Agency Restructuring and Amalgamation of Children Aid Societies: Social Workers in Northern Ontario

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

This research project explores the effects of neoliberal policy reform at Children Aid Society (CAS) in Ontario with a specific focus of a newly amalgamated agency in Northern Ontario. For the purpose of this research paper, the agency currently restructuring is referred as Agency # 1. The amalgamation has been initiated by the Ontario Ministry of Youth and Children Services (MYCS). In order to provide these changes, the MYCS formed the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare (CPSCW) to look into approaches that would make services more efficient and sustainable. This project focuses on the interpretation of the amalgamation through three lenses: the academic literature reviewed; five interviews conducted with administrators and front line workers; and finally the researchers lived experience at Agency # 1 will form a backdrop to the research questions in order to highlight the voices of the research participants. A qualitative approach was conducted to analyze and outline specific themes and sub themes that relate to the literature review such as Neoliberalism, Centralization and New Public Management (NPM). The findings support that neoliberal policy reform has impacted employees at Agency # 1 through a series of miscommunication on policy and procedures along with a delayed process to agreeing on a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). The data outlines that the process has been highly influenced and developed by the MYCS, CPSCW and senior administration. The data supports the conclusion that neoliberal reform through managerial approaches is highly entrenched in restructuring of Agency # 1.

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Introduction

As a past employee of a Northern Ontario child welfare agency, I have been interested and implicated in the formal process of amalgamations of Children Aid Societies (CAS). For the purposes of this thesis, I will refer to the newly amalgamated CAS organization as Agency # 1. Prior to the amalgamation, I was employed as a residential worker for CAS at one of the previous legacy agencies, which I will refer to as Agency # 2. At that time Agency # 2 was responsible for child welfare and mental health services in the district of Cochrane, Ontario. My time with Agency #2 has spanned almost 5 years; I have not only been employed as a residential worker but also procured a field placement on the Agency #2 child welfare team. I additionally provided relief for the child welfare team during my time at Agency #2. Four years into my time at Agency #2, we were informed that the agency would be amalgamating with two other agencies. In this thesis, these two amalgamating agencies will be referred as Agency #3 and Agency #4.

By the time of this writing Agencies #2, #3, and #4 had amalgamated their services to create Agency #1 who's central office is located in Timmins, Ontario. As will be discussed further in the findings chapter, the amalgamation was precipitated by a report commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Youth and Community Services. Agency #1 began to operate as an organization on April 2, 2012, and though largely complete, in many aspects the amalgamation is still ongoing. This thesis explores the experiences of the employees in this amalgamation and the impacts it has on everyday work in the agency.

Since its initial inauguration, one year has passed and the changes are still relatively fresh to workers at Agency #1. As a former front line worker with Agency #2 and Agency #1, I experienced the amalgamation as a distant process that did not reflect the daily activities or knowledge of workers, and hence proved to be stressful and difficult for workers and service users alike.

The literature reviewed for this project views public service restructuring as a form of neoliberalism at the level of policy and practice, that is a common and popular practice in western liberal welfare states (Hurl, 1984; Lawler & Hearn, 1995; Dominelli & Hoogvelt, 1996; Dominelli, 1999; Larner, 2000; Parker, Bradley, 2000; Baines, 2004; Clarke, 2004; Carey, 2009; Fanelli &Thomas, 2011). The current recessionary and sluggish economic conditions in Ontario provided the context in which to justify the implementation of austerity measures in public service sector organizations. Children's Aid Societies are not exempt from changes in "economic realities" and, in Ontario and elsewhere, have been targeted as organizations that need to become more financially sustainable (We Are Ontario, 2012). In 2009 the Ministry of Child and Youth Services (MCYS) created the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare (CPSCW) to provide a report and recommendations that were studied over a three year mandate ending in September of 2012 (CPSCW, 2012). In its final report, the CPSCW provided numerous recommendations to the MYCS. One of the recommendations that are pertinent to this study was the proposed amalgamation of 13 separate child welfare agencies into 6 organizations (MCYS, 2012). In the northern region where I was employed, Agency #1 was the only organization that would amalgamate three former separate agencies with different management structures into one unified and centralized final product.

This project focuses on the interpretation of the amalgamation through three lenses: the academic literature reviewed; five interviews conducted with administrators and front line workers; and finally the researchers lived experience at Agency # 1 will form a backdrop to the research questions in order to highlight the voices of the research participants. I will argue that the reasons behind the process of amalgamation are rooted in ideological notions of pro-market approaches to public restructuring (Baines, 2004) focusing on market-like notions of efficiency and cost saving. This thesis tries to take a closer look at how forms of New Public Management (NPM) and managerialism intersect with the neoliberal notion of public sector restructuring in the process of amalgamation. These two themes underline some of the major changes to Agency #1 in terms of structure and philosophical vision. For example, the neoliberalization of social work can be seen in changing the label of "services users" to "individual consumer of services".

The idea of customers as empowered individuals as opposed to service users as a non-market construct and the ideological notion that customers should be provided with a "choice" of services in a public sector organization like CAS, suggests that agencies like CAS and its front line workers possess the power to attract service users and build consumer loyalty. It suggests that service users can approach services on a voluntary basis and are happy to do so. This stands in contrast to the reality that many CAS clients are involuntary and are cautious about interacting with this particular state agency. Similarly, frontline workers have little power to attract or retain customers as NPM policy scripts and restricts their work in rigid hierarchal processes, aimed at reducing risk to the agency and state and providing little room for discretion or autonomy (Carniol, 2010).

The recommendation to amalgamate three legacy agencies into one centralized structure highlights questions as to how practical it is to service such a large geographical area from one agency (the area now covered by Agency #1 is roughly the same size in terms of distance from Toronto to Ottawa). Whether the intent is financially motivated, service user focused, or aimed at providing a simple sustainable model, it also encourages questions as to the evidence on which this course of action is based. Further, Northern Ontario has vast terrains, a diverse cultural population and low-density population. The recommendations made by the CPSCW are generalist in nature and may not take into consideration the factors of varying rural and/or remote locations. For example, the intake procedures of Agencies #2, #3, and #4 were combined into Agency #1 creating a centralized process. This appeared inefficient and confusing to many services users who were not used to a new amalgamated formalized system and found it frustrating and intimidating. This underscores the question of how a diverse and dispersed population of service users can be affected by a policy created from the concept of centralization.

