Social Construction, Control, and News Work: A Study of Newworkers as Agents of
Civic Function and Resistance in the Changing Media World

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Social Construction, Control, and News Work: A Study of Newsworkers as Agents of Civic Function and Resistance in the Changing Media World

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This study looks at social construction of reality as it relates to the challenges of modern news work. The goal of this study was to better understand how corporate directives and changing technology is challenging the civic responsibility of individual newsworkers and the specific jobs they do. Interviews, job shadowing, and participant observation were the primary methods used to generate data about this evolving profession. Social controls and influences are constantly at work on newsworkers as they try to master new digital skills and organizational directives in a profession that is struggling to stay viable. Many newsworkers are doing jobs, which are not related to the traditional journalism craft skills with which they entered the business. As newsrooms become smaller, reporters are challenged to do even the most fundamental tasks associated with investigative, civic, or enterprise reporting. Likewise, technology is demystifying photography and design, causing executives to see those personnel areas as over-staffed. Those who are slow to adapt are laid off, negatively labeled, and lose their professional mobility. Organizations make decisions above a “black ceiling” without newsworker influence and are actively working against older newsworkers as they restructure operations to be more streamlined. As a result, newsworkers resist organizational controls with “Sunshine Blogs” that network newsworkers together. They also resist by not conforming to an encouraged culture of loyalty and organizational
support. They do not trust that digital media is always the best service to readers. As conditions change, the reality of the newsworkers’ function and their place in the organization becomes transparent. The cultural reality for many newsworkers is a distasteful job and they cannot be moved between tasks with commitment unless the task is perceived by them to be a civic service or a personal passion. Newsworkers find the printed-paper to be sacred and hold it in reverence, but most do not look at digital products in the same way. This creates an irreconcilable friction between management and newsworke with neither filling the others’ needs.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Marilyn S. Greenwald
Professor of Journalism
For Jackie and Harper, of course.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

When one looks at news organizations they often seems to be a one-way mirror. The organization can see out into the public to do reporting or interact with sources, but when the public tries to see inside, the glass is black. Newspapers are involved with the public as members of their business communities, and reporters are present at many community events. Communities are not usually privy to newsroom dynamics and often assume that the stereotypes portrayed in entertainment media are a reflection of the reality of that world. This is a dangerous assumption when one considers the role of news organizations as government watchdogs, and as the eyes of the public in society. Scholars are often guilty of these oversights as well, but in different ways. Many follow the traditions of media history – in terms of power, progress, and capitalism – to inform their understanding of the institution of journalism. Perhaps this is not wrong, but it does leave a hole in the understanding of media mechanics because following these traditions does not necessarily address the contributions of rank-and-file newsworkers and their direct influences on journalism. The media is often a darkened field in the public’s eye and audiences cannot penetrate the influences in the field and understand that which comes to bear on those who are supposed to be their eyes and ears.

This project is an effort to understand the position of newsworkers in the modern newsroom and understand the pressures, influences, realities, and structures these individuals experience in their jobs as well as their place in the contemporary climate of media capitalism. This is a dynamic and challenging period for newsworkers as competing forces like the Internet and other digital platforms force their organizations to
re-create themselves. As publishers scramble to bring costs in line with thinning revenues, more than 35,000 newspaper job have been eliminated in the last five years. This includes 4,111 newspaper jobs that were eliminated in 2011 (Smith, nd). Digital change has broken the traditional business model, which has served media organizations well during most of the rise of the American press. This study relates to the commodification of the news, but does not follow corporate interests beyond their effects in newsrooms themselves. Newworkers have an interesting history. They have been caught in the middle of the rise of journalism as mass entertainment and their work has been sensationalized. They have been held responsible for both maintaining the status quo in society and for its unfavorable changes. They have been both the mouthpieces of corporate America and the strongest advocates for freedom of the press. According to Hardt and Brennon (1995):

Their middle-class backgrounds or ambitions were deflected, despite promises of professionalism, and squashed by the social and economic realities of news work within a social and political climate that fostered industrial growth and led to the triumph of business interests. Their own voices were rarely heard and their story remains to be told (p. viii).

This study reports the result of collections of formal interviews and observations among working journalists who perform jobs in various aspects of news production. It incorporates the ethnographic tradition of participant observations, the collection of documents, in depth interviews, and informal conversations. The intention of the study is to give newworkers a voice while attempting to understand their changing industry, and to add insight into how those changes are affecting their lives, work, and attitudes. It is also a goal of this study to add to a literature base that sees the contributions of newworkers as critical to the understanding of media reality, as it is a unique culture,
environment, and site of struggle over the conditions of industry and civic function. The expectation of this study is that an ethnography of the modern newsroom will not only expand the understanding of the newworker’s world, but will help define what progress has been made in terms of education, experience, community knowledge, and service. These are the areas of “human capital” that give newworkers a meaningful and dignified experience in what was once a decidedly patron – client relationship with their employers.

The history of newworkers parallels the history of American labor. Industrial growth, labor relations, education, and craft skills in the service of entrepreneurship – and later large corporate interests – are at the heart of the work; and newworkers at all levels have been instrumental in laying the groundwork for what is valued in the profession today. This study is not a comprehensive examination of all those who serve in the rank-and-file of news work, though press workers; circulation staff, clerical workers, and distribution specialists are certainly important players in any news operation and worthy of attention. This study is about the journalism professionals who gather, report, and/or present news and information for the benefit of the public. Moreover, it is about those professionals who do this at newspaper organizations that include a print product as part of their daily mission. This study uses “newworker” as a single word to generally reference line editors, reporters, designers, copy editors, photographers, digital specialists, and all the variations therein who contribute to the goals of journalism, work within an organization’s for-profit structure, and are not upper-echelon management.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman’s (1966) definition of social construction of reality guides this study, as it explains how reality is formed by social systems over time.
constructionism in the newsroom is the representation of individual actions that become habituated into roles played by newsworkers in relation to each other. When these roles are played out, the reciprocal interactions are institutionalized. In the process of this institutionalization, meaning is embedded in the culture, or in our case, the culture of a newsroom. The belief of what reality is becomes embedded in the institutional fabric of the group. That is what is meant by social constructionism. A range of literature related to social construction of reality and the individual level of newswork is explored in Chapter 2 to help situate this study among others of similar purpose.

This study suggests that newsworkers are fundamentally influential in the development of public communication and that their influence, though challenged, is profound, even under the shadow of corporate media ownership, changing technology, and downsizing. In this study, a snapshot of those whose work continues to shape contemporary media, will add to the understanding of the traditions of labor and the Fourth Estate. Many media studies focus on influences, which are more macro than the individual newsworker, or they focus on the effects of content. These studies are important for protecting the interests of media users but add little to the understanding of the production process and the reasons content takes the forms it does. This approach has generated a top-down view of the press that privileges property and ownership at the expense of understanding news work (Hardt and Brennen, 1995). This study addresses the need to chronicle newsworkers as the industry struggles to morph into something viable in the modern age, and adds to the literature that has chronicled this shift from the beginning of newspaper history. An old adage among newsworkers is that journalism is a first draft of history, but the history of newsworkers themselves has only just started to
catch up with other chronicles of the industry. The result of this study is a journey through the ways newsworkers do their jobs, the understanding newsworkers have of their industry, and the ongoing challenges they face as journalists.

**Explanation of Chapters**

The goal of Chapter 2 is to review the literature of newsworks and social construction of reality. Social control has often been approached as a phenomenon beyond the individuals’ influence, but an alternate reading of the literature finds it to also be a collective dynamic with individual influence playing an active role in constructing reality. This is combined with literature on news work, organizational influence, and works that examine the social realities in newsrooms. This informs the following chapters by identifying issues, which may be important to newsworkers, such as how the modern newsroom is engaged with civic function, traditional routines, morale, influence, professionalism, and digital technologies. It concludes that there is no consistent pattern for the social world of newsworkers and that there is little literature that allows newsworkers to explore that question for themselves.

Chapter 3 looks at the process of news work, takes the reader through the structures of a typical newsroom, and explores the various tasks and routines required to produce a newspaper or related media product on deadline. This chapter explores the naturalized processes which have been the tradition of news work for a long time and observes how these tasks have changed to make room for new technology and a slimmer workforce. It examines digital and technological considerations, and tasks that have added to the complexity of the work. We define for this study such different newsroom
positions as news gatherers, presenters, and digital specialists to understand their unique contributions and their daily pressures. From this, understandings of modern organizational controls become apparent and are evaluated in terms of Warren Breed’s (1955) explanations social controls. The chapter concludes that the newworker’s world today is more convoluted than ever with added policies, evolving technology, and administrators unable to focus on daily routines. This is a world ripe for mistakes, lawsuits, and a mass exodus of overwhelmed personnel.

Chapter 4 is guided by in-depth interviews of newworkers and is intended to give the study a starting point for the participant observation phase of the project. The goal was to determine the concerns to newworkers and how they viewed the challenges in their jobs throughout their careers. It concludes that many are fearful of losing their livelihoods as the industry has seen extreme and unprecedented layoffs in the two to four years. Many do not feel appreciated for the traditional journalism skills they practice. Some newworkers are excited about the paradigm shift between printed to digital journalism, but still more are threatened by not only the technology but also by younger newworkers who are adept at digital journalism and cheaper to employ. This chapter finds that Warren Breed’s (1955) social controls of the newsroom are still very much a part of the culture of newwork but that these controls have adapted to be much more overt and transparent in the minds of the newworkers themselves. It also reveals a profound distrust of employing organizations. This distrust is so strong that many newworkers feel they are being actively plotted against, causing “cautious” journalism and low job satisfaction. In the face of these challenges, newworkers reveal passion for the civic duty of the press and diverse interests outside of the job.
Chapter 5 updates the social controls of the newsroom first explored by Warren Breed (1955) and adds to those controls by identifying several others. Authority and sanctions have become much more overt as organizations struggle with knowing what is needed from newsworkers in a difficult financial and technological terrain. At the same time newsworkers find it difficult to advance in organizations or to move to other newspaper jobs as operations are downsized. Newsworkers no longer respect superiors as they once did and elements to their interactions with administrators can be decidedly adversarial as these administrators favor digital over traditional skills. Technology demystifies many once-sacred newsroom tasks, such as photography and the publishing process itself. The result is a loss of respect for rank-and-file workers, layoffs, conspiracies to implement layoffs, and the amalgamation of positions. Newsworkers are often blindsided by changes as executives plot reallocation of resources and personnel above a “black ceiling” where newsworkers cannot see. As a result, newsworkers are often apprehensive about interactions with superiors and unsure of the perceived quality of their job performances.

Chapter 6 focuses on the ways newsworkers resist as organizations introduce directive after directive that challenge their core principles. Newsworkers often have forceful personalities and have developed clever ways to use the current shifts to digital mediums to control their workloads and make favorable opportunities for themselves. Executives are also struggling to understand new technology and, with the industry changing as quickly as it is, they do not have the focus to monitor all newsworker activity. Additionally, newsworkers have also found ways to send messages of dissatisfaction to their employers by not supporting goals outside the direct practice of
journalism, such as giving time or money to charity fundraisers and volunteering for promotional endeavors. Such relationships as interoffice marriages create buffers for criticism by bolstering support between spheres of influence and discouraging criticism within those spheres. “Sunshine” blogs keep newworkers connected to decision making above the “black ceiling,” and fill a void in fellowship lost by the demise of many unions. Trying to resist organizational directives has become as naturalized a process as are the directives themselves. Newworkers have found ways to work around them through apathy, citing precedent, manipulation of their daily routines, or by the force of their personalities.

The conclusion of this study, Chapter 7, looks at the newworkers’ world in terms of the theory and research explored in the literature. The study found that newworkers cannot be separated from the civic responsibility of journalism or the traditional crafts associated with its practice, in any sustainable way. Their labor is as much a spiritual endeavor for them as it is a profession. At the same time, organizations fail to see, or at least fail to acknowledge, that the removal of the civic aspects of the newworkers’ world results in the removal of passion, loyalty, and respect. At the time of this study digital endeavors were not valued with the same reverence as a printed newspaper by newworkers. This is perhaps because of the Web’s lack of physical substance or because of its short history. In either case newworkers do not approach it with the same sense of seriousness as print. These areas are points of great friction between executives and newworkers and both sides have exploited these dynamics in newsrooms.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The public would largely expect that individuals who collect, produce, and present news would be the most influential players in constructing those images as a reflection of reality. The dominant literature on the pressures and influences on the American newsworker over the years has indicated that this simply has not been the case. According to Gaye Tuchman (1972), each story a newsworker produced had the potential to affect the way he/she was viewed by the superiors who controlled their professional mobility, 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 wrote (p. 298). In the newsroom of old, the landscape was dangerous for even the most stalwart of newsworkers. They had to make quick decisions that influenced validity, reliability, and truth on a daily basis.

These pressures, as a social dynamic, are explored in Peter Berger and Thomas Luchmann’s (1966) *Social Construction of Reality*. They introduced the idea that such social organizations as newsrooms will form over time a mental picture of the roles played by individuals interacting together. This social construction informs the way individuals interact with one another and will perpetuate behaviors until this construction is institutionalized as the norm. This “belief” of what reality is becomes reality; thus reality is socially constructed. This concept takes on great complexity as one considers such abstract values of news work as ethics, civic responsibility, and objectivity in the context of a capitalist endeavor – not to mention an individual’s personal worldview, education, home life, etc. To say however, that an individual newsworker’s influence is
challenged is not to say it is nonexistent. In fact, the influence of newsworkers –
considered in terms of social constructionist thought – is extremely influential. Berger
and Luckmann (1966) found that although reality is socially constructed, rather than a
reflection of an objective reality, “concrete individuals” serve as the agents of that reality.
This makes the motivations and “reality” of those definers, in this case newsworkers,
paramount.

This literature review took a fresh look at evaluating the newsroom community in
a way that is theoretically informed by social construction of reality, and it considered the
ways newsworkers have been disenfranchised by the dominant theoretical paradigm in
this area. After all, they were not the only ones constructing reality. The hierarchy of
influence model proposed by Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese (1996) had some
utility in this area as it saw the newsworke level of influence squeezed by routines,
organizational controls, extramedia concerns, and ideology. In this model, the levels of
influence approach were explanatory of the hierarchical structure of organizations. The
individual was at the center of this model and this level of influence referred to the
education and professionalism of individual journalists. The next higher levels of
influence were, in order, media routines (journalistic practices), the organization
(organizational goals, roles, structures, and controls), extra media concerns (social issues,
economic concerns, and climate), and ideology (the political/economic systems under
which they operate). The overall effect of this hierarchy was that individual newsworke
appear less important than other levels of influence. However, David Manning White
(1955) and Pamela Shoemaker (1999) saw great utility in understanding the news process
through the concept of gatekeeping. Gatekeeping is the premise that information, before
it reaches the public, passes through a series of “gates” in the form of newsroom decision making. These gates were seen as the newsworkers’ independent hand of authority over information that reached the public. This idea has been met with resistance among modern scholars. The dominant wisdom was that gatekeeping was oversimplified and neglected to explain the pressures put on newsworkers while they did their jobs (Williams, 2003). Warren Breed (1955) supported the idea of a newsworker 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, p. 84). Tuchman (1978), in his look at strategic ritual, reiterated that reporters must protect themselves from dominating influences. He observed the use of quotation marks and an obsessive observation to what the establishment called “objectivity” distanced reporters from exerting their influence. The literature concerning social control has supported this position. However, much of the literature concerning social construction of reality and media has focused on how this social construction has affected the consumers of media rather than its effect on the newsworkers themselves.

Much of the literature contained herein can also be applied to the internal workings of news gatherers by taking a fresh look at some of the texts. To do so, this study turned the mirror back on newsworkers and news organizations to better understand influence, resistance, and reality in the modern newsroom. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) found “the individual level of influence is useful in determining what the communicator thinks is worth transmitting to his or her audience and how the story should be developed … (although) organizationally defined factors have direct impact on mass media content”
It is uncertain how Shoemaker and Reese intended this individual level of influence be addressed, but rather than viewing the influence model as having overpowering elements forcing the individual level of influence into a position trapped by the other levels, the case also can be made that the individual level is at the “core” of the model for a reason, both figuratively and literally. This review of literature attempted to frame the influences on news work beyond the individual as a starting point for understanding the systems under which they operate. The review then explored the newsroom culture as a collective dynamic in parallel operation with these other hierarchical considerations. The review then examined how individual realities have been explored in the past. Collectively these works positioned the study for its examination of the modern newsroom.

**Social Construction Beyond the Individual**

Social control as it has been used to examine pressures in news work and influences beyond the individual level has been explored in several ways. Bagdikian (1990) offered insight into the organizational and extramedia level of influence when he claimed media’s pursuit of advertising dollars made them structurally dependent on business, and that dependence has restricted news content. Schlesinger (1978) 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. This was the result of his observations of the British Broadcasting Network in his book *Putting Reality Together*. Schlesinger found that newsworkers on the front line of production could make
only cosmetic changes that appeared profound to other professionals because of their novelty. Far-reaching changes, such as political satire or an investigative culture, would not develop to fruition or simply be stopped by the powers that be. He concluded that meaningful change could only come from a re-examination of the BBC’s relationship with the state. Herman and Chomsky (1988) also found a model of propaganda explanatory of organizational control. They used the theory of political economy to explore the influences that affected news production and suggested that capitalist forces and the bourgeoisie were interlocked with media ownership, and reflected the dominant ideology of the states in which they were found. This placed newsworkers in the Marxist position of the proletariat that fed a superstructure supporting the “haves” that controlled the means of production, and where individuals found themselves in terms of the means of production determined how their reality was constructed. As Marx and Engels (1848/1998) wrote in The Communist Manifesto the ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas: i.e., the class that is the dominant material force in society, is at the same time its dominant intellectual force.

Durkheim, as he was interpreted by Williams (2003), was found to have taken a mass-society approach to the social world. Durkheim (1912/2008) observed that the social structures required for creating solidarity in society existed in “social fact.” He asserted that, in spite of individual ideas and will, groups had social mechanisms in place to create “mechanical solidarity” for the purpose of perpetuating the structure. Social facts are the established, expected or conventional ways of behaving laid down in custom, law, or precedent. These components of mass society theory are also reflected in Marxist thought in one key way; both remove the individual from a position of self-
agency. Owners and publishers of large media organizations can be seen as being among the ruling class, where newsworkers generally are not, and therefore are seen as doing their employers’ bidding. As the values of journalists, their societal positions, and their representative behaviors have perpetuated themselves over the years, it can also be seen how Bourdieu’s (1984) ideas on social space (peer networks) and social capital (non-financial social value of an individual) have been at work in newsrooms. 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 behavior and expectations, they will start to understand their place in the social order and begin to embody this expectation in their habitus. Bourdieu showed how these dispositions could reproduce inequality and are a major factor in getting better jobs.

Consolidated ownership across multiple media platforms leads to restrictions in social discourse in the form of news choices (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). “Most biased choices in the media arise from the preselection of right-thinking people, internalized preconceptions, and the adaptation of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organization, market, and political power” (p. xii). Graham Murdock (1973) looked at the ways the press presented militant mass demonstrations. He observed that news reporting of such events was influenced by the norms held by those in power. The Glasgow University Media Group (1976, 1980) looked at the ways television media distorted social reality in its coverage of industrial disputes. Striking laborers were framed as rabble-rousers, where management was portrayed as rational. This study echoed the viewpoint that news discourse privileges the dominant ideology and present a distorted
picture of objective reality. News discourse has thus maintained the powerful and their capitalist structures in a symbolic way and symbols are socially constructed. This higher order of influence is still being argued. Siu (2009) found the Wall Street Journal and The New York Times both supported the tobacco industry over the Surgeon General’s report on the danger of tobacco in 1964. Although support from The New York Times had fizzled over five decades, this has not been true of The Wall Street Journal. As a newspaper vested in financial rather than civic interests, the economic considerations of tobacco were privileged by the Journal, indicating that ideology plays a role in the way The Wall Street Journal works to construct reality in the capitalist world.

