills on the job when applying for new positions, while others—especially women—can underestimate their qualifications and assume they need all required skills before taking on the job.
- Some men are more conditioned to publicly celebrate their successes, whereas some women are discouraged from openly acknowledging their achievements or strengths.
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: SYSTEMS TO DIVERSIFY]
Search committees and boards sometimes pass over qualified internal candidates (often female) in favor of external (often male) candidates.

CAUSES CONT.

Perceptions about women sometimes get in the way of their advancement to top leadership.

- There is a perception among some that women choose not to pursue top leadership because they lack ambition and confidence.
- The skills and experiences that women gain in senior leadership jobs are sometimes perceived to be different from or incompatible with the skills required for top leadership.
- There is a perception among some that women choose not to pursue top leadership because they desire a greater balance between work and life.
- There is a perception among some that women are caregivers who are responsible for managing their household or family, not top leaders of organizations.
- There is a perception among some that women are less competent than men in skills that are often seen as critical for top leaders, such as finance, fundraising, and negotiation.

Workplaces can be hostile environments for people who are not male, or who belong to other marginalized categories of identity.

- People sometimes experience sexual harassment in the workplace based on their gender or other identity groups.
- Women and others in marginalized identity groups are sometimes scrutinized by personal traits and circumstances, such as appearance, likeability, and marital status.
- Women sometimes experience misogyny in the workplace.
- Those in marginalized identity groups are fatigued by combating inequities and microaggressions.
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES IN JUDAISM]
The desire to protect individual and communal reputations and avoid retribution can lead to a culture of silence when it comes to reporting sexual harassment or other abuse in Jewish organizations.

CAUSES CONT.

There are persistent and deeply held ideas and biases among some about who is a leader.

- The stereotypical idea of a leader is a man.
- There is a perception that you cannot be both a top leader and a primary caregiver.
- Some people believe that the behaviors and attributes most commonly associated with men are the behaviors and attributes that are the most important for top leadership.
- There are not enough diverse role models of top leaders in the Jewish community.
- There is a perception among some that men and women have different leadership potential because of inherent biological traits.
- There is a perception among some that men have the charisma necessary for top leadership and others do not.
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: SYSTEMS TO DIVERSIFY]
The tools and protocols used in performance reviews sometimes reflect biases about what makes a qualified leader.
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: SYSTEMS TO DIVERSIFY]
Some members of search committees and boards hold biases about what makes a qualified leader.
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: SYSTEMS TO DIVERSIFY]
There is a perception among some that there is a dearth of qualified diverse candidates for top leadership jobs at Jewish organizations.

CAUSES CONT.

Sometimes male employees are more highly valued in the workplace.

- There is sometimes a significant pay gap between men and women, even for the same job, which is exacerbated for women of color.
- Salaries can decrease when women enter a field or industry.
- Tasks traditionally associated with women, such as building relationships, emotional labor, caregiving and home responsibilities, are sometimes undervalued.
- Women are sometimes asked to and agree to take on more administrative tasks, which is not conducive to envisioning them as top leaders.
- Women's job security and employment opportunities are more vulnerable to crises, such as pandemics and recessions.



THEME

UNSUSTAINABLE JOBS

Top leadership jobs are unsustainable for any leader, regardless of identity.

CAUSES

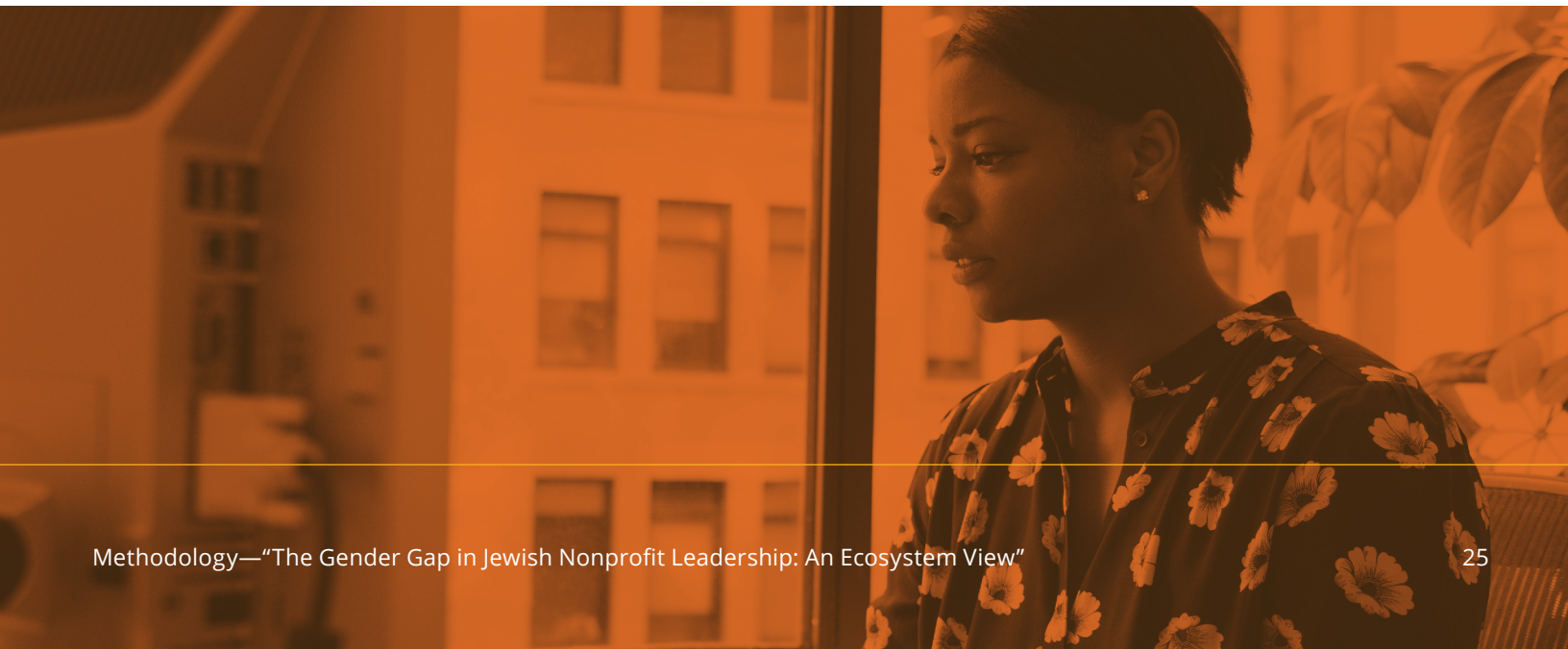
Top leadership jobs include too many stated and tacit requirements for any one person.

