Rosabeth Moss Kanter: A Kaleidoscopic Vision of Change

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Abstract

At first glance, Rosabeth Moss Kanter's approach to change appears as eclectic, ranging from the study of utopian communities to corporations, non-profits, and governments to ecosystems. But look closer and there is a deeper coherence. Behind the witty turns of phrase, digestible frameworks, and punchy action lists lay theoretical subtlety and complexity. Kanter is a trained sociologist, who seeks to understand the structural determinants of individual behavior. She melds the sensibility of symbolic interactionism, and its emphasis on fieldwork, with attention to how structural relations, especially power, constitute social systems. Her mode and method are evident in her early work and, though later made less explicit, remain throughout. As such, she may be best understood, to borrow one of her phrases, as a kaleidoscopic thinker. She seeks to identify patterns and understand how people and elements relate, combine, and recombine in multiple ways and in multiple contexts to form new patterns. She then shares with leaders and citizens the emerging possibilities and suggests how to get there. Kanter thus does not study change for change's sake – she links it to a utopian search for perfectibility.

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Introduction: Hedgehogs, Foxes, and Kaleidoscopes

The British philosopher, Isaiah Berlin (1994), famously argued that thinkers fall into one of two categories. Some are like foxes. They know many things and pursue many ends and ideas, all equally insightful but not necessarily connected. Others are like hedgehogs. They know one big thing and seek to link all to one central principal or system.

At first glance, Rosabeth Moss Kanter's work appears fox-like – cunning, astute, and wide-ranging. She has written about commitment in nineteenth-century utopian communities (Kanter 1968, 1972a); homosocial reproduction, tokenism, and relative proportions in groups (1977a); and the quality of work life and its influence on the family (1977b). Later, she asked how to make companies more innovative and entrepreneurial (Kanter 1983, 1989) and then examined how corporations and communities can, together, make the most out of globalization (Kanter 1995a). Afterward, she offered her take on the digital revolution (Kanter 2001), provided frameworks for instilling the confidence needed to turn around firms (and sports teams) (Kanter 2006a), and gave guidelines for how values-led companies do well by doing good (Kanter 1999a, 2009a). She has also advocated for public policy solutions at opportune times prior to elections in the United States (Dukakis and Kanter 1988; Kanter 2007), including a foray into transportation infrastructure (Kanter 2015), and she and colleagues have sought to create a new stage of higher education by redeveloping experienced leaders to enter the social sector and solve the globe's most pressing problems (Kanter et al. 2005; Kanter 2011a). Kanter's work seems eclectic and subject to the changing times. Surely the work of a fox.

Or not. Kanter writes well – and clear writing is clear thinking. But in Kanter's case, her clarity veils a sophisticated sociological imagination or, paraphrasing C. Wright Mills (1959), the attentiveness to the relationship between the individual and the larger society. Behind Kanter's witty turns of phrase, digestible frameworks, and punchy action lists lay theoretical subtlety and complexity – pierced with a clear purpose. Kanter is a trained sociologist, who seeks to understand the structural determinants of individual behavior. She melds the sensibility of symbolic interactionism, and its emphasis on fieldwork, with attention to how structural relations, especially power, constitute social systems. Her mode and method are

evident in her early work and, though later made less explicit, remain throughout. But more than theory and method, Kanter is a hedgehog in theme. She does not study change for change's sake; she links it to a utopian search for perfectibility in society. Kanter may be a fox in practice (she knows many things), but she is a hedgehog in principle (she wants one big thing). Berlin's analogy breaks down.

But Kanter often thinks in "threes" and maybe, for her, there is a third, more suitable possibility. To borrow one of her concepts, she is a kaleidoscopic thinker with a kaleidoscopic vision (Kanter 2000). "A kaleidoscope is a device for seeing patterns. They're made up of a set of fragments, but it's a flexible set of fragments, so that if you twist it or look at it from a different angle you can see a different pattern," Kanter explains. "Leaders have to shake people out of their orthodoxy and get them to see that a new pattern is possible" (Kanter 2006b, paragraph 37). As a thought leader, Kanter sees patterns, and over time she has studied how people and elements relate, combine, and recombine in multiple ways and in multiple contexts to form new patterns. She then seeks to share with leaders and citizens the new possibilities and how to get there.

