Newsroom Resistance: An Ethnographic Study of the Modern News Worker, Policies, and Organizational Dissatisfaction

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Abstract

Modern news workers see themselves pressed by digital routines, industry confusion, and their organization's loss of journalistic focus. This ethnographic study looked at the ways they resist counter-journalistic policy. Social construction theory and the hierarchy of influence model informed this study as new and forming occupational pressures push news workers' ideological and professional dispositions away from their employers. This study found friction and frustration for news workers when organizations defied the traditional journalistic tenets. Organizational directives to follow policy were overt and common. As the newsrooms in this study struggled to find effective business models, their attention was often diverted from the needs and performance of news workers. The desire to streamline information and have more content handled in the digital realm kept management from addressing news worker satisfaction and deficiencies in coverage. This study found management did not value traditional tasks like quality writing or photography and revealed that those news workers slow to adapt to digital tasks were laid off. Organizations generally have the upper hand, but news workers have found a few ways to send messages to administration.

Keywords: Future of newsrooms, digital news, newsrooms, news workers, policy, control, resistance, dissatisfaction.

Introduction

Cultural upheaval in the realm of news work is not a newly minted dynamic. History has shown news workers become protective of their traditions and civic roles when technology threatens to change their routines or their function. However, the modern American news machine has shed news workers at an unprecedented rate. Over the last five years traditional civic roles have become subservient to seeking a tenable business model for many news organizations.

A 2008 survey in *American Journalism Review* revealed that news workers were pessimistic about their futures in the face of changing technology and felt disenfranchised by leadership. This has not always been the case. Fellowship was once common in the newsroom (Breed). This is depicted in classic movies like *The Front Page* (1931), *Ace in the Hole* (1951) and *All the President's Men* (1976); even the *Lou Grant* show that ran from 1977-1982 featured a heated but collegial dynamic between supervisors, staff, and peers. This study shows that the acerbic personalities, once depicted in these movies, now in reality find creative ways to resist management.

The *American Journalism Review* study explored loss of fellowship among colleagues and a disconnection with readers. Many news workers highlighted in this work felt this loss was the result of favoring digital newsgathering and distribution (Wilson). According to Linda Foley, then the president of the Newspaper Guild,

> pessimism stems from changes in the workplace. In earlier days, she says, reporters came back to the newsroom to write stories after gathering the information they needed, and there they could bounce the story off coworkers. The resulting feeling of connection around the newsroom is missing in an age when reporters can file stories without ever meeting their coworkers. (Wilson 3)

This lack of optimism that concerned news workers in 2008 has certainly proved to be valid in terms of jobs. Between 2008 and 2012, the newspaper industry laid off over 38,000 news workers (Smith). This was done in favour of cheap citizen journalism and younger, video-savvy news workers. Layoffs continue to rise, notably June 2013 saw the layoff of the entire *Chicago Sun Times* photo staff.

This is a challenging period for news workers as competing forces like digital platforms force organizations to re-create themselves. As publishers scramble to bring costs in line with thinning revenues, digital change has broken the traditional business model that has served media organizations during most of the rise of the American press. This study reports the results of a collection of observations among working journalists. It incorporates the ethnographic tradition of participant observations, job shadowing, and informal conversations. This work visits the concepts of newsroom social controls but focuses on how new social controls have given rise to resistance in the workplace.

Literature Review

Many would suspect that the individuals on the front line of news production would be extremely influential in controlling the images brought before the public as a reflection of the world. However, the literature related to the pressures and influences on the American news worker has indicated this has not been the case.

According to Tuchman (1972) each story a news worker produced had the potential to affect the way he/she was viewed by superiors, and their daily actions affected the ability of the organization to make a profit. "Inasmuch as the newspaper is made of many stories, these dangers are multiplied and omnipresent" (Tuchman 1972: 298). Berger and Luckmann explored these pressures and introduced the idea that over time social groups form a mental picture of the roles individuals play as they interact. This belief of what reality is becomes reality; thus reality is socially constructed. They also found that although reality is socially constructed, rather than a reflection of an objective reality, concrete individuals served as the agents of that reality.

