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WOMEN'S VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS AND THE RESTRUCTURING OF CANADA'S VOLUNTARY SECTOR: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Creative and innovative strategies will be required as voluntary organizations find themselves under increased pressure in response to changes in their relationship with government funders. In the past, women's voluntary organizations shaped the character of the voluntary sector; similarly today, they may be the harbingers of future trends.

The Changing Environment

The societal transformations affecting the voluntary sector today are so fundamental that they demand new models of action, rather than simply a modification of existing patterns. Since the mid-1980s there has been a creeping erosion of the welfare state in Canada, as neo-conservative political philosophy is replacing the social democratic liberalism of the postwar era. Both the federal and provincial governments have been withdrawing from direct service provision in several areas of social welfare. With deficits out of control, they have been slashing their health, education and welfare budgets, including grants to the voluntary sector, by billions of dollars (Baker, 1996). This is happening at a time when the country is enduring a sustained economic recession, which is exacerbating the need for social assistance. The voluntary sector in Canada is in crisis (Scott, 1992).

Some early indications are that voluntary organizations are bracing for these changes by adopting competitive marketing strategies that will give them an advantage over their adversaries (Foster and Meinhard, 1996). This is in keeping with the neo-conservative philosophy prevalent today. There is some evidence to suggest that communitarian strategies, which include cooperation among voluntary groups and all levels of government, are also being considered by some organizations (Scott, 1995). In fact, there are strong indications that the public is overwhelmingly in favour of united action on the part of charities, community services and all levels of government (Foster and Meinhard, 1997).

Based on the extensive body of knowledge that documents the importance of collaborative decision making, participative management style and an emphasis on interpersonal skills among women managers (Adler & Izraeli, 1988; Beutell, 1984; Foster & Orser, 1994; Orser et al., 1994; Rosener, 1990; Schein, 1975), it is expected that women's voluntary organizations will be more likely to favour cooperative strategies not only within their organizations, but among other voluntary organizations as well.

Women's voluntary organizations have a rich history of contributions not only to the lives of women, but also to the voluntary sector and society as a whole (Perlmutter, 1994). Their activities have helped shape the character and nature of the voluntary sector as we know it today (Odendhal, 1994). This paper will explore recent trends in Canada's voluntary sector, and by

examining the history of women's organizations, speculate on their role in shaping the future of the sector.

Models of the Voluntary Sector

The voluntary sector plays a significant role in Canada's social and economic life. Although the earliest recorded voluntary organization dates back to 1685, the sector became an economic force only in the last 35 years, as it grew in tandem with the emerging welfare state forged in Canada   following World War II.   It reached its peak of growth during the 1970s to the mid 1980s (Tucker, House, Singh and Meinhard 1984).   At last published estimate, the value of donated labour output in the voluntary sector in Canada was estimated at "1/2 million full-time, full-year jobs" which translates into 1 billion hours of voluntary labour (Duchesne, 1989).   It is not surprising therefore thatthere has been an increased research focus on this topic as scholars attempt to explain the role and function of the voluntary sector   in a democratic state and its relationship with the governmental and the for-profit sectors.   (See for example: DiMaggio and Anheier, 1990;   Douglas, 1987;   Kuhnle and Selle, 1992; Salamon, 1987.)

Jacquelyn Thayer Scott (1992) outlined the history of Canada's voluntary sector from 1685 to the present and concluded that voluntary organizations reflect their environment and the prevailing philosophies of state.   Based on Van Til's (1988) classification of different models of volunteering, Scott identified the two predominant models that have characterized the Canadian voluntary sector in the latter half of the twentieth century: The pluralistic social welfare model which informed the voluntary sector during the three postwar decades, and the neo-conservative model, which is replacing it.   Both these models reflect an individualistic, competitive society, one in which both people and organizations compete to attain their needs (Neal and Paris, 1990). However, there is evidence of an emerging third model, communitarianism, which highlights community relationships and inter-organizational action (Scott, 1992, 1995).   At this time of massive societal changes, voluntary organizations are at a cross-roads.   Will they respond individually, trying to compete for dwindling dollars, or will they undertake a unified effort, involving a community approach?   Following is a description of each model.

Pluralism

The pluralist model sees the voluntary sector playing a distinctive role in society, one that involves interaction with the state.   Voluntary organizations represent special interest groups that are not part of the establishment.   Their function is not only to provide direct service to their constituents, but also to engage in advocacy and social change.   This may place them in conflict with the state and/or the for-profit sector. Their focus is more on serving their members and constituents than on advancing the common good, although the two often go hand-in-hand. Because they see themselves in competition with other organizations, they concentrate on organizational strategies and programs that will assure them a sociopolitical niche.   The board's primary concern is advocating public policy favourable to the organization (Gidron et. al., 1992; Scott, 1992, 1995; Van Til, 1988).