The imposing hand of corporate hegemony was taken a step further in Doug Underwood’s (1993), When MBAs Rule the Newsroom. The selling of newspapers as a product as opposed to journalism as a practice and social check on power was Underwood’s focus. Underwood 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” (p. xii). This profit-centered shift is veiled as service to readership. Underwood cited Susan Miller, Scripps’ vice president of news, as she reframed a somewhat pandering ideology as being service driven and strongly indicated that any editor not on board with this concept would be driven out. This silencing of newsroom voices damages and alienates newswriters, and limits opportunities for a pluralistic presentation of news. Underwood also noted that this practice has not improved the financial position of most newspapers:
They (management) are too willing to squeeze news resources and space for news in service to corporate demands and the pressures of Wall Street; they suppress aggressive in-depth reporting for the sake of formula journalism; and they have created a newsroom environment increasingly inhospitable to the independent, irreverent, and challenge-the-world personalities that have traditionally been attracted to the profession of daily newspapering (Underwood, 1993 p. xiv).

Corporate America at odds with journalism and its traditional form and practice was a theme in Martin Mayer’s *Making News* (1987). As a distinct subculture, Mayer indicated that investigative reporting is not a socially benign act. “Reporting is snooping, and snooping is not a genteel activity. It is not, I fear, entirely compatible with brownnosing to get invited to Henry Kissinger’s cocktail parties…” (p. 12). Mayer supported Underwood’s theme of journalist ideals before marketing when he quotes an dialectic from the advertising industry. “Brands do not in reality, as they do in textbooks, find their customers; instead customers find their brands. By the same token, people find their news” (p. 22).

Source diversity as it related to media ownership, trust protection, and voice in media was likely to be reassessed soon in the face of the growth of new media, according to Stucke and Grunes (2009). They looked at the “health” of traditional media in an issue of *Connecticut Law Review*. Declining audiences and the consolidation of media outlets are raising new concerns about antitrust policy, and they suggested a better reading of the First Amendment would be more in tune with Supreme Court precedent. That is “the right of the viewers and listeners, not the right of the owners” is paramount. They concluded that a vibrant marketplace of ideas is too important to our society to let momentary financial issues be determinant of lax regulation, and they spoke in depth about how poorly investigative reporting has translated to the internet. They also note that
in spite of record profits by news organization, both print and broadcast, lay offs of journalists continue to rise.

Epstein’s (1978) *News from Nowhere* looked at the structures behind network news on television. *NBC News, CBS News*, and *ABC News* were used in his study. Epstein observed how various methods of selecting and gathering news may affect the final product. According to Epstein, there was a great deal of research and thought devoted to propaganda and publicity and little by way of the news gathering process itself. Epstein also made the case that a look at processes as well as the individuals involved in news gathering was important because, “news events cannot be expected to take place under the sort of controlled circumstances which lend themselves to methodological analysis” (p. xiii). He also pointed out, “newsmen have tended to work on their own rather than in groups or in tightly regimented office situations” (p. xix). He looked at cultural pressures as follows:

To what extent is the direction that large organizations take, whether they are political parties, city governments, business corporations or whatever, determined by pressures to satisfy internal needs rather than its external circumstances or even long-range goals? The working assumption was that members of such organizations eventually modified their own personal values in accordance with the requisites of the organization and that therefore the key to exploring the particular “outputs” of organizations … lay in determining the basic requirements, which a given organization needs to maintain itself (p. xix).

Epstein was granted access to news meetings and he conducted interviews and followed camera crews. His methods consisted of direct observation of people, internal politics, and the news processes. He also did in-depth interviews, kept logs, and conducted informal and off-the-record discussions, as well as looked at formal policy and public statements. He found that the final product, “though it tries to reflect reality, was
so shaped by the organization, reality was badly distorted” (p. 198). The structures imposed to construct events into stories became the values involved in news culture. “The net effect was the news selected was the news expected” (p. 199). Epstein found that the personal values of newsworkers are not by any means decisive when in conflict with an organizations’ values, despite being an important input in the news process.

Schlesinger (1978), in *Putting ‘Reality’ Together* also looked at the concept of professional and organizational structures and used similar methodology to Epstein. He asked the question, “Are BBC’s journalists producing news for an audience – or are they producing news according to their own professional institutions” (p. 12)? He discovered that BBC producers must appear “value free” concerning matters in dispute. “This myth of value-freedom is essential for public consumption and believed by those to propagate it. Value-freedom, objectivity, and impartiality are essential validating ideas for broadcast news production which is perpetually exposed to critical appraisal” (p. 204). Schlesinger quoted a newsperson in his study saying, “‘In ten years here I’ve never had an explicit conversation with any of my colleagues on politics or religion. There’s a feeling that you might limit your scope for action if you declare yourself’” (p. 164). With regard to news producers, he found that newsworkers see themselves as working with a high measure of autonomy. “They often deplore the omnipresence of the producer as inhibiting their initiative, but accept the legitimacy of his presence because it is his program” (p. 162). He concluded that there was a general awareness of the competitive structure within which broadcast news has to be produced and successful competition is measured by the resourcefulness shown by the journalist’s peers in other organizations, and by the extent to which the mass audience can be “hooked.”
The members of the Glasgow University Media Group (1978) who authored *Bad News* made it clear that, “contrary to the claims, conventions, and culture of television journalism, the news is not a neutral product” (p. 10). They looked at the ways in which British television structures shaped the news. They explored the cultural codes and frames deeply ingrained in the news gathering system. The group found:

The code works on all levels; in the notion of “the story” itself, in the selection of stories, in the way material is gathered and prepared for transmission, in the dominant style of language used, in the permitted and limited range of visual presentation, in the overall duration of bulletins, in the duration of items within bulletins, in the real technological limitations placed on the presentation, in the finances of the news services, and above all, in the underpinning processes of professionalism which turn men and women into television journalists (p. 11).

The group also discovered the concept of “cultural neutrality” was false and the net effect of the mass media was dysfunctional for social change. The media also failed to raise essential questions about the structure of society. The group explained that the organizations were, “in practice, an expression of a middle class consensus politics, which continues that tradition of impartiality on the side of the establishment” (p. 12). “When we look at cultural power in this context we mean the power to typify, transmit, and define the ‘normal,’ and to set agendas” (p.13). The group stated that the presentation of news outside the consensus was often treated as easily dismissible, irrelevant eccentricities. The group explained this through the ideas of George Gerbner, who said, “mass communication is the cultural arm of the industrial order from which they spring” (p. 15). In other words, they reflected and reinforced the power structures of the society in which they operate. They explain in their introduction to *Bad News* that news selection is “so speedy and habitual as to seem almost instinctive and those who practice news
gathering are as defensive of scrutiny of the practice as they are of the practice itself’’ (p. ix). “One gets the impression of a trade which has hardly ever thought out its own basic premises but continues, come hell or high water, to rest its cause on a few unexamined assertions (including objectivity and presentation of facts)” (p. ix). They also noted that the cognitive filters of news process that encouraged news practices to emerge as they did - in the form of bias, constraint of time, and news values – are controls, which force a cultural atmosphere of conformity and affirm action of the status quo. This was why extensive “context” in television news was rarely used and pithy stories filled the broadcasts.

The group concluded that the culture pushes for literate, easily comprehensible, and interesting levels of reporting. In disputes, newsrooms set themselves up as arbiters of conflict but find themselves missing unofficial views of disputes. As the group updated its work in More Bad News (1980), they concluded, “‘ritual tasks’ are ingrained in the professional culture of news organizations and journalists” (p. 398), and “The refusal of broadcasters to recognize the basic constraints of their professionalism cannot be taken as a refutation of their power to set agendas defining the perimeters of social issues,” (p. 399).

Foucault (1970) also found discourse to be a key element in understanding a work dynamic. The idea of discourse – a systems approach to work and its organization – may produce a way of thinking about one’s function within an organizational, and the power to define these roles becomes a means of controlling workers. This can be seen as the underlying conditions of a worker’s actual function being different than the perceived function to the individual; moreover, these conditions change over time. Tuchman (1972)
observed the specific discourses of objectivity, such as presenting conflicting truth claims, presenting evidence, presenting the most material facts first, and carefully separating fact from opinion. “Examining the ritualistic behaviors of professionals, we get a hint of what may be the deeper function of the art, cult, and ritual of various occupations (p. 305).” Ritual, though social in its practice, has great utility in the exploration of the individuals who practice them. Newsroom journalists practice ritual with a capital “R.” Durkheim (1912/2008) observed almost 100 years ago in his classic *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, that there is power in that which is held sacred. Just as a Durkheim’s “totems,” or what could be thought of as divinity, were transformative, perceived as real, and an expression of self for Aboriginal peoples, so too do newsworkers believe that through their rituals and practices, their work can be transformative to society. Having these practices considered sacred has in the past been advantageous to organizations as newsworkers performed them as part of a strong business model. These influences on the newsworker are a part of the fabric of the culture; however, they do not wholly explore individual agency or the autonomy built into that culture.

**Social Control as a Collective Dynamic**

There is an alternative way to view the individual level of influence. That is as a lateral consideration rather than in terms of being superior or inferior to more macro views. Hardt and Brennon (1995) examined the under-explored history of newsworkers and the importance of such work in the United States:
Traditional press historians have concentrated primarily on the structure of the institution and its major forces, as well as on the importance of protecting content, instead of addressing the issues of production in terms of labor and newsworkers. They have done so under ideological conditions that have generated a top-down history of the press that privileged property and ownership at the expense of an understanding of newswork (p. ix).

Berkowitz (1990) attempted to refine White’s gatekeeping metaphor and explained that decision-making was a group process, thus content was shaped by group dynamics. However, equating journalistic routines and practices with ritual may be somewhat problematic. After all, what is ritual? Rothenbuhler (1998) offered the following general but substantive 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” (p. 27). He further explained that this behavior must be logical and have affect beyond the behavior itself. It must be inclusive of formal rules and the symbolism should be explicit. In communication, all players in the ritual accept that participation is symbolically meaningful and effective. According to Hirsh (1972), most content is symbolic, and news, entertainment, print, broadcast and other media are remarkably similar in that constraint. Organizational contexts are at work on practitioners, and how they carry out activities and characteristics related to their roles, crafts, and occupations. Each of these values, both core (journalistic) and imposed (organizational), may be interpreted in a similar fashion to the way Durkheim viewed the “totem.” Ideas had the same function within respective spheres. The totem was to Durkheim a stopping point for universal power (manna), sacred in its manifestation, real in its influence, but ambiguous enough to serve many functions and the needs of many
societies. This universal dynamic explains coalescence for groups that need to function effectively together.

Certainly, individual newsworkers live and work in a social world. Berger and Luckmann (1966) in *Social Construction of Reality* suggested that reality was “constructed” by social interactions to build meaning, and this “meaning” depended on the way people interact with each other. Thus, those things that society sees and hears in media provided a symbolic reality for the social world. This approach showed less regard for the ideology noted in the previous section and found collective understanding more informing. Murdock, as previously noted, was clear that those in power influenced media; however, he, with Peter Golding (1991), warned that this influence could be oversold. “Consumption practices are clearly not completely manipulated by the strategies of the cultural industries but they are equally not completely independent of them,” they wrote (p. 164).

The insights provided in *For the Record* by Bonnie Brennen (2001) reinforced the general idea that journalists are motivated by a social component. Oral histories that she collected from the staff of the *Rochester Democrat* in the 1950s and 1960s supported a sense of higher social function perceived by “rank and file” newsworkers. And, although political activism from the right was a consideration by management (particularly Frank Gannett), there was also a profound sense of fellowship and respect for those on the lower echelons. One of Brennen’s informants described this:

Frank Gannett himself was far to the right of his editorial staff and far to the right of his editorial writing staff…however, in Frank Gannett’s day, he was very paternalistic. That word was made for Frank Gannett. He used to give out turkeys and have parties and picnics. His wife used to come and she treated us like family. We didn’t think in those days he was
looking down on us or patronizing us…but paternalism is rejected out of hand these days (p. 4).

This informant indicated that not only were the political relationships more tolerant, but the social stratification was less rigid. However, the influence of capital and the power of advertisers were in the front of the typical newworker’s mind. According to other informants, covering influential businesses, store openings, ribbon cuttings, and the like were prominent practices. But mentioning products in unrelated stories could cause arguments. This was where the power of the gatekeeper came into conflict with the concept of hegemony. Brennen drew on British cultural studies and resistance in her conclusion to explain how an institution, with an ideology based in service to society, found itself yielding to economic agendas. Brennen cited the work of Antonio Gramsci (1840/2000) to explain how cultural hegemony found itself in all aspects of life. Hegemony was the active dynamic process that allowed high social classes to dominate others. It was societal norms that are perceived as universal truths about the way things were. This habitus becomes the dominant discourse. 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.

Hegemony, as a collective dynamic, transitions the focus of this review to an alternative way of looking at the social controls of news production. The idea was that collective decisions met broad needs and this moved away from models which privileged
power elites as pulling all the strings. Hegemonic discourse was bigger than the media elite and included ideas such as objectivity. An alternative theory on routines of news production suggested that the media were in fact disconnected from the bourgeoisie and their control mechanisms because they needed the media to confirm their legitimacy (as a civic force) in the capitalist system (Hallin, 1985). Molotch and Lester (1974) offered a similar perspective. They argued that news gatherers could not become pure ideological instruments of those in power, as this would harm their credibility with their audience. This social constructionist theory asserted that ruling classes were not as powerful as previously stated and newsmen had at least some liberty in their selection and presentation of news. Greenwald and Bernt (2000) also addressed the changing cultural atmosphere of the news gathering world with respect to investigative reporting in the United States. They noted, “many news consumers view the press not as a watchdog that monitors huge faceless corporations, but as one of those huge impersonal corporations” (p. 3). They also explained that it is not that simple:

It (disenchantment with the media) derives instead as a result of numerous complex changes in society and the media over the last two or three decades. Changes in four aspects of American society – in its economic system, recent legal rulings, culture and technology – have had both subtle and obvious effects on news content and consumers (p. 3).

Many staff members at news organizations were unlikely to have lived very long in the city where they work. This was due to local ownership decline. “The result was readers and viewers were increasingly isolated from their local newspapers and television stations” (Greenwald and Bernt, p. 6). They also noted, “Inevitably, changes outside the newsroom affect the culture within the newsroom, thus shaping how news is presented” (p. 9). Greenwald and Bernt explained that influences on news values centered on the
changing techniques of newsgathering. They cited computers and the Internet as promoting a culture of desk reporting.

Tuchman (1976, 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 newsworkers to do their complex jobs within the news cycle. He found this more telling of how they constructed reality. Hall (1999) found the assignment of meaning and reality personal. Journalists used authoritative 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 (1984) 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 the discourse at least originated with the individual journalist, but under social constrains.

Other scholars found the individual level of influence even more profound. Goffman (1974) 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. Gitlin (1980) explained that media frames allowed the newsworker to organize material in a way that could be disseminated cleanly to the public and organized in the production process. It was in this way that news became a symbolic construction of social reality. In these instances, Goffman and Gitlin presented social construction as a value-free manifestation of what media did rather than
quantifying it based in its influences. Robert Entman (1991) supported this position as he evaluated the ways the U.S. media framed international news events. Several players were seen as being involved in impacting if news was acted upon, understood, remembered, or even noticed. Those players included the narrator, a role played by the reporter, and the authoritative voices and sources quoted by him or her. Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes and Sasson (1992) found an optimistic voice among media that they admitted 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 (p. 380).

The many voices of media could often be read oppositionally and television imagery was a site of struggle where the powerful were forced to constantly justify why their view of reality should be dominant and accepted by the masses. This dynamic undermined the power-influence nature of media discourse and allowed room for other voices to offer competing constructions of reality at an individual level (Gamson et al, 1992).

**Social Realities of the Newspaper World**

As this review began to synthesize the theoretical underpinnings of the newsworkers’ world through the previous literature, it became clear that the influence of newsworkers were challenged but profound. Thus was needed need an analytical tool to observe macro-influence dynamics because newsroom culture was observed to be
influential. One of the tools for this study was ethnographic fieldwork. According to Robbens and Sluka (2007), ethnography was the response to a desire to advance human understanding; the potential for its application was in every culture and subculture imaginable.

In cultural anthropology, it is fieldwork based on participant observations, which hinges on the dynamic and contradictory synthesis of subjective insider and objective outsider. As an insider, the fieldworker learns what behavior means to the people themselves. As an outsider, the fieldworker observes, experiences, and makes comparisons in ways that insiders would not (p. 2).

The synthesis to which Robbens and Sluka referred arose not only from cultural differences but from cultural change as well. The change in the social and professional climate of today’s newsroom has been weighty indeed. A newsroom community, like any other community, comes with unique issues. The pressures of observing a community was addressed by Berreman’s (1967) *Behind Many Masks* as he noted that “in terms of community, social orders are always stratified, plural, and internally divided, and relations have to be maintained with different factions and interest groups who may be in conflict or competition with each other” (p.136).

According to Gans (2004), newspapers as they have been historically operated and conceptualized in the past, had been undergoing a dynamic paradigm shift during the last two decades. He noted that technology and profit motive lead to layoffs. This led to questions concerning how these looming concerns affect journalistic autonomy, job performance, story choice, treatment, and division of responsibility. One justification for an expansive look at social changes within newsroom organizations can be seen as Gans looked at the fundamental differences between the golden and modern age of journalism:
“Journalists were thought to be different…coming from the working class, less elitist, and were not paid or treated like celebrities. Staffs and budgets were larger as well and the world, like the country, was doted with well-staffed burrows” (p. xvi). Gans insisted that virtually all national news organizations continued to swear by objectivity, and journalists still aimed for fairness and detachment. These values, generally considered to be positive attributes of journalists, were according to Gans, at odds with the goals of stakeholders. “(Journalists) do not comprehend the persistence with which ideologues pursue their objectives, play hardball politics, and refuse to compromise, but then they don’t see how their own professional values constitute an ideology” (p. xviii). What did this indicate about personal values, human and social considerations, power within the newsroom, and internal stakeholders? Gans concluded that clichés, with regard to the justification for multi-perspective news (or news with more than one focus), were somewhat flawed. He rejected the idea that democracy rests with a well-informed public and that knowledge is power; rather, he noted that, “journalists themselves see this function as valuable” (p. 332). In regard to media organizations, he suggested American journalists share a set of “enduring values” that shape the nature of news. He discovered that in the conventions of the news story, order and presentation of its narrative structures have been shown to shape not only what becomes news but also how it is presented.

The inception of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 opened opportunities for journalists to reach communities in new ways (Aufderheide, 1999). The medium of the Internet was young and the possibilities for digital communication untapped. In time, the Internet itself removed a substantial source of revenue in the form of classified advertising (by way of Ebay and Craigslist etc.) from newspaper organizations
permanently. This shift has had detrimental effects on the bottom line and on staff at many newspapers, but audiences still look to newspapers to serve their information needs.

The news media that have been losing audiences have also lost income from advertisers, and the result is smaller budgets and slimmer news organizations. New technology induces further downsizing … like other American businesses, news firms are now demanding higher profit margins (Gans, 2004, p. xii)

The idea of a cultural study of newworkers is not new. Returning to the work of Warren Breed (1955), it is notable that he explored pressures and organizational stresses prior to the Internet and digital revolution. His groundbreaking study of social control in newsrooms is considered one of the first explorations of newsrooms as a unique subculture. Breed compiled his analysis from 120 interviews of newworkers. He concluded that social control and policy were maintained through a series of structural and behavioral norms. Breed’s use of interviews as a method is one of several ethnographic tools used in social science to examine cultures. Although Breed’s analysis was decidedly cultural and based on community structures, he never used the word ethnography. Much of his work was informed by his years as a journalist, and he did not frame it as participant observation (Reese and Ballinger, 2001). Breed concluded that policy sometimes supersedes journalistic norms, staffers often personally disagree with it, and executives cannot legitimately demand policy be followed. Breed termed policy as “controlling behavior.” In the newsroom they included: intuitional authority and sanctions, feelings of obligation and esteem for superiors, collegial relationships with authority, mobility aspirations, absence of conflicting group allegiance, the pleasant nature of the activities, and news itself becoming a “value.”
According to Hardt (1990), the loss of autonomy was technological in origin. He explained that the drive to be technologically optimized required a workforce to be able to perform many functions and adapt quickly. This increased control over journalistic products at the expense of creativity and intellectual discourse. According to Cottle (2003), “the social contextual realities of news production deserve attention because they lie between the economic determinations of the marketplace and the cultural discourses within media representations” (p.13).