Since White's pioneering study, gate keeping has been thought of as the foremost example of news worker power. Various studies suggest that the gate and the gatekeeper role neither remain intact nor are fully replaced but have become a hinge between tradition and change (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski). Warren Breed supported the idea of a news worker disempowered by social control. He said, "Any important change toward a more free and responsible press must stem from various possible pressures on the publisher, who epitomizes the policy-making and coordinating role" (Breed 334).

The hierarchy of influence model proposed by Shoemaker and Reese had utility in understanding the role of the rank-and-file news worker. It saw the news worker's level of influence squeezed by routines, organizational controls, extra-media concerns, and ideology. In this model the levels of influence were explanative of the hierarchical structure of organizations. The individual was at the centre of this model and this level of influence referred to the education and professionalism of individual journalists.

Schlesinger found routines to be more than just a way to meet deadlines and manage a complex world for audiences. He noted the routines of news programs were affected by political, economic, and ideological constraints that made news production akin to propaganda. Schlesinger found that news workers on the front line of production could make only cosmetic changes that appeared profound to other professionals because of their novelty. Many scholars assert that digital transition has obscured what a journalist truly is (Allan).

Bourdieu explored social space in terms of peer networks and social capital as the non-financial social value of an individual. As individuals engage and interact in the various aspects of life, they develop certain dispositions toward their identities and the ways they are expected to behave. Through these dispositions, combined with other complex social behaviour and expectations, they will start to understand their place in the social order and begin to embody this expectation in their habitus.

The imposing hand of corporate hegemony was explored by Doug Underwood. He noted, "Newspaper content is geared to the results of readership surveys, and newsroom organization has been reshaped by newspaper managers whose commitment to the marketing ethic is hardly distinguishable from their vision of what journalism is" (xii). Individual agency is challenged when that which is expected is in discord with outside behaviours.

> Actions we did not think about in advance will be dissociated from our selves and experienced as the doings of outside agents. Our rational judgments of our own authorship, in sum, seem to be accompanied by a more ephemeral sense of controlling our worlds—a feeling of vicarious agency that comes and goes depending on whether we have merely contemplated the action. (Wegner et al. 847)

Influence can also be viewed as a lateral consideration rather than in terms of being superior or inferior to more macro views. Berkowitz attempted to refine White's gatekeeping metaphor and explained that decision-making was a group process, thus content was shaped by group dynamics. Rothenbuhler offered the following definition of ritual to inform communication research: "ritual is the voluntary performance of appropriately patterned behavior to symbolically effect or participate in the serious life" (27). He further explained that this behavior must be logical and have affect beyond the behavior itself.

Gramsci explained how cultural hegemony found itself in all aspects of life. It was societal norms that are perceived as universal truths about the way things were. Hegemony entered all aspects of daily life and influenced work, leisure time, and interpersonal relationships and impacted creative energies, thoughts, beliefs, and desires. It created a status quo, limited alternatives, and contained opportunities. It also shaped public consent so that the granting of legitimacy to dominant classes appeared spontaneous and normal in the structure of society. However, for the system to function decisions needed to meet broad needs. Hallin suggested that the media were in fact disconnected from the bourgeoisie and their control mechanisms because they needed the media to confirm their legitimacy in the capitalist system.

Tuchman (1978) found social construction only loosely related to power; moreover, he found that social construction of the factual world had more to do with the strategic rituals (such as objectivity) that allowed news workers to do their jobs within the news cycle. He found this more telling of how they constructed reality. Hall found the assignment of meaning and reality personal. Journalists used sources to create conceptual maps that organized information and fixed meanings; however, there was no single meaning and this varied depending on the historic, cultural, and personal viewpoints that gave them context.

