

When Ronald Reagan said “no government ever voluntarily reduces itself in size” (Educational Video Group, 2009) he certainly could not have included public research institutions in that statement. Public research organizations, in Canada at least, as they seem to be prime targets for government cuts with proposed branch closures in Toronto (Church, 2011) and massive layoffs at Library and Archives Canada (Public Service Alliance of Canada, 2012). This quote from Reagan is interesting because he is considered one of the major players in the neo-liberalism movement which occurred in the late 80’s and early 90’s (Boston, 2011). Neo-liberalism is characterized by a reductionist view on public spending, and related institutions, and saw a push to have such organizations conduct themselves in a way more akin to how private corporations operate the legacy of which is New Public Management (NPM). NPM seeks to adopt private management techniques and styles into public service organizations. The goal of which, among other things, is to increase efficiency while reducing cost. For this paper I consider this reality in the context of the relationship between the librarian, and information professional, to their employer. I will also consider the changing nature of this relationship by examining post-war sources from the 20th century and comparing those from the 21st century.

Herner and Heatwole (1952) describe staffing requirements in a small library in a way I would imagine Henry Ford would if he had been a librarian. That is to say it seems very mechanical and reads like a technical manual. Herner and Heatwole (1952) undertake a systematic hour by hour breakdown of what they deem staff ought to do as part of their job requirements and how long those activities should take. The reading contains engendered language, which is a product of the time it was written, but to its credit does not make many value judgements as to the worthiness of particular tasks or staff. The only place such

ascription occurs is when Herner and Heatwole (1952, p. 5-6,) give substance to what is meant by professional librarians and non-librarians but, like the rest of the text, it is done in such a technical way that really the only value judgments occurring are those inherent in hierarchical labelling. There are two things that stood out to me about this reading which I felt were contrarian to most of what I have experience in the LIS literature in my studies thus far. The first being that Herner and Heatwole (1952, p.6) arrive at the conclusion that libraries of that size are actually understaffed from the 6.2 persons they deemed were necessary to run it. This is a far cry from the New Public Management method discussed in Boston (2011) which looks for reasons to cut employees for efficiency or productivity sake as Herner and Heatwole (1952, p.7) are arguing that libraries need to hire more staff to do their job effectively. I also found it really interesting that Herner and Heatwole (1952, p.13) note that “the importance of libraries in educational and research organizations is well established” as if it is a given that such institutions fill an important role in our society. Not citing any source in particular but I would argue that generally, based on my experiences in the MLIS program, there seems to be a sense from the literature that libraries seem to feel they continually have to justify their existence, which is understandable given the political and economic realities.

In the contemporary resources used in writing this essay I found them to be blend elements of the humanistic tradition with those of NPM. For example Tucker and Sinha (6, 2006) writes that, for information professionals, “a sense of humour is an absolute must” and provides her readers with several assessment tools asking them to consider what values are important to them as individuals. Arguments could be made but I suggest that having a sense of humor and being introspective are not skills that are actively sought out by employers in the private sector. Which is to say those types of considerations fall well under the humanistic

tradition but what is interesting is Tucker and Sinha (2006) then take that information and try framing it in the context of NPM. Having a sense of humor is important to having excellent customer service skills (Tucker and Sinha, 2006, p.5) or networking skills (Tucker and Sinha, 2006) which then in turn could lead to other job opportunities. Introspective activities help give one a better sense of what values they may bring to a organization or particular role which helps with salary negotiation (Tucker and Sinha, 2006, p. 26-7). In a way it seems as if the reader is supposed to ascribe monetary value, or worth, to those individualistic traits established early in the book. There is language cushioned throughout discussing satisfaction and feeling fulfilled by one's work but it is jarring next to assertions such as "tech skills are survival skills" alluding to the working world being a type of warzone or battlefield (Tucker and Sinha, 2006, p.5).