This begs the question: what personalities and values are involved in the newsroom now? Underwood (1993) cited opinions of newsworkers and former newsworkers. They included themes such as, profit does not have a place in the running of a newsroom, USA Today style “McPapers” do not sell well, and finally, “newsrooms must often institute tough newsroom management systems in order to bring along newsworkers’ reluctance to buy into the philosophy of market-oriented journalism…a lot of the fun has gone out of journalism when it became a product” (p. 38). Other interviews revealed even editors see systems management as being overly focused, “fashion in managerial styles come…they blow, and they go,” editors were not editors anymore, they are managers, and modern corporation management was sapping the vitality out of creative editors and reporters. Underwood concluded that the components that make journalism special and important “can be cheapened but are somewhat indelible” (p. 176). “The new corporate minded editors say they are giving people what they want, yet they do not really know what they want. Surveys can be read a number of ways and that is why they have done the newspaper business so little good.”
Chapter 3: Detailed Methodology

The literature review revealed social construction of reality has many interpretations, but it also revealed that it has much potential for informing the reality of the modern newsroom. Potential influences on newsworkers are plentiful and the literature review did not reveal a consistent hierarchical pattern of what newsworkers found influential or what they might find to be priorities. This study addresses how these considerations are internalized and acted upon by newsworkers and seeks a deeper understanding of the newsworkers’ reality. Given the limitations of the research cited above, this study explores several questions, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

How are news values socially constructed in light of the digital paradigm in journalism, pressures emerging from changing platforms, economics, or other external issues, and how are they resolved with the traditional civic roles of the press?

Can the observations of newsroom journalists be categorized into consistent themes to better understand the reality of the profession and, if so, what new or old mechanisms and routines are in place to assure individual motivations are organizationally favorable?

How are disconcerting influences received, perceived, and acted upon by newsworkers?

How do current newsroom climates, extramedia concerns, and ideology manifest themselves in the newsroom and affect morale?

How are collegiality and autonomy in the current newsroom environment challenged or changed? What motivates these behaviors?

How do newsworkers view the goals and direction of journalism and are concerns and values of newsworkers informed by traditional newsroom routines?
Are individual passions infused into news work? If so, what is important to newsworkers and what does it say about those who are attracted to the profession?

If ritual patterns arise from newsworkers, are they consistent with Rothenbuler’s definition of ritual? What elements are consistent with the approaches discussed in the literature, and are they related to the pressures emerging from changing platforms, economics or other external issues?

As the research questions at hand were considered, as well as the aforementioned literature on social construction of reality, an amalgamation of several methods of qualitative research were found to be optimal for this project. Leedy and Ormond (2001) discuss qualitative research in a way consistent with the intricate social nature of this study:

To answer some research questions we cannot skim across the surface. We must dig deep to get a complete understanding of the phenomenon we are studying. In qualitative research, we do indeed dig deep: We collect numerous forms of data and examine them from various angles to construct a rich and meaningful picture of a complex, multifaceted situation (p. 147).

Because this research was conducted in the “natural world” and the complexity of work relationships, attitudes, and job routines was germane to understanding changing newsrooms, a qualitative approach was chosen to allow the researcher the latitude to be responsive and observant in an environment often rife with sensory chaos. This study was conducted in two phases. The first was a series of face-to-face interviews with journalists, conducted by this researcher, to gain an overview of their concerns and observations in the field in which they were working. The second was a period of participant observations to see how these concerns played out in the field. All told, data was gathered from more than three months of observations, from thirty-one formally shadowed informants, and forty-five informal informants met at the newspapers while conducting
research. Thirty in-depth interviews with newswrkers and administrators were conducted over the course of the project (twenty-five in Phase 1 and five more in Phase 2), and assorted internal documents such as news budgets and employee handbooks were used when attainable and pertinent. The literature in the study provided a map for highlighting newswrker studies and social construction of reality. This literature was used to inform how the industry of the past has evolved over time and justified the need for further study. This study was done in the following two phases, which were intended to build on each other and be informed by previous studies of newsroom dynamics. They are as follows.

**Phase 1: Interviews**

In Phase 1 of this project, results of an analysis of twenty-five, in-person interviews with journalists were compiled from mid-western daily newspapers with circulations ranging from 8,000 to 160,000. The subjects interviewed were front-line newswrkers, defined for the purposes of this study as non-management or first-tier management who produce or process news and editorial content for print or online consumption. This included reporters, copy editors, photographers, designers, and news service workers and line editors (editors who directly supervise the workers in the preceding list). The goal in the selection of lower-echelon journalists over higher-ranking management was to limit the influence of organizational concerns as described by Shoemaker and Reese as this study sought honest feeling rather than a “company line.” This served to privilege individual issues, to examine the hierarchy-of-influence model through a lower-echelon lens, and allowed interviewee perspectives to be examined in a
clean form. Because the goal of this phase was to analyze feelings, motives, and behavior — and centers the study on key questions — structured interviews were chosen as the methodology. Rubin and Rubin (2005) said in support of this method, that interviews are flexible and likely to yield information for which the researcher has not planned. Interviews reveal the conscious reasons for actions and feelings as well as people’s beliefs about the facts.

Another important concern was accessibility of the newworker for a candid and honest interview. To further this goal, the journalists were given anonymity and promised they would be identified by a pseudonym and with demographic information only. Furthermore, their specific publication would be held in confidence. All interviews with newworkers were conducted face-to-face, in private, in empty conference rooms at their workplace, or at an offsite location, such as coffee shops or restaurants. All interviews were recorded and transcripts were made from those recordings for analysis. Beyond the criteria noted above, journalists were selected for this study based on their willingness to participate and answer all posed questions in great depth. Informant newworkers were approached for this study through e-mails and telephone calls to their respective organizations or through social media. When told the study involved the voices of newsroom culture and newworkers, they were often eager to voice their opinions. Interviews were conducted between the dates of December 3, 2010, and February 11, 2011.

With only twenty-five journalists interviewed, in this first phase, this was certainly not a representation of all newworkers in comparable positions and publications. Rather, it yielded ideas from which themes could be extrapolated. Questions
were not disclosed to participants before interviews in an effort to evoke spontaneity and a genuine response. Prior to the interview, participants were told they would be asked questions about their feelings regarding newsroom culture. Each interview included the same six questions, but allowed the informant to guide the direction of the discussion and be as conversational as possible. This at times evoked similar themes, but often in response to different questions. They were often encouraged to elaborate on ideas with follow-up questions. The questions, developed from social construction theory and newworker literature, were sufficiently ambiguous to allow subjects to freely associate that which was of concern for them. The goal was that the themes identified would inform the participant observation phase of the study. This would allow a comparison of attitudes to practice.

The questions were as follows:

1. How do you view the value of your publication for your readers?
2. Would you encourage your child, grandchild, or youth you mentor to enter this field?
3. All things being equal, what would you like to be doing professionally in the next 5 years?
4. Why did you get into journalism? Would you do it again?
5. What is important to you personally and/or professionally and how does it come through in your work?
6. What is an important cultural dynamic in journalism you would like people to understand?

Because informants were encouraged to guide the interviews, the duration of each interview varied. The longest interview was 36.13 minutes; the shortest was 7.44 minutes. The mean (average) of all the interviews was 18.31 minutes, and the median was 19.28 minutes. In all, the data was compiled from 7.08 hours of interviews.
This stage of the study yielded several themes that became the focal points of the observations in the next phase. These themes were cynicism and distrust as a cultural value; the perception that newsworkers were neglecting civic and professional functions due to increased responsibilities; and the perception that management favored digital competence over traditional skills (such as writing, photography, and editing), and a keen awareness of organizational controls. These themes were observed in the participant observation phase and engaged based on the literature and interviews. The interviews also revealed that newsworkers were aware of a loss of ideological control in the newsroom and they felt powerless to change this situation. Furthermore, organizational influences were perhaps more transparent because of the training and nature of journalism work. The biggest limitation to the interview phase considered before the study progressed was that individual journalists may not be consciously aware of influences that are imposed upon them. Further observation and participation tested the assertions found in the exploratory interview phase.

**Phase 2: Participant Observation**

Armed with the results from Phase 1, this researcher observed three daily newsroom field sites that differed in size, ownership, and structure, but were similarly geographically located, to see how newsworkers interacted with the themes that surfaced through the interviews. Newspapers were chosen with the aforementioned characteristics in mind, but needed to meet other characteristics as well. They needed to be both willing to allow a researcher in their newsrooms, and be geographically close to one another so travel from site to site on a weekly basis would be feasible.
Newspaper field sites were observed from June 20, 2011 to October 20, 2011. The circulation at the newspapers varied from more than 150,000 to less than 13,000. One newspaper had a union affiliated with a national guild that covered its editorial workers, another had no union but had a collective bargaining agreement – which had lapsed but was still legally binding – and the last newspaper, had no union affiliation at all. Ideally, three different companies would have owned the three newspapers observed for the study. However, not all newspapers that were approached fitting those criteria were willing to accommodate observational research in their newsrooms. The same large media corporation owned two of the newspapers observed; a large non-public media group owned the third paper. All of these newspapers were within one hundred fifty miles of each other. Due to financial constraints and personal obligations of the researcher, extensive travel was not possible for this study, so newspapers needed to be geographically close to one another. Although this was not ideal, it eliminated proximity as a variable and 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 readily agreed to, as that anonymity was desirable to protect the newsworkers who were observed. It also promoted candor, and was in keeping with ethnographic tradition.

This researcher spent one to two days a week at each site for a period of three months, observing during a standard working shift (about eight hours), using the ethnographic tradition of participant observation. Field notes were taken within each newsroom site as this researcher participated with and observed newsworkers in their jobs. The participant aspect of this study varied from site to site. Management was
encouraged to use this researcher as needed to perform newsroom work, but none felt this was appropriate. The reasons given included a discomfort with work being done without compensation, and not having time to train a newcomer (ironically because of the dramatic reductions in staff). Therefore, the researcher essentially engaged in “job shadowing” to gather information, being helpful to the newworkers whenever possible, and learning the specifics of their various jobs. The only activity outside this interaction occurred when this researcher trained managers in some software at one of the newspapers.

Don Heider’s book, “White News” (2000), utilized similar ethnographic methods and that study was performed in a similar media environment. Heider situated himself in two broadcast newsrooms for five weeks each to study the internal reasons why there was less or negative news involving minorities compared to other groups. Like this researcher, Heider was the product of the discipline he wished to observe (he was a broadcast journalist and this researcher is a former newspaper journalist). Similar to this researcher, he spent several years away from the business doing extensive reading, thinking, and writing about the news practice before his return. His understanding of the culture allowed him to quickly acclimate to the environment and achieve informative rapport. This proved to be true in this study as well. This researcher attended news meetings, interacted with newworkers, accompanied reporters and photographers to stories, but was not a functioning member of the news staff.

Though this researcher was not a working observer, the “observer effect,” (the idea that people may behave in an inconsistent or unnatural manner while being observed to please the observer) was alleviated by consistent presence (Adler and Adler, 1994).
Though time did not permit for this researcher to become a completely naturalized part of the newsroom environment, conversation was engaged in a natural way, newsworkers were observed as quietly as possible, and newsworkers initiated conversations that involved opinions of policy and other internal dynamics. Questions germane to this study were certainly asked as needed and if more elaboration was required, an interview was requested at an “off duty” time. Along with these tasks, this researcher attended news meetings to observe policy-making and planning in process. Involvement in these day-to-day activities allowed access to newsworkers and management for observation and interviews. Staff were asked to elaborate on daily decisions, as well as organizational policy decisions in which they were directly or indirectly involved and that were indicative of or related to the phenomena observed in Phase 1. This participant observation phase involved conducting more interviews, letting people tell their own stories as their unique culture was observed, and allowing responses to situations as they occurred.

In each newsroom this researcher was able to observe the rationale behind decision-making and interplay between newsworkers and managers. This helped give insight into institutional structure and the decision-making process. This was instrumental in discerning patterns among locations and the reasons the interaction and dynamics reported in this study occurred.

Documents

This researcher was also given access to daily newsroom budgets, memos, and in a few of cases, organizational research. In addition, the researcher also obtained design
handbooks, collective bargaining agreements (old and new), and historic documents about each of the publications. This was valuable because it gave additional context to the observations being made and the policies being acted upon (or not acted upon as the case may have been). Pieced together with other data, these documents allowed newsworkers to explain what some of this information meant to them and how they use and react to this material in their jobs. The documents also presented another point of contrast between policy and reality.

**Analysis of Fieldnotes**

In the field, extensive “jottings” were taken at the newspaper sites in notebooks color coded for each publication. Jottings are the listings of topics or events used in preparation for writing fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995) These jottings were explained as the notes were transcribed into dated and categorized formal fieldnotes. A binder of chronological observations was generated from these files. Initial analysis was being done at every level of this process, noting recurring themes as they related to the interviews previously conducted and the literature reviewed. The data was then sorted, compared, and contrasted with findings in Phase 1. This was an important step as it served to separate the perceived realities of newsworkers from the ways these realities manifested in the newsrooms. Examples from fieldnotes were taken to exemplify themes that were discovered. This data was classified according to the type of information it contained, and sorted into themes as examples of the observed or relayed events. Once the themes were identified they were collected into a narrative so the social realities could be more easily understood. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) explained:
The ethnographer as author must represent the particular world he has studied (or some slice or quality of it) for readers who lack direct acquaintance with it. To do so, he moves back and forth between specific events recounted in fieldnotes and more general concepts of interest to his discipline. An overconcern for scholarly framework and concepts would distort and obscure the nuances of everyday life; but to simply present members’ categories exclusively in their terms would produce texts devoid of relevance and interest to scholarly audiences (p.169).

The writing itself was another step in the analytic process. Richardson (1994) notes that the act of writing allows the researcher opportunities to further interpret findings as he/she makes those findings more accessible for an audience. Throughout the writing and analysis process, it was important to keep in mind how informants were influenced by their need to maintain their livelihoods and the historical, cultural, and organizational nuances that existed between newspapers, as well as the writer’s limitations.

**Rationale**

The mixed qualitative method used in this study was selected for several reasons. To understand newsworker culture and the practices therein it was felt that one needed to be among those being studied. The work and reality of newsworkers was considered vital to the understanding of the way the profession operates in the contemporary world. The goal was to get as close to the action as possible while keeping the objectivity of an outsider for the sake of analysis. Inasmuch as this was a micro study, it was the hoped that this work will add to a macro understanding of social constructionism in terms of the trends, routines, and influences already identified in the news industry by other
researchers, and that the newworker-oriented focus would add to a multifaceted literature base.

This study is by design exploratory. It certainly does not wholly adhere to ethnographic tradition, but elements of participant observation were vital for the honesty of the findings and the human level of engagement desired in the study’s conception. The incorporation of interviews and informal conversations from many different newspaper duties allowed for the critical analysis of the challenged but important institution of newspaper journalism. The method was also appropriate for the theoretical traditions drawn upon for context.

As this industry is changing, and no one can anticipate exactly what the future of newspapers will be, it was important to capture this period of uncertainty for posterity. The aim was a description and understanding of the moment, through the construction of the world of newworkers. History will always determine the impact and lasting effect of subcultures – newsrooms included.
Chapter 4: The Process of Newwork

The flow of a typical newworkers’ day can vary greatly from one organization to the next, as well as from one job to another. However, in the process of performing these jobs, certain activities must invariably happen to produce a piece of consumable journalism for the public. The newsrooms in this study are typified by an open bay of desks or cubicles and televisions tuned to CNN, or one of the local news channels. At one operation, each assignment editor had his/her own mini-TV tuned to local news, as well as televisions mounted over their heads and throughout the newsroom for national stories. At a smaller operation, the newsroom had only one television that staff gathered around to see the breaking news of the day.

Workers move around their newsroom to communicate with each other as a matter of routine throughout their days. They do this to ask questions about topics that range from deadline concerns, community history, sources, and events of common interest. They keep mementos like bobbleheads and Star War action figures on their computer monitors. They often have pictures of pets or family in frames that are frequently too big for the pictures, or photos pinned to his/her bulletin boards right next to correspondence or news clippings. Birthday cards and balloons remain on desks long after the events have passed and sports memorabilia spills over the sides of desks as it builds up over many years. Some newworkers use the space under their desks for filing old newspapers. This occurs until they cannot even put their legs under their desk to work. At the end of some long days, workers go home and try to have a personal life.

All of this is indicative of the typical newworkers’ world. It is within this world that newworkers do their jobs as they interact with sources, management, technology,
and each other. This can be stressful, but it is not unlike many stressful professions. The unique nature of news work comes in the form of its civic function and the newsworker’s role as the eyes and ears of the public. They are government and business watchdogs, and must take on all the ethical concerns that such a role entails. It is within that role that the dynamic becomes complex. Although these roles are the core values of journalism, the organizations for which journalists work have the added goal of running a viable business. Sometimes the watchdog role and the profit motive clash.

Informants for this study consistently explained that there have been immense changes to their jobs over the last three years as organizations have become committed to a more invested in a shift toward digital endeavors. New changing technologies, business concerns, and a shrinking workforce challenged formerly naturalized processes. This study started by looking at these processes and the motivations of those in the field, and then examined the changes and struggles in the industry. A brief look at the mechanics of day-to-day news work and an exploration of what led many newsworkers to the field helped inform an understanding of their concerns for the profession and themselves. Also, a look at the areas of new technology that have emerged, as well as a challenged business model, led to a better understanding of the operational directives that influenced the workplace today. This is certainly not a comprehensive list of all newsroom tasks, but rather, it is intended to give a broad overview of responsibilities germane to this study and context for those who are unfamiliar with the newsroom environment.
**The Mechanics of Newsroom Operations**

Most operations start their day with an “understanding of purpose.” This often takes the form of individual news meetings where reporters talk with editors about the stories on which they are working. For some, this meeting can be a formal critique session assessing how the prior day’s endeavors went. In many cases, both occur and can be stratified by position with top editors critiquing, and line editors planning content. This dynamic can be thought of as the birth of the day’s controls, controls which will allow the next day’s materials to reach an audience on time and as expected. These meetings affirm goals and organizational direction. They allow editors to give input to reporters about sources and coverage. This is an extremely naturalized process, which was as true for Warren Breed in 1955 as it is now, and it has been true in one variation or another ever since there has been daily newspapering in the 1700s (Eadies, 2009). What is new, at least in terms of process, is that digital journalism has dramatically influenced this process and has changed the meaning of “breaking news.” In terms of story treatment, immediacy at a newspaper once meant that the next day’s edition would include a story about the “immediate” event in question. This is not as true in the digital age. Digital specialists upload stories minutes after they are written as fast as information can be confirmed. This often happens before a story is fully formed, forcing reporters to routinely change stories online as new facts are uncovered. Digital specialists watch the online traffic and performance of their organization’s materials, and they adjust placement of content to get as many page hits by readers as possible. These specialists comb the web and wire services to cultivate materials, bring them to the paper’s website, and link them to related content. They update social media with promotions and teasers to
draw audiences to their pages and represent the organization by reacting to comments left on online stories and social media sites. Although some newsrooms have committed breaking-news reporters or breaking-news teams, most reporters and editors contribute content on their own to online mediums. This takes place outside the traditional processes of news structure, but often includes the traditional players such as copy editors and reporters. Digital specialists, at organizations that can afford them, fall outside of these traditional processes, and jobs in this area are growing even though newsroom staffs are shrinking.

Reporters must find the time to create their stories within an unforgiving news cycle, observing formal and informal deadlines. This of course includes much more than writing. They must follow leads, gather facts, call or sit down with sources, and assign photographs or graphics to supplement their work. Smaller staffs in newsrooms mean reporters are pressed to write more stories, but the depth of those stories often suffers as a result of this increased demand. Reporters must justify the time and subject matter of their work to superiors and carefully evaluate how executives will receive their work. One reporter observed in this study said he feels he has the process under control, at least in terms of his organization. He explained that a story would be front-page material only if it involves a trend that can subsequently be built upon. He felt this gave the organization a sense of “owning” the idea. Although this reporter was making an informal and personal observation about what his leadership tends to prefer, all newspapers owned by chains or corporations create operational directives for coverage. (These are explored later in the “Operational Directives” section).
Communication is key to putting out a news product, and newsrooms have tried and tested mechanisms to ensure that all the key players understand expectations and story status throughout the process. Newsrooms create “story budgets,” which are working headlines, and brief descriptions of stories on which reporters are working. These descriptions exist in a database accessible to all editors and staff. Papers owned by a chain will often have their budgets available to their sister papers as well as stories, photographs, and supplemental materials. There are also regional partnerships where papers with disparate ownership will share stories and resources in an attempt to cut overhead. The list of stories called “the budget” includes all of the elements that will be incorporated in the final story, such as photographs, breakout boxes (fact lists or contact information), graphics (maps or charts), and sidebars (smaller supplemental stories). The budget allows editors and page designers to plan space in the next day’s paper and decide if holding a story for a later time is in order. The budget is gathered from wire services, reporters, press releases, or press conferences, and is usually compiled by a mid-level line editor, although this responsibility normally does not fall on one person. Depending on the size of the organization, one person is normally the final arbiter (with much input) of the budget. Generally these line editors’ responsibilities include making assignments and checking on the progress of stories, listening to emergency scanners, and watching local television broadcasts to make sure nothing is missed. Reporters will often have semiprivate queues on local servers that allow editors to view the progress of unfinished work.