Giddens argued that institutions did not create discourse; rather they helped those discourses become favorable and legitimized in the eyes of the public by controlling the allocation of resources through the economic forces under their influence. This indicated that discourse at least originated with the individual journalist, but under social constraints.

Boczkowski (2004) and Deuze (2007) suggest that journalists are in danger as that

which has historically been associated with their professional identity is being replaced. Journalism in terms of traditional roles like gate keeping and agenda setting is less important than speed, hypertext, and multimedia (Deuze and Paulussen). Goffman asserted that social construction of reality was an act of participation between media performers and the audience. He used the metaphor of a theater to explain that individuals were like actors performing scenes in front of others, and the stages were mediums that allowed communication to be framed.

Gamson et al. found media was overbalanced by way of ideological constraints. They noted,

> If all we have learned is that reality construction takes place in a commercialized space that promotes a generalized "feel good about capitalism," this does not take us very far. It leaves open a bewildering array of messages that are produced in many voices and many modes and that can be read in many different ways. Whatever we can learn from reality construction by examining the process, it leaves a great deal open and undetermined." (Gamson et al. 380)

According to Choshen-Hillel, agency and power do not appear to be synonymous. Rather they are influenced by conditioning, and the allocation of resources in an ultimatum game. This triggers strategic thinking and interpersonal considerations such as reciprocity, revenge, and fear.

The previous research reviewed in this article synthesized the theoretical underpinnings of the news workers' world and it is clear that the power of news workers to assert influence is often challenged. Technology and profit motive have led to layoffs and this has led to questions concerning journalistic autonomy, job performance, story choice, treatment, and resistance. News organizations continue to swear by objectivity, and journalists still aim for fairness and detachment. These values, generally considered positive attributes, are often at odds with the goals of stakeholders.

This review indicates little about personal values, human and social considerations, power within the newsroom, and internal stakeholders on a micro level. Gans suggested American journalists share a set of enduring values that shape the nature of news. Domingo looked at online newsrooms and discovered interactivity in newsroom discussions was common, the tendancy was to consider the audience as passive rather than active. This begs the question: what personalities and values are involved in the newsroom and how do they react when challenged?

Methodology

The literature review revealed that social construction of reality has many interpretations, but it also showed that news workers have a number of reasons to resist organizational structures. Influences on news workers are plentiful but the literature review did not reveal consistent ways influence is resisted in a modern newsroom. This study addressed how news workers internalized and acted upon unfavourable policy. Given the limitations of the research cited above, this study explored the following questions:

1. How are news values socially constructed by traditional or emerging pressures, platforms, economics or other external issues?
2. How are policies resisted when traditional civic roles of news workers are marginalized?
3. How do news workers view interactions through the lens of journalism and how do directives and values resolve themselves in a functional newsroom routine?

Because this research was conducted in the "natural world" and the work relationships, attitudes, and job routines were germane to understanding the culture; a qualitative approach was chosen to allow the work to be responsive in an environment often rife with sensory chaos. Data was cultivated from three months of observations, thirty-one formally shadowed informants, forty-five informal informants met at the newspapers, and assorted internal documents such as news budgets and employee handbooks.

Participant Observation

This researcher chose three daily newsrooms to serve as field sites. They differed in size and structure, but were similar in geographic location. This was done to see how news workers interacted with the themes above.

The observation lasted from 20 June to 20 October 2011. The circulation at the newspapers varied from more than 150,000 to less than 13,000. The same large media corporation owned two of the newspapers observed; a large non-public media group owned the third newspaper. All of these newspapers were within 150 miles of each other. Proximity allowed all of the newspapers to be observed in the same time period. The news managers who granted permission for the study requested that the publications not be mentioned by name. This term was agreed upon, as that anonymity was desirable to protect the news workers. All informants in this study are anonymous. A pseudonym is used in field note and when referencing specific news workers. This promoted candour and was in keeping with ethnographic tradition. This researcher spent two days a week observing at each site during a standard eight-hour work shift while participating with and observing news workers doing their jobs.