Though the intake problem may now be resolved, the difficulties it initially created highlights the challenges that can develop when "consumers" are required to discuss highly sensitive issues with intake workers. Note that changing clients into "consumers" was a driving force in the restructuring and was addressed at agency campus meetings early on through power point presentations by senior administration to staff shortly after the amalgamation took place. As such, one of the questions this paper seeks to investigate is why the amalgamation pursued a policy that entails the neoliberal strategy of categorizing service users as "consumers", promoting a false sense of choice in a tightly controlled and mandated organization like CAS (Bovaird, Löffler, 2003).

In addition, the research questions the emphasis the Ontario government places on neoliberal reform. Although much of the reforms introduced during the amalgamation look more like consolidation of management control rather than the dispersed and decentralized power argued to characterize neoliberal management forms such as managerialism. A fairly traditional management approach is quite evident in reports and recommendations of the MCYS and CPSCW. The CPSCW is adamant about using the term "amalgamation" rather than "takeover". They want to give the impression that participants in the research included senior administrators, supervisors, front line workers and service users, and that everyone had a role to play in the amalgamation.

My research shows a marked lack of participation in the planning and preparation of amalgamation outside of senior management. In the implementation stage, the board and senior administrators were touted as the leaders of change, and consistent with a traditional managerial structure, they implemented policy from the top to bottom. It became evident (through both my personal experience and the data gathered from this research) that a large consolidation of power can take place in an amalgamation.

Literature Review

Neoliberalism
Fanelli & Thomas (2011) define neoliberalism as both a philosophy and social policy established in the context of a decline in capitalist economics that originated in the early 1970's. This decline led to large restructuring of labour relations and labour market policies over the course of the next few decades (Fanelli, Thomas, 2011). By the introduction of austerity measures after the 2007 General Financial Crisis, neoliberal

presence was not new, rather it was prevalent throughout North America and Europe and was embraced by very different capitalist governments with little organized resistance from their respective citizens (Panitch et all, 2010). Whether the Conservative government of Mike Harris, the NDP government of Bob Rae, or the Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty neoliberalism had a common presence in many Ontario public policy reforms (Fanelli and Thomas, 2011).

Social services were not immune to neoliberal ideology. Despite claiming that the recession of 2008 was over, the Ontario government has continued to pursue neoliberal policy by making a strong shift towards austerity measures in public service organizations. Austerity measures were evident in a 2011 report published by the Ontario MYCS, the area of government that regulates funding allocation for child welfare in the province. Basing its recommendations on similar child welfare programs in Alberta, some American states, and the United Kingdom, the CPSCW sought to mimic social service reforms from other jurisdictions that many consider to be at the forefront of neoliberal restructuring. (Lawler & Hearn, 1995; Dominelli, 1999; Gendron et al, 2001, Baines, 2006).

Further evidence of Ontario's desire to pursue neoliberal reform was clear following the publication of the 2012 Drummond Report. Mr. Drummond, a long time banker and economist was tasked with providing recommendations as to how the public service sector could attain fiscal responsibility through economic restructuring (Drummond, 2012). In the case of child welfare, the report did not identify any major fiscal change other than capping the expenditure growth at 0.5 % and supporting the CPSCW recommendations and support the further implementation of these reforms

(Drummond, 2012, chapter 8).

A number of authors argue that the shift from a Keynesian Welfare state towards an open market is characteristic of globalization (Dominelli, 1999, Larner, 2000). A global shift can also be seen in policy frameworks pursued by most Western liberal industrialized countries. Rather than equity or entitlement, which were the hallmarks of Keynesianism, new policy frameworks focus on the enhancement of economic efficiencies and market provisions (Larner, 2000). The shift toward neoliberal policy frameworks is often attributed to ideological notions. Ideological notions are based on beliefs and values and have little empirical support (Clarke, 2004; Carey, 2009). Larner (2000) explain neoliberal values as the individual, freedom of choice, market security, laissez faire, and minimal government and argues that they set the stage for policies at the national, regional and agency level.

Governmentality distinguishes between government and governance. Whereas neoliberal policymaking may promote smaller and less government intervention, this does not mean there is a reduced need for governance (Foucault, 1991). Larner (2000) argues that neoliberal forms of governance assist institutions to conform to the needs of the market over the needs of the larger community or society (see also Baines 2004, Clarke, 2004). Forms of neoliberal governance include New Public Management (NPM), a form of managerialism which attempts to introduce an efficient transition from supposedly inefficient traditional public administration to more responsive, locally governed, flexible services (Osborne, 2006). This form of governance constructs independent service units within public service delivery that ideally compete with one another in order to provide customer choice and greater innovation and efficiency

(Osborne, 2006). By providing a healthy and competitive framework, neoliberal policy allegedly promotes the inherent rights of individuals to choose the services they want within a free market of provision.

Proponents of neoliberal reform posit that the only way to measure accountability and efficiency is through a system that controls and quantifies practices (Baines, 2004). By decentralizing services through the means of performance measure and outcomes, control mechanisms are argued to shift from inefficient and horizontal bureaucratic models toward a formal and hierarchal structure aligned with private sector efficiency model (Parker & Bradley, 2000). Introducing performance-based mechanisms from private sector managerial models such as NPM launches tightly scripted practices with the goal of controlling finances, budgets, and labour unions (Parker, Bradley, 2000; Baines, 2004). This neoliberal conceptual framework extends to the individual's capability and resourcefulness by purportedly empowering one's ability to locate the best services and to advocate for one's self when these services are not available or appropriate through a decentralized process of decision-making (Parker& Bradley, 2000). This individual focus is strongly associated with Public Choice Theory (PCT), which claims that the choices available to individuals are the principle drivers of change (McDonald, 2006). Market demand and minimal government intervention is preferred within these policy and managerial approaches.

