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Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age

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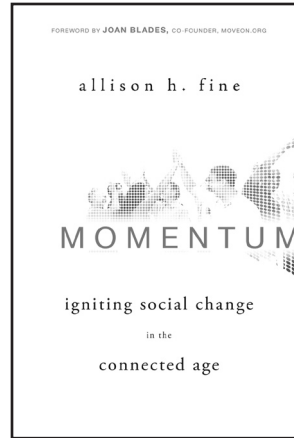
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Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age. Allison H. Fine. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Basse, A Wiley Imprint, 2006. ISBN: 978-0787984441. \$27.95.

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In *Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age*, author Allison Fine argues that the efforts of community literacy workers may be more effectively advanced through the power and potential of using technology. As a social entrepreneur, writer, and activist for grassroots organizations, Fine outlines ways that digital tools—email, the Web, chat rooms, cell phones, PDAs and iPods—can be used to facilitate interactivity, connectedness, and access to information within an organization and to help these organizations construct new ways to achieve social change.

Fine's book is divided into two parts. In the first part she discusses the obstacles social activists face when they shift to connected activism. Fine describes connected activism in this section as consisting of self-determination and social media, with social media being digital tools. In this first section, she discusses the importance of working through networks, listening, and what she terms "powering the edges." By combining these strategies, connected activism shifts from one-way conversations with volunteers, donors, and communities to two-way conversations that encourage stakeholders to contribute and shape the purpose, activities, and resources of the organization. Inherent in this approach is the improvement of listening skills and the shifting of "responsibility and opportunities to individuals on the ground who can make the most difference in their communities," in other words, powering the edges (xviii).

In the second part of the book, Fine focuses on the opportunities present in the Connected Age, and in the age of connected activism. According to Fine, connected activism can provide opportunities for organizations to be self-determining, "and to involve large numbers of people in their efforts

in new and meaningful ways” (12). Fine cites the 2004 Howard Dean for President campaign as one example of connected activism where millions of Americans across the spectrum of age and political affiliations got involved in this national election. Additionally, Fine discusses some of the strategies and efforts of MoveOn.org, an online advocacy group founded in 1998 “with the goal of getting Congress to stop the Clinton impeachment activities and ‘move on’ to more pressing issues” (46). According to Fine, MoveOn.org’s willingness to let their members take the lead in determining their strategy created a membership base of more than three million individuals. She discusses some of the ways they achieved this, as well as how the organization has evolved in response to member criticism. Additionally, it is in this second part of the book that Fine addresses some of the risks associated with digital tools—i.e., security and privacy—and provides some strategies for improving listening, measuring success as well as progress in terms that stakeholders will understand and respect. In the final chapter, Fine addresses one of the biggest worries of any social organization, funding. She explains how the Connected Age provides an opportunity to change funding in ways that make donors feel less like they are participating in a transaction and more like they are in a relationship with the organization. From establishing and facilitating giving circles to understanding the new generation of younger donors, Fine emphasizes the network aspect of fundraising and the necessity to create relationships with donors and foundations. As Fine states, “Money fuels the network, but so does information and connections” (171).

Throughout the book, Fine is upbeat and optimistic about what digital tools have done and can do for social and political organizations. She urges organizations to take advantage of this time, a time that appears to bring with it increased interconnectivity. “In order for change to happen in large-scale, meaningful, sustainable ways,” she argues, “activist organizations must change the way they view themselves and their members; they must start to act as part of networks of activists, not as soloists” (xvii). This book, then, is for organizations and individual activists that need some encouragement to try new things with the digital tools available to them. Inherent in this message is an urging for activists not to lose this opportunity to reach a demographic they might otherwise dismiss or overlook, e.g., the new pool of what she calls activist technophiles. There are a number of inspiring examples that serve this purpose, from women in Kuwait anonymously texting their legislators under their burkas, urging them to vote in favor of women’s suffrage, to the start-up websites like MoveOn.org. In a word, this book is about momentum—about using technology to create enough movement forward to keep going and sustain change.

With this in mind, Fine also leaves room for some additional questions. For example, how do organizations and individuals gain the necessary literacy skills to accomplish some of the tasks made possible by digital tools? Moreover, although some digital tools may seem “inexpensive, accessible, and massively scalable,” they are inexpensive, accessible, and massively scalable to particular individuals or groups. Consequently, whom are we



leaving out when we decide to use digital tools to increase interconnectivity within our organization, exchange information with other groups, and create networks? The Connected Age is indeed filled with opportunities that help us connect to each other in ways we haven't before. Fine clearly provides the needed encouragement to engage with such opportunities and possibilities in *Momentum*, even while we tackle how exactly to do so.