In Canada, during the halcyon postwar years,governments encouraged the formation of voluntary organizations. They were to be part of an elaborate social welfare system, allies of the state, extending specialized services that the government was uninterested in or unable to provide. Many voluntary organizations were created, representing a myriad of special interest groups. Not only did voluntary organizations receive generous funding from government sources, but more

importantly they gained legitimacy to represent and serve their various constituencies (Tucker, Singh and Meinhard, 1990).   It was during this period that government gave formal recognition to women's issues by creating the National Advisory Committee for the Status of Women.   This encouraged women to form organizations that addressed their needs and to seek governmental funding for them.

Neo-Conservatism

In the neo-conservative model, the voluntary sector has no special role and is marginal to the main economic and political forces in society.   Market forces should dictate the formation and survival of all organizations, including nonprofit organizations.   Funding for nonprofit organizations must come from private charitable support and user fees, not from government. Thus, governments espousing neo-conservative philosophy have not only withdrawn from providing direct services, but they have also decreased funding to the voluntary sector.

As in the pluralist model, in the neo-conservative model voluntary agencies must compete with other organizations.   However, the competition is essentially economic, so their focus is on management control, marketing and entrepreneurship.   The principal role of the board is fundraising (Scott, 1992; Van Til, 1988).   The danger of this model is that excessive concentration on economic management can lead the voluntary organization away from its charitable mandate and diminish its ability to respond to the needs of the disadvantaged (Salamon and Anheier, 1996). The voluntary sector in Canada is only now beginning to feel the full impact of neo-conservative policy, as governments are transferring significantly less money to the sector.   The message has been received.   Almost all of the voluntary social service organizations surveyed by Foster and Meinhard (1996) identify a need to become more competitive, to learn marketing and entrepreneurial skills, and to streamline management practices in order to increase organizational efficiency. This is in tune with the neo-conservative philosophy.

Communitarianism

Is learning to become more competitive the only answer to the philosophical shift that is taking place in Canada?   Or are there other solutions that are less individualistic, less likely to increase competition?   Lodge (1991) was the first to distinguish between individualistic British-American capitalism, and communitarian Japanese-German capitalism.   In the latter model, companies believe they should be financially interlocked and work together to strengthen each others activities (Thurow, 1992.)   Scott's (1992) research hinted this may be the newly emerging paradigm in the voluntary sector as well.   This philosophy holds community values and the common good paramount.   Voluntary organizations "are not *mediating* structures, but *actualizing* instruments of the commonweal" (p. 384, original italics).   As such they focus on community building, through interaction with other service givers, through partnerships with organizations in other sectors and through co-production with clients.   The board's principal role is governance and adherence to values of its mission.   "Board members occupy their positions on behalf of the community" (Scott, 1995:36).

The history of women's voluntary organizations suggests that their contribution to the third sector's transformation will be informed by the communitarian philosophy.

The History of Women's Voluntary Organizations

Women's voluntary organizations have long played an important role in women's lives as a window on broader public issues, as a source of skills development and as a vehicle for contributing to society. Until the influx of women into the work force in the latter half of the twentieth century, a woman's domain was almost exclusively in the domestic realm. Voluntary association was one of the few socially sanctioned extra-domestic activities available to women. Thus for many, volunteerism played a liberating role in their lives, giving them their only experience in the public realm (McCarthy, 1990). However, as long as decision making and funding remained in the hands of men, these voluntary activities continued to keep "women in their place." Participation was encouraged, but control was withheld (Kaminer, 1984:11). Frustrated, women began forming their own associations and by the mid-1800s, they were administering organizations in the fields of philanthropy, the arts and sciences, and social reform. This trend has continued into the present century. Despite the growing participation of women in the decision making bodies of large national voluntary organizations, 16% of which have women executive directors (O'Neill, 1994), women still favour joining women's organizations. McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1982) found that fully half the organizations they studied, were exclusively female as opposed to only 20% that were exclusively male. Today the National Action Committee on the Status of Women has more than 600 member organizations under its umbrella. This number represents a mere fraction of women's organizations in Canada (NAC, 1996).