Opponents of neoliberal policy making argue that the marketization of public sector services discriminates against individuals who may be marginalized and unable to advocate successfully for themselves (Clarke, 2004; Carey, 2009). The notion of individual choice seems more ideological rather than research or knowledge based.

Kershaw (2004) corroborates this by observing that BC childcare policies have strayed from evidenced-based to partisan-based policymaking, which she argues is consistent with the current neoliberal ideological framework. Instead of referencing research, politicians simply refer to a concept emphasizing private choice and gather popular support for policy change (Kershaw, 2004).

Neoliberal reform also has a gendered impact. Studies show that manegerialism has deeply affected the status of women in social services as service users, providers and volunteers (Harlow, 2003; Clarke, 2004; Baines, 2004 & 2006; Carniol, 2010). Traditionally women have had a high rate of employment in social services. However, similar to the manufacturing sector, jobs conventionally held by men have been moved overseas due to globalization and neoliberal reform. Some of these male workers have begun to move into traditionally female job categories such as those in the social services. They bring with them an emphasis on technical skill rather than interpersonal or relationship-based solutions thereby displacing women and changing the work culture in ways that require further research (Baines, 2006; et al, 2013).

Managerialism
Though managerialism discourse is very similar to the notion of NPM, for the purpose of this essay, NPM and managerialism are classified as two separate notions. They both represent different facets of social work restructuring. NPM has a broader focus on the discourse regarding macro-level analyses of the market, policy, and ideology (Dominelli, 1999; Baines, 2004; Carey, 2009). Discussions surrounding managerialism share similar themes as NPM but provide a better explanation for the micro-level analyses of social work restructuring, including situations where managerialist

approaches go outside NPM. For example, rather than governing at a distance, which is NPM-consistent, amalgamations seem to involve a simple consolidation of management control, which is consistent with a managerialist approach. This approach tends to see all issues as something that will benefit from tighter management control (Harlow, 2003.

Similarly, senior managers are usually entrusted to implement policy changes recommended by the MCYS or the CPSCW. According to Clarke (2004, p.36) within the discourse of managerialism, "managers' are the bearers of 'real-world' wisdom of how to be 'business-like'. They embody the generic 'corporate' ethos of transformation, innovation, efficiency and flexibility". This notion of managerialism is expected in both the voluntary and public sectors. It is not an approach solely based on private business entities (Harris, 1998, Dominelli, 1999; Clarke, 2004, Baines, 2004). Managerialist reforms of the public sector often entail little or no debate and seek to implement a procedural neutral environment that sees efficiency and accountability as enforcement discourse and nothing more (Aronson, Sammon, 2001). This imaginary distancing from political discourse reaffirms the business ideology behind managerialism.

The push towards this type of managerialized restructuring is hegemonic across the province of Ontario. In 2011, the CPSCW provided recommendations to the MCYS about how to promote sustainable measures in child welfare (CPSCW, 2011). The clear recommendations from this report concerned how to make child welfare sustainable in a climate of austerity measures. This managerialist ideology went beyond agency administrators simply implementing new or revamped service delivery programs. Instead, by geographically relocating which made it difficult for service users to access services

and difficult for workers to reach service users, the ideological notion of managerialism

provided a shift to "thin" rather than "thicker" definitions of needs leaving front line

workers with a narrow interpretation of what is defined as "essential" (Aronson,

Sammon, 2001) and a decreased capacity to meet even this thin definition. This

narrowing meant there was less room for front line workers to critically analyze the

interpretation of their work or generate alternatives.

Managerial structures reduce and simplify front line workers mandates and as a

result, secure a good and obedient worker who follows the rules. Carey (2009) sees this

process as a push by the state to have greater managerial control, increase regulations and

workloads, and to deskill social workers. This process redefines the role of state social

workers and causes the profession to become even more bureaucratic as it is increasingly

called upon to document every interaction with clients and provide evidence that outcome

targets have been met or exceeded. Carey (2009) also argues that managerialism's

emphasis on strict guidelines redefines the de-skilling of social work roles. Social

workers are becoming the facilitator of the strict guidelines set by managers or within

government funding contracts. This results in workers taking on extra workloads that do

not necessarily entail more client contact, but rather an increased requirement to write

reports, take inventory, assess, purchase, and document (see also, Harris, 1998). Thus, the

role of social workers is becoming less about theory, therapy, advocacy, and more about

case management.

Harlow (2003) introduces an adaptation of Payne's (1997) notion of competing

perspectives on social work structures (Appendix 1 pp. 67). The diagram in Appendix 1

compares different themes and perspectives within different social work approaches. It

outlines four key features that social work organizations include in their philosophical perspectives: i) an implication reflexive therapeutic perspective, ii) socialist-collectivist perspective, iii) individual reformist perspective, and iv) and managerial technicist perspective. It also outlines some key themes and features these four-perspectives share. For example, one of the themes outline in the diagram is "organizational context". Payne's schema provides a small outline of how the different perspectives would approach that theme. Thus from a therapeutic perspective, the organization would focus on a therapeutic intervention approach. A socialist-collective perspective would outline the importance that interest groups reduce the pressures of an oppressive society & maintain dependence of discretionary services. An individual-reformist perspective outlines the context of social work practice by limiting social work activity through the lens of socially defined objectives. A managerial technicist perspective aligns itself with government directives and the technologies of performance define the activity of social workers (Payne, 1997).

These examples provide a useful tool to analyze the transformation of social work and current emphasis on new managerial technicist approach (Harlow, 2003). The managerial technicist approach is shaped and influenced by bureaucrats through not only legislation and government policy, but through reshaping the organizational context and labour of social workers (Harlow, 2003). In essence, Harlow (2003) argues that the core values of critical thought and social work discretion are pre-determined by a specific set of policies enforced through a strict top to bottom approach. This approach is influenced by government mandates highly entrenched in the ideological notion of NPM. This leaves almost no room for reflexivity, a practice once thought to be central to social work

practice and management. New managerialism has also brought about new forms of

marketization in social work. For example, the culture of new manegerialism has

transformed the way internal management models function though older models continue

to exist alongside. Harris (1998) argues that a culture of pro-business like approaches,

and a generic model of management blend in a private sector and public sector approach

(Harris, 1998, Baines, 2004, & Clarke, 2004).