Meetings are also key communication tools for journalists, but the models for these meetings can vary greatly from organization to organization. Some groups have
adopted a culture of few meetings and they use e-mails for immediate communiqué. E-mails are such a norm at some sites that in-boxes rarely leave computer desktops as work is done and reporters hang on their Blackberries for e-mails. There was little distinction between e-mails and instant messaging at one newsroom observed for this study. Regularly scheduled meetings, set in stone, are the norm for some newsrooms. At these meetings, editors and staff plan front-page stories for the upcoming weeks, and they meet as enterprise reporting teams, government reporting teams, or designers. The meetings observed for this study tended to be extremely informal with individuals coming and going as they pleased. The number of newshworkers involved in any given meeting varied with the size of the newspaper. Larger papers had meetings of about seven people (such as an entire night-design team) and about once a month an all-staff meeting conducted by the executive editor would take place. Some operations were so small they had meetings attended by only one person and an editor, or they were frequently canceled. Staffers at the smaller paper indicated that this was a holdover routine from a time when staffing was more plentiful and robust. The staff went away but the routine remained. Newshworkers at meetings were often as engaged with their smart phones as they were in the actual meetings.

At some point the news gatherers must hand off their work to “news presenters.” The presenters are charged with quality control, amalgamation, and presentation of material. In other words, they read stories and put them on the pages, but this is a deceptively simple way of describing the work for which news presenters are responsible. Within this function resides remarkable complexity and accountability. Presenters design pages among other duties but the titles of these newshworkers and specific duties may vary
from place to place (copy editors, designers, and paginators to name a few). Some organizations may have copy editors devoted to only reading copy and designers who only design pages, but often they are one in the same job. Presenters receive different numbers of stories with varying lengths and components each day. They must assess page dummies (the blank pages with advertisements placed on them) and plan the placement of stories. The number of pages, number of advertisements, and configuration of those advertisements will fluctuate with each day’s edition, as will the length of the stories, the shape of the art elements, and the number of those elements. At the same time, presenters try to reflect design theory and the publication’s individual design philosophy while honoring requests made by editors and the gathering side of the operation. They also must plan to incorporate breaking news that can quickly lay the best plans asunder. The function of copyediting is the duty of the presenter. They must be versed in media law (such as laws regarding libel), proficient with grammar, and the organization’s writing style guidelines (such as Associated Press style). They must have strong institutional and community knowledge, and be good interpreters of a reporter’s intended meaning. All of this must be addressed before pages are sent to print.

All of this is done within what is normally an eight-hour work cycle.

As the printed news product has become smaller, the responsibilities of design desks have not. Not only must desk workers often upload digital content during their production window, the industry is transitioning them into regional or national “design centers.” These design centers must handle the pagination of several of the organization’s properties, often in different states. These transitions are brutal as staff are laid off or forced to relocate. Those remaining at the site must manage the flow of pages in the
traditional way until the design centers are ready. Some workers are laid off just in time
to see temporary workers brought in to do their former jobs until the transitions are
complete.

Breaking News and Digital Dynamics

As mentioned above, the online component of daily news organizations have had
a profound impact on the routines of journalists and on the way these organizations are
staffed and structured. Many organizations have shifted resources away from their printed
newspaper in favor of digital products. Newsrooms have lost revenue to online
competitors and have invested heavily in getting some of that back. They have done this
by charging individual newsworkers or online specialists with growing online value. This
takes a few different forms. Programmers create digital products such as online pages
with spins on information or services different than the traditional print formula. These
online pages go beyond standard online news pages and can include community guides
with maps, restaurant guides, or traffic reports. Administrators call these pages “news
products” and the advertising space therein “inventory.” The goal is to create as many
new (not necessarily news) products as possible and sell the inventory. As these web
pages are created, they must be maintained and, although the goal is to make these pages
as self-sustaining as possible, maintenance normally falls to site managers who update
information. These are not new jobs added to the industry but rather jobs that are quickly
replacing such traditional craft skills associated with journalism as writing and
photography. Moreover, it is not an equitable trade. Online advertising yields only about
10 percent of the revenue that print advertising does, thus newsrooms can no longer
support the staff size they once did (Karp, 2007). This shift has caused massive layoffs and overwhelming workloads for those who remain. The implications of this for newsworkers will be explored in subsequent chapters.

A sparse few traditional journalists have reaped the benefit of this new technology in their newsrooms. The ability to digitally upload stories and remotely communicate with editors has allowed a few breaking-news reporters to better merge personal obligations and their workload. The ability to customize digital products for different geographic areas has, in many markets, done away with several editions of the same newspaper (although much of this continues in areas which are notably different, such as covering different state governments). This has cut newsprint and manpower at the same time. The staff required to put out these editions are diminished because online specialists can update sites quickly, thus fewer workers are required.

**Operational Directives**

For many years large media conglomerates had been searching for the correct formula for the news industry to grow. Now, with shrinking profits, they search for a way to survive. Operational directives are the result of what Underwood (1993) called market-oriented journalism. He concluded that audiences respond poorly to it. If this study is any indication, newsworkers like it even less. Operational directives are explored in this section due to their variable nature and their direct influence on news work. It is from the desire to grow and be appealing that research-driven news directives have sprung, and surveys and focus groups are the key tools of market-oriented journalism. These types of studies are meant to create an amalgamation of journalism values (as corporate
executives understand them) and what readers will find appealing. The hope is that as demographics and trends are identified, the markets will grow and the publications will flourish. These operational directives have had many names over the years that resonate with veteran newsworkers: News 2000, Real Life, Real News, New Information Center, Key Topics, Passion Topics, etc. One former Gannett editor has this to say about the “News 2000” directives before the turn of the century:

It was an effort to re-structure the newspaper’s news content according to reader opinion. That’s why we held focus groups asking them what they wanted to see us cover. If I remember, we did make some changes based on that initiative, including some rearranging of beats and adding some new ones. We were looking ahead to all the possible changes in technology and the world that was supposed to happen in the year 2000 (personal email, Nov. 2, 2011).

These directives are meant to assure that organizational research is reflected in the product but they contain a number of friction points for the average newsworker. These friction points include requiring reporters to include key readership zip codes when calling sources, as well as certain desirable demographics in the choice of stories. The story may even be written in a manner that puts news favorable to a certain group at the top. Directives like this cause newsworkers to resist and resent such orders, but most newsworkers acknowledge that from time to time the research reinforces core journalism values (such as investigative reporting). The idea is certainly that the research serves readers, and marketing these directives gives the impression to readers that they are being served.

Naturally readers are not privy to what is removed from content or the possible manifest meanings behind these changes unless they notice these things on their own. One recent organizational push was presented to readers with the following ideas in a
front-page letter from the editor. The editor unveiled a redesign with a new look, new local section, and a renewed emphasis on investigative journalism. She explained that these changes came after months of research to better understand what was important to readers. The issues with organizational research are explored further in subsequent chapters, but as an issue of process, they present another level of daily engagement newsworkers must interpret and incorporate in their work. The ways newsworkers balance these directives with the other demands of their profession varies. Some newsworkers wholly ignore directives, forcing editors to do what one newsworker called “cowboy-up” and confront the staffer, which sometimes they do, but most often they do not. Usually managers avoid direct confrontation. This is time and again due to the manager’s workload, distaste for conflict, or his or her own belief in newsworker autonomy. Other times the directive is simply not strongly emphasized. For example, an editor may say to a photographer, “We would like to see more video on the web site.” However, the editor may put in place no plan and give no training or quota, creating the impression the instruction is only lip service to the corporate directive – a directive in which the administrator likewise may not believe.

The other reasons newsworkers may ignore directives is that often directives come periodically, change often, or come with many other directives. Newsworkers will put other priorities ahead of them believing they will become obsolete if given enough time, that the consequence of ignoring them will be mild, or simply no one will notice. Newsworkers see these directives clearly and react to them very much like Schlesinger (1978) observed, as non-substantive, and only cosmetic. Sometimes directives are not acted upon because they are seen as pandering, or lowering the civic or cultural function
the newspaper represents. For example, this could be the case when an arts reporter is asked to compile celebrity gossip briefs because they appeal to women aged 22 to 35. In the end, many resist operational directives because they feel they hurt the paper or their personal missions as civic-minded journalists or serious professionals.

Other newsworkers see new directives as an ingrained challenge, naturalized to the culture. They enjoy the shift in focus and see new directives as growth, and improving the ways readers are engaged. Often these changes open the door for promotions and new job titles. Naturally, newsworkers accepting and embracing directives are positively supported by the organization. These dynamics have changed some since Breed explored them in 1955, although this study suggests that they have been enhanced rather than changed, as they still exist in their essential forms. The social controls in the newsroom were in Breed’s observations as follows:

1. Intuitional authority and sanctions
2. Feelings of obligation and esteem for superiors
3. Mobility aspirations
4. Absence of conflicting group allegiance
5. The pleasant nature of the activities
6. News becoming a “value”

New organizational controls will be explored in subsequent chapters. Operational directives as they have been observed for this study are veiled in decisions about content, but formed so organizations can streamline operations. This streamlining means newsworkers must add more tasks and considerations to their workday.
Conclusion

The world of the modern newsworker is convoluted. Traditional concerns and craft skills within a newsroom culture have not in any way dissipated with the advent of digital products, but those digital products have yielded few new jobs and given newsworkers new levels of “process” in which they must engage within a brief news cycle. The moving or eliminating of personnel has amplified this stress. Newsworkers struggle with communication in the office and with understanding corporate directives. At the same time, understanding these directives does not guarantee newsworkers will agree with them. In fact, it normally means the opposite, as these directives are often regarded as driven by poor conclusions based on badly designed research, and are contrary to long-practiced routines and to what many journalists see as their civic missions. Organizational directives have changed in the last few years to be more overt and digitally favorable, but the overall goals are the same. The plans themselves are not new. Corporate research departments and independent consultants have been trying, and largely failing, to advise owners, publishers, and top editors how to attract readers in certain age groups or geographic locations for some time. What is new is the desperation. Whereas once these plans needed to fit neatly into the core missions of journalism, or at least a civic service, we now find journalism secondary to content that will draw readers and online viewers. The effect this has on newsworkers will be explored in subsequent chapters.

The controls put in place to guarantee a product the next day, are themselves slowing workers and adding to an overwhelming work cycle. News presenters are caught in the middle of this paradigm shift, asked to do more and more as staffing is reduced and
their own futures appear bleak. Reporters are often left just as taxed, as layoffs and
organizational directives cause them to question what and how to produce a news product
that is consistent with core values, safe from organizational sanctions, and important
rather than merely entertaining.
Chapter 5: How Newworkers See Their World

Due to the nature of the profession, newworkers are a keenly observant group. They are trained to interpret surface-level communications and people’s actions for underlying meaning. Many are adept at digging up financial records and personal information, and they consider it their duty to hold financial stakeholders and the affluent accountable for everything from criminal behavior to social injustice. Existing in the world of journalism means being surrounded by skepticism, and few can argue that the forces at work in society have given them any reason to do otherwise. That newworkers assess their own organizations in the same terms is hardly surprising. The shift from economic prosperity that has led to layoffs and restructuring has not been embraced by newworkers as the sole reason for their organizations struggles. Instead, they see poor leadership as the cause of current strife. This chapter explores what newworkers think of their world and profession, and what their personal observations indicate is the direction of journalism.

This chapter was guided by in-depth interviews and observations of journalists who performed a range of newsroom jobs. This researcher hoped that newworker voices would inform an understanding of the culture as it has grown from the newsroom processes, which were reported in the last chapter. The names of those interviewed were changed to protect their anonymity. The following questions were used as launching points for the interviews but much information was also gleaned from observations and informal conversations. The questions serve as section heads and can also be found on page 36.
As the responses were examined it was evident that the components of dominant themes were not limited to any particular question. For example, some respondents used the question regarding the value of their publication as a springboard to discuss digital transition, whereas others talked about their digital savvy when asked about their plans for the next five years. Though themes are grouped under questions where the answers most often fell, the informant might have been responding to a different question in exploring an emerging theme.

**How Do You View the Value of Your Publication for Your Readers?**

Newsworkers tended to think first in terms of the civic responsibility of journalism. Many expressed that, in the face of media overload, their products should be more important than ever for giving context and clarity to readers in a convoluted world. They found the services they provided to be unique and often superior to other local media and online services not affiliated with their brand. They were also hyper aware that they were struggling to perform these functions with depleted resources and staff. Cathy, a line editor with twenty-seven years of experience at a small daily newspaper, explained her understanding of what she called a “broken business model,” which made the newsroom more beholden to advertising than ever, even as advertising dollars were drying up:

The newspaper used to be a good watchdog – we used to do a lot of investigative reporting. That’s what I see our role as – watchdogs and helping people understand the community. Now we’ve cut staff and hours so much that we are not doing that any more. Investigative journalism? I’m trying to think what was the last thing we did that was investigative. Right now we’re doing a jobs package that’s linked to our classified
That’s the closest thing we’re doing to investigation. That to me is tragic.

We’re missing out on investigating things, but we’re not even getting regular news covered. It’s catch as catch can, if someone is here who knows how to do something; it gets done, if not, whatever. It’s a vicious cycle, the economy is bad, advertising is gone, and we can’t get it back. The papers are dinky. Classified is decimated. We don’t have the money to keep the staff to keep these papers full.

Opinions such as Cathy’s were dominant. Even at publications that had a focus on investigative reporting, staffs were aware that they did not do nearly as much as they had in the past.

Several opinions regarding the shift toward digital media and the future of journalism were positive, or at least hopeful. These opinions involved the belief that corporate-driven research and directives will lead to news outlets finding their audiences again. The redefining of newspapers as “information centers,” was one of the many operational directives in which some newsworkers were placing their hopes. Being non-medium specific as a means of reaching audiences was seen by some newsworkers as staying on the cutting edge. Butch, a line editor with twelve years of experience in journalism and working at a large metro newspaper, viewed the digital shift and personnel reduction in the follow way:

Journalism is going through a big transition. I hear a lot in terms of, you can’t charge for your product online because people are going to get the information from somewhere else. I think about how in (city) there is one person who covers city hall, one who covers the county government, a couple of reporters that cover the police. I think it’s different, but I think the fundamentals are the same.

There is a swath of our readers who don’t expect to get their news on the end of their driveway; they expect to get it on their phone or on their Blackberry. I think the platform has changed. Certainly the reporting experience has changed with the advent of blogs and community journalism, but the paper has been aggressive. When we’ve had to lose staff, the staff we’ve lost has mostly been in middle management … we
could do more with more people, but I can’t honestly sit here and complain about resources in terms of news gatherers.

*If You Had It To Do Over, Would You Still Have Become a Journalist?*

Who are newsworkers? The reasons newsworkers chose their profession were as varied as there are jobs within the profession. The overwhelming majority examined for this study said that if given the option again, they would still go into journalism. However, those responding negatively had strong bitter feelings about the money-driven nature of news production and the recent changes in how news organizations are structured. Although most said they would still become journalists if given this decision to make again, this was not an indicator of whether an individual was despondent about his/her profession. Many informants were quick to take the opportunity to tell this researcher the story of their personal journey through journalism. The reasons for going into journalism touched on several themes, and individual reasons certainly overlapped among them. Many informants said that they had an affinity for, or discovered a talent for, a craft associated with journalism. “I loved to write,” was a dominant theme for these practitioners, as was enjoying taking photographs or editing. These newskers saw journalism as a way to “practice writing” or “practice photography” just as a doctor would “practice medicine.” Justin, a photographer with fourteen years of experience at a small daily newspaper, said this of his direction:

I started in photography in high school and started thinking about what kind of pictures I wanted to take. At that time I had a different view of what a professional photographer was or did, I thought the only options were newspapers, magazines, working in a studio, or shooting weddings, and I thought, I don’t want to work in a studio, or shoot weddings, so I went into journalism. So, would I do it again? Yeah, I think so, because I
still like making the kind of pictures you make as a newspaper photographer.

This indicated that the medium itself perhaps had little meaning for newsworkers, but few newsworkers encountered in this study transitioned from other news media outlets to newspapers. There are indications that this is changing. In this age of converged newsrooms, many organizations find that sharing resources with other media, such as broadcast media in the area of online content, is a good way to cut overhead. Still others try to drum up business by doing public access shows with no advertising or other support, in hopes that everyone can profit from the “synergy.” Although this yields no direct monetary return, it is a creative way to direct journalistic endeavors and it is enlivening to those who participate.

Some informants had legacy connections to journalism, having had a parent in the field. Others were a part of journalism’s long journeyman tradition. They found newspaper work a viable option for employment following primary school in their hometowns. Interviewees in this group worked, at one point, in other departments at the newspaper, such as distribution or printing, and moved into the newsroom for higher pay, more interesting work, or because of an institutional reorganization. These newsworkers tended to be older.

The desire to do something satisfying often merged with a sense of citizenship for many newsworkers. Several shared that they felt a civic calling and some even called it a “higher” calling. These responders were moved by the social and historic watchdog functions of newspaper journalism and saw their work as way to give voice to the disenfranchised or make strides toward social justice. Roger, a line editor with thirty-one
years of experience in journalism and working at a small daily newspaper, explained how social consciousness moved him:

When I was in college I was involved in some social change movements. It was the ’60s, and early ’70s. And I would still like to see more people get involved in whatever is important to them. And perhaps move just a small piece of society forward. I realized a long time ago that what I’m going to be able to influence is going to be right around me. And so you try to do the best job you can in that sphere of influence. Part of that for me is the newspaper. I try to keep government honest and try to get people together.

Would You Encourage Your Child, Grandchild, or Youth You Mentor to Enter This Field?

Answers to this question came with qualification and informants tended to explain their answers in terms of the mentored individual’s personal choices. Very few interviewees gave their answer as an unequivocal “yes.” Also, few informants were positive about the prospect of a youth following in their footsteps, although they explained that the choice was up to the youth. This group, as the one above, elaborated on their reasoning by citing the social function and importance of journalism, and they highlighted the positive aspects of the job, such as the gratification of seeing one’s work in print, being among the first to know about events, and the sense of fellowship prevalent in the environment. One of the most positive responses came from Donald, a line editor at a small daily newspaper with thirty-eight years of journalism experience:

I would still encourage people to go in. You know when I see college students expressing their interest I’m very hopeful. To me it’s something that I think, not only validates what I’ve done my whole life, but I think young people bring a savvy that I never had. They know the different means of delivering messages and so forth. So the fact they are interested is, I think, reason for real hope that the media does have a future. I think people are still interested in news, but I think they’re selecting different ways of learning news.
The majority of journalists were not as positive as Donald about the profession. Most interviewees said unequivocally “no” to the question of their children or protégées following in their footsteps or explained that, while the decision would be up to the individual, the profession did not offer a secure future, nor was it a goal worthy of maintaining. Younger newsworkers cited money, hours, and frequent layoffs, while seasoned interviewees cited a growing disrespect for the efforts they put forth and the traditional skills they had cultivated. Most sensed they were costing upper management too much money, and that their efforts were rarely good enough. The impression was that the industry was slowly sliding away from them. Todd, a copy editor with thirty-one years of experience at a large metro newspaper, gave comments indicative of this recurring theme:

I think that the newspaper side of printed journalism is going to slowly go away. You know we’re seeing now that newspapers are shrinking because things like Craigslist, Amazon and eBay are taking away all the classified ads. The opportunity isn’t going to be there in print journalism. As far as the rest of journalism goes, its reliability, credibility, and quality are all being chopped bit-by-bit and week-by-week by the onslaught of blogs. Kids believe what they read on the screen more than what they read on the page, and I know that from my kids, they don’t even read the newspaper. I’ll show them an article I’ve written and they don’t even read that. My daughter reads books, my son reads graphic novels, but they are just completely glued to the Internet all the time, so I don’t think there is going to be opportunity in this field to make a living. It’s a bad way to make a living and any desire to be involved in the print product is crazy because it’s just not going to hold on long enough for kids to make a living. If they want to blog, that’s fine, but they should not become disseminators of news, no way.
All Things Being Equal, What Would You Like To Be Doing Professionally in the Next Five Years?