- Top leadership jobs demand too many hours and too many varied responsibilities for any one person.
- Top leadership jobs demand too many hours and too many varied responsibilities for people with caregiving responsibilities, whether for children or other family members.
- America's work culture, with a focus on productivity and the bottom line, can drive decisions about personnel (e.g., hiring fewer individuals who are assigned too many responsibilities).
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: DISCRIMINATION]
Some people believe that the behaviors and attributes most commonly associated with men are the behaviors and attributes that are the most important for top leadership.

CAUSES CONT.

The expectations and pressures associated with top leadership jobs in Jewish organizations can be undesirable.

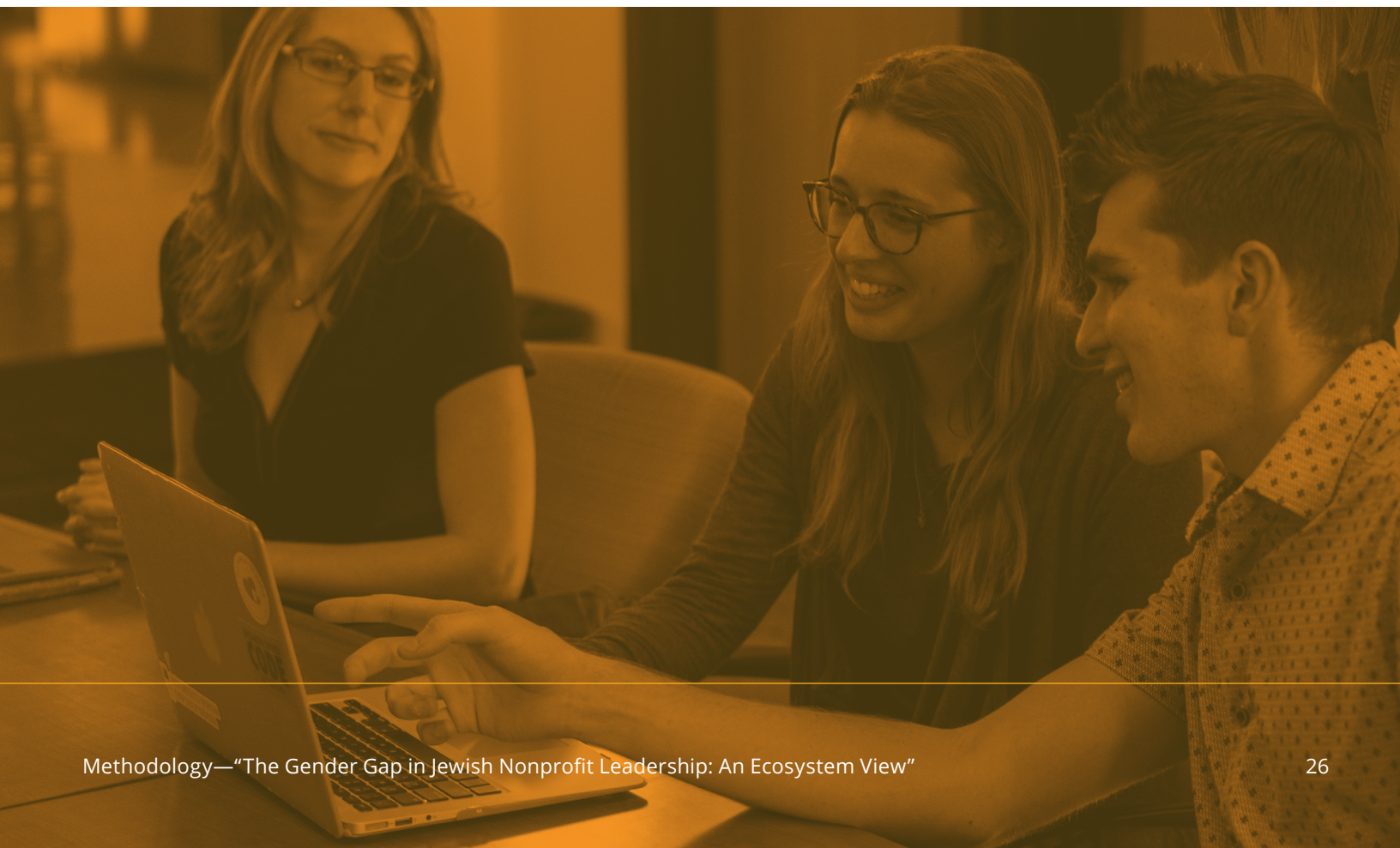
- Highly qualified people sometimes choose not to pursue top leadership jobs in Jewish organizations, which can be perceived as less flexible and/or modeling outdated ideas about leadership.
- The politics and pressure that accompany top leadership in Jewish organizations, especially related to funders and boards, sometimes causes stress and fatigue and can make the jobs less desirable.
- The pay gap between top leadership in Jewish organizations and organizations outside the sector sometimes makes people less willing to confront the pressures and challenges of top leadership in Jewish organizations.
- Top leadership jobs in Jewish organizations may not feel “worth it” when people consider the balance between compensation, job stress, child care costs, and other life priorities.
- There is a perception among some that top leadership jobs in Jewish organizations are not desirable.
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES IN JUDAISM]
Personal relationships sometimes seep into the workplace of Jewish organizations and supersede professional accomplishments.