This form of managerialism is also heavily influenced by political decisions made

by the state. These decisions become actualized in the details of funding contracts,

mandated agency services, outcome measures and accreditation standards. Thus in an

organization like Agency #1, that serves child welfare needs, becomes concretely and

ideologically positioned to be an arm of government. Further, when state governments

outline recommendations, highly embedded in new managerial approaches, it is difficult

for mandated organizations to approach restructuring from an alternative route. In the

situation analyzed in this paper the Ministry of Child and Youth Services launched a

Commission (CPSCW, 2011) mandated to recommend efficient ways for CAS's across

the province to operate. The final report recommended amalgamations and CAS

organizations across the province were left with the decision whether to do it or not.

Although the decision was putatively up to them, given that government is their exclusive

funder and provides the mandate under which they operate, it seemed there was little

choice but to adhere to the recommendations and begin agency restructuring through

amalgamations.

Operationally, much of the responsibility for organizational restructuring fell on

the shoulders of senior management. Howe (1991) suggests that the growth of

managerialism has increased the powers of managers in the public sector, rather than decentralize control and power as claimed by neoliberal governments. This power takes the form of control and surveillance, and social work practices directed by a managerial system dedicated to meeting imposed targets (Howe, 1991). Some of these changes systematically undermine the discretion of social work practitioners by tightly controlling the content and process of their work tasks. Managerialism consolidates power through a top down approach to restructuring and the introduction of extensive metrics, which encroach on social work autonomy while simultaneously expanding the power of managerial ranks (Lawson, 1993, Langan, 2000, Evans & Harris, 2004, Carniol, 2012).

New Public Management

According to Clarke (2004), neoliberalism and public sector reforms have been synonymous with one another over the past decades, and usually fall under the rubric of New Public Management (NPM). The province of Alberta has been one of the most successful governments to implement NPM policy in Canada (Gendron et al, 2001) with other provinces following suit. This is evident in the recent recommendations proposed by the Ontario CPSCW, which following the lead of Alberta supports the province wide amalgamation of various Children Aid Society (CAS) agencies across the province. Though Alberta and Ontario seem to be growing closer in their approach to child welfare and other social policies, the literature on NPM argues that it entails a variety of activities and policies, which depending on how they are implemented, differ substantially across countries (Hammersmichd et al., 2007; Alonso et al., 2008; Pollitt & Boukaert, 2011). These differences generally result from: local cultures, competition between public and private service providers (Hood, 1991; Dunleavy and Hood, 1994), decentralization of

government bureaus (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Pollitt, 1993; Kettl, 2000), notions of more choice for citizens (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Pollitt, 1993; Kettl, 2000), differences in benchmarking and output measurements (Hood, 1991; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Dunleavy and Hood, 1994), approaches to downsizing (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2003) and outsourcing (Kettl, 2000; Pollitt, 2007), ways of separating purchaser/provider (Pollitt, 1993, 2007), contrasts in how to separate political decision-making from the direct management of public services (Osborne and McLaughlin, 2002), and variations in assimilation within the public sector of private-sector management techniques (Hood, 1991; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). Though the academic literature on NPM is numerous and varied, scholars and government agencies have yet to produce consistent ways of evaluating NPM itself (Alonso et al., 2008; Clifton and Diaz-Fuentes, 2010). Differences, such as those listed above, require further research and evaluation in order to gain a clearer understanding of the varied impacts of neoliberalism and restructuring.

The rationale of NPM hinges on the similarities between the public and private sectors. The objective of a private firm is to maximize profit, which is essentially linked to a manager's performance, while a public sector organization has a more complex set of objectives that involve the maximization of social welfare or the public good (Jensen and Stonecash, 2005). Workers within the public sector are generally considered to be intrinsically motivated to provide optimal effort (Francois, 2000). Unlike managers in the private sector, they are not swayed by high-powered incentives schemes as their efforts and activities will not increase or decrease asset value (King, 1998). Despite having very different goals, private and public sector organizations do share some commonalities:

mainly they have a large size work force (Mitliangpili, 2010, 5).

Proponents of NPM use this similarity to explain the rationale behind implementing private sector managerialism into public sector organizations. The current NPM trend has been touted as a best practice of governments to obtain benefits and enhanced accountability (Gendron et al, 2001). Some authors such as King (2002) argue that the underlying premise of NPM - the private sector is more efficient than the public sector - is unfounded and naïve. Other scholars corroborate his position noting there is no empirical evidence that universally supports the widely held view that the public sector is less efficient (Megginson and Netter, 2001; Jensen and Stonecash, 2005; Mitliangpili, 2010, 5). With such minimal supporting empirical research, it is interesting that NPM reforms have occurred at all levels of government in most western countries and even some developing ones, without serious scrutiny.

Governments have adopted NPM globally as the best method to engage in social service reforms but this claim is not supported by academic social work literature. The majority of scholarly research argues NPM is not a successful strategy and further that it does not benefit social workers or the people they serve. For example, Carniol (2010), Hurl (1983), Phelps (2001), Harlow (2003), and Evans & Shields (2004) argue that NPM, managerialism and neoliberal ideology have a specific impact on those working within social service organizations. Provincial governments favor workforce reduction plans in light of fiscal pressures during economic downturns. This has a detrimental effect on front line workers by increasing workloads of remaining staff. In many cases, workforce reduction occurs simultaneously with budget decreases and policy changes. Agencies are expected to do more with less people and less resources while upholding the

standardization detailed in government funding contracts.

Social work organizations have a tendency to compensate for budget cuts by reducing the amount of full time equivalent staff - front line workers who are in salaried positions with pensions and benefits (Hurl, 1984; Baines, 2004, Carniol, 2010). Instead, agencies often hire short-term contract social workers under the guise of providing more work for individuals at a lower cost to the agency. This generates a group of precarious workers who may not have the skills needed to do the specific tasks of their short term contracts and do not have access to increased training, benefits, and job security. Numerous scholarly work corroborates this finding noting that neoliberal social service reforms lead to increased part time contractual work that results in the deskilling of social work employees (Harlow, 2003; Clarke, 2004; Baines, 2004 & 2006; Carey, 2009; Carniol, 2010).