Influences and Motivations: Be More than Yourself

Rosabeth Moss Kanter wrote early and often, drafting mystery novels and entering essay contests during her childhood in Cleveland, Ohio. She was also ambitious, printing business cards proclaiming herself as a "child psychologist." She majored in sociology and English at Bryn Mawr College, having spent her Junior year at the University of Chicago. After graduating in 1964, she considered working in advertising or as a journalist but instead enrolled in the doctoral program in sociology at the University of Michigan. (While in college, Kanter met and married Stuart Kanter, a psychology major from the University of Pennsylvania. She moved with him first to the University of Michigan and then to Boston in 1967. She accepted a job at Brandeis University, while he took position in Organizational Behavior at Harvard. Tragically, he died in 1969. She maintained his name after his passing.)

Ann Arbor proved an apt place for Kanter to explore her interests in sociology and psychology. Several decades earlier Charles Cooley (1962) began to formulate his utopian-tinged version of symbolic interactionism, a social psychological perspective that views individuals as socially constituted agents emergent from meaningful social interactions. By the time Kanter arrived to Ann Arbor in the 1960s, the department had further integrated major postwar structural, functionalist, and conflict theory perspectives popular in postwar American sociology. Two early mentors included the political sociologists, Leon Mayhew and William Gamson.

Kanter's dissertation developed a theory of commitment to explain the survival rates of nineteenth-century American utopian communities (Kanter 1968), and it

helped her gain an academic position in 1967 in the sociology department at Brandeis University. Years earlier Everett Hughes (1958) had moved from the University of Chicago to found the graduate program and create a "Chicago School" extension, emphasizing fieldwork and micro-interactionist perspectives. Kanter's emerging sociological imagination fit well there as she, in the company of Hughes, Lewis Coser, Kurt Wolff, Philip Slater, and others, worked through her own theoretical understanding of how social systems and internal relations condition individual experience and behavior, a framework articulated most explicitly in her early work.

Her first book, *Commitment and Community*, was published in 1972. It proposed a theory of commitment, positing that the ability of communes (or any organization) to attend to cognitive, affective, and normative needs of individuals via multiple social mechanisms aligns individual and collective interest, thus explaining commune survival rates. The theory contributed founding insights on the concept of organizational commitment (e.g., Meyer and Allen 1991). Her second book, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, came out in 1977. It offered a gender-neutral critique of gender (or any majority-minority) relations in organizations, asserting that differences in behavior and even personality were attributable to one's role and position, rather than inherent characteristics. The job makes the person or, more specifically, the opportunity structure, the distribution of power, and the relative composition of groups explain the experience, behavior, and career prospects of individuals. This gender-neutral analysis gave birth to literatures on homosocial reproduction in organizations and tokenism in the workplace. The latter analysis reflects Kanter's deeper integration of the relational thinking of Georg Simmel (1950), as it focused on the relative composition of minorities and majorities in groups and was communicated through the relational use of "Xs" and "Os" (Kanter 1979a).

But couple Kanter's first two books and a framework of analysis emerges, the faint outlines of which appear in a lesser-known paper, "Symbolic Interactionism and Politics in Systemic Perspective" (Kanter 1972b). Like Gamson (1968), she identifies two core perspectives in sociology. A behavioral or influence view represented best by symbolic interactionism and a social control or system perspective found in structural and functionalist approaches. Both have merits and biases – and they need one another, she claims. Symbolic interactionism recognizes the role of symbol in human interaction and how people in relation to one another create new forms of action. Systems approaches see how the parts fit together, theorize the distribution of power, and account for collective interests. "The important question is not which paradigm is best under all circumstances, since all of them capture some elements of 'the truth'," Kanter wrote in kaleidoscopic fashion. "The task for the future is to confront perspectives with one another and from this confrontation develop ever more sensitive tools for understanding social and political life" (1972b, p. 91).

As Kanter solidified her sociological imagination, in the strict sense defined by Mills, her research began to engage more deeply in practice. In 1972, she married Barry Stein, who received a Ph.D. in community economics from the Massachusetts

Institute of Technology, and he helped introduce her to the world of consulting. A fecund and curious mind, Stein coauthored several works with her on quality of work life (Kanter and Stein 1979), parallel organizations (Stein and Kanter 1980), and a treatise on organizational change (Kanter et al. 1992). A critical moment in Kanter's career came when she opted to publish her second book, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, with a more trade-oriented rather than a pure academic press. Doing so gave her a wider readership and more engagement with practice. Following her penultimate chapter about the study's theoretical contributions, in which she detailed a framework for understanding the structural determinants of behavior in organizations, she tackled in a concluding chapter the issues of organizational change, affirmative action, and quality of work life. The same year as publication – 1977 – she and Stein founded Goodmeasure, a consulting firm, and Kanter accepted a position at Yale University.