CAUSES CONT.

Starting and supporting a family can have different impacts on one's leadership trajectory, depending upon one's gender.

- Women sometimes miss opportunities for education and professional experience during pregnancy and caregiving years.
- Those primarily responsible for child care, most often women, sometimes have less flexibility to pursue top leadership jobs when organizations have inadequate policies around child care or parental leave.
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: DISCRIMINATION]
There is a perception among some that women are caregivers who are responsible for managing their household or family, not top leaders of organizations.



THEME

TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES IN JUDAISM

Modern Jewish life has inherited patriarchal beliefs and traditions.

CAUSES

Jewish texts and traditions have patriarchal elements.

- Traditional Jewish texts were written and, until recently, interpreted mostly by men.
- In traditional Judaism, certain kinds of leadership have historically been available only to men.
- There is a perception among some that the masculine is privileged over the feminine in Judaism because the traditional images and gender of rabbis are male, as is traditional language and imagery about God.
- [ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: DISCRIMINATION]
The stereotypical idea of a leader is a man.

CAUSES CONT.

There is sometimes a blurring between what is personal and communal versus what is professional in Jewish organizations.

- Traditional Jewish culture and family values sometimes manifest in the workplace and can preserve gendered roles of men as leaders and women as caregivers.
- Women rabbis are more likely than men to be assigned family education roles, which are often less prestigious and less powerful positions.
- Personal relationships sometimes seep into the workplace of Jewish organizations and supersede professional accomplishments.
- The desire to protect individual and communal reputations and avoid retribution can lead to a culture of silence when it comes to reporting sexual harassment or other abuse in Jewish organizations.
- Jewish people's collective trauma from the Holocaust may manifest as existential fear about future potential crises and the reliance on dependable and known leaders—those who fit cultural stereotypes of leadership.
- **[ALSO MAPPED TO THEME: UNSUSTAINABLE JOBS]**
The politics and pressure that accompany top leadership in Jewish organizations, especially related to funders and boards, sometimes causes stress and fatigue and can make the jobs less desirable.

PHASE 3

FINDING THE KEYSTONES

Qualitative research into people's experiences and expertise helped us posit **71 causes**; quantitative network analysis suggested **five "keystones"** among them.

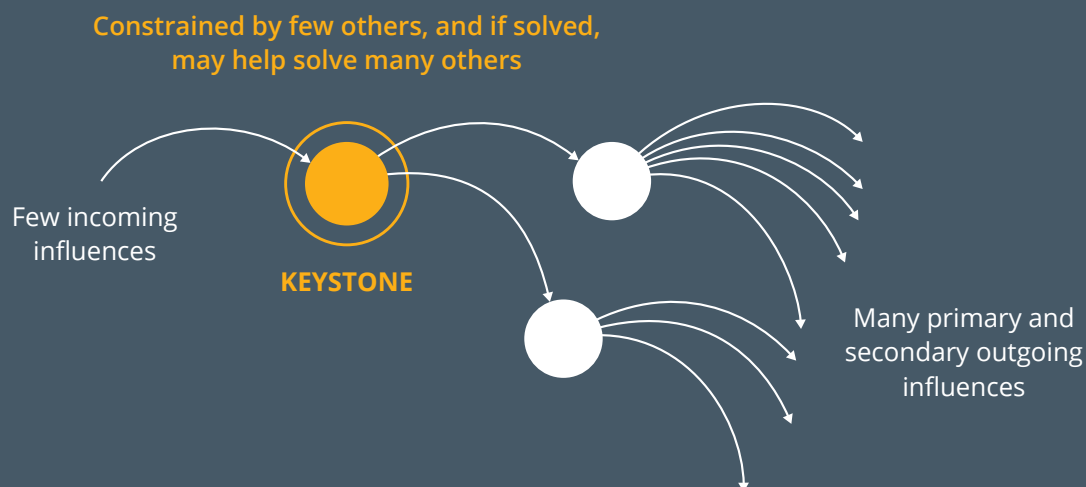
Phase 3: Finding the Keystones

WHAT IS A “KEYSTONE?”