Many newsworkers were willing to leave journalism and all other forms of media work. They cited money, hours, loss of interest, pending retirement, or the combination of these as reasons for an exodus. Other interviewees said they wanted out of newspapers but would enjoy doing other media-related work. Public relations and web business development were among the favored choices. Of the newsworkers who said they would like to stay in media but not necessarily journalism, many also indicated they would like to participate in other creative endeavors. Some hoped to write books in the form of non-fiction and fiction, and one even had an idea for an interactive-children’s book. Only two interviewees said they would like to climb higher in their organizations, but most newsworkers said that they would like to stay in their current positions and were willing to change as their positions evolved. Some were excited about an evolving field, and others were resigned to their fates. Ron, an online editor with eleven years of experience at a small daily newspaper, exemplified the former view:

I guess I would like to be doing what I’m doing now. My job has changed so much in the last eleven years. I’ve done a lot of different things and things have changed so much, but still it boils down to, I’m still a journalist, and I don’t see that changing over the course of the next five years. Now how I do that job will change, will continue to change, but the bottom line is I will still be a journalist. So, yeah, five years from now I plan to be doing basically the same things I’m doing now, it will just be different in how our customers consume that product of news. That’s what’s going to change.

Shelly, a features reporter and columnist with more than twenty years of experience working at the same small newspaper also wished to continue, but she was
more resigned than enthusiastic. She felt she was submissive to tasks that were no longer appealing to her, in a field that was leaving her and her skill-set behind:

God willing, if the paper survives, I’ll probably still be here. Maybe it’s just laziness, but I would like to still be here. I wish I could go back to a more expanded features role and less of this being pulled in so many different directions. My dream job would be to do my column all the time. I would come up with stories that way, and not have to do things that have to be done. Some of it may be laziness that I don’t aspire to do something else. Every time somebody else has left the paper, I kind of question why I’m still here.

One key to newworker satisfaction to emerge from this look at professional aspirations was that fulfillment seemed proportional to how creative newworkers felt they could be in their jobs. Those wishing to leave to write books were expressing a wish for creativity and even Shelly who seemed to lose all passion for her work longed for the autonomy and self-direction she once had in her job.

What is Important To You Personally and/or Professionally and How Does It Come Through in Your Work?

This question was somewhat ambiguous for many journalists, but certain approaches to answering the question did dominate the responses. Several saw the personal and professional importance of their work to be improvement of the human condition, much as Roger noted above. Most approached the question in terms of professionalism and saw the different tasks and functions associated with journalism, and the way they perform them, as valuable. Others voiced values that were desirable in most professions, such as organizational skills, hard work, and commitment, as standards that they hoped came through in their work. The example set by the interviewees for their
family was paramount according to informants and it was influential in their approach to their jobs. Liam, a reporter with thirty-two years of journalism experience, and working for a small daily newspaper said this about values, family, and work:

When you have a family, it all becomes very important – closeness, caring for each other. And those are the things I think I bring to work. Honesty. The things I want my daughters to learn and to understand and to project in the world are those things. When you write for newspapers, you represent the things people say, and to do so, accuracy is key … There is a code to it and I think it’s related to having children and having a family, a loving family and being devoted to it. You’re devoted to your craft of journalism the same way. It’s important to me that I do a good job; it really bothers me if I think I didn’t, or people say I didn’t. You have to be honest to that, just like you have to be honest with your family and your children, you have to follow them, you have to be concerned with them. The newspaper is the same way … I think those are related, those things are never easy but there is a sense of accomplishment, just like raising a family.

Many newsworkers were passionate about their families, but the range of interests in areas related to journalism, such as politics, business, and entertainment, also dominated life outside the newsroom. One line editor would like to start a “yurt” dealership when he retires (a yurt is a shelter adapted from Central Asian nomads that functions as a vacation home) and run the business much like a recreational vehicle dealership. That former athletes and sports enthusiasts become sports writers is hardly surprising. One online specialist refereed soccer outside of work. The world of news seldom stops for journalists when their shifts end, but beyond the obvious related pursuits the newsworkers in this study enjoyed activities that ranged from gardening, to singing, to woodworking, to art.
What is an Important Cultural Dynamic in Journalism You Would Like People to Understand?

Newsroom atmospheres were responding to a paradigm shift from a print medium to a dominating digital component, as well as to what many viewed as a failing business model. Newsworkers saw these considerations as poised to sever them from their jobs. The fear involved in such an existence came through in nearly every interview and is the most prevalent cultural shift affecting newsworkers today. Other cultural issues included cynicism as a shared trait among journalists, the importance of teamwork and building relationships, distrust of the employing organization, and, along with that, feelings that they were not respected or valuable to the organization. These latter concerns are tied to layoffs, poor pay, and the changing business model. Several felt that their traditional skills were underappreciated or misunderstood and that they were occupying space on the payroll that the organization wanted to fill with younger, multifaceted staffers who are more digitally savvy and cheaper to employ. Some see this cultural shift as an exciting new challenge, while others say it is an opportunity to enjoy the last years of their dying trade. Todd, the copy editor cited above, with thirty-one years of experience at a large metro newspaper, said this:

The culture has changed a lot in the last three years. Our department has gone from 29 to 13 people. In a sense we went from being a newspaper that was corporately influenced, run like a corporation, stiff and quiet to now where it’s more like working at a small paper where ideas are free flowing, people are laughing, people are talking across the room. We don’t worry about Human Resources anymore; I mean I used to get written up. Someone would complain about me to HR. Now everyone jokes about HR. I have a telephone receiver that has no cord but I call it my HR hotline, so when someone says something inappropriate I grab it and say, hello, HR. Three years ago we never would have done that … It’s like people, we’re on this ship, it’s slowly sinking, let’s enjoy it, have some
fun, and lighten up a little bit, because all that other stuff, it really doesn’t matter.

Most, however, were far from upbeat about Todd’s “slowly sinking ship.” They had difficulty understanding the company’s business goals so they did not know how to train for new positions, which may offer more security. This manifested itself in the newsroom in a number of ways. The most common was described as a loss of morale and work ethic among the group. Greta, a copy editor with ten years of experience working at a small newspaper, and a family history in newspaper journalism, said this:

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.

Conclusion

This chapter, at a macro level, revealed what rank-and-file journalists perceived as influential to their work in newsrooms. The interviews, informed by journalists who did a multitude of information-gathering and news-processing jobs, painted a picture of a changing profession that is becoming difficult to navigate. The depth of the questions and face-to-face interviews added to the honesty and personal nature of the findings.
Newsworkers are deeply concerned about their profession and many offer creative solutions to deal with financial issues and struggles. One resounding theme is that management does not care what rank-and-file newsworkers think or care about their ideas. Moreover, they do not have a comfortable or safe avenue to share these ideas. The concerns and observations of journalists about the modern newsroom fall into other themes as well. Three dynamics or friction points emerged as being vital components in the construction of reality being re-formed around newsworkers. All of these relate in some way to the shift to digital platforms. The first issue to emerge centered on the collective acceptance of a broken business model and informants could not see how their businesses would make enough money to operate in the next few years. Newsworkers could see little indication that leadership had a desire to save the “sinking ship” or their jobs. The second idea focused on the civic responsibility of the press, as it existed within the reality of the services newsworkers provided. Some saw the media as a users’ market, with the public being well served by the ability to access news and information on demand, whereas others found the role newspapers played in communities withering, with no better media outlet able or willing to fill the void. Some newsworkers saw the jobs and resources lost to downsizing as frightening and personally damaging. Job satisfaction in the changing newsroom was the third theme to emerge. Newsworkers were asking themselves if newspapers are still serving their interests as craftsmen and creative communicators, the implication being that their skills as wordsmiths and creators of useable information were being undervalued as news organizations began to privilege digital and technological savvy.
The various sources of influence as defined by Shoemaker and Reese (1996) are indeed at work in the modern newsroom. Informants addressed elements of ideology, extra-media concerns, organizational pressures, and media routines in a naturalized way as they talked about their world. What was divergent was the weight individual journalists gave to each of the influences in the form of a pressure, stress, or priority in their jobs. Ideology, if journalism itself can be said to be ideological, tended to be at the forefront for newsmen as individuals showed a sophisticated understanding and belief in the social and civic functions of journalism in society. Many understood how economic forces have compromised those roles of integrity in the past, but they did not feel particularly compromised by these forces in the present. The hindrance to them doing their jobs to the fullest was more closely associated with the economic pressures of what many journalists called a broken business model, perpetuated by management, rather than to a capitalist system under which that business operated. This economic concern would be consistent with Bagdikian’s (1990) views that dependence on revenue will restrict news content. However, many subjects viewed that restriction as physical rather than ideological in nature. In other words, fewer employees were available to produce good work and less space was available for that work. These economic pressures also led to the adoption of new routines, which are not historically consistent with journalism talents. One example of this was wordsmiths required to learn how to upload stories to the web sites, engage social media, and take video. Fewer workers also means they must field traditional tasks as well, like taking photographs, copy editing, and designing pages.

The influences as imagined by Shoemaker and Reese should perhaps be refined in light of this study, with each element of influence, regardless of level, becoming
concentrated in the newworkers’ world, like material forced through a funnel (See Figure 1). These new routines lessen the role of management in the direction of work for their staffs, as time for new and old tasks are constrained within a news cycle that is more packed than ever. One editor described himself as a circus performer, spinning plates and juggling content. Closer adherence to changing routines lends credibility to Molotch and Lester’s (1974) interpretation of social construction and the notion that the power holders are not always the final authority. Newworkers saw themselves having increasing autonomy in the face of shifting platforms because no one had time to watch them, thus individuals were able to interject their personalities more overtly into their work, although they were generally enjoying the work less and less and did not feel their jobs were safe.

Concerns and values of newworkers are consistent with traditional journalistic values but are also the result of pressures that emerge from changing platforms, economics, or other external issues. The reality of newworkers today, as they see it, is quite different than the reality of the past. Routines are a direct influence on individual journalists, according to Shoemaker and Reece’s model, and informants saw this dynamic clearly. Newworkers who favored elements of the journalism “craft,” such as writing or photography, found the technological shift toward digital platforms uncomfortable. Pressure was exerted by organizations to adopt media routines that move away from traditional roles, which many informants enjoyed and were often the reason they got into the business in the first place. Digital-related routines did not require the skill sets of many in the business. This caused resentment that responsibilities grow while staff sizes
shrink. Ultimately these factors lead to poor performance in both traditional and digital arenas.

Although several journalists adopted this new paradigm with enthusiasm, the majority was struggling, indicating that newsworkers are resistant, if not impervious, to having their reality constructed for them.

![Hierarchical Model Diagram](image)

**Figure 1: The hierarchical model with the individual as focal point:**

In the model above each element of influence is pushed through the newsworker’s world. Those levels of influence farther from contact with the newsworker create an ambiguous manifestation in the newsworker’s routines. These non-direct and indefinite influences are symbolized by the spaces between the dots and influences become increasingly indefinite the more macro an influence becomes. Regardless of level, influence must invariably concentrate itself through the newsworkers’ work to find an audience. This is like material forced through a funnel. The newsworker is always the final arbitrator of the way this content takes form, as they are the last to touch the material.

*Source: Schulte and Bernt (2011), adapted from Shoemaker and Reese (1996)*
Chapter 6: Modern Social Controls

As indicated in the last chapter, newsworkers see themselves as pressed by new digital routines, industry confusion, and organizations’ loss of journalistic focus. Continuing observations of this industry’s culture revealed these are far from the only occupational pressures, and far from the whole story. The issues newsworkers described are in fact just a few of the pressures they are dealing with among others. Breed (1955) looked at these issues in terms of social control and policy building, and found that policy was often covert in nature. “Policy, if worked out implicitly, would have to include motivations, reasons, alternatives, historical developments, and other complicating material. Thus a twilight zone permitting a range of deviations appears” (Breed, 1955, p. 332). The ever-increasing pressures of the modern newsroom cause management to scramble to direct newsworkers, and struggle with finding a direction that will have permanence. This chapter, though not inclusive of every manifestation of policy, explores many prominent social controls and policies, updates the dynamics explored by Breed in a classic newsroom setting, and adds modern controls that were revealed by the participant observation phase of this study. Excerpts from field notes are used to illustrate and support the assertions made in this chapter.

Authority and Sanctions Merged with Organizational Directives

Breed reported on an “ethical taboo” that once prevented policy makers such as publishers from “overtly commanding” journalists to follow organizational directives. This came about for a number of reasons, but the most influential was an ethical idea that journalistic norms were sacred, a trust guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, carrying
weight in its civic function and manifesting in the newsroom. Policy makers would not have considered meddling in this sacred “calling” when newsrooms were fiscally healthy. As that health has consistently declined for the past few years and organizations look to readership studies to bolster their circulation, those journalistic norms are regularly infringed upon by the business office. In the past, organizational directives based on audience research have caused newspapers to create new beats or new design directives, but core principles remained sacred. Now, in the most desperate of economic times, that “meddling taboo” has all but disappeared and a new rulebook is being written. In many cases, sanctions on newsworkers for not following organizational directives are much more overt, much more insidious, and much more calculated. This is perhaps the result of confusion as to what the right direction is for news organizations and philosophies certainly vary. However, the majority of organizations are looking more closely than ever to readership research to save them in this time of economic need. One instance of this dynamic is in the following passage from field notes:

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Sally and Margot

One week, Sally, an education reporter, planned to write a story and present data from a set of school evaluations being released by the state. When Sally discovered that twelve inner-city schools out of the twenty-two on her beat were taken off academic emergency – a status they struggled to resolve the preceding year – and that there were no significant changes, good or bad, in the suburban schools on her beat, she chose to focus her story mostly on the schools in the city. She assigned a photograph of a
classroom at the school that demonstrated the most improvement. This photo featured a black teacher in a suit teaching with animated hand gestures and black students engaged in the class. Sally’s story mentioned the inner-city improvements in her lead, mentioned all of the area schools later in the story, and secured space for the reports of all of the area schools on page two. At the same time Margot, one of the managing editors, had been charged with making sure suburban areas, that were strong in readership, were served every day by the content of the paper. There were few inner-city readers. Thus Margot raised the question, “why did we shoot (photograph) an inner-city school?”

Margot had the story rewritten with a regional focus, the former lead was moved to paragraph five (considered “buried” by many journalistic norms) and the photograph was replaced with a surplus photograph from a “first day of school story” that ran earlier that week. That photo was of a white mother hugging her son on his first day of school at one of the suburban communities’ schools. Margot never saw the original photo nor did she wish to see it.

* * *

Sally was subsequently sanctioned for not following policy. The sanction was public and immediate, as Margot pointed out Sally’s “mistake” in front of her peers. Margot was visibly angry in the afternoon editors meeting following the incident. She framed the instance as a reporter unwilling to incorporate into her work necessary changes for the operational model. She said the driving force behind the newspaper was the fact that it is struggling to survive. However, Margot presented even more justification for her actions. She explained that Sally was “just lazy” for not going to the suburban schools, that she had too close a relationship with administration at the inner-
city schools, and that she knew better. Sally’s peers strongly believed the story and photo were more compelling before Margot’s changes. Margot was performing the directive she had been given, but collegial relationships and Sally’s dignity were damaged.

_Esteem for Superiors Meets a Digital Divide_

The previous section indicated how the collegial relationships that Breed (1955) once observed as a positive aspect of newswork have evolved. The relationships between superiors and rank-and-file newsworkers have become strained. Newsworkers have historically viewed themselves with great pride and many still do (Brennen, 1995). The establishment of expertise, community knowledge, technological knowledge, and craftsmanship has, in the past, made journalists unambiguously valuable commodities. This once encouraged editors and publishers to defer to newsworkers and depend on them to produce the details of newsgathering and the presentation of the day as they saw fit, and interact with them as peers in a collegial and dignified way. This in turn encouraged executives to recognize a symbiotic patron/client relationship. Newsworkers returned this relationship in kind, seeing their employers “paternally” as Brennon described, and giving their best efforts as much for the organization as for the civic trust. This collegial atmosphere is certainly not extinct, but it is not as prevalent as it once was. Many newsworkers have friendly relationships with their management and they may be observed going to lunch together, making friendly conversation, and perhaps more importantly, having frank and measured conversations about content choices. However, as noted above, the goals of the organization and newworker often diverge. Much of this
can be attributed to organizational directives and those directives associated with technology are prevalent factors in the rift.

Technology has made such crafts as photography much less mystifying to management. Once photographers were considered not only masters of focus, composition, and drama, but darkroom technicians and manipulators of film as well. The range of skills required to be a good photographer were broad. The age of digital photography has made the transfer and production of images easier. Management can send reporters with a “point and shoot” digital camera to a scene and have the reporter return with what is, to management at least, a photograph just as serviceable as the one a staff photographer might have taken. This devaluing of the photographer has been compounded by how few pages are now in the newspapers themselves, resulting in less need for photographs in print. Online products have also changed the role and worth of news photographers, as they are asked to produce images for online galleries of events, which are normally composed of the photographer’s “throwaway” shots. Although the galleries do get many “hits,” giving a photographer this task serves to demonstrate that management views a photographer’s skills as easily replaced.

In general, newsworkers, not just photographers, are asked to do more in the digital realm. Unlike traditional skills in which many professionals have had the advantage of years to master and often a college major for support, newsworkers are asked to respond to new technology much more quickly. If the newsworkers question the wisdom of the digital direction, are slow to adapt, or have duties that do not allow time for retraining, management will often label them as “resistant to change,” “dinosaurs,” or
just not committed enough. Layoffs are often the result. (See the section “Sidestepping,” page 84, for an example of this from the field.)

**Mobility**

Fewer jobs in the industry means less mobility. As explained in the last chapter, few newsworkers reported a desire to advance within their own organizations. Mobility in journalism has traditionally been reserved for those willing to move laterally to other newspapers. This was a common source of promotions, as well as a source of raises for those who wish to remain rank-and-file newsworkers, as they are often able to negotiate for more money at a fresh newspaper. Breed (1955) presented the idea that journalism is a stepping stone to other media work, but this is no longer as viable as it once was. Public relations firms and companies that employ public relations professionals at one time valued the experience and insider knowledge that journalists brought to the table. This dynamic has changed somewhat with university mass communication programs offering specialists in this area. Likewise, journalists rarely see public relations as a comfortable transition. Although journalists are overall an imaginative group, venues to practice journalism outside the mainstream sphere are difficult to find and even more difficult to maintain. Many reporters say that they would like to practice journalism for themselves but that they feel stuck. Thus, with the shrinking of newspaper operations and the organizations holding all the cards, many newsworkers are desperate to hold onto their livelihoods. It is also difficult for those willing to move up the ladder. The first stepping stone out of the rank-and-file of newswork is middle management. As organizations became top heavy with middle management in more prosperous years, positions like
deputy metro editors, or assistant features editors, were common but they were also the first positions cut when newspapers became less prosperous (Tourish, Paulsen, Hobman, and Brodia, 2004). At the newsrooms observed for this study, those positions were also the first on the chopping block when management restructured for a leaner newsroom. Cutting unique positions in middle management allowed those tasks to be absorbed by their former supervisors or the newworkers the middle managers once supervised. It also allowed administration to ignore seniority because the positions were unique. Even with this being the case, some newworkers still want to move up the newsroom ladder. Individuals must walk a thin line between knowing what the organization will find favorable and how far they can deviate from core principles. Consider the following case:

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**Matt’s Ambitions**

Matt, a copy desk shift leader at a mid-sized newspaper, was the only new hire on his organization’s copy desk in more than four years. When recounting how he moved into his current leadership position he explained he took on extra work whenever possible and listened closely to changing organizational directives to know where opportunities to get noticed might arise. He made himself instrumental in a directive to improve consistency between several newspapers, as Matt’s team was part of the chain’s area design hub. This process included Matt’s heavy involvement in a redesigned print product and the accompanying research. Matt explained that he generally said “yes” to company directives and extra work, and that he would continue to say yes until it become apparent he will not advance any further in the organization. He sees himself poised to
advance as older management structures fell away and gaps in the structure were created. As this happens, Matt wants his superiors to positively reflect on his support and hard work.

Saying yes was not always effective and came with challenges. Matt was at a large meeting, involving a consultant and many editors from different properties. The meeting was an instruction on how to report to readers the internal processes newspapers engage in as they get information for in-depth reporting packages (a self-promotional endeavor to be sure). This is called “process language.” One seasoned editor expressed the opinion that readers were less likely to care about the process than the story itself. To this, the consultant explained that those were not the customers to cultivate. Matt, wanting to add his support to the momentum of the conversation said, “It is like that old business adage, ‘Fire your worst customers.’” This was a serious faux pas for Matt.