Thereafter, Kanter proceeded to articulate in systematic fashion her kaleidoscopic vision of organizational change. The core of her work focuses on the transition from the bureaucratic firm (as represented in *Men and Women of the Corporation*) to post-bureaucratic organizational forms: the entrepreneurial corporation (1983), the post-entrepreneurial corporation (1989), the global corporation (1993), digital transformation (2001), corporate turnarounds (2006a), and the values-led global enterprise (2009a). (Toward the beginning of this period, in 1986, Kanter moved to Harvard Business School, as only the second tenured female faculty member, and she served as the last academic editor of the *Harvard Business Review* between 1989 and 1992.)

Yet as a multivalent, systemic thinker, Kanter never abandoned her original utopian dream: an infectious optimism felt in the tone of her writing, a contagious desire to make the world a better place, made even more apparent during her speaking engagements. Not only should we, but we can, she repeats, before suggesting how. As she continued to theorize the flattened (nonhierarchical), connected (non-siloed), and flexible (agile decision-making) organization in which opportunity and power are more evenly distributed and within which people at all levels of the organization can realize themselves not as workers but as human beings, she also remained sensitive to the organization's relationship to the environment. Kanter adopts a contingency theory of organizations and ascribes to a natural, open systems view (e.g., Thompson 1967; Lawrence and Lorsch 1967; Weick 1979). There are also echoes of the human relations school in her approach, including Mary Parker Follett (Kanter 1995b) and Chris Argyris (1964, 1973), among other influences.

Between the 1980s and 2000s, Kanter structured her corporate change books in a similar fashion. They begin by specifying the environmental conditions faced by the corporation, the organizational challenges produced, and how leaders and workers can reorganize themselves to confront them – similar in spirit to her original work on communes. Her long-standing concern for how business affects society, articulated most explicitly in her prefaces, introductions, and conclusions, lurks beneath throughout the late 1970s and 1980s and is largely expressed via her analysis of the company and the employee, via such concepts as "employability security" and

the self-realization of people in organizations as they align their values and interests with that of the group – once again echoing her insights on commitment in utopian communities. But by the 1990s, she integrates community more explicitly, and it becomes clear, at least to her immediate business audience, that her approach to change does not apply solely to corporations or even organizations but to society as a whole (Kanter 1995a, 1999a).

Corporations operating in globalizing contexts not only must flatten themselves to become more entrepreneurial and innovative, but they must also turn themselves *inside out*, developing alliances and partnerships with suppliers, buyers, governments, and civic organizations. Businesses are members of society. They employ citizens and sell to citizens, and they may create positive or negative impact not in the market but the community. To compete globally, companies must thrive locally, Kanter says. And to do so businesses and communities need to find common ground and articulate a shared strategy. Later, with the dot-com boom and bust at the turn of the century and subsequent deepening of globalization in the first decade of the 2000s, Kanter further developed her frameworks for how to enact organizational transformation and turnarounds (2006a) and lead with values in order to continue realizing innovation, profits, growth, and social good (2009a). These same principles apply to political leadership (Kanter 2007), leadership in the social sector (Kanter 2005c, 2011c), and even in the concrete policy case of transportation infrastructure (Kanter 2015).

Kanter articulated a system of understanding, and as such her work could be viewed as one would that of a self-referential film auteur or novelist. More narrowly, Kanter is an ethnographer of corporate transformation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century who interprets the organizational evolution with her concepts, her frameworks, and her vision. But with each publication, she extended her system, from person and organization to community and society. Her systemic self-referentiality does not mean that Kanter does not integrate new evidence and literatures. To the contrary, her footnotes detail the wide-ranging literatures she draws from. Rather, Kanter integrates them, such as the case of network theory, into her larger framework for understanding change (Kanter 1992). In this sense, Kanter is a hedgehog – albeit a kaleidoscopic one – focused on changing business and society for the better.