NPM reforms of social service policies have a tendency to create negative workplace morale for front line workers (Lawson 1993, Lawler & Hearn 1995, Harlow, 2003). Although recipients of services are also affected, it is usually front line workers who are required to understand the restructured policies and implement them. When and if there is backlash from service users or the community, it is most often projected on front line staff though they have little or no power to make changes. If the workers have difficulty in complying with new policy or attempt changes to resolve implementation problems, they often experience conflict with management who are under extreme pressure to make the changes work. For example, if frontline workers do not comply with new policies they can become subject to possible "official written warnings" or

reprimand (Sainsbury, 2001, Carniol 2010). In this situation front line workers are not only exposed to complaints and pressure from service users, they are also subject to punitive human resource policies endorsed and undertaken by administration.

To align with neoliberal ideology, the welfare state has been largely dismantled and social services have been retrenched to ensure decreased state expenditure. As noted earlier, in order to implement cost cutting measures, governments have adopted neoliberal-compatible private sector practices designed to reduce costs and eliminate inefficiencies. Though neoliberal ideology promoted the idea of decentralized control, practices such as managerialism and amalgamation produce rigid hierarchies and increased management control within the restructured public services (Hurl, 1984; Harlow, 2003; Evans & Harris, 2004; Clarke, 2004; Carey, 2009). This gap between the claims of managerialism and neoliberalism and the way it was actualized within the amalgamation I studied, form the main focus of the rest of this thesis.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to provide a comprehensive analysis of how workers at Agency #1 experienced the restructuring of their organization through the implementation of neoliberal policy. The ethics board of McMaster University approved this research on May 7th, 2013 (Appendix D). The study focused on workers who had previously worked for one of the legacy organizations and then transitioned into the newly amalgamated Agency #1. All participants are employed by Agency #1, and the participants hold varying positions that are different from one another.

The following sections will identify three specific areas of the methodology. First, the sample of participant's confidentiality is carefully taken into consideration and maintained in this study. Second, the outline of the interview format will be discussed. And finally, I will discuss how the data was analyzed.

Interviews were conducted with five employees of Agency #1. Each participant occupied a different position in the organization but have all experienced the changes of the amalgamation. Since there were three former legacy agencies coming together to form Agency #1, I believed it would be beneficial to have all three represented. This sample was obtained through the participation of Agency #1 senior administration and union representatives (OPSEU). With their help and flexibility, I was able to recruit participants from both management and the front lines.

Once a research participant indicated their interest in possible participation, an e-mail script was sent to them in order to provide general information concerning the study. Interested participants were given a letter of information (Appendix E) with further details of the study. Both the Executive Director (ED) and Union President were presented with these documents to ensure both parties had equal opportunity to participate and that as broad a sample as possible could be involved. It is also important to note that while I had been an employee of Agency #1; I am currently on educational leave (since August 2012). I do not have any financial arrangements with the agency and provided formal notice before the research started that I was not coming back to Agency #1. My position with the agency was of a casual part-time Residential Worker thus I did not hold any position of power or conflict over the participants in this research. Each participant voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

All participants of the study were females. To ensure confidentiality, the participants were categorized into five different codes: 001, 002, 003, 004, and 005. I decided not to provide alternative names for the participants, as Agency #1 is a large agency with many employees, since I do not know many of them, I did not want to risk utilizing a name that may be misconstrued as somebody else. Although the agency has grown exponentially since the amalgamation, the participants do come from relatively small communities and offices. In this case, without any disrespect for the integrity of the participants, they will be referred as numbers to ensure confidentiality. Participants had varying experiences and tenure in social work with careers ranging anywhere from 5-25 years. Since the amalgamation of Agency #1 was officially introduced on April 2, 2012, the majority of the participants' experience comes from their time with the previous legacy agencies. It is also interesting to note that some of these participants were also present when earlier amalgamations took place in their legacy agencies. Thus this amalgamation was not a new concept for some of the workers.

The amalgamation of Agency #1 covers a large geographical location, thus the participants were gathered through a mixture "availability" and "purposive" sampling. The reason behind using both sample methods was to ensure a perspective that would represent both management and union members. As previously mentioned, both the ED and union were contacted in order to maximize the opportunity of both sides participating. The strategy of using both availability and purposive ensured that the study would have representatives from both sides of the amalgamation (Grinnel, William. & Unrau, 2012, p. 202). With this method, the researcher was able to recruit a population of

n=5, a quota that was set before the recruitment began and also reached with five participants coming forward.

In terms of recruitment, the participants were contacted via various methods. The union (Ontario Public Service Employees Union or OPSEU) was having agency meetings in three separate communities to talk about their collective bargaining with Agency #1. I was able to secure some speaking time at all three events. Unfortunately I missed one event due to bereavement, but my material was distributed and I received participants from all three former legacy organizations. The OPSEU local also posted my e-mail script on their website and Facebook page. The administration was also provided with the same email script and letter of information. I contact the Communications Director and Executive Director of the agency regarding the study and they confirmed their interest in participation and willingness to distribute the email information.

Each participant that came forth from either the union or agency was given the opportunity to withdraw his or her participation from the study at anytime before or after the interview (Appendix D). Every participant signed a consent form that outlined the information of the study. Participants were also given a copy for any point of reference or questions they may have after the interviews have taken place. Since the interviews were conducted in various communities, the locations of the interviews were chosen in places participants deemed as neutral and safe.

For the interviews, I used an interview guide that was organized and explained in advanced (Appendix C). Because this process of interviews was done in a semi-structured and open-ended format, other questions arose from the information participants would share. Through qualitative questionings, the researcher provided the

individual's with a chance to express whether they felt the restructuring model was going according to plan, exceeding expectations or whether the message initially introduced been abandoned (Baines, 2004).

The article "Critical Discourse Analysis and the Marketization of Public Discourse" provides an important guiding tool in qualitative research interviewing (Fairclough, 1993). This approach provides the participant an opportunity to share their experience and be critical without being criticized for their point of views. It also illustrates a research emphasis on qualitative analysis for research subjects that work in a mandated field entrenched in the political and economic sphere (Baines, 2004).