Analysis of Fieldnotes

While in the field, this researcher filled notebooks with extensive "jottings." Jottings are the listings of topics or events used in preparation to write formal fieldnotes (Robben & Sluka). These jottings became a narrative as the notes were transcribed into dated and categorized formal fieldnotes. These fieldnotes generated a binder of chronological observations. The next steps were to sort, compare, and contrast the data. Examples from fieldnotes are used herein to exemplify themes that were discovered.

Findings: Resistance

Organizational controls have taken on remarkable complexity in the wake of the digital paradigm between print and digital product. Management has become much

more overt and committed to re-branding newsrooms as digital information centers rather than newspapers. Administrators have many tools at their disposal to bring news workers in line with these goals. At the same time, news workers have not abandoned their vocations as creative, civic-minded journalists. Although they understand the issues their organizations face, they are increasingly disenchanted with being treated as commodities and liabilities, rather than valued professionals. At least that is the impression many journalists have with regard to the way their organizations views their contributions.

Journalistic autonomy is challenged in newsrooms like never before. With management desperate to find an operational model that works, they do not have time for discretion with news workers, and their sanctions are much more overt. This paper explores how organizations are perhaps poorly served by this behavior. News workers resist unfavorable policy and challenge organizational rhetoric, especially when they see these behaviours as contrary to journalistic principles or unjust to themselves or their peers. As news workers are the front line of their organizations, and the last to touch content on its way to the public, they are positioned to resist. Practical concerns for their livelihoods and the organizational controls placed on them by administrators often led to "indirect" resistance in the newsroom. But, the digital world has opened the door for news workers to exercise autonomy and stay informed.

The Practical Nature of Self-directed Work

Reporters are still, at least on paper, extremely self-directed. Although assignment desks will dispense work, this is often the result of the need for story quantity (for instance there not being enough stories to fill a local section of the newspaper on a certain day), breaking news, or a request from management. This can be a large swath of time, but it does allow reporters the latitude to find and develop their own stories. In fact, it is an expectation. Even in the cases where stories are assigned, it falls to reporters to choose the angle, sources, and style the work will take. This dynamic, like so many others, is challenged by the evolving needs of management. With smaller staffs, administrators need to control and understand what information they will have up front so they can control their content.

Breed pointed out that executives are not involved in the legwork of story building, thus staffers were able to use their superior knowledge to subvert policy. This is still true, but to a far lesser degree. Planning coverage before an event gives editors more control of the finished product but removes much of the organic spontaneity that many journalists value. In reality, editors are stuck confronting a great deal of content. Although reporters have been laid off, the means to cultivate material for the paper has grown through citizen journalism, partnerships with other news organizations, and digital sources. Line editors have been laid off as well, forcing those who remain to contend with copy and wrangle other material. Reporters are expected to write between two and three stories a day and most line editors manage between six and ten staff members. Getting all of the stories edited is a challenge and controlling the elements contained within them is nearly impossible. It is also not desirable.

Many line editors share core principles and empathy with the staff they manage. Autonomy itself is a principle for line editors that allows them to both manage staff and see to their own routines. Line editors have a very different role in the culture

from upper management. They are on the front line with news workers and often find organizational directives as puzzling as their staff. They act as a buffer between management and staff, and though they must at times enforce policy, they have close connections to news workers (having risen from their ranks). Line editors do influence and change content, and do follow organizational directives, but they do not take action against news workers in a consistent way. They exercise their autonomy by allowing reporters to exercise theirs. For line editors, compression of tasks in the news cycle justifies letting go of some operational directives. This, along with the tradition of autonomy and the need to maintain collegial relationships with their staff, lends to the self-guidance of the news worker.