The preference by women for participating in women's groups, can be explained in part by the literature investigating voluntary affiliation. The question of why people volunteer has long intrigued researchers. Although "helping others" is the most frequently cited reason given for voluntary affiliation (Duchesne, 1989; Carter, 1975), more probing investigations suggest that altruism represents only a minor factor (Smith, 1982; Gluck; 1975, Lang, 1986). Social catharsis (Langton, 1982), and collective identification for a "good cause" (Kramer, 1981; Duchesne, 1989) are other reasons that have been advanced. Olson (1965) suggests that affiliation can best be explained by the pursuit of tangible rewards offered by the organization to potential members. Knoke (1986) recommends broadening the definition to include both affective incentives (eg. friendship; Flynn and Webb. 1975, Gluck, 1975) and instrumental benefits (eg. acquiring skills; Clark and Wilson,1961; Flynn and Webb, 1975; Masi, 1981).

This broader "selective incentives" paradigm may be particularly germane in explaining women's affiliation in all female organizations. Although Masi (1981:59) found that women "define voluntarism in terms of selflessness", research suggests that many women in fact use the experience gained from voluntary activity as a stepping stone for acquiring jobs (Masi, 1981; Kaminer, 1984; Flynn and Webb 1975). In addition, involvement in exclusively female organizations provides women with experience in leadership and management. Such opportunities are seldom available to them in mixed settings, as evidenced by the absence of women in top administrative positions, even in organizations in which they are a majority (Masi, 1981; Kaminer, 1984). Not only do women have the opportunity to fill leadership positions, but they are also not constrained to adopt male, hierarchical, task-oriented leadership styles, as women in mixed settings feel so often forced to do (Eagly, 1987; Kanter, 1977). Thus, they can practice a leadership style more in tune with their natural tendencies to inclusiveness and process orientation.

Recent historical studies point to the importance of women's voluntary organizations not only for women, but also for society as a whole. Whatever societal power women had in the last century, they achieved through participation in these organizations. Women's voluntary

organizations gave voice to women's concerns and needs at a time when they were still disenfranchised (O'Neill, 1994). Even after they gained the vote, these groups continued to agitate for societal and legislative changes in women's status. Their impact was not only on the status of women. Women's benevolent societies formed a powerful lobby for social welfare legislation and strongly influenced the creation of the social welfare state (O'Neill, 1994). Women's organizations were both efficient and effective in carrying out their mission (A. Scott, 1990). They laid the foundations of the modern voluntary sector (Lewis, 1994; Odendahl, 1994). Women's organizations continue to give voice and aid to the marginalized and excluded of our society: Aboriginal women, women of colour, immigrants and refugees, single mothers and in general, the poor (NAC, 1996).

This history suggests that women were motivated to join voluntary organizations not only because of the desire to advance their cause and that of their constituents, nor as a marginal force in society, but rather as a vehicle to contribute to the common good and community values; a distinctly communitarian perspective.

The Future of the Voluntary Sector in Canada: Competitive or Communitarian?

In a recent survey of 85 voluntary social service organizations in Metro-Toronto, Foster and Meinhard (1996) found that the majority of organizations are anticipating a more competitive atmosphere in relation to garnering funds, now that the government has decreased its support. Their response has been to embrace activities with a marketing focus in order to increase public awareness. Fundraising has become their primary concern, and although many of them are considering collaboration with similar agencies as a possible strategy, their main thrust is to gain competitive advantage by marketing themselves to both private and corporate donors.

The neo-conservative philosophy would endorse such competition as healthy in that it would weed out the poor performers. However, in the voluntary sector, the correlation between performance in terms of providing a good service, and ability to survive is not straightforward. The danger is that those organizations serving the neediest sectors of society are probably the very ones that would find it most difficult to compete for funds.

This is true for many women's organizations. Women have special needs which often rank low in society's evaluation of what is important and their organizations are generally perceived to be less prestigious (Bradshaw et.al., 1996). As a result, corporations are not generous in funding women's causes (Useem, 1987). This in turn makes women's organizations more dependent on government funding (Bradshaw et.al., 1996). With fewer alternative funding sources available to them, women's voluntary organizations are exposed to greater vulnerability in times of governmental cutbacks. This may influence their strategic responses away from a competitive model to a communitarian one which would be expressed by: a) opting for cooperation rather than competition; b) encouraging community participation; c) expanding services to include several community actors; d) creating partnerships across all sectors; and e) empowering their members and clients in the decision making processes.

