

# "Building Shared Workplaces"

TheMarker

*By: Yuval Gamliel*

**Co-Impact - the Partnership for a Breakthrough in Arab Employment, was established in 2013 - with the aim of promoting appropriate employment for Arab society in the business sector, with the help of the largest employers in the economy. Currently, the initiative is operating successfully in about 40 of the largest companies in the economy and the positive change in the field is already noticeable.**

The relative share of Arab society in the State of Israel is 21%. In other words, one in five people in the country comes from Arab society. In view of this figure, we would probably think that members of Arab society occupy a significant share of the labor force in Israel, but it turns out - that is severely not true. A study conducted by the consulting firm 'Shaldor' shows that employees from Arab society constitute only 5% of the employees and 0.3% of the managers in the leading companies in the business sector who employ about 70% of the labor force in the country. And who is harmed by this reality beyond, of course, the members of Arab society who are discriminated? The State of Israel of course. A study by the Bank of Israel found that underemployment in Arab society results in an annual GDP loss of 31 billion NIS (approximately \$8 billion), meaning that this built-in distortion adversely affects every citizen in Israel.

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"The Co-Impact initiative was established to change this reality. The initiative was born from the joint dream of lawyer Yifat Ovadia and Dr. Sameer Kassem, who currently runs two corona wards at Carmel Hospital in Haifa. The two met in 2013 as part of the Wexner program at Harvard University. Yifat had known the world of non-profit organizations before, as the founder of the 'Olim-Beyahad' organization, which helps academics of Ethiopian descent to find employment in their field. I knew her activity in the NGO by virtue of my position at Bank Hapoalim," says Tzvika Ziv, chairman of Co-Impact and former CEO of Bank Hapoalim. "Yifat and Sameer decided to implement a similar model in Arab society, and I was called summoned to assist. Today, Sameer and I serve as joint chairmen of the initiative." Ziv adds that "Co-Impact is a joint initiative with the Ministry of Social Equality and includes a group of Jewish and Arab businesspeople who promote the initiative on a regular basis".

**What is the overriding principle behind the initiative?**

"The concept on which the initiative is based, is the collective impact model, i.e. the understanding that if you wish to promote a social idea in the country you must put all stakeholders around one table. Indeed, in order to achieve the desired results, we have created a wide and influential network of partners from all sectors: the business sector, Arab society, the third sector, local authorities, philanthropy and the government. This is based on the assumption that large-scale, sustainable and long-term change can only take place through inter-sectoral influence processes."

**TheMarker**

"The main question we asked at the start, was what is the percentage of adequate employment of the Arab public in general Israeli society, with the understanding that the future of the State of Israel depends on the successful integration of Arab society in Israeli society and economy," Ziv expands. "In light of the fact that the government did not have in-depth data on the scope of employment of Arab society, we initially conducted in-depth research through the consulting firm Shaldor. The study revealed some significant insights: first it revealed to us the low employment rate of employees and managers from Arab society in the large companies employing about 70% of the labor force in the country, but more than that, it revealed the insight that businesses have no real barriers to employing Arabs, as they work according to rational market forces. The directors of these companies also stated in our study that they experience a shortage of quality manpower and that they will be happy to accept any person, regardless of race, religion or gender, as long as he can contribute to the business activities of the company they lead."

After internalizing the insights gained in the study, the founders of Co-Impact set out to produce models that would lead to a breakthrough in the employment percentages of Arab society in leading companies, while building integration and promotion mechanisms based solely on the candidate's professional level of excellence. Thus, together with Shaldor, the initiative team built a model to encourage the employment of Arab society among the leading private companies in Israel. "Once we started implementing the model we created in companies, we discovered that it works," says Ziv, "and therefore we set ourselves a strategic goal to run the project in 10 new companies every year, so that within a decade we will reach 100 companies from diverse sectors such as hi-tech, pharma, services, the food industry, the automotive industry and more."