Key Contributions: A Skeleton Key

Kanter has made multiple contributions to multiple disciplines. But what holds her insights together? Is there a *skeleton key* for understanding her *key* contributions to the theory of organizational change? In Kanter's case, a skeleton key is especially critical since she, as a kaleidoscopic systems thinker, does not examine organizations and people apart from one another. Nor does she view society or community apart from organizations and people. What, then, are the core elements she works with and how does she understand their relationships?

People

People work in and interact in organizations, and they, as humans, have needs – instrumental/cognitive, affective/emotional, and normative/evaluative. For people to commit, the organization or group needs to fulfill these needs. The former supports continuance of membership in the group, the second generates a sense of cohesion, and the third enables social control. People also think, feel, want, and evaluate with symbols. They need meaning, and it is values that guide choices, serve as control systems, forge shared identity, and create aspirations and ideals (Kanter 2009a, 2011c; Kanter et al. 2015). But meaning and values are not static; they are dynamic and social. To either persist or evolve they must be enacted – made and remade via dialogue and interaction.

Yet behavior in organizations cannot be understood with sole reference to the person's instrumental, affective, and normative needs and the mediating importance of symbols, values, and meaning. These are socially constituted. As Kanter stated early on, a systems perspective should complement social psychological frameworks.

Organizations

Consider first the internal structure of an organization. Three determinants include opportunity, power, and relative number (Kanter 1977a). People occupy positions, which condition whether someone has more or less expectations and prospects. These opportunity pathways – into or out of the job – condition employee attitudes and behavior, i.e., aspirations, self-esteem, satisfaction, motivations, and interaction styles. Organizations also exist as distributions of power – the ability to mobilize resources, information, or support and then garner the cooperation to get something done (Kanter 1979b, 1983). The organization's design can *empower* all members of the organization and enable better flow of resources, information, or support – and in so doing improve group morale as well as the individual sense of security and propensity to participate. Finally, the relative number of majorities and minorities matters. Skewed (i.e., token) and minority (i.e., tilted) groups create intense visibility, conformity, and performance pressures for those below a certain threshold of representation, which in turn influence the opportunity and power available to them.

Externally, just as Kanter sees organizations as a structural determinant of behavior, she recognizes that the environment is a structural determinant of organizations. They are natural and open systems. But she goes deeper, offering more textured accounts of how the natural, open systems function. They consist of thinking, feeling, wanting, and valuing people who, as collectivities, adapt to changing environmental influences in order to survive as an organization or group (Kanter 1983, 1989, 1995a, 2001, 2006a, 2009a). The forces unleashed by globalization – in sum, increased flows and connectivity, which led to increased competition, volatility, diversity, uncertainty, and complexity (Kanter

2010) – pressured companies to develop the post-bureaucratic forms needed to survive and thrive. Not only must firms engage differently with their workforce, as Kanter began to observe in the 1970s and 1980s, but they must interact differently with other organizations and the larger community, especially after the Cold War.

Communities

As part of an ecosystem remade by expanding and densifying networks spanning geographies and sectors, organizations merge, ally, or partner with other organizations as well as the larger community (Kanter 1995a, 2012a). The organization's boundary becomes porous, and the ability to manage relationships becomes critical for organizational survival and success (Kanter et al. 1992, 1999b). Those that succeed create "collaborative advantage" (Kanter 1994, 1995a). Kanter's analysis of how this is achieved builds off of her core focus on social relations. Collaboration is not exchange. The former is an ongoing relationship in which partners build value together. The latter is giving and taking. And successful collaboration is regulated not by a formal but an informal system of control. Integration – be it an alliance, a joint venture, or a full-blown partnership – is like marriages. Integration comes at several levels – strategic, tactical, operational, interpersonal, and cultural (Kanter 1994, 1995a). Although the interaction is occurring at the organization level, the problem of commitment (of the "I") to the new entity (the "we") remains the same. "Only relationships with full commitment on all sides endure long enough to create value for the partners," Kanter wrote nearly three decades after her studies on communes (1994, p. 100), before specifying mechanisms for sustaining collaborative (as opposed to organizational) commitment.

Finally, organizations must interact with communities. On the one hand, communities benefit from building an infrastructure of collaboration or "the pathways by which people and organizations come together to exchange ideas, solve problems, or form partnerships" (Kanter 1995, p. 363). While Kanter's unit of analysis has shifted from the organization to the community, her insight is similar to that observed in organizations. (She has even proclaimed that businesses should be treated as communities (Kanter 2001)). Create the structural conditions and the actors – people and organizations in the community – are more likely to work together to find solutions. But an infrastructure for collaboration is a necessary, though not sufficient condition.