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The room poorly received this idea. Though Matt voiced the exact intent of the consultant, the idea of “firing readers,” or treating them callously, was an affront to journalism norms beyond what could be accepted in this public forum.

Moving between different properties in a chain as a means of upward mobility, even within the same company, is also difficult. If staff can find an open position, “performance reviews” are an influence. These reviews tend to be unflattering, even for good employees. According to many workers, performance reviews are tools used to justify keeping merit raises low. Setting improvement goals and highlighting successes
(the formal purpose of performance reviews) are secondary to management playing with the reviews’ arbitrary numbers. In other words, giving a reporter a 3 out of 5 in a performance category like “Cultivates Sources” is difficult to argue (especially considering reporters must at times be adversarial with sources). The abrasive and forthright nature of some journalists, the difficulty many have with transitions, and the marginal nature of bargaining groups compound “performance issues.” (This is developed further in the section, Challenged Allegiance, Reorganization and Control, on page 84).

Upward mobility in newspaper organizations exists most prominently in the realm of new digital products, although the technical aspect of this online facet has little to do with operational “journalism” as a practice. “Online” is a powerful influence on decisions by managers because they prioritize online growth. Because server management, information technology, and online product building are rarely within the traditional journalist’s skill set, trained journalists are more often working directly for online specialists. There has been much restructuring and adding of positions for those able to create, manage and make profitable the digital world. Those newsworkers who cannot are often laid off. Some of these sought-after digital specialists have little or no journalism background, but they do have good technical knowledge. Some clever newsworkers have found a place in this trend, but depending on the sophistication of the operation, they also find themselves practicing very little journalism in the traditional sense. Instead they find themselves “cultivating” an assortment of materials, updating websites, and reporting on online traffic. Moreover, they report to those who see journalistic value in terms of online
performance. For instance a “gallery” (an online group of photographs from an event) has much more “value” than an “investigative story” because it generates many more hits.

Many newsworth workers are put off by market research that they believe infringes on core principals, though this has been the practice for many years. Management tends to look at “digital” as one more transition to which newsworth workers will need to adapt, but there are few incentives in place for newsworth workers to try. Newsworth workers have been the unwitting victims of online and digital products across the board, as they are asked to produce things outside of their training that produce “hits,” but are often composed of frivolous “light” journalism. Even though news organizations are getting hits, these hits are not resulting in dollars. Those hits do, however, function to demonstrate to management that traditional newsworth workers are easily replaced, as the skills to do these jobs come from non-journalism disciplines and younger newsworth workers are easily trained to do them.

**Challenged Allegiance, Reorganization and Control**

Loyalty on both ends of the management – newsworth worker spectrum is strained as each side struggles to meet the other’s needs. Seasoned newsworth workers struggle with the digital talent an employer wants and newsworth workers feel the talents they have are not valued. Breed (1955) revealed that unions and bargaining groups have very little influence in terms of policy. This absence of negotiation between organizations and bargaining groups allows organizations to make policy decisions with impudence. Unions only have influence in terms of the contracts under which they operate and for jobs that are also clearly defined. Organizations learned long ago that a carefully planned
reorganization could break apart many of the bonds of these contracts. Some
newsworker’s unions have been traded away for a piece of the corporate pie. This comes
in the form of 401Ks and profit-sharing incentives that management will often refuse to
put into place while dealing with unions. As organizations have become adept at
manipulating structure, newsworkers often see their unions as toothless and are happy for
the immediate gratification of a 401K savings plan. Some organizations refuse to bargain
in good faith by not sharing employee terms and salaries with the collective leadership.
Many newsworkers are stretched too thin to participate in union organizations. Still
others see their participation as detrimental to their upward movement. The Teamsters
represent over 60,000 workers in the printing and publishing industries, many of which
are newspaper print workers, delivery drivers, and designers (Teamsters, nd). The
Newspaper Guild, Communication Workers of America, is a union of more than 34,000
journalists and media workers. It actively seeks membership, works to improve the
working conditions of media professionals, and promotes ethics and standards in the
industry (Newsguild, 2012). The Newspaper Guild’s web site features news concerning
labor issues and the means to become part of the group, but shows few direct ways for
newsworkers to connect with each other, share advice, or mobilize workers experiencing
common issues. At the three papers observed for this study, only one was a “union shop.”
One had no union at all, and the other had only a very old collective bargaining
agreement. This agreement had last been updated in 2001 and only one member of the
employee-representative board remained at the paper. The others had been lost through
layoffs and attrition. At properties that still maintain an active union, newsworker
interests are perhaps more protected than properties without union affiliation, but there
are many insidious ways to work around contracts. Management devotes a great deal of
time and legal resources to that effort, assuring all legal requirements are met before
proceeding with layoff directives. This forces union leadership to be reactive rather than
proactive in advocating for employees. Case in point:

* * *

Sidestepping

One executive editor found her photography department to be overstaffed. She
had transferred from a larger newspaper and that organization maintained fewer
photographers. At the same time, the organization was redesigning the newspaper there,
and at several other sites. Leadership elected to create a more uniform and formulated
template to design pages. This was done so its flagship newspaper and other smaller
newspaper properties designed by the pagination team could work between products with
greater efficiency. This “consistency directive” was seen as necessary so that designers
could manage many pages in a short amount of time. Placement of photos became
constrained by this process, as a set number and size were predetermined for the sake of
consistency. Traditionally, designers use their discretion to place art and other elements
on a news page. Beyond that, the redesign featured a “Local Focus” page that had one
consistent place for a photo. This photo would be provided by reader contributions
whenever possible.

At the same time, management offered opportunities to photographers and others
in the newsroom to cross train with other areas of the operation, notably as broadcast
videographers and online specialists. This was not framed as a “job saving” directive in
any way, but rather as “personally enhancing.” The photographers who chose to defer cross training picked up additional work so that their peers could participate.

Before any layoffs were announced, planning was well underway for a “breaking news team.” The first skill mentioned on several of the team’s job descriptions was photography. These descriptions were not disclosed to staff. The breaking news team was planned as a merged endeavor between several elements of the operation. Newspaper, online, broadcast, and radio would share the breaking news team and its resources. The broadcast news director was clear that any new positions were to be “entry level with no previous union affiliation.”

Management decided on layoffs before the team’s formation, and justified ignoring seniority because not all of the photographers were crosstrained. Management informed union leadership that there would be photographer layoffs the week before they occurred. A Pulitzer Prize-winning photo editor resigned in protest before the layoffs could be made, and union representatives brought the situation to the attention of their lawyers.

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This information taken together indicates this was a well planned effort by management to trim older staff with higher paychecks. The staff certainly viewed the layoffs that way. Organizations are perhaps not all as nefarious as this narrative indicates. The history of unions and the press has often revealed instances of management painted into corners by union stipulations and contracts. These stipulations were prohibitive of change and technologically specific. Some newsworkers even had a “job for life” clause
written into their contract. Still, older newworkers see their younger counterparts unable to make what they consider a fair wage and they believe this situation will not change.

**Pleasant Nature of Activities**

In light of the previous sections, it may be surprising to learn that newworkers are very fond of certain aspects of their jobs. Warren Breed (1955) explained that being among the first to know inside information and deal with important timely issues is extremely attractive to newworkers. In fact, this study confirms that those attracted to the news business appear to have an underlying need to see and understand social mechanisms at work around them. The tasks associated with the job are, in fact, a joy when they are in keeping with the skills and core values newworkers entered the business to practice. Breed also observed that there is a sense of “in-groupness” in the newsroom. He noted that staffs were not treated as underlings but as peers, allowing morale to stay high and making up for relatively low pay. This is no longer the case. The appearances of in-group dynamics are still in place but are challenged by the organizational directives that force administrators to exercise a heavy hand (as evidenced above by Sally and Margot). In turn, there is little respect for executives or any authority. Editors who are directly involved in the daily work, and have genuine empathy for those under them, are often seen as comrades, but these same newworkers feel they can see through the platitudes of other administrators. Morale is not high, usually because newworkers do not see their goals aligning with those of the organization. At the same time, they are moved about the newsroom like chess pawns to protect the more important administrators in the back row. When administrators say they regret layoffs or are tying
to avoid them, many newworkers believe they are lying. When administrators say they will do what is best for the newspaper or the organization, newworkers brace themselves for the worst. Moreover, this discord between newworkers and administrators underscores the fact that newworkers make low pay and deadens the satisfaction of being part of a “live wire” organization. These elements remove the motivation for newworkers to perform to their potential.

This communication deficit creates a quietly adversarial relationship between newworkers and administrators, both playing a collegial game while conspiring to protect themselves. One line editor said of morale and the general tone of his workplace, “It’s just not fun anymore, and this was not the case even a few years ago.”

\textit{News Itself is a “Value”}

Many managers rise from the newworker ranks, presumably because the passions that led them to the industry in the first place are philosophically aligned with the newworkers they manage. As Breed (1955) addressed news as a “value,” he concluded that newsgathering as a goal trumps discussion on policy, ethics, and even objectivity. As seen above, it can also trump newworkers’ best interests in terms of job security. Breed also noted that executives and staffers are cemented together by their mutual interest in news. This promotes the in-group dynamic also noted above. After all, executives do not have time to chase down or present news stories. Newworkers often view their work as a higher calling of profound civic worth. This is a primary motivation for them, however, as financial issues, administrative concerns, and new technologies have challenged newsrooms, news as a core mission of administrators becomes not only
secondary, but poorly defined as well. This is evidenced in the passage about Sally and Margot. The question of what the company’s mission should be was once clear in the mind of the newworker, but administrators see the company bleeding money, thus they seek more lucrative directions. This leaves newworkers often asking the question, “What do they want me to do?” and in the case of many staff, like Matt in the above anecdote, “How do I say yes to my organization?” In meetings with staff, administrators still ask all of the right questions such as, “Is it important? What does this mean?” “Is it civically minded?” They also favor strong economic purpose in stories. However, reaching an audience rather than a story’s impact defines importance. Organizations favor “trend stories” in part because of their broad appeal, but in fact these same stories are a safe way for them to look at certain provocative issues. Writing a negative story about an individual advertiser or large local corporation is specific and, as such, dangerous. Going after a trend, such as the use of public money for private development, is safe. Administrators are held accountable for their decisions in the civic arena by their staffs and upper-level executives alike, these broad-scope stories lend themselves to the value of “objectivity” as well as “service” to the largest number of people. But they also do a poor job of holding accountable specific stakeholders, which many newworkers consider a disservice to the public.

Civic responsibility and a higher calling also serve a pragmatic function in the administrator’s favor. It is a card often played when newworkers broach the question of money. “If you’re just in it for the money, this is not the profession for you,” is a resounding theme of administrators, as though service and livelihood are exclusive. Many newworkers report feelings of guilt and distaste over discussions of compensation and
those with the loudest voices in this area are labeled as selfish, or not committed to the profession. One veteran reporter said, “In the 30 years I have worked here, we have never been in a strong economic position when it comes time for my evaluation.” The current economic challenges make the administrator’s position even easier to argue. Some newsworkers are so grateful to be working in the profession in this uncertain financial time that they are willing to overlook the poor raises; they feel sympathy for their administrators, and believe their hard work will pay off when finances even out. Staff with this opinion tended to be younger.

**Separation as Control**

“Go work somewhere else,” is always the most heavy-handed of social controls in the newsroom. The example “Sidestepping” (on page 84) shows that newsroom administrators are actively looking for ways to streamline staff. Newsworkers see layoffs as part of their culture and an inevitability of the profession, at least until a sustainable business model is achieved. As they are moved from position to position, often they believe that if they do not say “yes” to these moves they will be replaced. They are often right. They have seen their colleagues laid off, many of whom had long tenures (nearly thirty years in some cases), were loyal, and were extremely talented. Money-saving initiatives come in many forms, but the most lucrative come in the form of simply not paying employees. Layoffs, early retirement packages, or making the job so inhospitable that newsworkers move on, are common practices. At that point, companies hire young, fresh, cheap workers; or they simply ask more of those who remain. These practices are observed, resented, and resisted by newsworkers; but few can see alternatives.
Furloughing employees is another money-saving practice that has been incorporated at several newspapers owned by large corporations during the last few years. Consider the following:

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Furloughs

At one large metro newspaper, staff was told the financial situation was grim. To remain viable, management explained that unpaid furloughs would be required of each newsworker. This was a corporate-driven and company-wide directive. Furloughs would consist of an unpaid week of vacation for all newsroom staff at every level. Losing a week of pay was challenging for many of the staff members. Those with savings were forced to dip into it and those without were forced to pay bills with credit cards. They did this with the understanding that the company was in need and going through a difficult transition. The newsworkers’ belief was that in the end, furloughs would save jobs. The hope was that this sacrifice would give administrators time to refine plans and put them on more stable financial ground. The fact that each newsworker shared the burden, and it was stretched across each newsroom, created a sense of solidarity in the community. They were rewarded when it was announced in a company wide e-mail that the directive paid off. At the end of the year, the furlough program saved the company over $20 million.

At the end of that year, the company CEO was rewarded with a $30 million bonus. One long-time respected and loyal investigative reporter was observed to say, “I couldn’t pay my mortgage so he could get a $30 million bonus. From now on, I’m just
doing the minimum, not a single thing more.” Two large rounds of layoffs and many other individual layoffs resumed the following fiscal year.

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All indications were that the reporter quoted above could not in good conscience sustain his promise of a minimum level of work. But the damage had been done and loyalty was then seen as one-sided, and poorly serving the newsworker’s needs. Conditioned professionalism, practical need, and civic responsibility in some ways overcame the sense of betrayal from corporate scheming, and newsworkers moved forward to the next day’s work. Most journalists take pride in their ability to watch society and hold institutions accountable for their action. They find naïveté counter to their mandate. Thus, when blindsided by corporate maneuvering, the resentment amplifies, and trust is not easily earned again. Moreover, the tool journalists use to fight these injustices, the power of the press, is closed to them when dealing with their own corporations’ behavior.

Layoffs are a precarious move for organizations to make, but as seen in the section, “Sidestepping,” organizations with active unions approach layoffs with careful legal consideration. In cases where no union is active, the actions of organizations can be much more cavalier but layoffs must still be justified. If a newsworker is on a PIP (performance improvement plan), a written sanction for newsworkers not performing up to standards, this is reason enough to lay off a seasoned newsworker instead of a newsworker with less tenure. If a newsworker is in a unique position (such as assistant photo editor or deputy features editor), the organization can eliminate the position without the need to justify it with a performance-related issue because the organization is
eliminating the position. The reality is that those with unique positions have been in the industry for a long time. A longer tenure comes with a higher salary. This sets up an opportunity for “legal” age discrimination in the workplace.

Older newsworkers are often not given the opportunity to retrain for more stable positions in online departments. There are a couple of reasons for this. The first is that older newsworkers are more expensive and eliminating their current positions saves a lot of money. The second reason is that older newsworkers are seen as less technologically savvy than younger workers and are seen as unwilling to adapt to change. This dynamic also favors the organization in the following ways: newsworkers who are seasoned are more likely to challenge directives, point out inconsistencies with civic duty, and remind leadership of mistakes in the past. Organizational leadership with younger staff enjoy greater latitude to define organizational missions. In other words, eliminating these older workers also eliminates experience, confidence and the tendency to assert oneself.

One young woman was moved from a copy desk to an online desk just prior to a round of layoffs. When asked if she was afraid of layoffs in the future, her comment revealed the ageism ingrained in the culture: “What’s going to happen, is going to happen, but I have two things going for me: I’m young and I’m cheap,” she said. It is notable that this particular newsworker had no previous experience with online work, but was trained in managing data in less than three weeks. It is also important to note that executives and administrators have the final authority in these moves, their judgment about a newsworker’s “value” is final, and all of these activities are legal. The question is, how does this behavior affect the newsworkers’ understanding of their workplace? The way they do their jobs, in the long run, is affected by the dignity afforded or removed
by their employers. How the industry will be affected by the loss of seasoned voices in the newsroom is another consideration. At the very least, the organization loses a source of long intuitional memory and community knowledge.

Employers do not remove newsworkers wholesale, and certainly there are many exceptions to the instances noted above. There were many older individuals visible above the tops of cubicles in the newsrooms observed for this study, but according to the newsworkers who informed this study, there were far fewer than in years past – even just a few years ago. Newsworkers have long memories and they are not a trusting group. They notice how their colleagues are treated. As colleagues, they lament the loss of coworkers, but as pragmatic workers, they try to interpret layoffs in a way that might help them better understand what their superiors are looking for from their employees. It is often unclear to newsworkers however what missteps their colleagues had taken to warrant the loss of their jobs. When the motivation for the layoff is clear, it often is received as fundamentally unfair.

Planning and Time Management as Control

Time is a difficult realm to navigate for the modern newworker. Staffing is cut to absolute minimums, and this happens to the point where use of time must be carefully monitored by management and newworker alike. Organizations are legally required to pay newsworkers (many reporters and news presenters are paid hourly) for all of the time they spend doing their jobs. Some newsrooms have added time clocks to keep overtime under control. For Shelly, the features reporter and columnist at the small daily newspaper highlighted in the last chapter, this is an undignified cultural shift:
I always thought it was the strangest thing that reporters, who are asked to do a creative job, are paid by the hour and expected to create within a certain amount of time. I think a clock should never bind us. When reporters started being reporters, they didn’t have to have a degree. You still don’t have to have a degree, and there is no professional standard. [There is] no governing or licensing committee so you’re somehow not eligible to be salaried. I wish I were salaried because now that we have an actual time clock that we punch, if you spend five minutes laughing at something, you can’t tack that time on at the end of the day. I always thought creativity shouldn’t be abutted with a clock because sometimes you just don’t have it in you between eight and five, you have it in you at seven or eleven. They don’t want us to do anything on the road now. That’s why it’s so important that I come in on time, because I have to punch the clock. It’s all about the clock.

This control of movement has been somewhat justified by the organization because many companies issue or subsidize 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. Reporters can easily reach sources by texting or e-mailing on the go. The data needed for stories is often available online, reducing the amount of legwork required for even some in-depth stories. 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 for what many newsworkers see as the whims of editors. 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:

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Kelly was a breaking-news reporter at a large metro newspaper. Her day started from home at 4 a.m. and she was incredibly efficient. She started her shift while her children were still asleep and, from her home office, she was able to check the police blotter and fire runs (all of which were all available online). She watched the local television news to make sure nothing was missed overnight, she listened to the police scanner for breaking news, and she made breakfast for herself. On this day, 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 the theft of $3,000 worth of brassieres from a Victoria’s Secret store. Kelly filed six stories online by 4:45 a.m., updated her professional 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 her kitchen, made her children’s lunches, and got ready for the day. 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. By 8 a.m., Kelly’s children were off to day care and she was on her way to the city building and jail to retrieve police reports and observe the arraignment of an alleged rapist.

Kelly identified the rape case and the theft of brassieres as the stories of the day. She planned to visit the location where the alleged rape occurred to conduct interviews before filing a longer story about it. This did not work as planned.
She hoped to avoid the office altogether because of the “depressing environment,” she said. However, her editor called her in to the office 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.

* * *

Due to technology, Kelly was able to manage her time in a way she found beneficial. Internet, scanner, and smart-phone technology allowed her to be remarkably 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. Although Kelly tried to be careful, she said she is only human. In the race to be first, or at least very fast, the editing comes later or not at all. Kelly said it’s not the fault of editors because they are shorthanded. Although the speed of her work may indicate she was reactive to situations rather than proactive, Kelly was comfortable judging the importance of events that did not intrigue her and telling editors she was not writing about them.

Technology and the realities of the newspaper’s financial situation have forced an environment where “more” information must be seen as “better” information because depth is difficult to manage. Limited space in the print product also has caused the online breaking of news to change routines.
Communication as Social Control

Newsworkers are in the communication business and they are the first to tell newcomers they do not communicate very effectively with each other. This is an old adage in many newsrooms, but the reasons for poor communication are understandable in terms of a social control that is extremely beneficial to administrators. There are several levels of communication newsworkers must overcome internally to determine what administrators and coworkers would like to see. It is the nature of human beings to engage and interpret each other’s intentions, and this interpretation is the core of social constructionist theory as one must receive a message of their social self to interpret their social identity. Reliance on digital means of communication is the norm, as previously established, but what does that mean for newsworkers? Because editors see digital communication as an apparatus of simplification, they are increasingly comfortable with asking for more work.