The interviews took on an average of 30 minutes, they were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim after the fact. It is noted that those with an overview of the agency (union reps and administration) had longer interviews and more to say about the process of amalgamation where as front line workers had shorter interviews with less emphasis on overview questions and more to say on immediate experience.

The transcripts were coded with the participant's numbers and read over diligently on numerous occasions. The method of coding was constructed by dividing the data into multiple themes and sub-themes. This coding procedure ensured that certain themes that arose could be categorized and sorted into areas that correlate with one another (Kreuger, Newman, 2006, p. 326). There was one main theme for each specific question, along with two other main themes that came up in the participant's answer, along with several sub-themes that related to the main categories. In order to identify these themes, I used three different colors of highlighters for the main themes accompanied with two other designated colors for the sub-themes.

After all the interviews were coded, I began to re-read all the transcripts and included notes in the margins that would be pertinent observations. These were a point of reference for myself to go back to when categorizing all the data together. For example, all the color coordinated themes that were highlighted on my initial transcript were re-highlighted on a word document and each theme with the same identifying color was then added to a specific folder that entailed each theme for all the participants transcripts. Cuttings these codes out of transcripts are represented by pieces of data called "bibbits" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). The bibbits were useful for the sub-categories that sometimes would fit into one or more of the main themes. Therefore, they were utilized on more than one theme and stored separately as sub themes.

After deconstructing the interviews and categorizing them, I went back to my literature review and began to extract the data from my interviews and combine them with similar themes arising from the literature. This technique is consistent with a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA focuses on problem oriented and deductive approaches, emphasizing that the focus is not on a specific linguistics item but rather a set of thoughts that are similar in nature and content. This form of data analysis also moves back and forth between theory and practice (Wodak, 2010). This has a significant importance to my research as the market influence on the restructuring of organizational policy in Ontario is rooted in marketization discourse. Fairclough (1993) sums up what CDA means within this research. First it helped me to outline the discursive practices, events, and texts in relation to the participants and the amalgamation at Agency #1. Second, it permitted a wider investigation of the social and cultural structures, relations, and

processes (Fairclough, 1993) that included the relationship between the MCYS, Agency #1 administration, and front line workers.

Fairclough (1993) refers to "opacity" a notion that discourses (such as ideology, power, and marketization) may very well be unclear or unknown to the participants involved in the research though they seem very clear to the researcher. The data provided some practical notions linked to some of the theoretical frameworks outlined in the literature review. This provided a good frame of reference for organizing my data into categories related to public sector restructuring/amalgamations, and the perception of Agency #1 employees. Since I have had some experience as an Agency #1 employee, I did not want my subjectivity to come into play and tried to regulate this by coding first so that categories were not predetermined. Using this method the information and data collected was categorized for its importance to the research question and some of the bibbets that may have been deemed as not relevant were used to further generate suggestions for further research.

Findings

This chapter reviews the responses of the five participants interviewed for this paper. It is divided into two main themes: centralization and NPM/managerialism. The theme of centralization entails the major institutional, structural and political changes that occurred when combining three separate CAS agencies. This theme encompasses two sub-themes found in the interviews and literature: ideology and poor communication. Four of the five participants emphasized that this service agency amalgamation were steeped in theoretical and normative presumptions of policy-makers, with little empirical evidence to support and inform their proposed reforms. All participants noted there was

some evidence of miscommunication throughout the amalgamation process, especially

between the three campuses.

The second theme of NPM/managerialism entails the impact of new policy

changes on front line employees and the local community. It also has two sub-themes:

fundamental changes to the underlying processes of service delivery, and declining

community participation. A majority of participants interviewed observed the services

offered by the amalgamated agency were essentially the same as before, but that

amalgamation entailed new processes and policies for service delivery. These were

confusing and unclear to workers (and service users), but little assistance was offered

from management to front line workers in order to enhance their understanding and

interpretation of new said policies. As will be discussed further, two participants were

strongly convinced that new policies implemented by Agency #1 were detrimental to the

relationship between the agencies and service users, as well as to the surrounding

communities (businesses and police services).

Centralization

The amalgamation of Agency #1 began when the CPSCW was convened by

province of Ontario's MYCS in July of 2009 (CPSCW, 2012). The CPSCW final report

was released in September of 2012 but Agency #1 started the process of amalgamation

well before then and officially opened as a new organization on April 2, 2012. This was

not an anomaly, many other agencies in Ontario amalgamated before the final report

throughout the year 2011-2012 (MYCS, 2012). This was in part due because the CPSCW

released multiple reports during that three-year span between its creation and final report

and it was clear that amalgamation was a strong and consistent recommendation. For

example: the CPSCW released two reports, Towards Sustainable Child Welfare (2010),

and A New Approach to Funding Child Welfare in Ontario (2011), which both included

amalgamation as recommendations.

Agency #1's service delivery mandate is for North Eastern Ontario, a vast

geographical area with a low-density population (See Appendix B for map). Please note

that Agency #1 does not cover the whole region of north eastern Ontario. There are

various maps that outline the boundaries of north eastern Ontario; the two maps provided

in (Appendix B) provide the closest interpretation of the geographical area Agency #1

has to cover. The second map in Appendix B provides a descriptive map of the towns

and cities included in Agency #1. The three main towns included in this map are

Kapuskasing (North Campus), Timmins (Central campus), and New Liskeard (South

campus). In addition there are many other communities that have offices located in these

three campuses. In all, Agency #1 identifies on their website 14 different communities

having one or multiple offices (NEOFACS, 2013). Prior to the amalgamation, the three

represented cities of the north, central, and south campuses represented the main

buildings for the previous legacy organizations. Timmins has now become the "main

campus" of Agency #1.