People and organizations also need to be called to action and motivated to create change – and in steps the importance of values, which permeate all levels of interaction: Between people and people, people and organizations, organizations and organizations, and organizations and communities, all of which are, in essence, made up of individuals interacting under structural conditions. At the organizational level, values guide decisions, spur intrinsic motivation with positive emotions, act as an organizational control system, forge organizational identity which fosters a

longer-term perspective and widens the organization's scope, and enables ecosystem creation (Kanter 2009a, 2011c, 2015; Kanter et al. 2015). Furthermore, values may also be used to create common ground across multiple stakeholders, thus reducing intergroup conflict by establishing an overarching goal and shared values, which instill aspiration and future orientation among community members (Kanter 2009b).

Kanter's kaleidoscopic vision is layered and systemic. But this does not mean that it is deterministic. Things can change if one changes the structural conditions – or turn the kaleidoscope. And this is the role of the leader – be it of a small group, a large company, an entire nation, or beyond.

New Insights: A Grammar of Change for Leaders

Kanter's insights may be best captured in what could be called a grammar of change. Languages, like kaleidoscopes, consist of elements. Jumble up the words, or shake the kaleidoscope, and the elements can combine and recombine in an infinite number of ways. But there are rules – a grammar – for how they may fit together and in what sequence. For Kanter, even though the only constant is change itself, there are principles for how change comes about. If leaders understand the grammar of change, then they can better lead it.

Change Projects

In Simmelian fashion, Kanter has observed that "all leadership is intergroup leadership, because the potential for differentiation exists in any social unit larger than two" (Kanter 2009a, p. 83; see also Kanter and Khurana 2009). In this sense, a cellular basis for change for Kanter is the relationship between and leader and the team or small group, with the potential for these core relational dynamics to be reproduced at higher levels or units of analysis.

Leading a change initiative, whether from below, in the middle, or at the top, involves the exercise of seven core skills: (i) sensing needs and opportunities, (ii) stimulating breakthrough ideas, (iii) communicating inspiring visions, (iv) getting buy-in or building coalitions, (v) nurturing the work team, (vi) persisting and persevering, and (vii) celebrating accomplishments (Kanter 1983, 2001). Although structural conditions may enable better exercise of these skills – for example, the distribution of power in the form of information, resources, and support (Kanter 1979b, 1983) or the cultural existence of values-led organizational guidance system (Kanter 2009a; Kanter et al. 2015) – the leader and the team have the agency to carve out space and create the in situ conditions for initiating change, however minor. Writ small, the change agent must deal from the beginning with the challenge of overcoming "intergroup" conflict, finding common ground, and forging group commitment, for it is only through and with people, starting somewhere and often starting small, that change begins.

Extending Simmelian insights, Kanter proposes a "change agent rule of three." While leading an initiative, the agent encounters three types of people, allies, opponents, and undecideds, each of which ranges from active to passive. For allies, the agent must maintain their commitment, increase their numbers, and avoid faction creation. For opponents, the agent may eliminate them, neutralize them, or divide them. For undecideds, the agent's task is to win them over by increasing credibility, demonstrating benefits, or advancing group interests. Importantly, these cellular insights also apply to larger units of analysis such as teams, organizations, communities, or even nations.

Alliances

Not only must change leaders form coalitions, as described above, but if they are organizational representatives, they may also need to form interorganizational alliances such as joint ventures, consortia, or value-chain partnerships. The change challenge remains that of overcoming intergroup conflict (this time without the quotes), finding common ground, and forging group commitment, but with the goal of generating and maintaining value-creating collaboration. For Kanter, there are eight "Is" that make "We": (i) individual excellence, (ii) importance, (iii) interdependence, (iv) investment, (v) information, (vi) integration, (vii) institutionalization, and (viii) integrity (Kanter 1995a). The more "Is" attended to in an alliance, the more commitment binding the two groups or parties. Although senior leaders may initiate the alliance, senior and middle managers also execute it. Alliances are a marriage of organizations at multiple levels.

Mergers and Acquisitions

Sometimes, alliances are not enough, and full organizational integration is needed. Such processes can be traumatic for people because change of any kind, but especially in merger and acquisition contexts, may generate a loss of control, excess uncertainty, surprise, difference effects, loss of face, concerns about future competence, ripple effects, resentments, and, often, very real threats such as the loss of a job or livelihood (Kanter 1985). While there may be a technical or financial logic for bringing two organizations together, they are still made of people with values-mediated instrumental, affective, and normative needs. Organizational integration is human integration, and once again a core challenge is how to overcome intergroup conflict, find common ground, and forge group commitment.