**How is the process carried out with the companies?**

"The process begins with making direct contact with the CEO. He leads, gives the go-ahead and conveys the message to all layers of the organization, and then together with the CEO and management we formulate an annual work plan and measurable goals. We perform an in-depth diagnostic study on each company for three months while understanding the organizational characteristics, opportunities and barriers. Along with the diagnosis, we identify the business benefits that the company can realize as a result of integrating employees from Arab society. After the diagnostic and mapping phase, we assimilate processes, tools and supportive mechanisms at all stages of employees' employment cycle and in a diverse and inclusive organizational culture."

Nawa Jahshan Batshon, Co-Impact's CEO, is at the forefront of the change that Co-Impact is making in the field. "Our uniqueness is in the in-depth work we do in every company that partners with us," she says. "In these companies, a steering committee promotes the change with our help, and everything is done in an orderly manner with measurable models and tools, so that at the end of the joint process, the companies can continue it themselves."

**Who manages the direct relationship with the companies?**

"After the company enters a partnership with the initiative, we attach to each company a key account manager and a senior organizational consultant. Our team accompanies the entire partnership and builds work plans together with the company. They also accompany each employer in adjusting work processes, accompany and train managers,

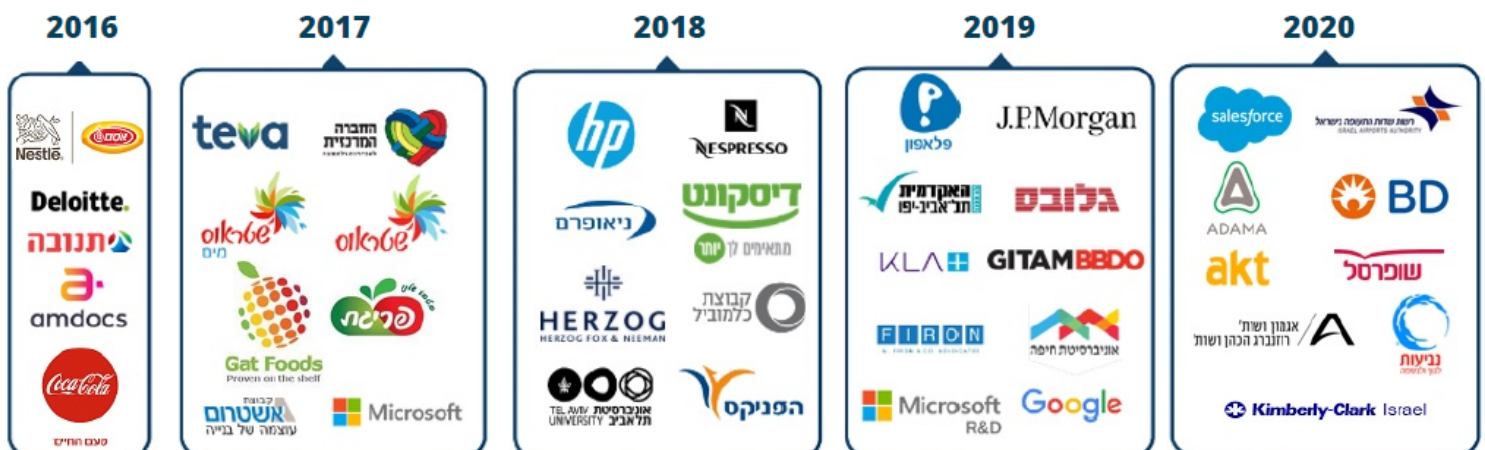
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monitor the progress of the work plan, identify challenges and barriers and ways of dealing with them, identify and act on opportunities, contact and establish work processes with appropriate partners, and more."

### How many companies currently take part in the change process?

"We currently accompany close to 40 of the leading companies in the economy, in which more than 4,000 quality placements have been made, along with internal organizational change. The goal is not only to lead to a numerical change in the number of Arab employees, but to create an organizational culture that will be an opening for long-term change. Leading companies such as Osem, Tnuva, Strauss, Deloitte, Microsoft, Amdocs, Herzog Fox Ne'eman, Strauss Water, Neopharm, Teva, HP, Globes, KLA, Salesforce, Adama, Coca-Cola, Central Company, Prigat, Ashtrum, Colmobil Group, The Phoenix, Discount Bank, Google, GITAM BBDO, Firon & Co., Shufersal, Neviot, Kimberly-Clark, Agmon & Co., Rosenberg Hachohen & Co. and more, chose to partner with Co-Impact and lead the change."