What we’re calling “keystones” are the causes with the most potential to make a big impact across the whole system.

“Keystone” is a technical term, short for “keystone species.” The Starfish Institute borrows this term from the science of ecology, in which “a keystone species is an organism that helps define an entire ecosystem. Without its keystone species, the ecosystem would be dramatically different or cease to exist altogether.” ([*National Geographic*](#).)

In the ecosystem of factors we have mapped, **keystones are factors that have high “reach,” which means they affect many other issues, and high “leverage,” which means they are influenced by few others.** Solving the keystones causes may be difficult, but doing so could create a large ripple effect on a large number of other causes.



Phase 3: Finding the Keystones

HOW WE DETERMINED THE KEYSTONES

We began from a premise that some causes were likely to be keystones—that is, to be influenced by few factors but have an influence on many more. We didn’t begin from any presuppositions about how many or how few of the causes we identified might turn out to have those attributes, or which ones they might be.

To find out which causes might be keystones, we first needed to **map the causal network** between all 71 causes. Just as an ecologist might begin to understand an ecosystem by mapping out “what eats what,” we wanted to understand how each cause might affect or be affected by each other cause.



Phase 3: Finding the Keystones

We wanted to ensure that the causal network didn't reflect any quirk or bias of our own teams at Leading Edge and The Starfish Institute. So to map the causal network, we went back to the community. **We designed a computer game-like tool that could help us crowdsource answers** to a series of questions in this format: "If [cause A] increases, what happens to [cause B]?" Here is a sample of one question:

QUESTION 14

If the number of women rabbis that are assigned to prestigious and powerful positions increases, what happens to the number of people in power who include diverse opinions?

Increases

No clear relationship

Decreases

NOT SURE, SKIP

BACK

Players responded to 20 such questions for each round, with the causes they were asked to evaluate being paired in randomized order.

It's worth emphasizing that the strength of this approach is in the specificity of the questions. Rather than asking something highly subjective, like "Which of these causes is more important?", we asked whether each cause increases, decreases, or has no effect on a specific other cause. **This focus on causation allowed us to create an analysis that sidestepped our team's preconceived notions, and the preconceived notions of all our participants, about which causes might be most *important*, and focus on creating a causal network which no participating individual could completely control or foresee.**

Phase 3: Finding the Keystones

We sent the game to as many people as we were able to reach: those who had participated in the initial survey and conversations, people on our and our partners' organizational email lists, people who follow us and our partners on social media, and more. We asked those we reached to play the game and to pass it on to others.

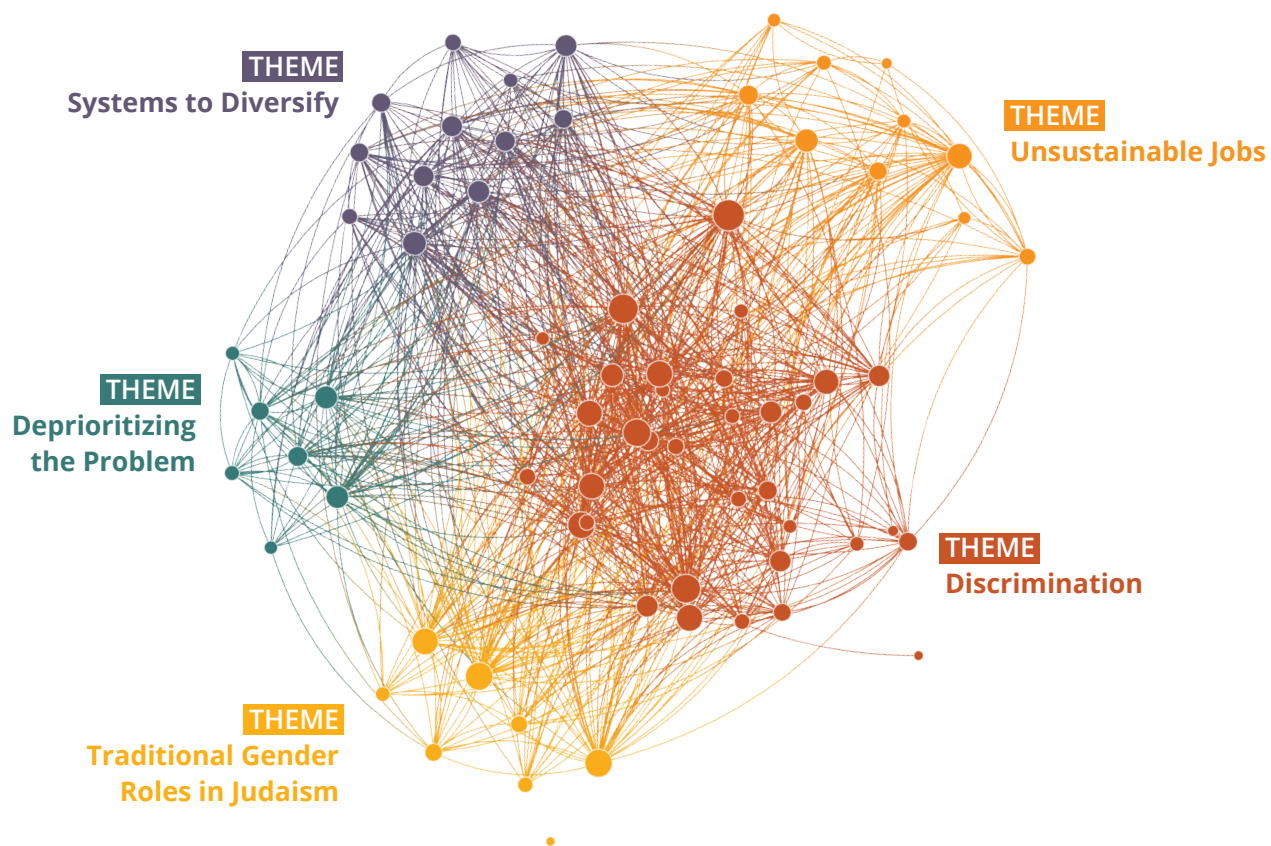
People played the game 771 times. (There was some overlap with people already represented in the nearly 800 previous participants in the project, but we estimate that this phase of the project brought the total number of people engaged to over 1,200.)