As observed by Tuchman (1972), the sheer amount of stories produced make newsworkers vulnerable to mistakes and internal judgments by superiors. Digital communication is not always a reliable means of clear messaging, but it’s an effective means of redirecting work. Numerous times during this study it was observed that newsworkers, acting on text messages or short e-mails, would perform a function unsatisfactorily. This was because editors changed directives remotely, without regard to the stage a newsworker was at when working on a specific task. Remote communication removes the respect for the actual labor that has been done. In doing so, it reduces tasks to a superficial level of being “done” or “not done.” Newsworkers not only believe their
time has been wasted when things unfold in this way, but they also find it gives them less
time to consider depth or attention to detail.

Although planning for these tasks usually originates with management, the
redirection of work and its ramifications often reflect poorly on the newworker. It
appears to management that work is poor and that newworkers manage their time
inefficiently. Newworker frustration with this assessment is viewed as non-collegial. At
the same time, management is also over-tasked. This is perhaps the reason for the issues
in the first place. Because managers are not involved in the nuances of information
gathering and presentation, they misunderstand the realities of the job, thus they abide
few excuses for work not being completed. All of this gives management justifications
for sanctions, poor performance reviews, and in-office labeling. This might take the form
of “Newworker X does not cope well with change, does not meet deadlines or works
poorly with management.” These labels easily find their way into the cultural dynamic of
newsrooms, and workers and management alike react to negative-interoffice
pigeonholing as though the label tells the whole story of the newworker’s abilities.

Reduced staff and what one newworker describes as “kicking the can down the
road” have further challenged communication. When one person in the course of a news
shift cannot complete a task, it often falls to others to complete it. This happens with the
design of news pages and in story production alike. Newworkers do not generally like
leaving work unfinished. They are concerned that it will not be completed properly.
Leaving work undone challenges the newworkers’ sense of ownership in their work, and
creates concern that the uncompleted task will reflect poorly on them. Many
newworkers are so uncomfortable with this idea that they will often clock out and return
to the task at hand. When newsworkers choose not to do this, those who must finish their
tasks resent that it interferes with their own tasks and wonder why their predecessor could
not finish, spurring resentment.

Challenged communication among peers takes other forms as well. Because the
news cycle is tight, deadlines are challenging. Information producers struggle to get
stories to presenters in a timely way. Informing them of changes is itself time consuming.
Story budgets are rarely completed by the appointed times and stories are often changed
after deadline. Reporters and those on the gathering side of operations rarely experience
ramifications from the bad will of presenters when they are late, whereas filing an
imperfect story can bring uncomfortable sanctions from management. This creates
friction between departments, but presenters are forced to make do. They must design
cookie cutter pages (as previously described in “Matt’s Ambition” on page 80), and
consider copy editing a novelty, so it is not always done. The presenter’s desk is the
story’s last stop before it goes to press, and that exacerbates pressures put on a presenter.
A missed deadline costs the company money in terms of printing and delivery labor and
delays the product reaching the consumer. As the news-production cycle itself is finite,
there is also only a finite window when consumers are willing to buy the day’s news. The
“presentation” newsworker internalizes being late as a personal failing that costs the
company money. If the “production” newsworker misses a deadline to get their work to
the presenters, there is no indication they are burdened by such thoughts.

To cope in this environment, newsworkers are often terse with coworkers and
management alike. Some suffer in silence and others resist pleasantries and carry
resentments for the loss of co-workers, low wages, and long hours. Many are slow to
forget past wrongs and fear management is plotting against them. This, coupled with the
dynamics noted above, gives the impression that some newworkers are socially
backward. The result of this is a distance between management and peers, which further
challenges communication and prompts the loss of the collegial atmosphere that Breed
cited as being so attractive to newworkers. As a result, distance between workers of all
levels becomes part of the culture and the newworker’s individual talents, needs, and
feelings are marginalized. This distance also allows management to become increasingly
comfortable with moving newworkers to new positions, changing beats and duties, and
ordering lay offs. All the while, newworkers wonder where their autonomy has gone.

Research as Social Control

Organizational reliance on audience research also bears some responsibility for
the dissatisfaction of newworkers. Individual organizations often do their own research,
and newworkers and editors are placed on teams to conduct focus groups and gauge how
the public will react to content and design decisions. As Underwood (1993) described,
many organizational leaders see audience research as a service to readers. They frame
this for workers in a way that has almost become a core journalistic value. After all,
putting the reader first is unselfish and this appeals to the “higher calling” and “greater
good” aspects of the journalism mystique. The reality is somewhat different.
Organizations are well aware of the aspects of the operation that cost the most money –
printing and labor costs are the most prominent among them. Digital transition is the
most promising area to alleviate the concern of the former, but according to industry
experts, most operations are still making the majority of their revenue from print
advertising (Berte and De Bens, 2008). On the other hand, labor can be pruned. As previously noted, organizations have drawn together news presenters and resources into design hubs where design desks produce news pages for many properties in their chain. However, many newsworkers are concerned that the individual personalities, traditions, and cultural variations of the individual communities served by each of these properties will not be reflected in these amalgamated design schemes. Consider the following:

* * *

“Research Indicates What Readers Want, But Only Our Research”

Mitch, a presentation editor at a metro newspaper, had many responsibilities, including running a converged presentation desk. Mitch was charged with learning what the best design scheme would be for converging the design and pagination operations of several properties. This effort would save the company money by decreasing staff and opening opportunities for the desk to manage outside design jobs. In the pursuit of this goal, Mitch conducted focus groups with community members that featured prototype pages and surveys that gauged what was important to readers. The prototypes all had characteristics consistent with ease of design, with very little variation between properties.

When asked what resources, previous research, or current trends he incorporated to design the prototypes, Mitch was at a loss. When a non-profit consulting firm specializing in newspaper redesigns was mentioned, he understood the question better, saying, “They just want to be the experts and tell you what to do. We don’t want to be told what to do.” Mitch explained that his research indicated that readers do not care
about the individual “flavor” of a newspapers design. This is a conclusion that directly corresponded with the goal of making all properties work under a single design desk. Mitch found consistency to have more utility than creativity.

* * *

In the production and distribution areas specifically, there is a profound trend toward production cost saving. For example: One organization found in a research query that many women aged twenty-five to forty-five would prefer their local news in a more compact version than what was currently in the paper. Some specifically called for a tabloid format. The organization’s study explained that this is “another voice” supporting other research underway that examines reactions to a smaller-size, easier-to-handle newspaper. The study does not explain why this is being tested, but it is fairly obvious that it has cost-saving implications. This study was unusual in that most of its results explored digital, rather than print-driven, opportunities among the demographic group. The implication is that this new information confirms an idea that was already being pursued. Although this researcher was not privy to the specific questions or past studies by the organization, the idea that research subjects volunteered, unprompted, that they would like a more compact newspaper is far-fetched. If worded another way, few would say they prefer a “less” easy-to-handle newspaper.

This particular publication released plans to go to a ten-and-a-half-inch by fourteen-and-a-half-inch publication the following year as opposed to a standard broadsheet newspaper. The production costs would reportedly be 25 to 30 percent of current costs, and newsprint would be reduced by 33 percent. Although the publication promises the content will not change in any way, it is difficult to understand how a
newspaper can use 33 percent less newsprint and offer the same content. This is a leap in logic that has not been missed by newworkers who are already struggling with trusting superiors. It is also notable that this organization is jointly buying a press for this endeavor with a competing publication and closing the production facility in its city. Newworkers suspect more content will be digitally presented or abandoned all together.

There is evidence that organizational directives do not support research but rather research is done to support pre-conceived organizational directives. Because “research” indicates a certain path may be lucrative, it justifies the organization’s movement or elimination of resources. Movement requires newworkers to relearn tasks and adapt to new organizational needs. It also draws focus from traditional civic duties. The same focus group that found a compact version of the newspaper favorable also indicated that women twenty-five to forty-five want more “watchdog” reporting and local news, but this prompted no overt organizational directive. The research, which is turned into directives, generally supports what the company would find profitable rather than what would be favorable to journalistic values. Limited space in the print product has already caused the online breaking of routine news, such as car accidents, arrests, and event calendars to be seen as adequate. These research directives are based, at least in part, on directions management has already decided will be lucrative.

**Conclusion**

Friction can explode into frustration any time routines are disrupted, but organizational directives to follow policy are overt and common. As organizations try to find new effective business models, their attention is diverted away from newworker
needs and their performance. The desire to streamline and have more content handled in
the digital realm keeps management from addressing low newsworker satisfaction and
deficiencies in coverage. The current dynamic finds it not in management’s best interest
to value traditional tasks like high quality writing or photography. Breaking news exists
outside of meetings and convoluted planning, but adds one more component to a jammed
news cycle. Speed is the order of the day, but depth is compromised. This is a dangerous
game. Stories of a softer and shorter nature, typical of an online product, are considered
to be “safer” in terms of libel and other legal issues, and the odds of libel increase with
the speed of the operation. Add to this the organizational directive to see how many
editing layers can be cut by laying off as many copy editors as possible, and newsrooms
have a recipe for a lawsuit. Organizations are not only in transition, but struggling to
learn what they want from newsworkers. Organizations know they need a digital
presence, and have moved immense resources in that direction, but it has not proven to be
lucrative. At the same time, newsworkers scramble to fill holes in the print product and
fill online content, all the while worrying about their jobs.

Management enjoys a “black ceiling” above which they can plan without
newsworkers interfering. This allows them to avoid lawsuits and order directives before
workers can react. It also cuts off leadership from valuable problem solvers and creative
thinkers. Every indication is that management does not see this as a problem as they have
continually failed to reenergize their operations. Newsworkers do not see management’s
intentions, desires, motivations, or needs, thus newsworkers are left guessing as to how
they should behave, report on stories, and stay viable in their workplaces. Many times
sanctions are the result of good core journalism practices at odds with organizational
directives. Research is executed with desired financial outcomes in mind beforehand, which causes newsworkers to question the conclusions. Leaders are not trusted because their behavior seems to actively work against their own employees. This is often intentional but never overt, and includes trying to remove union influence behind closed doors. More often, managers do not know what the right answers are and are pressured by corporate interests. In both cases, communication between newsworkers and management is strained, although neither group finds this favorable. The result of all of these social controls is fear.
Chapter 7: Autonomy and Resistance

Organizational controls have taken on remarkable complexity in the wake of the digital paradigm and the monetary strain in the news industry. Management has become much more overt and committed to re-branding newsrooms as digital information centers rather than newspapers. As noted in the last chapter, administrators have many tools at their disposal to bring newsworkers inline with these goals. At the same time, newsworkers 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 newsworkers, and their sanctions are much more overt. This chapter will explore how organizations are perhaps poorly served by this behavior. Newsworkers resist unfavorable policy and challenge organizational rhetoric, especially when they see these behaviors as contrary to journalistic principles or unjust to themselves or their peers. As newsworkers 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 newsworkers to exercise autonomy and stay informed.
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 (See Chaper 4). Breed (1955) 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 reporters 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 newsworkers and often find organizational directives as puzzling as many of their staff. They act as a buffer between management and staff, and though they must at times be the “heavies” and enforce policy, they have close connections to newsworkers (having risen from their ranks). Line editors do influence and change content, and do follow organizational directives, but they do not take action against newsworkers 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 newsworker.

The close connections in newsrooms can have domestic considerations as well. Several newsworkers 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” newsworker is married to a “middle manager.” One middle manager was married to a newsworker 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 included criticism of an editor’s spouse would be uncomfortable. Peers are also involved in this dynamic. Small job
performance issues that would be cited 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 such that negative rhetoric is curbed. Interestingly, this dynamic works for both partners, with the editor defended in the newworker’s social circles as well. This connection is something of a social protection and can give newworkers added autonomy in their jobs, but does little to defend against layoffs. Such connections can also cause peer resentment.

Extra-Newsroom Resistance

Newworkers have many outside interests beyond their work lives and those worlds are not always entirely compatible with their organization’s goals. Likewise, the organization also has goals beyond the confines of the newsroom. News organizations are members of a business community, and, as such, must show civic responsibility and interest in the overall welfare of the communities in which they operate. They also must show presence in the community to remind readers of their brand. In general, staff need not support these efforts, thereby giving newworkers another opportunity to show their dissatisfaction. Consider the following passage from field notes:

* * *

The United Way and Non-News Tasks

Emmett worked as a copy editor and designer at a small daily newspaper. He considered his compensation modest but he thoroughly enjoyed his work. Emmett felt that because the organization did not recognize him on what he considered an equitable financial level, there were limits to how the company should engage him. One area of
particular resentment for Emmett was the annual United Way fund drive. Once a year, within his paycheck envelope, he would find a donation form asking how much he was going to donate, on a per-paycheck basis, to the United Way. The amount requested was between $5 and $30. On the week of the fund drive, there would be breaks in the day’s routine where employees would play carnival-style games and participate in raffles and silent auctions. All of this was to raise money for the United Way. Emmett found this extra-media influence insulting and considered charitable giving a private matter: “I can’t buy a modest house, or afford to leave town on vacation, but they expect me to give a portion of my paycheck back to them to give to the United Way. All so (publisher) and (company) can feel like big shits.” Emmett would not in any way acknowledge the campaign, although e-mails, voice mails, and at times public pressure, were put on him to do so. At the same time, he was certain that his work was above reproach. He said that invariably the publisher or the United Way committee chair would come to him seeking an explanation, to which he would say he could not afford it.

Emmett also would not play games on employee appreciation day, nor would he volunteer to work at the newspaper’s information booth at the county fair or at business expos. He also refused to play on the company’s softball team. Because Emmett was recognized as a consummate professional, his “outside-profession” protests had little adverse effect on him and he was always pleased he could send these messages to the administration.

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Emmett resisted an obligation being placed upon him, and although administrators did not find this favorable, they had little direct recourse in sanctioning
him. A United Way donation drive is clearly an organizational directive but is not related to the profession of news work. These non-news related directives and tasks are still outside the publisher’s ability to command. This is different than the “ethics taboo” Breed (1955) reported on, whereas publishers would not overtly command that policy be followed. Publishers will overtly make these demands in the modern newsroom. However, giving to the United Way remains a “non-commandable policy,” as it is beyond the executive’s ability to legally enforce. This is not a direct detriment to the bottom line, so publishers stand down and the level of administration that finds this resistance unfavorable is normally high enough that there are several levels of administrators between them and the newsworker doing the resisting (Emmett being the exception because he was contacted). Careful communication would need to be crafted to sanction a newsworker for not giving to a charity. In this instance, the message of dissatisfaction travels up the ladder with no direct feedback returning to the newsworker. Even though a publisher can require newsworkers to work at a business expo booth, he/she must pay them. This is only an issue if they cannot generate enough volunteers (something that has reportedly happened). Corporate giving is not always a noticeable area of resistance because newsworkers and corporations give in some capacity for tax reasons. However, this giving, or lack there of, is notable as another point of friction between newsworkers and administrators. When policy decisions are beyond the newsworker’s ability to participate, and resistance to policy does not result in sanctions, the policy is resisted to the organization’s detriment.
How Newsworkers React to “Big Picture” Decisions

One parent company gave a million dollars for a development plan to beautify and add amenities to an urban waterway. This plan had been on the agenda of city officials for some time. Some newsworkers were glad the company was helping beautify the city; others were shocked they would do so during such difficult economic times in close proximity to a number of layoffs, and others were angry the company used funds in such an overt attempt to influence city policy (the proposed project was to cost $3 million and was not universally supported in the community). “Well, there goes your raise next year,” one newsworker commented. Overall, this action caused divisive rhetoric and frustration. The general feeling was the corporate office was lying about the company’s financial health. On top of this, reporters were asked to write positive stories about the company’s generosity, none of which would or could mention adverse opinions or the tax breaks the company would surely receive.

Resisting amenities is another way newsworkers send messages of dissatisfaction to administrators. Amenities come in the form of cafeterias, break rooms, gyms inside the facilities, or gym memberships outside the facilities. These amenities can be group rates on cell phone plans, allowances for certain equipment, or continuing education. Amenities may start at the corporate level or be site specific, but in both cases, executives must try to extrapolate what employment packages will be most favorable and cost effective to the broadest range of employees. This works well at a macro level, but becomes difficult to predict in individual newsrooms as newsworkers have been shown to have an assortment of values, interests, and personalities. Even the most loyal of employees will quietly resist when their decision-makers try to “buy” them with
amenities, especially when they feel an ethical conflict. Note how this worked in the passage below:

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*Civic Duty Beyond the Newsroom*

As an operation began the process of consolidating its broadcast and print operations into one building, one line editor had concerns. Barry was a native of the town in which he worked, had earned his journalism degree locally, and felt a great deal of loyalty for his organization. He would align himself with most organizational directives, considered himself a “company man,” and was well respected by his staff and superiors alike. He did not participate in newsroom “grousing,” and even in the face of layoffs he kept his opinions to himself. Still, as a native of the city he worked in, Barry was concerned about the number of buildings being left vacant in the downtown area. Barry believed that the absence of business presence in the downtown would lead to urban decay and increased crime. The new facility his organization built to house both aspects of the company was located well away from the downtown and was able to hold all of the various entities that his organization required. It also had a new cafeteria with many different meal choices, a gym that could be joined for a small fee, and room for the business to grow as needed. Barry agreed, but was disturbed by the lack of responsibility the organization showed for the old building. The old presses could still be seen from the street through a window. It was not repurposed in any way, but sat empty for years as the trend Barry feared came about. Crime in the area increased, more buildings sat vacant, and even the newspaper considered the city proper to be a secondary coverage concern.
(See Sally and Margot, Chapter 4). Barry promised himself that he would not buy into the enticements promised with the new building. He did not use the gym or the cafeteria. Although he did not announce the reasons why, he also does not keep them secret. Barry normally eats lunch at independent downtown businesses.

* * *

It is doubtful that Barry saw this as resistance at all. There is little indication that resistance in the form of bucking organizational causes and amenities influences change in policy or day-to-day operations. However, it does indicate that newsworkers feel the need to look for opportunities to reach administrators with their concerns. It further indicates that newsworkers will take action and offer resistance in subtle ways when they feel challenged, repressed, or under-appreciated. As these things happen in the periphery of the primary responsibilities and tasks involved in newswork, they are tolerated by the organization.

As news work is self-directed and the will to resist exists in newsworkers, the question becomes, can they resist when it comes to directives that more directly affect newswork? In light of the social controls previously established, it would seem not, but technology and downsizing can work to the newworker’s advantage as well as the executives’ advantage.

**The Personal Brand**

Historically, staffers who were considered “stars” by executives were able to sidestep policy much more effectively than younger newsworkers (Breed, 1955). Now, even seasoned newsworkers face the ax as administrators look at cutting “stars” to save
money. In spite of this, newsworkers do have ways to build their value to an organization. A number of audience engagement techniques exist in the digital world that newsworkers have started using on their own. Many newsworkers, 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 newsworker, will often be followers on Twitter and repost “tweets.” Digital specialists representing the organization will be “friends” with reporters and other newsworkers 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 newsworker 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 newsworkers, 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 newsworker 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 in this area. This is a different dynamic from what Epstein (1978) 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 newworker 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 newworker 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 Tweeter feed with sources, editors, and story promotions. Newworkers may also exercise influence indirectly by pointing subscribers to something the newworker 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 newworkers build followers, so does the organization gain online traffic with little risk to their objectivity or reputation. 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. Newworkers use social media to promote civic organizations, hobbies they favor, and the work they do interchangeably. This creates a richly human newworker that resonates with readers and peers alike, and in doing so creates an autonomous brand beyond the organization.

The Soft Organizational Directive

As we have seen, 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 new 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, new workers are often given the latitude to choose which assignments to which 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” role, and music under the audio. It was so over produced that the segment looked more like a promotion for the organization featured in the story, rather than a news story itself. In fact, the audience would need to work to find the “news” in the video at all. This seemed to be 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. Newsworkers 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 product, all the while keeping alternatives quietly to themselves. One newworker called this, “driving the bus without being behind the wheel.”

**Adhering to Expected Tasks**

Many newsworkers 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 newsworkers. This is certainly contingent on the day of the week, the specific tasks, and the organization’s culture, but some newsworkers 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 who also enjoy an easy work day. 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, newsworkers remember a time when this was not the case, exacerbating the situation. Some newsworkers 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 were reflected in Greta’s comments in Chapter 3 (See page 69).

