

CAN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY BE REENGINEERED?

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WHY IS IT DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT REENGINEERING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY?

According to Michael Hammer, the business theorist who coined the term "reengineering" and who has propagated the theory, reengineering is "a revolution, the most important one in business since the advent of the Industrial Revolution 150 years ago" (Hammer & Stanton, 1995). However, while reengineering has revolutionized the business world, its theory has limitations when applied to the nonprofit sector. Reengineering works best when set in a self-contained environment in which leadership emanates from one source, far-reaching decisions can be made swiftly and suddenly, and every worker is empowered to carry out the mission of the corporation.

Reengineering is not a simple process by any means. The key word "radical" appears in its classic definition. Reengineering implies "disregarding all existing structures and procedures and inventing completely new ways of accomplishing work" (Hammer & Champy, 1993). The type of massive business overhaul recommended by Hammer is daunting and is usually greeted with failure. Hammer estimates that 50 to 70 percent of all reengineering efforts will fail not because of any factor inherent to reengineering but because of "people who don't know what they're doing and who don't pursue reengineering the right way" (Hammer & Stanton, 1995).

Nonprofit agencies and their staff face special challenges when pursuing reengineering. "They include identifying the mission and the customers, finding ways to measure performance, and coping with resisters who, from idealism or cynicism, ground their opposition in the 'higher' purpose of the mission-driven organizations" (Hammer, 1995).

The previously described optimal conditions for reengineering are not necessarily present in Jewish communal agencies. Jewish communal agencies may be single operating units, but funding sources may dictate certain policy outcomes. Leadership is a partnership between professional and lay leaders. Change within the Jewish community is generally very slow because of the multi-tiered, professional-lay decision-making process. This process becomes even slower when it has to cross agency boundaries.

Reengineering is based on the principle of creating value for the customer. This principle presents Jewish institutions with a complex dilemma because it asks them to isolate their customers and to see themselves as individual operating bodies that can best serve the customer. However, individual Jewish organizations are inextricably linked to other Jewish institutions by ties of tradition, expectation, and perception. No one agency in the Jewish community can reengineer without creating a domino effect of change. This linkage is apparent from two of the examples given by Cohen when discussing how the Jewish community will be reengineered. When describing the functions of individuals in agencies, under the sub-heading, "Broad-Banding Professional Responsibilities and Skills," he writes:

Beyond reengineering the individual agency, we could also imagine advances inspired by the reengineering perspective on the community level. Here we are talking about processes that cut across synagogues, schools, Centers, federations, and human services agencies. On one level, these are all departments of the fictive entity known as the local Jewish community. On another level, these are competing corporations in the same industry, and one would hardly expect Taco Bell to reengineer with McDonald's to make sure that

more Americans affiliate with fast food (Cohen, 1996).

At a later point in his article, under the heading of "Interagency Cooperation and Communication," Cohen speaks of more "seamless" sharing of information of service and information between agencies. He writes:

Somehow we need to increase the likelihood that the JCC preschool teacher will advocate the Jewish day school or that the supplementary school principal will advertise the JCC camp, and that all agency professionals, including synagogue rabbis, will have direct interest in a successful federation campaign (Cohen, 1996).

When Taco Bell reengineered, its desired effect was not to have more people eat at McDonald's, yet within a reengineered Jewish communal institution, the desired effect will be measured by participation of the customer not only within but also outside the agency, in the larger Jewish community. This duality of purpose is based on the concept of "Jewish community." While for the sake of his article, Cohen defines the Jewish community by the institutions that serve it, the crisis in North American life seems to be embodied by the split between what people think Jewish community should be versus what it is.

WHAT IS MEANT BY JEWISH COMMUNITY?

The concept of community is central to Judaism. The Revelation at Sinai and its subsequent elaboration took place in the collective. Rabbi Judah HaNasi presents an interesting insight into God's covenant at Sinai as a dual commitment that the Jews were making to Him and to themselves concomitantly: "This was Israel's excellence at Sinai, they were of one accord in accepting joyfully the Kingdom of God. Moreover, they pledged themselves for one another" (Mekhilta to Exodus 20:2).

The themes of commonality, responsibility, and fellowship run throughout Jewish tradition.