Social Connections

The close connections in newsrooms can have domestic considerations as well. Several news workers observed in this study met their spouses on the job. Office romances were common at all of the field sites. As partners are frequently promoted at an uneven rate, often a rank-and-file news worker is married to a middle manager. One middle manager was married to a news worker who was also the vice president of the local union. Despite the fact that most organizations will not allow a spouse to supervise his/her partner, editors do and must interact with each other. Thus, an editor supervising another editor's spouse must consider the social implications of the communication regarding that partner. In other words, a meeting that includes criticism of an editor's spouse would be uncomfortable. Rank-and-file peers are also involved in this dynamic. Small job performance issues that would be noted in passing by one's co-workers will be wholly ignored when that worker's spouse is in earshot. The spouse of an editor is positioned so that negative rhetoric is curbed. Interestingly, this dynamic works for both partners, with the editor defended in the news worker's social circles as well. This connection is social protection and can give news workers added autonomy in their jobs, but does little to defend against layoffs. Such connections can also cause peer resentment.

The Personal Brand

Historically, staffers who were considered stars by executives were able to sidestep policy much more effectively than younger news workers (Breed). Now, even seasoned news workers face the ax as administrators look at cutting stars to save money. In spite of this, news workers do have ways to build their value to an organization. A number of audience engagement techniques exist in the digital world that news workers have started using on their own. Many news workers, without prompting from the organization, maintain Facebook and Twitter accounts. Also without prompting, they will promote stories that appear or will appear in their print or online products. They build complex social media webs of sources and community followers. This is done separately from the organization's efforts in these social media areas. The publications themselves, as well as peers of an individual news worker, will often have followers on Twitter and repost tweets. Digital specialists representing the organization will be friends with reporters and other news workers on Facebook and reply, along with the public, in their comments sections.

Organizations see this as advantageous, as it builds a synergy between mediums. However, no news worker in this study said he or she felt pressure to maintain a

social media presence by employers. Most organizations have digital specialists who formally perform social media functions for the organization. This may sound like a new land of autonomous expression for news workers, but there are certainly limits to what the organization will tolerate in any public forum. The wholesale lambasting of the organization will certainly lead to a pink slip (if noticed). The real freedom of social media for journalists resides in other expressions, some of which have historically been taboo. A news worker can, for instance, endorse his/her religion in a social media forum. Because social media is voluntary and personal, organizations have not introduced formal policy is this area. This is a different dynamic from what Epstein noted, as he told of a ranking newsman who had never had a conversation with any peer about religion because he feared it would compromise his credibility. The modern news worker finds more freedom in the realm of personal expression. An individual can allude to a religious bias online and be associated with his/her organization without recourse. On Twitter one news worker wrote, "What a fantastic service. Thank you Rev. [Name]. If you're looking for a great religious experience, visit the First Methodist Church this Sunday." The message appeared in the same Twitter feed with sources, editors, and story promotions.

News workers may also exercise influence indirectly by pointing subscribers to something the news worker finds interesting in a social media forum. This can be a comment made by a political pundit with a charged opinion, or an article discussing the way another city is handling a problem similar to one their community is facing. Pointing to information is not considered taking a stance. Organizations at this point do not find this unfavorable. As individual news workers build followers, the organization gains online traffic with little risk to their reputation for objectivity. The organization's print product and directly-associated digital products are held to another standard, but the crossing of digital worlds generates conversations regarding everything from politics, religion, sexual orientation, and family life. News workers use social media to promote civic organizations, hobbies they favor, and the work they do interchangeably. This creates a richly human news worker that resonates with readers and peers alike, and in doing so, creates an autonomous brand beyond the organization.

The Soft Organizational Directive

Organizational directives can be resisted by not taking action in the hope that either the policies will blow over, or the organization is not wholly serious about them. Organizational directives are often not strongly enforced, but contain loose ideas that are left for news workers to act upon. Organizations have adopted several ideas in the last few years that are associated with the digital world, but responsibilities and personnel associated with those tasks are often loosely defined. Creating video for an organization's web site may in one newsroom be the responsibility of the reporter associated with the story or, at another, it may fall to a photographer, as a visual journalist, to be the videographer. At still another organization, video may be the responsibility of a digital specialist.