The amalgamation created a new organization that would inherit a geographical

area "…bigger than some European countries…" as stated by participant 004. The sheer

vastness of the amalgamation has created many issues concerning the extra time it may

take to complete tasks such as buying products for service users, extra driving for training

and conferences, and the intake and referral process. Particpant 001 notes that

"…buying merchandise for "our" kids has become complicated, there are new
rules around where you have to buy clothes and it feels restrictive for workers who may
work in a different community than the agency accepted store, which is usually Wal-
Mart…"

This large geographic area limited easy access to resources for workers and often entailed special trips for workers for a variety of reasons, particularly those in smaller communities.

There was also a major shift in training approaches undertaken by the amalgamated agency. The amalgamation depended on greater use of technological tools in order to train individuals spread across large distances. In some cases this has deterred the learning of participants, as some found technological learning difficult and preferred more hands-on training occasionally offered in local organizational offices. Participant 005 states "… There has been a large movement towards implementing so many technologies but the technology is not informing us very well…"

This increased dependence on technologies has especially created confusion in the communication aspect of the amalgamation, which many workers found to be a struggle to adjust. In particular, communication and technology became a problem within the restructured referral and intake process. Agency #1 workers describe the process as inefficient, which all five participants acknowledged became a significant issue after the intake process was centralized. Service users told workers that this was a significant problem that created anxiety and frustrations for service users wanting to call the agency for help. At this point, there is no clear evidence this will improve and although changes have been initiated, it continues to be unclear whether centralizing referrals is sustainable.

The Amalgamation

The decision to amalgamate three agencies in northern Ontario was initiated by the government's mandate to search for better sustainable approaches to service delivery in child welfare. The recommendations outlined by the CPSCW have been at the

forefront of Agency #1's restructuring. Senior administration involved in this research project provided an in-depth analysis of the stakeholders involved in the amalgamation process. According to interview data, Agency #1 administration identified May and June of 2011 as the date in which the idea of the amalgamation was launched with the goal of drawing the three CAS organizations into one organization. This gave the agencies roughly one year away to develop and enact their plan. The senior administrators involved in this study identified this as the time where the "CPSCW started to step back and the MYCS to step in to offer more help, resources, and guidance". The government provided an amalgamation plan and template to Agency #1 that included some outlines and guidelines for the restructuring. Agency #1 senior administration took into consideration the guidelines but described the managing of the amalgamation as "up to us". Once Agency #1 created an amalgamation plan that would meet the needs of their jurisdiction (Ontario North East), they submitted the plan to the MCYS. It was reviewed in conjunction with three members of the CPSCW assigned to Agency #1 amalgamation. Thus there was a close relationship between the CPSCW, MCYS, and Agency # 1 senior administration/board of governors and they became the major players in the amalgamation process.

It is important to note the absence of other key stakeholders such as service users, other community agencies, unions representing the workforce and frontline workers. From this point on, the actual practical process of amalgamation was entrusted into the hands Agency #1 senior administration and the board. The Board of Governors at the CAS agencies were made up of a variety of members across many communities that are now under Agency #1's jurisdiction. Many of the members, like current President Garry

Dent of Agency #1 served as previous member to one of the legacy organizations (NEOFACS, 2013).

The MCYS defines legacy agencies as previous CAS that existed prior to the amalgamations, for example in 2011-2012 thirteen societies amalgamated into 6 organizations in Ontario (MCYS, 2012). In addition, the Ontario Children Aid Society (OCAS) was present in providing resources for senior administration. But as a senior administrator states, " how you wanted to make your amalgamation, and how you wanted to structure it, was very individualized". From the point of view of the senior administrators the data shows they believed the restructuring needed to be individualized by agency. Agency #1 was the only new amalgamation that entailed three previous legacy agencies with multi service approaches to child welfare and mental health in the vast geographical area of North Eastern Ontario.

As previously stated, the sample of five participants in this project are situated in five different positions and physical site locations of Agency #1, thus the view of the amalgamation differs from region to region as well as from the front lines to management. It is not surprising that both sides held very different opinions on some issues. Some of the participants on the front lines claimed the amalgamation was something that could not be stopped or reversed, though it was experienced as challenging from their individual positions. In response to the question of whether they had any input in the amalgamation process, two out of five participants said that they did not have the room for any personal input. One of the participants stated, "No, I did not have much input, we didn't get asked much, well I should say we didn't get asked anything". The other participant shared similar views in that, "There has been little to no

room for input, no one has been asked for input, I know they set up these committees, but why that person was put on the committee we don't know".

Two other participants believed they had input. One of these two participants had a chance to participate in that process by sitting on a committee. As one frontline worker observed, the opportunity to sit on a committee involved selection by management. "I think people have had some opportunity for input, but I don't think people have had equal opportunity to say what they've had to say, but from what I can see, input has been selected through management". Participant 005 believed they had input but was not sure this input meant anything in terms of influence or the possibility to make changes to the process, "I think I have the opportunity to have input, I'm not 100% that it makes it to the end of the line but I think its like that across the board, it's a general impression I get from workers". In this case the participants shared a concern that though they had input they questioned whether there was actual meaning to what they were sharing. Another participant observed that there were various ways to participate in the change process, "There is input through surveys, focus groups and evaluations. There always opportunity for people to be apart of those groups".

These three positions reflect a variety of opinions. Though most participants felt that input was not meaningful, there was no consensus. Participants 001 and 002 noted they had no opportunity for input and questioned the process of individuals who received such an opportunity. The second position reflects that participants had the opportunity for input, but questioned whether answers were already in place before the input was requested. Thirdly, one participant claimed several measures of input were "available through surveys, focus groups and evaluations". The participants' statements also

suggest workers were unclear as to what constitutes participation or input. It is evident, however, that participants were aware management and other groups had an agenda to pursue.

Three participants confirmed there had been some ways that discussion and inclusion of staff in the amalgamation had occurred. For example, tone worker noted there had been formats for discussion and participation through surveys, focus groups, committees, and evaluations. Although only one participant outlined this factor, participants 001, 002, and 004 corroborated the data by also mentioning these evaluation tools. Although the evidence shows these forms of participation took place, there is still the strong suggestion that some workers felt that whether they had opportunity for input, it seemed tokenistic, and that the outcomes were pre-determined through an agenda set by management. These views are in line with what some authours outline as new managerialisms influence on public sector restructuring and lack of meaningful participation (Harris, 1998, Baines, 2004, & Clarke, 2004). The idea of participation is made available to some individuals on the front lines, but in the end, the expertise and experience of managers are favoured (Gendron et al, 2001).