- "All Jews are responsible for one another" (*Shevuot*, 39a)
- "All Jews are friends" (Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, *Hagiga*, 3a)
- "All Jews constitute one soul and one body" (Chofetz Chaim, *Shmirat Halashon*, on Genesis 46:27)
- "As God is One though his name has seventy ramifications, so is Israel one, though dispersed among the nations" (*Zohar*, Exodus 16b)

There is a natural expectation that the Jewish community will operate as a cohesive interwoven body. Solender (1996) touches on this expectation when he implores: "We must always operate in a way that protects the strong communal ties and unified and coordinated structures that have been operating for 100 years." While Solender is only referring to the North American Jewish community, he may as well be asking to retain the same type of system that has been in service to Jews for thousands of years. Yet, Cohen (1996) describes a North American Judaism that "may be becoming more religious and less ethnic, more individualistic and less collectivist, more spiritual and less tribal." He presents a type of Jew who challenges whether he or she needs to live within a Jewish community. As he writes, "The Jewish individual has gained ascendancy over the Jewish tradition and the Jewish community" (Cohen, 1996).

Yet, there is no abatement on the need for community. Reisman (1977) has written on the phenomenon of *chavurot*:

Through all of our work, no single conclusion registers so strongly as our sense that there is, among people we have come to know, a powerful, even desperate longing for community, a longing that is apparently, not adequately addressed by any of the relevant institutions in most people's lives.

The problem existing today is that the typical North American Jew may have the same longings for community, but is seeking it through the eyes of a modernist consumer.

Because of the dichotomy between institutions that appear as one whole but are really separate entities, Jewish communal institutions are not providing the services that members desire or expect.

If the push and pull of modernism has yielded a new type of Jew, as Cohen suggests, his prescription for change is to provide a different type of Jewish community that is more responsive and available to the individual. We can no longer afford to be the type of institutions that most Jews find "out of touch, remote, and even distasteful" (Cohen, 1996). The Jewish community needs to create institutions that are responsive to the needs and time frames of its members. Decisions need to be made at a speed that is comparable to business institutions. The Jewish community needs to move from a state where its institutions are partners in theory to one in which they are partners in actuality and where the client of this partnership is the Jewish community in its entirety.

Without the Jewish community as the client, then reengineering cannot succeed. In the writings of Cohen, Solender, Weiner, and Reitzes, there is the sense that all Jewish communal institutions operate in tandem. In reality, does a call to one institution elicit any cogent information about another? Do the staff at federation know the schedule of classes or camp fees for the Jewish Community Center (JCC), and can the staff of the JCC claim to know the starting time for Friday night services at the local synagogues? Do the synagogue staffs know what courses are offered through the local Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE), and can the BJE recommend a support group of Jewish Family Services?

Any reengineering effort must be done across agencies, because only through healthy cross-agency cooperation can a Jewish community thrive. If the wish of the Jewish community is to segment its members into categories, then it should recommend the improvement of single agencies within the Jewish community. However, if the community is concerned with being a whole, larger than the sum of its parts, then it needs to

reengineer in its entirety.

As Cohen suggests, a reengineered Jewish community calls for professionals who serve and lay leaders who determine policy for the Jewish community as a whole. Currently, if agency staff members are asked for information about a local Jewish organization other than where they work, they can generally do no more than provide a phone number. When contemplating a budget, the committee member from one agency will rarely think how a change in the financial situation of one agency has an impact on another. The "unified communal structure" that Solender suggests is much more of a myth than a reality for the members of the Jewish community. The current communal structure has acted more as an agent of disenfranchisement than of associationalism within the North American Jewish community. Because of the clear sense of differentiation that exists between agencies, we have served as agents of the growing movement away from Jewish institutions.

Is reengineering the solution to these problems? Reengineering a community creates conflicts, challenges, and headaches on a monumental scale. It implies drastic rethinking and radical initiatives. It is a risky venture whose end result is uncertain. *It is for these reasons precisely why the Jewish community needs to be reengineered.* Jews have always thrived during periods of true crisis when all of their skills were put to the challenge. No better example can be seen than the emergence of rabbinic Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple. I personally believe that the concept of reengineering is particularly suited for Jewish communal institutions, and that Jewish life has "reengineered" on several occasions throughout its history. Reengineering, for all of its difficulties, is an ideal strategy for combating the stagnation in Jewish communal life.

HOW WILL THIS NEW JEWISH COMMUNITY BE REENGINEERED?

The most important part of reengineering is process. Process means "a complete end-to-

end set of activities that together create value for the customer" (Hammer, 1996). Process-centered thinking empowers workers to see and understand the company as a whole and strives to eliminate those tasks that do not create value for the customer. Work is redefined because workers are no longer tied into the rigid performance of tasks, but rather to the flexible movement of process.