With a jammed news cycle, news workers are often given the latitude to choose which assignments they will give their full attention, whereas other assignments will be pushed down the road or given only perfunctory treatment. In the case of photographers, video production for a website is a relatively new responsibility. Some

enjoy the challenge, others resent it, but video never replaces the need for photographs in the newspaper or website. With this in mind, photographers are able to justify just doing the basics of video production or simply not finding the time to do it at all. Other photographers truly enjoy making video, almost to a detriment. One photographer was observed editing and re-editing a video piece until most of his workday was consumed. At the end of the shift, the piece was not done to his satisfaction, though it was extremely well polished and featured careful editing, "B" roll, and music under the audio. It was so over produced that the segment played like a promotion for the organization featured in the story, rather than a news story. In fact, the audience would need to work to find the news in the video at all.

This time management and work product was acceptable to the organization, perhaps because the industry tends to favor online products, and because administrators see a polished product as having inherent value, without regard to news value. News workers are sometimes able to use this blind spot to build their own agendas and drive their own workdays by presenting preferences favorable to them as being most favorable to the audience, all the while keeping alternatives quietly to themselves. One news worker called this, "driving the bus without being behind the wheel."

Planning and Time Management as Control

Staffing was cut to absolute minimums, and management and news workers alike carefully monitored their use of time. Organizations were legally required to pay workers for the time they spend doing their jobs. Some newsrooms have added time clocks to keep overtime under control.

This control has been justified by the organization because many companies issue mobile technology for their workers. Even so, reporters will routinely clock out so they have the time to finish a project without going into overtime. Editors say this practice is unacceptable but they have little inclination to monitor it. The data needed for stories is often available online, reducing the amount of legwork required. The removal of travel time has, in many cases, increased the productivity of reporters, decreased the need for staff, and kept staff on hand and in the office. Editors can reach their workers whenever they wish, but many in the rank-and-file believe that editors are more likely to assess their needs differently if a reporter is not close by. Some reporters have found technology to be a blessing and a curse in the control of their day. For instance:

Kelly and the Art of Breaking News

> *Kelly was a breaking-news reporter. Her day started from home at 4 a.m. and she was efficient. She started her shift while her children were asleep and, from her home, she checked the police blotter and fire runs (all of which were available online). She watched the television news to make sure nothing was missed overnight, she listened to the police scanner for breaking news, and she made breakfast.*

> *Kelly was prolific. She Tweeted headlines as soon as information was confirmed by police, she called for details of an alleged rape case, and*

> *gathered information for a story about a theft. Kelly filed six stories online by 4:45 a.m., updated her Facebook and Twitter accounts, and informed editors of her work.*
>
> *After she filed the stories, she continued to monitor the broadcast news and her scanner, cleaned the kitchen and made her children's lunches. Her children were up by 7 a.m. Kelly carried her Blackberry for mobility, and texted her editors with updates as she put her daughter's hair in pigtails.*
>
> *Kelly identified the rape case as the story of the day. She planned to visit the location where the crime occurred to conduct interviews before filing a longer story. She hoped to avoid the office altogether because of the "depressing environment." However, her editor called her in to work on an unrelated story about the day's heat advisory.*
>
> *At the office she was asked not only to write the weather story, but also to finish a story about a smoking ban, and update a missing-person report from the week before. Kelly filed a total of nine stories in less than six hours.*

Technology allowed Kelly to manage her time in a way she found beneficial. Internet, scanner, and smart-phone technology allowed her to be efficient and split her days in ways to manage her personal and professional obligations. Nevertheless, there were some holes in the process that made her uncomfortable. She was not able to elaborate on the stories she broke and she found this to be a dangerous precedent. All of her information came from official reports and no one edited her online copy.