Unlike middle managers, who lead from the middle and thus may have to carve out structural and cultural space for change, senior executives have the power to pull macro-organizational levers – to turn the kaleidoscope. Whether the motive is the turnaround of an acquired firm or leveraging a merger to catalyze change, the human integration may be thought of as three sets of activities: dual companies (run the old and the new side by side), one company (find common human bonds and encourage

relationships beyond tasks), and new company (quickly start envisioning and building the future) (Kanter 2009a, c). Kanter's earlier insights for how to overcome intergroup conflict, find common ground, and forge group commitment reappear, but once again she applies them to a higher organizational level. And this application is not limited just to mergers and acquisitions.

Turnarounds

It is natural for people and organizations to have their ups and downs or winning streaks and losing streaks (Kanter 2006a; Kanter and Fox 2016). Missteps happen, especially in rapidly changing environments, and just as people lose confidence – the expectation of future success – so do organizations. In Kanter's sociological, kaleidoscopic imagination, however, confidence does not reside inside people's heads but emerges from a system of structural relations. And because of this, agents – from athletics coaches to business executives – can instill confidence and lead turnarounds, a form of organizational change.

The process is threefold (see the appendix in Kanter 2006a for a theoretical diagram of the complex feedback loops). First, people – and it begins with people as members of a group – will need to face facts and take personal responsibility. Second, the establishment of responsibility opens the way for collaboration, in which people learn how to count on one another again, instead of finger pointing. With collaboration, respect and trust grow among group members and an upward cycle begins, thus opening the way for leaders to lay a third cornerstone: initiative. Leaders then provide the permission and encouragement for people to act and to feel like what they do can make a positive difference. If they do not feel this efficacy, then they may respect and trust others and they may even help other people out, but they will not necessarily give the best of themselves, which is needed to better stimulate innovation and change.

Systemic Transformation

Kanter conceptualizes systemic transformation – of which change projects, alliances, mergers and acquisitions, and turnarounds may be a part – as a "change wheel" (Kanter 2001, 2005b). Her description further highlights her kaleidoscopic thinking. She arrays around a wheel ten organizational elements, which contribute to organizational change. The change goal sits in the center. But the elements are not isolated. They are spokes on a wheel. When any two elements are combined, the change wheel begins to roll. Yet the spokes are presented with a logic in mind:

> Theme/vision, symbols/signals, and governance structures make sense at the very beginning. Next educational events can help identify and groom champions and sponsors, and quick/ wins/local innovations can then more easily follow. The activities at the grass roots then trigger the next three elements: lessons to communicate; clarity about what needs to change

in rules and procedures to support the kinds of innovations and activities that are emerging as the change idea becomes actualized; and measures of progress. Rewards help lock the whole thing into place. The elements overlap, because the same action can have multiple ramifications – for example, identifying change champions to lead local innovations and communicate with other groups to exchange best practices puts many of the spokes into gear. (Kanter 2005b, pp. 5–6)

Kanter presents a grammar of change. The wheel is based on core elements and principles, which enable multiple – kaleidoscopic – possibilities and combinations (see Fig. 1). Though not stated explicitly, the theoretical ground upon which the change wheel rolls is Kanter's kaleidoscopic understanding of the systemic, relational determination of individual and group behavior.

Social Change

The largest and most complex social organizational form is society – be it a community, a nation, or the world, each of which consist of social, political, and economic systems. Kanter likes to quote the anthropologist Margaret Mead: "Never

Fig. 1 Change wheel (Source: Kanter 2005b)

doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" (quoted in Kanter 2005c, p. 1). But, one cannot help but see the anthropologist's words filtered through Kanter's kaleido-scopic, sociological lens. The cellular, relational basis for change remains the leader and the group. Whether in the form of an individual or organization acting in society, both have the ability to transform society, beginning with convincing the "other" to commit and contribute to the change.

The challenge is that societies consist of a dizzying array of institutions, organiza-tions, groups, subgroups, and individuals all with their own distinct but overlapping values and instrumental, affective, and normative concerns. Leadership in the social sector is thus more complex than leading in an established organization (Kanter 2011a). Authority is more diffuse, resources are more dispersed, stakeholders are more varied, goals are more conflicting, and there are no existing institutional path-ways. Leading positive change in society requires *advanced* leadership.