The desired effect of reengineering the Jewish community is to create a system where everyone sees the same "big picture." Professionals who staff, and community leaders who create policy, will all see the larger Jewish community as the customers who buy into the company known as the "Jewish community." All services will be a series of seamless processes within and between institutions to guarantee the best possible service to the community.

For this end to be achieved, reengineering must take place on the macro and micro levels to reflect the interagency and cross-agency services available through the Jewish community. In effect, as the community defines what it seeks from a large-scale reengineering effort, each agency would work on its own internal reengineering.

The following is a recommendation for a model reengineering process for a Jewish community. Like Cohen's proposal, this model may be flawed and unrefined, but it is an adequate starting point for any real discussion on the processes involved in reengineering the Jewish community.

Reengineering is a top-down process. This means that the community-wide reengineering team must represent the best and brightest of the community's lay and professional leadership. Without the top leadership of the community at the helm of the project, it is bound to fail. The team should be a select group of inspired people who understand that they are launching a difficult and daunting project. It may comprise a mix of individuals who have held long-standing positions of leadership with people who have limited communal involvement, but who bring fresh and innovative ideas.

For the team is seeking nothing less than

totally changing the way things are done. It must be able not only to foster a vision for the reengineered community but also to inspire others with its vision. Its mission is to answer two questions:

1. What is our definition of Jewish community?
2. What is the process of becoming a member of this Jewish community?

As it asks these questions, the team will need to wrestle with some of the following issues:

- What should a Jewish community provide to its members?
- What are our expectations of the Jewish individual and family as part of this community?
- Is the Jewish community to be defined by those who actively make use of it or those who make no use of it?
- Is it to include only those who affiliate or all those with the potential to affiliate?
- Do the affiliated individuals within the community even agree on whom those with the potential to affiliate are?
- How do we contend with the cost of living Jewishly?

As the reengineering team is obtaining answers to these questions, it should be gaining a sense of how the community has operated in the past and present and how simultaneously with the community's reengineering effort agencies should be looking at their own internal services, under the guidance of members of the reengineering team. These team members need not be present at all the meetings where the agencies are exploring their processes, yet they should make certain that people who are heading the studies truly understand the essentials of reengineering, asking the following questions of their organizations:

- What are the processes involved with being a member of this agency?
- What does it mean to "affiliate" with a Jewish communal institution?

- How does affiliation in one institution influence or affect affiliation in another?
- How does information travel from one agency to the other?

In the course of answering these questions agencies will take a hard look at the way they disseminate and transfer information internally, the way they spread out tasks, and the number of handoffs that must take place between staff for work to be accomplished. Often, the channels of communication within an agency will be only slightly better than across agencies.

As agencies seek to define and redefine their processes, this information will be channeled to the leadership body at the top. What should emerge are gaps in the way information and service are delivered in the community. Teams of professionals and community leaders from various institutions should then be convened to begin creating a blueprint for a reengineered Jewish community.

Members of the reengineering think tank should devote their fullest energies to answering these questions, calling on a broad range of community members, yet they should not rush to announce any imminent change. Companies that stand the best chance of success when reengineering are those that present the clearest message of why reengineering is taking place and what the company is going to look like after reengineering occurs (Hammer & Champy, 1993). The reengineering team is nowhere near ready to present this information to the community.

The reengineering team must also be careful about the amount of time it devotes to the study. One critical challenge of reengineering is the time frame to be placed on the reengineering efforts. Hammer refers to a *time box* as a key concept in reengineering (Hammer & Stanton, 1995). A reengineering team can be bogged down forever with the study of the organization if it does not delineate at the onset the amount of time to be devoted to it. He generally recommends four to six weeks as the time box for understanding processes.

Without a definitive time frame established at the outset, the study will go on forever. This time should be looked at as an intensive one that will challenge both lay leaders and professional to the fullest of their abilities. It will be a heady time, where a tremendous amount of information needs to be gathered, analyzed, discarded, and revisited in order to understand the processes of the community. It seems that anything longer than twelve to sixteen weeks would unduly burden members of the reengineering effort and possibly derail all of their energies.

THE REENGINEERED JEWISH COMMUNITY

After their intensive study, the reengineering team should have gained an understanding of many of the processes involved in the transfer of information within and across the community. It should have a clear conception of the Jewish community and what responsibilities are entailed in being part of this community. However, it may not yet understand all the processes that should be put in place in the reengineered Jewish community. This degree of uncertainty is the greatest challenge to any reengineering effort because it asks companies (and in this case, the community) to explore new options of operation without knowing the end result. As Hammer writes: "When reengineering begins, we know little other than the old process is inadequate and that we need something far better. This uncertainty is not eliminated quickly, but only gradually, over the lifetime of the project" (Hammer & Stanton, 1995).