Their combined rounds of play generated more than **15,500 data points** — each one of them a simple answer to the question of whether and how a given cause is related to another. We used those answers to assign links between causes—marking one as influencing the other—**if and only if three or more players agreed unanimously on the existence and direction of the causal link.** No link was assigned based on any one person's view.

Phase 3: Finding the Keystones

RESULTS

Here is a visualization of all 71 causes and how they connect to one another. Larger circles indicate causes with more connections. The causes are color-coded by the five themes into which we organized them, but note that the colors and themes are not the same thing as the keystones and don't map onto them one-to-one.



Phase 3: Finding the Keystones

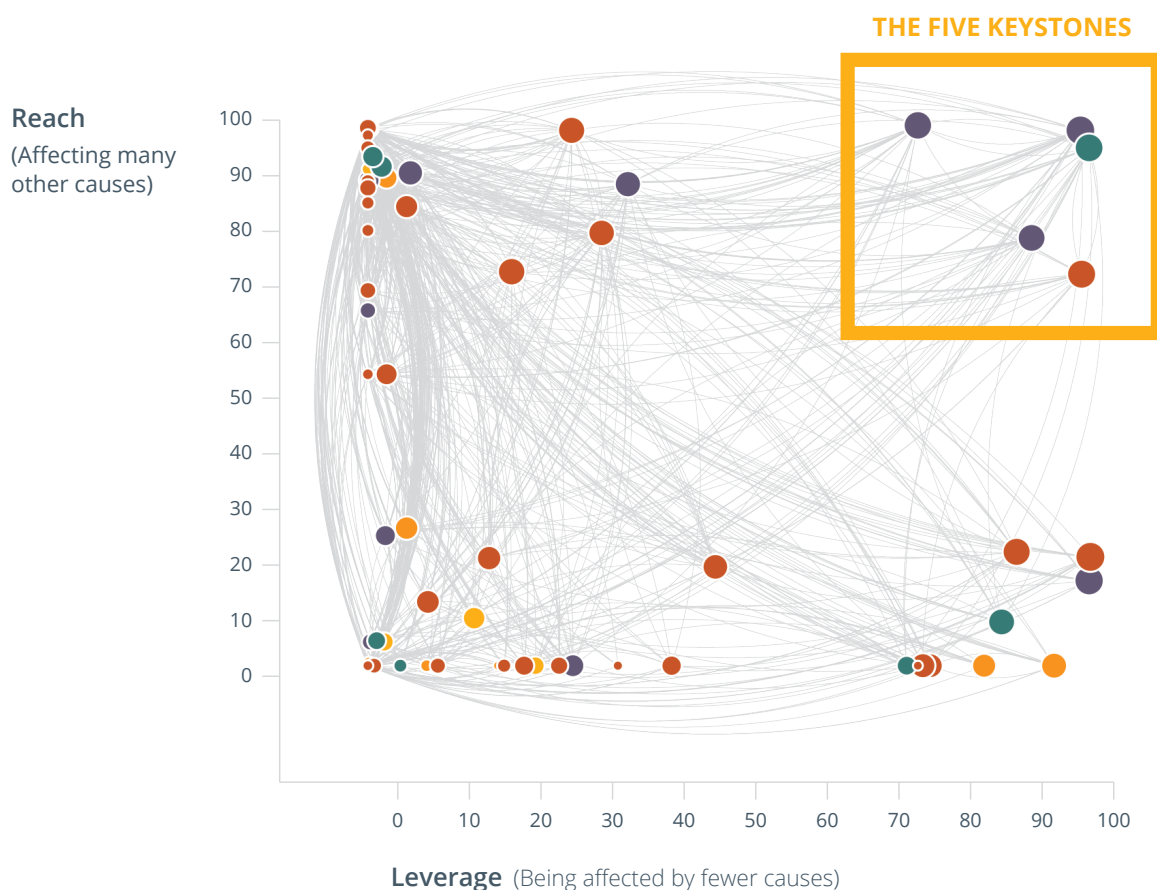
With that dataset in hand, we were able to evaluate each of the causes for **leverage** (being affected by few others) and **reach** (affecting many others).

