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## **Overcoming Organizational Conservatism: Community Organizing in the Greater Boston Area**

*We're trying to build organizations with staying power, not a movement based on instant power and charisma*

*- Ed Chambers, IAF director (Horwitt 1992: 548)*

### ***Abstract***

The rise and fall, the success or failure, the growth and decay of an organization can be considered outcomes of an organizational transformation process. In order to persist over time, an organization must be able to adapt to a changing environment (Zald and Denton 1963).

Michels' "iron law of oligarchy" (1959) combined with Weber's "iron cage" thesis (1968) represent the classical approach to the sociological study of organizational transformation. According to these models, over time, processes of bureaucratization, goal displacement and leadership oligarchization occur, transforming a social movement organization into a conservative, accommodative and highly bureaucratic structure.

I examine how a community-based organization, the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO), has been able to steer away from organizational conservatism, maintaining its original goal of organizing people and building power. More specifically, its intentional development of an internal "relational" culture together with its embeddedness in the Boston political landscape have allowed accountability mechanisms to come into play when GBIO begins to drift towards goal transformation.