“Sunshine” Blogs

Many executives depend on a code of silence among themselves and other stakeholders to keep sensitive decision-making plans from newsworkers while details are worked out. This control was called a “black ceiling” in the conclusion of Chapter 6 (See page 104), but while it is opaque, it is not impenetrable. Newsworkers 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 newsworkers and interested parties to connect and make their companies more transparent. They are the new clearinghouses for internal media company information. It is not known exactly who moderates certain blog-sites (certainly this is by design), which spill information about company plans, but newsworkers 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 newsworkers add information to sunshine blogs. This information is compiled to create a more complete picture of events
for newsworkers, but more substantial contributors must exist above the black ceiling. Many newsworkers believe that contributors are those working at corporate offices or are themselves executives sympathetic to the problems newsworkers 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 newsworkers 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 newsworkers 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.” Newsworkers characterize themselves and the personality attributes required to do their jobs as hard-nosed and abrasive (Mayer, 1987). Often those attracted to the business are forceful and do not find “brownnosing” consistent with doing their jobs. This is consistent with the stereotype of the tough, no-nonsense reporter who will go to any lengths 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. Newsworkers 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, newsworkers 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 newsworker 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 newsworker 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 newsworker has a reputation for being difficult, approaching him/her about their news judgment or changing him/her work will be avoided. Often, this reputation will keep newsworkers from being approached in the first place.

**Conclusion**

The deck is stacked against newsworkers in nearly every policy and personnel decision, but newsworkers are a resourceful group. Although the digital paradigm has closed many of the doors that made the traditional skills of newsworkers favorable, it has also opened others. The autonomy of the Internet has allowed newsworkers to peek around the “black ceiling” executives use to plan policy changes that effect staff.
“Sunshine blogs” have sprung up around the industry as a tool to understand and control the newsworker’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 newsworkers to build a hybrid personal/professional presence in social media.

Newsworkers find little guilt in these activities. Loyalty is challenged as newsworkers have become keenly aware that their fealty is unlikely to be rewarded, and administrators are often working against them. The newsworkers’ 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 newsworkers, but has burgeoned and become naturalized in many consummgrade 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.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

The newsroom issues and dynamics highlighted in the preceding chapters contain the principal ideas reflected in interviews and observations as well as informal conversations, operational documents, and some shared organizational research. This researcher would argue that these newsroom dynamics are representative of how social control and social construction manifest themselves in the modern newsroom. Several issues in conclusion deserve consideration. One is the utility and practicality of traditional tasks as new media arise as “ritual” in newsrooms. The second is the necessity of understanding digital influences on the process of news work and newworkers alike. The third is how this new realm of newworker reality could impact the future of news work.

The idea of journalism as a “calling” was said by many newworkers to be necessary for the practice of news work and is in many ways as powerful as organizational directives. This is due to the level of investment journalists have made to the principles of civic duty associated with the profession. Education, history, service to the public good, watchdog functions, and the role of the Fourth Estate are the things journalists find sacred and the elements that make journalism credible in the eye of the public. The belief is that journalism is more than a job, that it exists beyond capitalism, and that it is a benevolent practice. According to Rothenbuhler (1998), in terms of ritual, “the individual willfully submits to an external order of signs. We accept the command of ritual as if it were a material power against which we have none. In fact, it is not. It is an order of signs that has no power without our acceptance” (p. 129). If this is so, what is the reality of the newworkers’ world when they do not accept those signs from
administrators? One overriding theme from this study is that when journalists gain on one end – speed of news distribution, and convenience in gathering information or contacting sources – they lose in terms of comprehensive story content and meaningful civic work.

When newsworkers are thrust into a world where their beliefs and core values are secondary, an irreconcilable friction is created. It is the Marxist view that in a capitalist society laborers are invariably alienated from the product and thus they are separated from themselves (Marx and Engels, 1848/1998). The mistake made by media organizations is the belief that journalism can be produced in the same fashion as manufactured goods. But journalists are simply not like laborers working in a factory. In a factory when there is a surplus of a certain component, a worker can be moved to the production of another component without his/her values being compromised. This is not the case with newsworkers. Their education, beliefs, and world views are intertwined with a passion for their craft, so the argument can be made that they cannot be removed effectively from that which they produce. The two are as indivisible as a limb to a body; the removal of the limb is possible, the body may still function, but the efficiency of the body is irredeemably compromised. This has been a point of friction for many technological changes and trends in the industry over the years (Hardt, 1990), but it is clearly seen as uniquely exigent with newsworkers in the digital transition.

Technology is watering down the reasons many newsworkers went into the business in the first place – to “practice” writing and other craft skills, and most important, to contribute to society overall as a “higher calling.” Digital products are not viewed by newsworkers in the same worshipful way as the printed newspaper. Having digital knowledge is the employment trend across journalism’s landscape. Much as
having background in political science, business, or sports is favorable with regard to
certain beats, digital prowess is seen in much the same light. But it is a medium-specific
knowledge as thin in civic function as it is broad in technological usefulness. As
Durkheim (1912/2008) noted, sacred objects have power, a power observable in the
reverence a culture places on them. The physical printed newspaper has many “sacred
object” characteristics and it is the physical manifestation of the individual’s identity as a
newsworker. It has permanency and, at least to newsworkers, the power to change
government, to protect the disenfranchised, and to inform the public. Editors carry it
under their arm throughout the day like a weapon, and they pore over it like a lover.
Durkheim called the energy and reverence placed into a sacred object “manna.” and the
stopping point for manna is the totem or sacred object. It is not unreasonable to see the
physical newspaper in the role of the totem. Journalists devote their creative energy,
professional ethics, and personal character to this very public and social object. They
interact with it intimately, labor over every decision, and take personally every mistake.
Newsworkers await the public’s acknowledgment as they interact with the newspaper,
and many believe the smallest decisions regarding the newspaper have profound
consequences for democracy and journalism’s place as the Fourth Estate. They hold tight
to the society-changing “miracles” of the past, such as Watergate and the Civil Rights
movement, all the while looking for the stories that will lead to the next validation of
their faith. As the loss of autonomy is technological in origin, newsworkers try to draw
the line at letting that extend into their civic-mindedness. Sometimes they succeed, but
more often they fail. One thing is certain, when the civic nature of the profession is
removed from journalism, the newsworker’s passion for the job is also removed. Older
newsworkers see this clearly and organizations have been slowly removing older employees from their newsrooms in favor of those who are more digitally savvy, cheaper to employ, and less likely to question organizational directives. Even when older workers are retained, they are often wedged into positions to which they are not trained, destroying their confidence in their work as the organization destroys the position they often spent years building. This makes jobs in the newsroom unsatisfying and disheartening.

Civic principles have power and, as White (1950) observed, news itself is considered a value and newworker values have the power to hold them in positions they do not find entirely palatable. This is another point of friction within the culture. The history, traditional tasks, and even the sacred focal points which Rothenbuhler (1998) might call the “voluntary performance” are no longer valued by the organization, at least not in ways newworkers can see. Rothenbuhler (1998) like Hirsh (2000) found that those things, which are symbolically meaningful, affect the roles individuals perform. This can naturally be extended to newsroom crafts as well. These “performances” once touted as “appropriately patterned behavior” when it benefited the organization, have been diluted by economic stresses and desperation for audiences. A newworker’s time is spread so that watchdog functions and traditional crafts like writing and photography, which many newworkers entered the business to do, are given only a passing nod in favor of updating a website or a calendar item. This makes the function of journalism trivial in the eyes of many journalists and, as such, the rituals surrounding them profane. The rituals related to digital journalism do not have the same symbolic effect on the “serious life,” as described by Rothenbuhler, as does print journalism. This makes digital journalism endeavors
profane rather than sacred. The digital world by its very nature is non-substantive and its rituals lack the traditional meanings and focal points a print product contains. In this case digital products do not fit Durkheim’s (1912/2008) definition of a totem as a printed newspaper would. The digital product is profane in the eyes of newworkers because it lacks a physical and permanent stopping point for the newworkers’ manna, required to be a sacred object or totem. Moreover, it is not consistent with Rothenbuhler’s definition of ritual because it is not voluntary. Organizations have taken a hard-line approach to the digital products, forcing newworkers to see them as a new core value.

The pressures created by changing platforms and economic stresses have forced organizations to try to reconstruct the world of newworker values. They do this as they issue many organizational directives, and frame them as reader-centric services. This is as popular to many newworkers as demanding they worship in a church not of their choosing. According to Underwood (1993), people have not responded to market-oriented journalism. Organizations look to research for answers to a broken business model but rarely to the newworkers who write and edit stories and confront readers and the community every day. Organizations hold the process of change only for themselves. This study indicates that newworkers themselves do not find market-oriented research particularly effective and many resist it. Some newworkers who have been invited to be involved in the process are challenged because they suspect or are told what the organization would like to see as conclusions. Eventually these conclusions manifest into newsroom rituals, but they are never naturalized by newworkers at large. They become what Schlesinger (1976) called a “novelty of change,” or a change with little substance or
permanency. What becomes naturalized in the newsroom is the need to resist these directives.

Newsroom rituals are necessary for goals to be achieved and social order to be maintained, but newworkers rage against the programmed order, and they do this at a level of influence central to the operation, as seen in Shoemaker and Reese’s hierarchy of influence model. Newworkers are the first and last to touch the material that builds the organization. This should be a position of danger and concern for executives, but they do not seem to worry. Although newworkers have autonomy, they do not have adequate knowledge of the values and goals of decision makers. If there is clarity above the “black ceiling” of management decisions, that clarity is certainly not extended below. There are mixed messages and double-dealings in the way organizations contend with newworkers. So foggy are the goals and intentions of management, many newworkers have concluded they simply do not have a plan. Organizations will tell them they are valued for their traditional skills in one breath and lay them off in the next, all the while moving younger newworkers to “safe” digital jobs. As executives deal with newworkers, they voice support for traditional crafts and core values when it benefits the organization, and frame those beliefs as dated when they do not match monetary objectives. As Gramsci (1940/2000) noted, the media are constant sites of struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideas. This remains the case in the modern newsroom. It is a perpetual battle for administrators to achieve enough consensus among the workforce for things to operate smoothly. That consensus is never truly achieved and things rarely operate smoothly. “Consensus” in the modern newsroom often gives way to overt demands as the organization’s very existence is threatened. Any consensus-like
dynamics are clearly framed as a courtesy extended to the newworker from the organization.

Newworkers have long memories for history, institutional knowledge, and what they consider poor leadership. The current newsroom model calls for light engagement with both work and readers. Consumers, through online traffic, influence news judgment. This traffic determines an organization’s content decisions. This very fluid relationship is favored by organizations, at least until they can find firmer ground on which to build a new business model. Meanwhile, the news these organizations cover remains “soft,” and readers have little ability or motivation to retain it. As Foucault (1966/1970) observed, as conditions change, they make the function and reality of the individual’s place in an organization transparent. 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 newworkers 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 (1966) explained social construction is the result of those choices, and, according to them, social constructionist dynamics are pointed and specific, but they are not permanent and fixed for all time. It is the newworkers’ ongoing choices that are of most profound influence.

Some newsrooms are sad places with more empty than occupied cubicles. Some organizations have gone so far to as to reallocate space as meeting areas, common areas,
or break areas, as though the newsworkers who once filled those places never existed. As one reporter pointed out, “Sitting on a couch for a meeting is a poor substitute for job security.” Newsworkers are invariably confused. According to Strucke and Grunes (2009) a couple of years ago companies would show record profits but continue to lay off workers. In 2011 and 2012, during this study, they were by all accounts still making money, but not the very large profit margins they once did. Most newsworkers think their companies have successfully created a culture that perpetuates the myth that they are always experiencing difficult financial times. The other means of control organizations use to minimize pay is civic function itself. The idea that the higher calling of journalism and society’s needs outweighs monetary considerations is still perpetuated in newsrooms, though executives cite money as the basis for nearly every decision they make. Thus the latitude for organizations to demand journalistic professionalism is in opposition to their capital behaviors. There has, in the mind of many newsworkers, always been enough profit for companies to offer employees compensation equal to others with similar education and expectations in other fields. One newsworker said executives do not value “soft skills,” the skills that do not directly generate wealth. This is compounded and justified by a poor economy. For instance, there is little evidence that such newsworker tasks as editing, done well or poorly, will lead directly to profit – at least no evidence that exists in the recognized social contract between newsworkers and administrators. This, along with the layoff of friends, and the difficulty of tasks, has made newsrooms a shadow of their once vibrant stature and has destroyed morale.

One trend that has restored some level of this lost morale is convergence. Different media working together must cooperate and communicate to understand that
with which they are not familiar. The communication involved in managing different media has led to vibrant conversations regarding coverage priorities and how to best serve the community. As those newsworkers who practice the craft in broadcast, radio, and print are working together more, they must find a common “cultural” language beyond their respective mediums. This language is often journalism and service. Online, as a unique media outlet, does not share in this dynamic. Practitioners in other media see web endeavors as an obligation and an ethereal land of fuzzy goals. This is often a point of frustration between converged media outlets as newsworkers and managers try to decide whose responsibility online activities will become, but newsworkers and administrations do not want that responsibility. Newsworkers, still expected to do traditional tasks, see the digital world as a burden, and they both resent and appreciate digital specialists for taking it off their hands.

Adversarial behaviors arise between executives and newsworkers almost every day. They damage the cooperative function, which Bourdieu (1984) called “social capital” (the positive outcomes of social relations) and force distance between the employer and the employee destroying the patron and client dynamic that once existed with journalism as a common goal.

Herman and Chomsky (1988) observed that control often exists in the preselection of right-thinking people. They were referring to those who are willing to put the company before civic responsibility. In the modern newsroom, right thinking also extends to those who are digitally savvy. However, leadership is often as clueless about the digital realm as older newsroom staff members; thus, their motivations are no longer
simply to hire yes-men, but to hire those who will remove the scary digital ghost from their line of sight.

The damaged business model has changed relationships and moved those in the press away from collegial relationships (Schlesinger, 1999). We have explored how executives have exploited the distance between themselves and newsworkers in a number of ways, but they are not the only ones exploiting this distance. In the face of change, some individual newsworkers have found routines in which to hide. As the streamlining of tasks has made many traditional tasks more efficient, some newsworkers have not absorbed additional tasks to make their newsrooms more successful. Photographers no longer have darkroom responsibilities and reporters have many resources at their fingertips, but in some cases, their desire to take those surplus minutes and turn them into a fuller expression of their craft has not occurred. This happens in part because of laziness, and the sentiment that their companies are “getting what they are paying for,” but in most cases the dynamic is more complicated. Newsworkers see the streamlining of their jobs through technology or other means as equalizing. In other words, they felt over-tasked in the first place and technology or the reallocations of tasks make the job more reasonable. They have a full understanding of why they got into news work in the first place and often feel little responsibility for other areas of the newsroom that do not involve their personal skills. In other words, a photographer who finishes his work an hour early is unlikely will help an overwhelmed copy-desk worker design pages, look page proofs, or help enter community calendar items. More likely, the photographer will relax, read e-mails, visit with co-workers, or simply leave for the day. This is true of many newsroom positions. Administrators are also responsible for this dynamic to some
extent. They do not wholly understand the responsibilities and functions of every member of their team. They adhere to old job descriptions or have constructed in their minds a false idea of newworker-jobs or contributions. A false understanding of newworker tasks by administrators is perhaps one of the most prominent findings of this study, and this misunderstanding normally hurts both organizations and the newworkers alike.

The newsrooms studied for this project were struggling economically, and that struggle led to challenges in core values, treatment of newworkers, autonomy, and creativity. Naturalized aspects of the culture have exacerbated these problems as have a loss of collective bargaining. These newsrooms were filled with skilled journalists with many years of experience, all of whom were trying to serve readers and present people the news they need to exercise good citizenship. Many older newworkers with good community or institutional knowledge were laid off or felt undervalued. Administrators often took an adversarial approach to newworkers. This management style, combined with newworkers’ fear of layoffs, kept newworkers from doing what they considered their best work. Instead, their work was geared toward what would be acceptable and safe in the eyes of the organization. Hegemony is evident in the organizational decisions of newsrooms every day and culturally enforces the rituals, routines, and values that keep managers in their positions, but it creates no positive changes for newworkers or their craft. In the end, organizations are not serving themselves with this practice. They are destroying the passion newworkers have for their jobs and creating incentives for them to leave the industry. The newworker’s world is defined by dominant administrative views, and organizations are attempting to recreate the reality of journalism’s core values by privileging digital work. This emphasis on the medium, obscures good journalism by
marginalizing the newsworker. These issues are augmented by poor organizational research, which is distorted by economic stress. As a result, the insights of newsworkers are routinely ignored. Moreover, as organizations disenfranchise newsworkers communities are poorly served, as few know the issues, challenges, sources, and flavor of a community as well as the newsworkers who serve it.

Limitations

This study set out to produce a broad understanding of the modern newsroom by looking at the culture of three newspapers. The idea was to spend time in their operations to better understand how new digital technologies, old routines, and civic responsibility metamorphize in an industry that is economically challenged and in transition. A great deal of effort was made to situate news practices in the broader frameworks of social theory but it is important remember that this is a micro study of only three daily newspapers in a country of more than 1,400 daily newspapers.

In a study such as this, the standpoint of the researcher must be acknowledged. In participant observation, the researcher is somewhat the measurement tool. The questions asked, the positioning of the researcher in the newsroom, as well as prior experience in similar environments, becomes an indivisible part of the study. This researcher is a former journalist and editor with eleven years of experience. After six years outside the industry the researcher was surprised by many of the changes upon returning. These “surprises” and “status quo” experiences also shaped the data collected and its analysis. As a former newsworker studying newsworkers, this researcher was in the midst of people like himself. This background helped provide entrée to sites and provided
knowledge of the jargon and work-related pressures. It also allowed for rapport to developed quickly. Although this researcher was extremely open about the goals of this study, often newworkers and administrators felt a “causal notion” that this research was geared toward the mechanics of newsroom operation and not likely to be critical. Even though mechanics in newsrooms have changed in recent years and their understanding is fundamental to understanding the routines and culture therein, there is much evidence of dysfunction. Time with any given newworker was limited and that certainly had an influence, but the newworkers involved in this project were extremely candid. In many cases, having someone inquiring about their work was refreshing for them. And this inquiry was perceived as therapeutic, giving newworkers an opportunity to share thoughts and feelings they had retained in for a long time.

This study was newworker-centric. Though this researcher did interact with and interview administrators at various levels, this research is attuned to the cultural reality of the rank-and-file newworker’s world. Pressures and influences being exerted on high-level administrators certainly carry their own challenges, but this study visits these influences only in tertiary ways. Executives were not the focus of observation, and the reasons their behaviors manifest themselves as they do were beyond the scope of this study, though they are wholly influential to the newworker’s world.

This researcher was also the tool for the selection process. Staff members selected represented as many variations of newsroom newworkers as possible. This group of sources showed interest in the study or were receptive to the researcher’s request to shadow them. Had different individuals been selected, the conclusions might have been slightly different. This research does tend to highlight problems; often the elements of
newswork that were positive and fulfilling found only a minor voice in this study. They were certainly present but far from dominant themes. The like-minded issues and consensus voiced by newworkers in different jobs and newsrooms provided convincing evidence of the validity of the findings.

**Future Research**

This project raises many questions about newsroom culture. A few areas that should be addressed in the future could be the pressures and influences that occur in the world of news administrators and executives. This study identified a “black ceiling” above which these key players operate. The rank-and-file newworker is not privy to this world and the organizational directives and seemingly strange conclusions stemming from organizational research often dumbfounds him/her. Given the transition news organizations are going through with digital products and evolving business models, the question of how these variables will resolve themselves is paramount to a sustaining level of understanding of cultural reality in newsrooms. Also, how might the dynamics observed in this study compare with those at broadcast or radio operations? It was strongly suggested throughout this study that the structures and systems at work in a “for-profit” newsroom were highly influential of the culture. A study at a non-profit news organization, like *ProPublica*, would be valuable for understanding of how and if journalism and newworkers may be engaged under a different model.

Given the lack of control newworkers feel in their own environments, the exploration of ways to amalgamate the autonomy they once enjoyed with digital and evolving platforms is another direction for future research. Are there better models for
organizational structure than the dominant capitalist-corporate-growth oriented models that have recently served newsworkers and the civic function of journalism so poorly? As newsworkers are the front line for the public to understand the breadth of issues in their lives, any research that allows for a deeper understanding of their world would be welcomed.
References