Adhering to Expected Tasks

Many news workers resist their organization by doing exactly what is expected of them. The ability to digitally retrieve information is not a new phenomenon, but often administrators have no idea what is available online. Reporters who prefer a gumshoe journalism experience need only be ambiguous enough in their day's activities to leave the office. They can make rounds that feed their beats with information they find around the community and supplement that information as they wish with online data. This allows them to maintain the personal relationships needed to find good stories. Surprisingly, in light of the increasing complexity of the news world, in some cases minimal work is expected of news workers. This is certainly contingent on the day of the week, the specific tasks, and the organization's culture, but some news workers can do only the very basics of their jobs and still be considered productive. This is yet another blind spot for executives, but the culture itself is perpetuated by middle managers that also may enjoy an occasional easy workday. The roots of this minimalist approach normally goes back to an organizational culture that does not value its employees through monetary compensation, job security, or collegiality. Moreover, news workers remember a time when this was not the case, exacerbating the situation. Consider the following comments from one news worker:

> *We're management heavy and management is looking upward, working to satisfy the people upward. I don't sense management appreciates a*

work ethic. I don't think it even recognizes it. Partly because of all this over work, they don't see what the people around them are doing. I observe people around me that are not acting with integrity, and don't seem to be called on it. There are people making personal calls and saying they worked overtime, or playing video games. I don't think that's appropriate to do during work... Here is another way of not feeling supported; we have a deadline, and we'll go for weeks at a time meeting it, then we'll miss it by two minutes and there's a memo the next day.

No manager has ever watched me do my shift. And if they haven't seen all the things that happen in the last 10 minutes, then I can't take seriously their criticism. So I don't feel particularly respected. I have to build that respect for myself, to be proud when I walk out. And I understand that the people who are making personal phone calls or playing games are reacting to the same feeling of disrespect. And so they feel, if you don't respect me I'm not going to do the job. I can't do it that way and sleep at night.

News workers profiled in this study have learned that the organization will take all the time and energy they have to give, but the same respect will not be returned to them. This may be understandable, but it causes friction with peers who are very close to their work. These frustrations are reflected above.

"Sunshine Blogs"

Many executives depend on a code of silence among themselves and other stakeholders to keep sensitive decision-making plans from news workers while details are worked out. This control is called a "black ceiling," but while it is opaque, it is not impenetrable (Schulte). News workers are keen observers of their work environments, and although they are rarely given the complete picture of operational decisions, they are given enough to find themes and trends which are unfolding above their heads. One way they are able to construct the reality of their worlds, even without a complete picture, is through the anonymous independent blog. Like "sunshine laws" that allow journalists to make government operations transparent, these "sunshine blogs" are set up for news workers and interested parties to connect and make their companies more transparent. They are the new clearing houses for internal media company information. It is not known exactly who contributes to certain blog-sites (certainly this is by design), which spill information about company plans, but news workers find certain blogs to be remarkably accurate. They have predicted layoffs and executive changes at specific locations, added clarity to organizational directives, and peeled away mystifying acquisitions and policy. Many news workers add information to "sunshine blogs." This information is compiled to create a more complete picture of events for news workers, but more substantial contributors must exist above the "black ceiling." Many news workers believe that contributors are those working at corporate offices or are themselves executives sympathetic to the problems news workers face in a changing industry. At the same time, many executives are not fans of these blogs, and some find them positively galling. They say these websites are not credible, and have sanctioned news workers for looking at them on company time.

With the demise of many collective bargaining units, these blogs act as a kind of labor community to address common concerns and grievances.