The companies Co-Impact works with



**What do you mean when you say "organizational culture"?**

"An organizational culture of diversity and inclusion is one in which employees from Arab society feel belonging, equal opportunities, recognition of unique characteristics and motivation to contribute to the success of the company. Among other things, it includes holiday greetings and gifts on Muslim, Christian and Druze holidays, activities for International Diversity Day, adjusting welfare packages, diversity workshops as well as consulting for managers and employees. The goal is to relate to the world and culture from which the employee comes from, in order to create a sense of home in the workplace. Currently, there are tens of thousands of educated young people from Arab society without employment that is appropriate for their education, skills and abilities, and a change in organizational culture will lead to a deep and long-lasting change and not to something superficial and short-term."

One of the reasons for Co-Impact's success stems from the extensive network of partners on which the initiative relies. These include the Office of the President; the Ministry of Social Equality; the Ministry of Finance; the Business Council of about 100 senior members of the economy who identify with Co-Impact's vision; the mentoring program that brings together young Arabs working in the business sector (mentees), and senior Jewish mentors with extensive management experience in the economy; The NGO forum, which includes 12 leading non-profit organizations and organizations in the fields of employment and policy that work on the promotion of Arab society, mainly through employment, through training, building a common society, promoting students and graduates and connecting to the diversity and employment market;

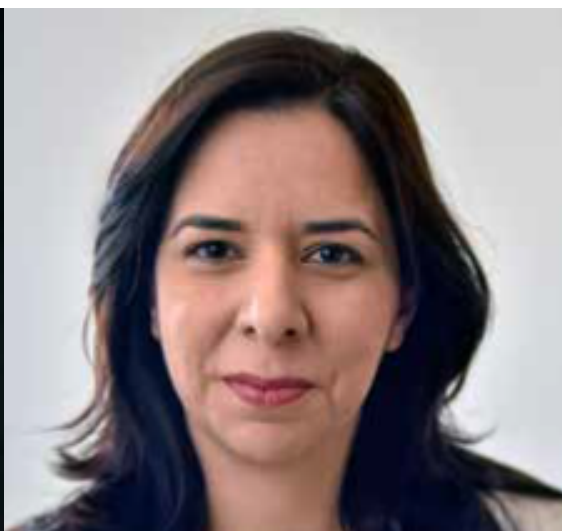


and the Young Co-Impact Club, which has about 300 members and consists of managers, academics and young entrepreneurs who are leaders and experienced in their field, who see the promotion of Arab society as their personal destiny.

"We are proud of the success of the companies that underwent the in-depth process with us. The average representation of employees from Arab society in our companies is 11% of the company's workforce, in a variety of positions in headquarters and blue-collar. "These numbers are significantly higher compared to the state of the economy at the start, where the percentage of Arab employees was only 5%," Nawa notes with satisfaction. "In companies that initially employed employees from Arab society, more diversity can be seen in the mix of positions with more headquarter employees and managers."



Zvika Ziv, Co-Impact  
Co-Chair



Nawa Jahshan-  
Batshon, Co-Impact  
CEO

Although things may sound ideal, not everything went smoothly in the beginning; the Co-Impact team encountered many barriers on the part of Arab society, whose young people expressed distrust that an Israeli company would hire employees from Arab society. "We are talking about years of exclusion and leaving talented candidates outside the gates of the leading companies," explains Nawa. "A study we conducted on the subject showed that 50% of academic candidates in Arab society do not even apply for employment at these companies, out of fear and distrust. Therefore, an essential part of the initiative was also to position the partner companies in Arab society, so that candidates understand that change is taking place. Our companies take proactive actions vis-à-vis Arab society in reaching potential candidates. In addition, through diversity and the creation of shared workplaces, it is possible to influence shared society outside the walls of the workplace."

"We often meet people who do not encounter Arab society in their daily lives. There is an opportunity through this initiative, to produce these encounters that shatter prejudices against minorities in Israeli society," she concludes, "And this will all lead to not only a better functioning economy but also a more moral, egalitarian and tolerant society."

**The article was translated from Hebrew. For the original please press [here](#).**