Chapter 1
Integrating Learning Management Systems in K–12 Supplemental Religious Education

Dana C. Hackley
Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA

Mary Beth Leidman
Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The separation of church and state in the United States brought more reliance on congregations for religious education. As a result, there is a long history of supplemental education within the walls of churches, synagogues, and mosques. However, there is an increasing pressure on American congregations to remain technologically relevant in order to teach digital natives the prayers, traditions, and morals in which their faith is founded and thus continue to grow the community. Yet, in most cases, the integration and adoption of such technology proves exceedingly challenging. The following case study focuses on the challenges specifically faced by Jewish congregational religious schools when adopting e-Learning tools. Discussion encompasses one attempt to integrate the learning management system, Moodle, into a congregational religious curriculum.

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ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

A 2011 aggregate Gallup poll indicates the U.S. is broken down by religious belief as follows: 42% Protestant, 10% Christian (non-specific), 23% Catholic, 2% Jewish, 2% Mormon and 21% unspecified or none. Within the same survey results, 55% of Americans reported feeling religion is, "very important" in their life and 59% reported they are a member of a church or synagogue. These statistics are in line with 2012 U.S. Census reports based on the most recent data gathered in 2008.

Congregations have been said to be the most significant social form of American religion. These communities build relationships, foster tradition, and shape future generations of believers. They also have a long history of making education a priority. In fact, religious education has been critical in building and maintaining congregations. A 2006-2007 survey shows congregations offer religious education to 82% of children 12 and under, 64% of 13 to 14 year-olds, 53% of 15 to 19 year-olds and 37% of young adults (Chaves, Anderson & Byassee 2009). And yet, a 2010 Pew Research Center poll found one in four members of the millennial generation, those born after 1980, are unaffiliated with any particular faith. Riegel & Ziebertz (2007) suggest young people that are interested in the latest technology simply don't feel they can relate to religion.

Four areas were found in the American Congregations 2010 report to benefit from congregational adoption of technology: innovativeness, distinctness, vitality, and congregational growth. The study indicates in order for a congregation to be perceived as relevant and in line with the shift in social culture, it must be considered innovated and thus adopt technology. According to the findings, adopting technology also contributes to a distinctiveness and competitive edge in obtaining members and creates a perception that the congregation is spiritually vital. Technology has been found to nurture growth of congregations.

SETTING THE STAGE

Religious entities haven't been known to readily adopt technology, but rather eliciting a reputation of avoidance. Technology use implies change, which can be worrisome to some or create conflict among congregants. Fear becomes a stumbling block to technology optimization and often the misconception that traditions will be lost stands in the way of embracing the true potential of technology (Sharpe 2004). There is also a concern that computer mediated communication will separate the individual from religion or make it somehow less spiritual (Wyche, Hayes, Harvel & Grinter 2006). But Ayya Gotamī, a Buddhist teacher, asserts technology can in