A critical task for *advanced* leaders is identification of the target of change and the action vehicle (Kanter 2005c). Three types of targets (policy/advocacy, programs/modeling, and people/mobilization) may be addressed via five basic action vehicles: an existing organization, a new organization, a coalition of organizations, an ad hoc convening of organizations, or individual action (see Fig. 2). A leader may start in any one cell, e.g., a celebrity generating awareness in order to mobilize people. But later the celebrity could found a new organization to create a service or product innovation addressing the issue, after which a coalition of organizations may be engaged to advocate for a change in policy. The bigger the change becomes, the more the leader brings other people and organizations on board working in multiple cells of the matrix at once – overcoming potential intergroup conflict, finding common ground, and forging group commitment. Change agent skills are needed

Action Vehicle

Target		Use of existing organization	Create new organization	Work through coalition of organizations	Ad hoc convening of organizations	Individual Action
	Policy (advocacy) Rules Resources					
	Programs (delivery/modeling) Services Innovation					
	People & Culture (mobilization/empowerment) Awareness Tools for Action					

Fig. 2 Even bigger change matrix (Source: Kanter 2005c)

to start the transformation; the change wheel is necessary to get change rolling and values matter – but the "even bigger change" matrix helps to chart the course. Following Mead, change can begin with a leader and committed citizens (indeed, all and any change does), and Kanter suggests how to navigate the process.

Conclusion: Kanter's Critical Utopianism

Yet how much change has Kanter made, both theoretically and practically? It is impossible to specify much less summarize the contributions of someone who coined such terms as "empowerment" and "employability security"; provided founding insights about organizational commitment; sparked new literatures on homosocial reproduction and tokenism; inspired new diversity policy and an industry of diversity training, with arguably the best-selling training video of all time; altered company quality of work life policy, with an award later created in her name for excellence in Work-Family research (given by Purdue University and Boston College); helped include "service" as a national policy in the United States; has counseled political leaders, scores of Fortune 500 companies, and thousands of firms and nonprofits; and has taught multiples more in classrooms, via videos and talks, and through print publications.

But the work of change is never done. Although Kanter admits that there are no organizational utopias, she embraces the aspiration for perfectibility or the search for ideals, as she observed in her first publications on utopian communities. After all, she knew that all the social experiments she studied for her dissertation eventually failed. Instead, Kanter focused on explaining why and how some survived longer. The ideal is never realized, but it is what keeps her moving forward. There are times when Kanter's law applies – everything looks like failure in the middle. But in the middle is when one must persist, drawing from the only energy that is infinitely renewable – one's own. It is in the difficult middles of change – big or small – that one realizes the wisdom in another of Kanter's phrases – change is not a decision; it is a campaign. Likewise, Kanter's work on change has also been a lifetime campaign. There were moments when her work resembled that of a cunning fox, moving from subject to subject, but through it all she built and maintained a kaleidoscopic vision of change with one larger hedgehog-like goal. If the perfect society cannot be achieved, at the very least the world can always become a better place. Some utopian communities did last longer than others. Rather, people and organizations – you – just need to get started and go from there, for there is always more good to create. And Kanter's hope is that her kaleidoscopic vision can help some lead the way.

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Further Reading

Rosabeth Moss Kanter has distilled her frameworks in books, articles, blogs, videos, and inter-
views. To understand her influential view of majority-minority relations within organizations,
read Men and Women of the Corporation (1977a) and then watch the classic diversity training
video The Tale of "O": On Being Different. To delve deeper into her work on change, begin with
The Change Masters (1983), considered one of the most influential business books in the
twentieth century. To round out understanding of her core vision of corporate change, follow
up with When Giants Learn to Dance (1989), Evolve! (2001), and Confidence (2006a). To
explore her understanding of the relationship between business and society, read World Class
(1995a) and SuperCorp (2009a), both of which develop her full vision of the twenty-first century
global enterprise. Move (2015), on the other hand, is unique in that it offers a book-length focus
on how to tackle a single social change issue. Finally, Rosabeth Moss Kanter on the Frontiers of
Management (1997) collects many of her classic Harvard Business Review articles. And if you
want to understand the notion of perfectibility, return to where her system and vision began,
Commitment and Community (1972).