There is evidence in the literature to suggest that cooperation, inclusion and empowerment would be a preferred mode of behaviour for women. Females are socialized to be nurturing and relationship oriented (Cooper, 1992; Grant, 1988; Rosener, 1990), as opposed to males, who are taught to be competitive, hierarchical and independent (Harragan, 1977; Henning and Jardim,

1976, Gilligan, 1982).   Of course, individuals may experience different socialization patterns, but in aggregate, the patterns for males and females hold true (Eagly, 1987; Gilligan, 1982). Gilligan's (1982) groundbreaking study *In a Different Voice*, documents in case after case, the importance of inclusiveness and relationships in women's lives.   They view morality through the spectrum of the common good, and judge actions in terms of how they   will affect relationships.   Men, on the other hand, have a more abstract concept of justice, one concerned more with the protection of individual rights than with an appreciation of the common good.   Where women seek relatedness, men strive towards independence.   Thus, women and men approach the world and organize their activities in different ways.   Lever's (1976, 1978) classic study of boys and girls at play points to early differences in interaction models.   Boys are task-oriented, creating complex rules within a context of distinctly defined hierarchical roles, whereas girls develop complex networks of relationships with shifting roles.   Both achieve their goals, but in different ways.   This is reflected in differences in leadership, management styles and organizing preferences.

Eagly and Johnson (1990), in their meta-analysis of 162 studies investigating sex differences in leadership styles found consistent differences between men and women in autocratic versus democratic styles, with women practicing more democratic styles of leadership.   Allan (1991), Helgesen (1990) and Rosener (1991), in three separate studies, have identified women in high leadership positions as displaying a "non-traditional" leadership style. The women in these studies all perform in ways characteristic of transformational leaders. Transformational leaders lead through inspiration by inviting their followers to share their vision, working together as a team with open lines of communication, encouraging participation and information exchange, and sharing. power (Burns, 1978; Bass 1985). Transformational leaders are more effective in leading their organization in times of change (Tichy and Devanna, 1986).

Although transformational leadership is not unique to women (Tichy and Devanna, 1986), some authors contend that this leadership style comes more naturally to them because of their different socialization patterns (Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1991). If this is the case, then women leading women's organizations would be expected to display the characteristics of a transformational leader.   This would not only have an impact on organizational strategies and processes, but also on organizational structure. As Daft (1989) pointed out, transformational leadership is conducive to organic, non-hierarchical organizational structures.

Currently the structure of most corporate and voluntary sector organizations mirrors the male emphasis on competition, hierarchy and task orientation, which Harragan (1977) and others (Henning and Jardim , 1976) describe as an "alien culture" to women.   Conversely, women's interaction patterns reflect an atmosphere of community rather than hierarchy (Tannen, 1990). This is evident in the voluntary sector where many women's organizations, despite the strong forces of institutionalization to create traditional structures, (Odendahl and Youmens, 1994) are eschewing the hierarchical model for ones that are more inclusive, consensual and empowering (Lot, 1994).

Not only is the spirit of inclusiveness evident within women's organizations through their leadership patterns and organizational preferences, but it is also evident in their inter-organizational patterns.   The National Action Committee on the Status of Women forms by far, the largest umbrella organization in the Canadian voluntary sector.   Under the leadership of NAC's executive, which is made up of representatives from member groups from across the country, these women's organizations share resources and form a powerful lobby to effect changes that will benefit not only their constituents, but also society as a whole.   Despite attempts in recent

years, the general voluntary sector has failed to form a powerful umbrella group such as NAC. Inter-organizational cooperation in pursuit of the common good forms the basis of the communitarian model.

Conclusion

Current research has indicated that the trend in many organizations is toward the competitive model.   This research, however, has not focused on women's organizations. It is not valid to make generalizations   from cross-sectional studies to women's organizations, which have a unique history and outlook.   In this paper we have speculated, on the basis of previous research about women's socialization and management styles, the vulnerability of many of their organizations, and the history of the women's volunteer experiences, that women's groups would prefer to embrace communitarian solutions to the situation they find themselves in today.

The entry of women into management positions in the workforce has had an impact on the way organizations conduct their daily business.   Transformational leadership styles and participative management programs, which include self-directed teams are already permeating the workplace.   Discourse in the business world and public sector about corporate responsibility towards their communities is increasing (Alexander and Bucholz, 1978; Kraft and Hage, 1990). An attitudinal shift in the corporate world, coupled with the already documented predisposition of women to work collaboratively, suggests that ultimately the future of the voluntary sector may lie more in the realm of communitarian values than neo-conservative.   This may occur, even though the immediate response of many organizations is to adopt corporate practices and   market themselves more effectively to compete in a world of dwindling government support.   While on an individual level, this may be beneficial to some organizations, it may not be the best solution for the sector as a whole.   Without a network of support at community, governmental and corporate levels, voluntary organizations will find it difficult to provide services for the growing social welfare needs of the population caused by the vacuum of government withdrawal.

Research is needed to explore these assumptions and speculations.   Women's groups must be targeted for research.   They have heavily influenced the nature of the voluntary sector in the past, and their responses to the current situation may very well be harbingers of the future shape of the voluntary sector.

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