In order to attain higher confidence that we were seeing a signal rather than noise, we didn't just run the analysis once. Instead, we performed a [Monte Carlo simulation](#), running our analysis of leverage and reach **1,000 times**, each time removing 25% of the causal links at random from the dataset. This allowed us to see which causes *consistently* had the highest leverage and reach even while dropping links at random. This ensured that our analysis did not rely on any small numbers of connections.



Phase 3: Finding the keystones

Here is a chart of all 71 causes, by leverage (being affected by fewer causes; horizontal axis) and reach (affecting many other causes; vertical axis).



As this chart shows, many causes have high leverage—see the bottom right corner. And many causes have high reach—see the top left corner. **But only five causes, in the top right corner, have both high leverage and high reach. These are the five keystones.**

THE FIVE KEYSTONES

KEYSTONE CAUSES

- #1** Boards, funders, and others in power don't always hold Jewish organizations accountable for addressing the diversity of their top leadership.
 - #2** Many Jewish organizations have no talent strategy for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).
 - #3** Some members of search committees and boards hold biases about what makes a qualified leader.
 - #4** Not enough men speak out about or prioritize addressing the gender gap in top leadership.
 - #5** There is a perception that you cannot be both a top leader and a primary caregiver.
-

KEYSTONE OPPORTUNITIES

Because our research focused on mapping causes and how they affect one another, the five keystones are negative factors; they are problems, each of which causes or exacerbates many other problems.

Each problem, however, implies **an opportunity to discuss, test, evaluate, and implement solutions:**

#1 Boards, funders, and other powerful stakeholders can hold Jewish organizations accountable and incentivize them to elevate diverse leadership teams.

#2 Jewish nonprofit organizations can implement talent strategies to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

#3 Search committees, and the boards that appoint them, can implement processes to ensure that the work of the search committee is professional, equitable, and fair and that the most qualified candidate is chosen for the role.

#4 Institutions can give men the knowledge, support, and incentives to speak out and address the gender gap in leadership (and DEI more broadly).

#5 Community members can work actively to shift our cultural assumptions about the capacity to be a leader and a primary caregiver at the same time.