Before announcing any wide-scale reengineering effort, the reengineering team must determine the specifics of how decisions will be made and where it will find the staff to fill these reengineered positions.

Decision making is one of the focal concerns when discussing reengineering. One of the reasons that reengineering works so well in the business world is because of the empowerment of the worker to make broad, sweeping decisions. The worker rarely consults a supervisor or a board because he or she

knows "the buck stops with them." In a reengineered Jewish community, should workers be so empowered that the current system of decision making is made obsolete? Should community leaders be given the opportunity to make large-scale change without the benefit of the committee process?

Cohen is aware of this dilemma, yet like the other respondents, very little attention is given to this critical issue. I cannot claim to have a specific answer to the way communities need to resolve this issue. Like Cohen, I agree that change needs to take place in the way decisions are made internally and across agencies. I also see the centrality of the consensus-based process to both Judaism and Jewish communal activities.

The consensus-based process for decision making must be kept in place. To remove it would destroy the very basis for the whole reengineering effort—the strengthening of community. In the traditional approach, community leaders decide policy, and professionals implement this policy into practice. While these roles should not change, the scope of services that fall under the workers' domain of practice and service may be expanded to reflect the policy decisions of community leaders. The specific determinations of this expanded role must be decided by each individual community.

Ideally, the current staff of workers in place in the Jewish community should be able to fill their respective reengineered roles. I write "ideally" because many people resist reengineering, and by eliminating unnecessary work, reengineering requires fewer workers to perform the same or more tasks.

The Jewish community has a leg up on most corporations in that it possesses highly dedicated, highly motivated people whose work is motivated by a value system, as well as a salary. While there may be resistance to reengineering, there will not be resistance to serving the cause of the Jewish community. Work should be more interesting and fun with reengineered agencies. Additionally, Hammer (1996) has cited cases where reengineered companies require more staff because of increased and expanded demand.

The reengineering team must be able to properly translate their vision into an exciting challenge for both professionals and community members.

The initial announcement of the reengineering effort should be done on a large scale, involving both professionals and community leaders from all community institutions. The presentation should explain why the community is reengineering and introduce their vision of the reengineered community. Very soon thereafter, each agency should announce specific changes in the way processes will occur within it and across agencies. Teams within agencies should reflect new processes and procedures that are more responsive to the needs of the community members. These teams should also have representation on cross-agency teams that would meet periodically to create new and innovative programs and improve channels of communication.

It is very important that the staff in place in the reengineered community see themselves as generalists, with redefined skills that allow them to see and serve the community as their customer. They should view staff in other agencies as their co-employees and strive to think creatively and originally. New forums of interagency staff meetings need to be occurring with the kind of regularity that will reinforce the community's commitment to cooperation through reengineering. The eventual expansion of staff roles may call for a reconfiguration of salary structures within the community. The reengineering team should at least plan for measures of thanks to compensate staff during the exhausting transitional phase.

The reengineered Jewish community must be vigilant not to allow early successes or failures to deter them from their efforts. Setbacks are inevitable. There may be resistance from staff, community leaders, and community members to new structures and changes. Change in a reengineered Jewish community is drastic and dramatic. While Hammer classically defines reengineering as an effort that will produce "dramatic improvements" it is difficult to predict just how soon there

will be a behavioral change in members of the Jewish community. In the long run, the benefits of reengineering should prove to be well worth the effort.

A FINAL WORD

Any community that seriously considers reengineering is going to face tremendous resistance because of the nature of the "crisis" currently being experienced in North America. For all of the talk of the "crisis," there may be no time or place in history that Jews have enjoyed as much freedom and wealth as they have in North America. This is a testament to the American system of democracy and to the Jews themselves who have managed to thrive within this system. However, the relative health of the North American Jewish community is the greatest deterrent to any type of change.

Hammer has said that three types of companies reengineer—those that have no choice, those that see trouble ahead, and those that are in fine shape (Hammer & Champy, 1993). Many North American communities may seem to be in positions of strength and wealth and may not be willing to accept the challenge of reengineering. This is unfortunate because reengineering offers benefits to all communities. It offers the type of invigorating challenges that can reenergize an entire community. It offers the community a chance to find its roots and its future. It enjoins the community to ask some hard questions, but more

importantly, it forces the community to come up with some hard answers. For these reasons alone, each and every Jewish community should explore the option of reengineering.

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