Ptolomey (2009) presents information in a very similar way to Tucker and Sinha (2006), in that we see a blend of the humanistic tradition with NPM leaning into the latter a great deal. Ptolomey (2009, p.178) puts a huge emphasis on professional development and argues that it is "essential" that the information professional be dynamic and continues to grow, or hone, their skills. Like with Tucker and Sinha (2006) the impetus to undertake professional development is very much in service to a NPM type of philosophy. This moves away from the humanistic when Ptolomey (127) talks about how having ongoing skill development looks good when "marketing" one's self to potential employers. I think this line of thinking fits into Boston's (2011, p.19-21), assertion that the "devolution of responsibilities and management controls" and "generic management skills" being desirable because it very much seems, from Ptolomey (2009) that the onus is on the job seeker to convey to employers they have these transferable skills. And although Ptolomey (2009, p. 59-60) highlights the differences between the four main types of libraries the fall back always seems to be the generic skills like communication, networking,

technology skills and “risk management” which seems more at home in a bank or insurance company rather than a library.

Nesbitt and Gordon (2002) was the last of the post-2000 resources consulted for this essay and seemed to fall hardest in the NPM camp. In the preface of the book Nesbitt and Gordon (2002) talk about information professionals having a “type of mind” which makes them more suited for careers in the field than others and it is made to seem that it is up to the individual to sell suitors that they have such a talent. The ones that do will benefit from the resources in this book. Also in the preface is a discussion centred on whether or not it is worthwhile to complete a Ph.D. in LIS. While Nesbitt and Gordon (2002) do not actively try to dissuade the reader they are matter of fact about it being useful only to those that have teaching inspirations at the university level, which they note the market is not good, and even then, one can do so with the right combination of work experience. While I am not trying to judge the merit of that position I do think the way it is presented is rather grim and glosses over that people may wish to go off the beaten track for reasons other than finical gain or job security. The NPM principals are most apparent in that it seems the position taken by Nesbitt and Gordon (2002) is that the reader is competing with all other information professionals for employment opportunities and using online resources can put them ahead of the curve in that regard. The same themes of integrating terms not commonly associated with public service such as “marketing” (Nesbitt and Gordon, 127, 2002) oneself and “networking” (Nesbitt and Gordon, 80, 2002) appear in the text but where the authors separate themselves from the crowd is through advocating for using technology as the main way to do that. The book does have “online” in the title so I am not faulting them for having a focus but mention is made of the “speed and currency” of the internet and those that do not get on board will be “left behind” (Nesbitt and

Gordon, 285, 2002). In many ways it appears their prediction was right but I find this noteworthy because we again see the adversarial type language cropping up.

I would like to a moment to talk about my work experience in the public service, as it was within an information organization, to show what values I am bringing to the table when engaging with these materials. I was with a health related Crown corporation for four years with the last of which saw me scanning and indexing several hundred health related documents per day. Shortly before taking that role the Ontario Parliament legislated that the organization I worked for could no longer operate under a deficit, as it had been doing for the decade preceding. After that the internal rhetoric began to change from performing an important function in our society to “the customer experience” and “efficiency excellence” which sounds very much like Boston’s (2011) description of the NPM. The distrust of the public service Boston (2011) spoke about was very evident in discourse I would read about the organization and even within the internal culture. From my perspective, as a newly graduated employee, I was excited and saw these potential changes as opportunities for me to contribute in a meaningful way. When rubber hit the road though I found the rhetoric did not match the day-to-day reality and seemed to be more for public relations than actual function. Reading through materials for this course, Boston especially, helped to give me more of a context to frame my experience.

As organizations grow staff is expanded to meet increasing needs however as public information organizations grow it seems that the counter intuitive goal is to reduce personnel. This was not always the case as we saw Herner and Heatwole (1952) advocate for staff sized to be increased as was necessary given the “well-established” important of libraries in educational and research organizations. Sources from the 21st century took a wildly different vantage point.

In those sources we saw phrases such as “survival skills” and “marketability” takes centre stage denoting the hyper competitive nature of finding jobs in the field. Many of the modern sources spoke less about how to be a good informational professional instead on focusing on how to appear to be one to find a job which is much different from the vantage point taken in Herner and Heatwole (1952). We started with a quote from Reagan talking about reduction of government so we will close by considering one from Dominion Archivist Arthur G. Doughty “of all the national assets, Archives are the most precious: They are the gift of one generation to another and the extent of our care of them marks the extent of our civilization” (Association for Manitoba Archives, 2012). The more we grow, preserve, and care for our collective history with these institutions says a lot about our progress as a nation and I think that the creation of a system that encourages competitors to trample one another for a handful of jobs says just as much.

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