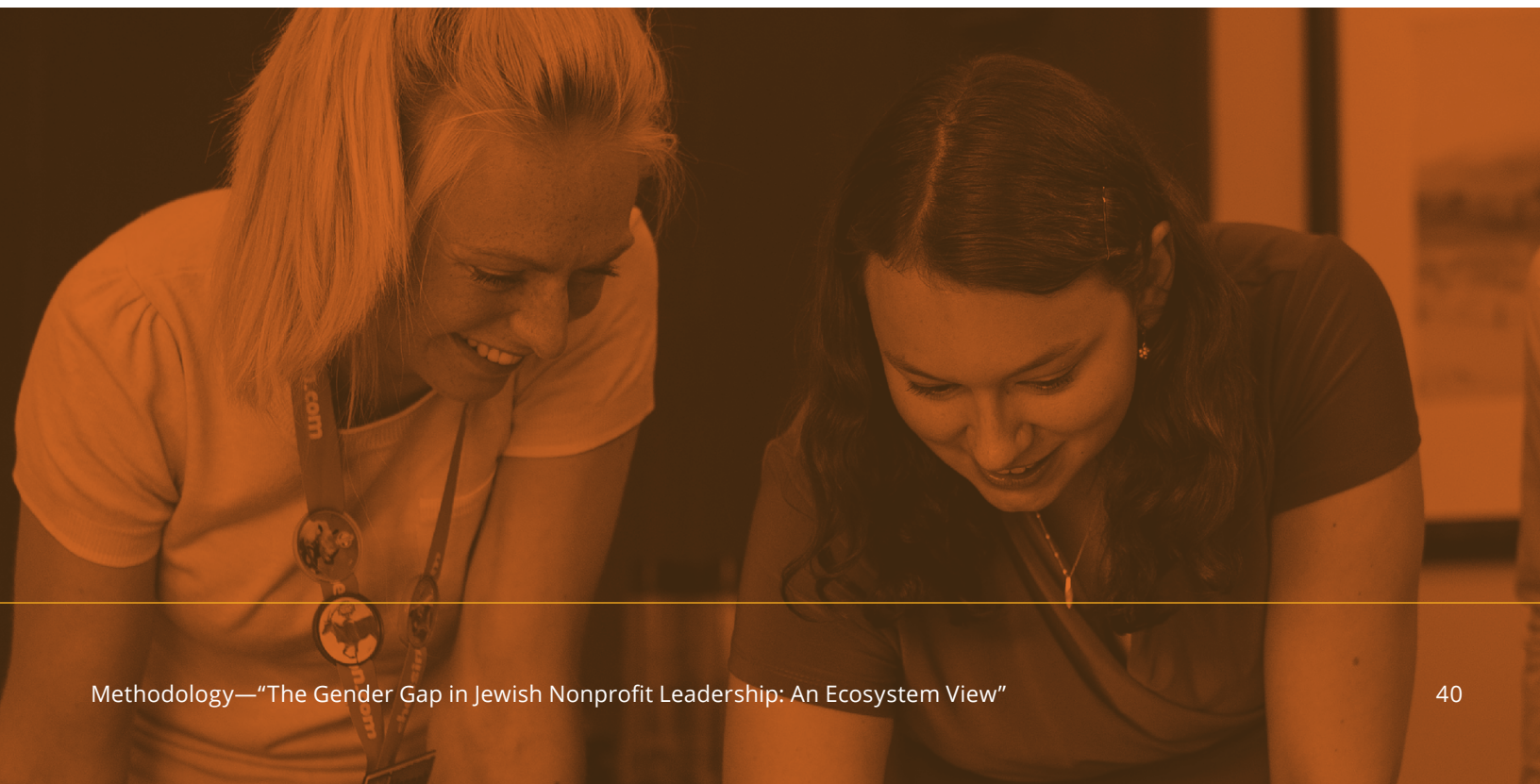
WHAT THE KEYSTONES MEAN

The keystones are not the *only* causes of the problem; their value, by definition, comes from their relationships to a large number of other causes that they affect. Nor are the keystones the most “important” causes per se. Our analysis did not attempt to evaluate, quantify, or rank which causes most intensely affect the gender gap in top leadership in their direct capacity as individual causes. Rather, our analysis began from a premise that many factors simultaneously contribute to creating and maintaining this gap, and that solving the problem will therefore require changing many factors at once. Our network analysis of how a large number of causes interact with one another suggests that these five keystone factors have decidedly more potential than the other factors we identified to make an outsized impact across the whole network. **Moving these five causes, we believe, would move many more.**

The keystones are not action steps; they are points of focus. They are an opportunity to shrink the problem. If the energy of those seeking gender equity in top leadership is currently being split in more than seventy directions, this analysis suggests that the same amount of energy may achieve more if applied in just five directions instead.

The Five Keystones

Making progress on each keystone will require a detailed agenda of action steps. In the coming months and years, Leading Edge will provide resources and tools that identify some such action steps. Beyond any individual organization, how best to advance each of these five keystones deserves prolonged **study, discussion, experimentation, and evaluation** over time. Within and beyond the Jewish community, **different experts, different organizations, and different stakeholders will advance and prioritize different ideas and actions** in the effort to achieve them. We welcome the robust debate that this will entail. We hope, however, that as many people and organizations as possible in our field will **align toward these five keystone opportunities and work together to advance them**. We hope these five keystones can serve as a catalyst that propels and aligns new efforts to establish processes, change behaviors, change systems, and, ultimately, close the gap.



WHY DON'T THE KEYSTONES MATCH THE THEMES?

In Phase 2 (Mapping the Problem), we distilled input from the community into 71 causes of the leadership gender gap, and in order to understand them as an overall picture, we organized them into five broad themes. Later, in Phase 3 (Finding the Keystones), our network analysis of how those causes interact revealed (quantitatively) which causes had high leverage and high reach (the keystones).

It turned out that of the five themes into which we had organized our 71 causes, the keystones represent only three:

- Systems to Diversify (Keystones 1, 2, and 3)
- Deprioritizing the Problem (Keystone 4)
- Discrimination (Keystone 5)

That doesn't mean that the keystones, or the three themes in which they appear, are all that matter. The causes in the other two themes—Unsustainable Jobs and Traditional Gender Roles in Judaism—are undoubtedly part of the full picture of the problem, but don't represent the highest-impact opportunities to move the full network of causes. The keystones do.

Many early reviewers of this data expressed surprise that the Unsustainable Jobs theme, in particular, did not produce any keystones. This surprised our team as well, but our analysis found that there were two causes in the Unsustainable Jobs theme that had high leverage, but low reach, and one more that had high reach, but low leverage. No cause from that theme was found to have high leverage and high reach at once.

INSIGHTS FROM PEER-LED LISTENING SESSIONS

Jews of Color (JOC)

Many participants expressed a deep sense of overlapping discrimination (race, gender, sexual orientation).

Stereotypes of Black women are particularly potent.

In the Jewish community, leadership tends to be expressed most frequently in its white male form.

“Leaning in” doesn’t work. We need more representative role models, access to opportunities for advancement, and more mentoring for emerging leaders of color.

People in #2 roles at organizations are doing substantial work without being recognized for it, limiting internal pipelines to the top.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) needs to be on the agenda for every board and organization.

Jewish men of color could do a better job of lifting up Jewish women of color.

Men

Participants feel that gender norms are rampant in the Jewish community and harm people of all genders.

Search committees are incredibly biased toward men and traditionally male leadership qualities.

You never really know as a male CEO—did you get the job because you’re the best fit or because you fit a certain mold / type (e.g., white male)?

There is an assumption that only men can handle high-pressure jobs and demands.

Some men fear speaking out—either because they fear they will say the wrong thing or because they feel they don’t know enough about gender issues to speak.

How can men be good allies without being accused of mansplaining or taking up too much space?

Some men feel they have something to lose if there are more women in leadership roles.

Men want to feel confident that if they are the best candidate, they will be chosen; they don’t want to lose a role to a female candidate who is chosen just because she’s a woman.