Forceful Personalities and News Judgment

The idea of "driving the bus without being behind the wheel" reveals another aspect of the cultural dynamic in newsrooms. As previously observed, many news workers who have climbed the company ladder are those who are less ideologically opposed to organizational directives and corporate goals. Some would call them "yes-men." News workers characterize themselves and the personality attributes required to do their jobs as hard-nosed and abrasive. Often those attracted to the business are forceful and do not find brown-nosing consistent with doing their jobs (Mayer). This is consistent with the stereotype of the tough, no-nonsense reporter who will go to any length to get a story, all the while angering editors and infuriating sources. These attributes are not as common today as they once were, but coarse behaviors and routines still exist in the culture. As norms, behaviors and ethics are somewhat distinct from one newsroom to another, and as individuals are indoctrinated into the profession in different ways, conflicts can arise.

News workers are often able to circumvent policy by citing precedent from past decisions or ignoring precedent, which has not been formally set. For instance, some newsrooms have a policy in place keeping the names of minors who are the victims of violent crime anonymous. However, editors maintain the privilege of making that determination on a case-by-case basis. Perhaps circumstances arise where a victim's credibility is called into question by authorities. In this case, editors may decide that it would be equitable to name the accuser. Down the road, news workers need not make a case regarding policy in this area. They may move forward as they please because similar circumstances have set an ambiguous precedent. The advantage in this case goes to the news worker who initially chooses how to address the material in question. This is because, from that point on, others must force a conflict or let the story go, the latter being the path of least resistance. Even when said conflict is forced, often a news worker with a forceful personality will get his/her desired result. This is because policy is ambiguous. This dynamic also has a cumulative effect. If a news worker has a reputation for being difficult, approaching him/her about their news judgment or changing his/her work will be avoided. Often, this reputation will keep news workers from being approached in the first place.

Conclusion

The deck is stacked against news workers in nearly every policy and personnel decision, but news workers are a resourceful group. Choshen-Hillel appears to be correct. Agency and power was not observed to be synonymous in this study. News workers were however influenced by conditioning and resources. Although the digital paradigm has closed many of the doors that made the traditional skills of news workers favorable, it has also opened others. The autonomy of the Internet has allowed news workers to peek around the "black ceiling" executives use to plan policy changes that affect staff. "Sunshine blogs" have sprung up around the industry as a tool to understand and control the news worker's reality, control corporate spin, and connect with others trying to do the same. At the same time, pressures on administrators have forced them to look at big-picture decisions. This allows some

staff the latitude to circumvent policy, exploit ignorance of the time requirements, and choose the tasks they wish to pursue. This is true whether they are digital or traditional tasks. This distraction of administration has also allowed news workers to build a hybrid personal/professional presence in social media.

News workers find little guilt in these activities. Loyalty is challenged as news workers have become keenly aware that their fealty is unlikely to be rewarded, and administrators are often working against them. The news workers' desire to resist is clear in their rhetoric each time the organization asks them to go the extra mile, buy into the organization's new projects, or give to their causes. This behavior is not confined to a few disgruntled news workers, but has burgeoned and become naturalized in many consummate professionals. Directives will be challenged by those with forceful personalities and will be relentlessly tested to see how committed the organization is to them. It is also clear that neither side desires this adversarial relationship.

The damaged business model has changed relationships and moved those in the press away from collegial relationships (Schlesinger). We have explored how executives have exploited the distance between themselves and news workers in a number of ways, but they are not the only ones exploiting this distance.

Media organizations introduce directives to control the social and professional values inherent in newsroom culture, but the more desperate they become to remain financially viable, the more transparent their controls. As news workers experience this, they resist in interesting but mostly ineffective ways. This may sound like a victory for organizational control, but it is not that simple. Journalism does not exist in a static state. It is a linear endeavor that exists in a perpetual cycle of decisions and countless human choices. Journalists are uniquely positioned to make those continual choices in relation to each other and their products. Berger and Luckman explained that social construction is the result of those choices and social constructionist dynamics are pointed and specific, but they are not permanent and fixed for all time. The news workers' ongoing choices are of profound influence regardless of policy because the ablity to select is not fixed, but fluid amidist professional and social discourse.

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