Some participants feel that the Jewish community has more important priorities than this issue.

Some participants feel guilt around male privilege.

Orthodox Women

It's a struggle to balance home and work life.

They have to combat assumptions about women's ability to take top leadership roles while also being a mother and/or homemaker.

Work environments can be unsupportive to women.

The lack of pay equity is demotivating.

They face unclear paths to salary increases and promotion.

Nepotism, patriarchy, and the "boys' club" mentality hold them back.

One participant shared that when she asked her male superior why she did not receive the raise she requested, he replied: "If we offer (you) higher pay, it sets the standard for other women to want leadership positions."

The gender disparity is particularly confusing to Chabad women, who are taught from a young age that Jewish women are powerful and hold a special significance in their community. They are afforded visible female leaders, teachers, and mentors. They typically receive more secular education than their male counterparts, thereby better preparing them for positions in business and management. Yet the other problems persist.

Setbacks were often excused by being coded in religious terms (modesty, etc.). Some participants expressed deep frustration that this religious paradigm becomes weaponized, while some women felt that men in their communities were unaware of how their actions marginalized women and with proper education could learn to become allies.

There is often a marked difference between how single and married women are treated in the workforce, relating to the types of jobs available, sometimes referring to work by unmarried women as "volunteering."

Even when women achieve an excellent education before beginning work, there is little support or professional development in the workforce.

People with Disabilities

As the field moves toward more virtual work, managers and leaders are making few to no considerations for employees or potential employees with disabilities. Concerns include basic representation, accessibility concerns on Zoom, and more.

Men need to be empowered to speak on behalf of women.

Those in power are not always willing to make room or go to bat for those not in power.

There are not enough programs that give *practical* leadership skills and experience. There are especially few that also give proper consideration to disability issues.

Not only do women look around the table and not see themselves in top positions, but also there are only a handful of leaders with disabilities. They are known within the disability community, but not shown on a broader stage.

More attention needs to be paid to the bottom of the talent pipeline.

Transgender and Nonbinary Jews

OVERARCHING THEMES

Most in the Jewish community still see gender as a binary. We need more education around the gender spectrum.

Transphobia—as well as a lack of education around trans issues—is persistent in the Jewish community.

Camp and youth groups are a huge pipeline for work in the Jewish professional field. If these spaces are not trans-affirming, this pipeline is virtually closed to trans people.

The leadership of white cisgender men seems to be privileged above all others.

There is a subconscious assumption that white cisgender men “have a shot” at top positions, whereas others are not necessarily shown that a “ladder” exists.

STEREOTYPES

People make assumptions that if you’re trans, you’re political and touchy.

People make assumptions that if you’re trans, you are less Jewishly engaged or knowledgeable, or even less authentically Jewish.

Standards for being and acting “professional” are very gendered (dress codes, appearance expectations, etc.).

FEAR

Some Jewish organizations are scared that if they have a trans or nonbinary person in visible leadership, donors will be deterred from supporting the organization.

Trans people exist with a fear of bullying, harassment, and discrimination, and are often scared of being out due to a lack of education, awareness, and inclusiveness.

REPRESENTATION

The paucity of transgender and nonbinary people on executive teams leads some trans and nonbinary people to assume that they would not be a good fit for an organization.

When trans people are hired, there is often an expectation that they are to be seen and not heard—that they are there simply to boost the appearance of diversity.

At the same time, people often assume that it is the job of the marginalized person to “educate” the organization and that can be exhausting.

When there is not actual representation, the use of pronouns in bios/email signatures makes a difference. It signals that people are aware of these issues.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

HR departments need to be better educated about gender—everything from ensuring pronouns are respected to having trans-inclusive health benefits.

Participants say they need more mentorship, allyship, and systemic change—rather than just individuals “being nice.”

Women, Late-Career

Participants felt that sexism exists with more energy in the Jewish community than elsewhere. Cultural and behavioral patriarchy is well entrenched here.

There is a persistent myth that women are not good fundraisers.

Boards in the Jewish community are too focused on wealth.

Search firms tend to be led by men and people hire people in their own image.

There is a disconnect between Jewish values of family and the life a CEO is expected to lead.

Women, Mid-Career

There were very few female role models in earlier generations; mid-career women had to look to male role models who were leading Jewish organizations, and they feel that loss now.

The top jobs are unsustainable and unappealing to people of all genders; they’re not compatible with integrated life today.

The Jewish community prioritizes male leadership qualities.

The “old boys’ network” persists.

The Jewish workplace operates like a dysfunctional family.

Boards have too much power.

We need to change the culture of overwork and unrealistic expectations.

Women are in fact at the helm of so many important social justice and social service organizations—we need to emphasize and value that more.

MORE ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Full Report:

[*The Gender Gap in Jewish Nonprofit Leadership: An Ecosystem View*](#)

Sign up for future updates and read future project materials:

leadingedge.org/gender-equity



Founded in 2014, Leading Edge influences and inspires dramatic change in how Jewish organizations attract, develop, and retain top talent. Leading Edge's flagship program areas focus on supporting and developing executive leaders, strengthening partnerships between volunteer leaders and professionals, and helping organizations improve their workplace culture by becoming leading places to work.

Learn more at leadingedge.org.