Communication Issues

Communication is the one persistent theme that arose on several occasions throughout all the participants' interviews. The data show the new size of the agency resulted in serious challenges in terms of communication. With this in mind, many of the participant identified "communication" when asked about any major concerns associated with the amalgamation. Participant 004 spokes for all participants, when she raised the topic of the new intake process. "... I know that there has been some feedback and backlash to that (changes in the intake process), in terms of concerns of people saying

you kinda caught up in the phone loop, but I can say there has been a response to it…"

The problems identified in the intake process by workers and service users was concerning the lack of consistency and disconnect with the new system. Often, service users were referred to intake workers in a different community, which confused clients using the new system. Some would often hang up while others were frustrated with the lack of French services. It is still acknowledged that some French service users have to leave a message and wait for a call back from a French-speaking intake worker.

Many workers felt ill-informed about the amalgamation or how they could meaningfully participate in the change process. Participant 002 noted, "…I find that things have been announced to us regularly instead of (us) partaking in the process of bring informed of the process. Whereas we just have general emails coming out as to how things are going to be…" Participant 001 noted that co-workers in other jurisdictions, have, at times, been in a position where they all offer the same services but are working from different policies because some campuses received information through fellow frontline staff instead of through their managers. She noted deep concerns regarding communication, "… Communication is the biggest thing, there's a communication glitch going, so what exactly is going on..." Participant 003 observed it is not only internal communications that was problematic. Other local organizations partnering with organization's like CAS have also reported difficulties navigating the new agency structure:

> There's been a significant lack of communication within teams in the
> agency whereas before we would meet more regularly with other teams
> to debrief. Furthermore we have also had glitches with other
> community agencies we work with, whereas we had a good and clear
> mandate with the OPP before hand, I now feel restricted as to when I
> can call them because I maybe working with a supervisor in another

community. Where we use to have a clear mandate with some Ontario
Provincial Police (OPP) officers are now confused with our methods…

Participant 005 observed that communication is still an on going problem that is difficult

to address no matter what technology the agency adopts:

I think that the new agency is determined to make things more
accessible via technology. But thus far I have not seen how it has
helped clients, especially if most of the communication comes from
what is happening in Timmins. There seems to be a lack of
communication between all areas, I would like to know what activities
are happening in Kirkland Lake also…

As many of the participants outlined, in some way or other there have been major

glitches in communication. These are not simple mistakes in operational activities of an

agency but rather problems rooted in the amalgamation itself. Participant 004 noted the

first fundamental challenge in communication in the amalgamation. "The sheer vastness

of this agency will be a challenge in itself". This participant also noted the different

cultural approaches the legacy agencies had undertaken because a large component of

their clientele were First Nations and French Canadian, necessitating special challenges

to communication and the need for ongoing cultural sensitivity within the new agency.

There were many factors to incorporate into the communication strategy.

Participant 005 noted the presence of new technology and its improvement. They

speculated other legacy agencies "were far behind" on this issue. Since the

amalgamation, the new technological tools have not made the difference management

hoped it would. Participant 002 argued that the notion of communication has been more

about "announcement rather than involvement". One can question whether

advertisements via e-mails is a viable type of communication tool in busy, geographically

dispersed, culturally diverse agencies whether they be private or public. If all forms of

communication are relegated via e-mails to inform workers of upcoming changes, workers will be left with what Aronson and Sammon (2001) call a "thin" retrospect of the institutional changes. This causes workers to provide their own interpretation of policies.

Participant 001 and 003 provided examples of situations involving miscommunication that significantly affected their day-to-day agendas. Participant 001 felt communication was not attached to technology but rather concerned earlier problems associated with the legacy agencies' CBA agreements and policies. For instance, a policy that was standard in Timmins finally made it to the front lines of one of the legacy agencies with little to no deliberation at their respective sites, leaving social workers confused and unclear how to proceed. In another instance, the policy changes had not reached all the sites of the other former legacy agency, resulting in workers with the same position working on a different set of policies while occupying the same position in Agency #1.

The above example holds similarities to participant 003's concern that communication problems existed both within the agency and with external community organizations. She had little guidance on how these policies arose or how to get someone to clarify and rectify the problems that were emerging. In both these examples, policies developed for Agency #1 had not reached or been effectively communicated to front line staff and they felt they had few, if any ways, to clarify or suggest changes to emerging problems. The majority of participants in this study outlined communication issues that consistently affected their daily work activities. Some felt communication issues were part of the process and would work themselves out in time. Nonetheless the issue of

communications needs to be further discussed and developed though systematic and constructive means.

Recommendations made by the MYCS or the CPSCW concerning amalgamation do not address how to deal with the significant challenges Agency #1 faces in communicating to such a large geographical constituency. These issues are seen as organizational problems to be dealt with at the local level. In part, it is not wrong to assume that organization-level policies should be developed to address local challenges of communication. However, given the vast areas most of the amalgamated CAS will be likely to cover, the government could have anticipated communication would be a problem. The provision of supports and guidance would have eased this transition and reduced problems at the frontline.

NPM/Managerialism

Legacy Agencies/Organizations

The participants in this study referred to their legacy agency on many occasions throughout the interviews. This was important data as most of the participants' work experience took place at one of the legacy organizations, all of which had different managerial structures. This research does not aim to look at each individual structure of legacy agencies and compare them to the newly amalgamated agency because they are fundamentally different agency structures with different board of governors, senior administration, supervisors, and front line workers. What is comparable is how Agency #1, as a new organization, navigates the changes and restructuring of child welfare and mental health services from legacy organizations to Agency #1.

Participant 005 provides a short analysis on how the process of amalgamation has both an appealing and unappealing perspective:

> The amalgamation is a long process, you see after one year that there are still many things that need to change, and we are still working on our previous three agencies policies and procedures. We still do not have a collective bargaining agreement (CBA), and when the current changes are more about client services than appearances, then maybe will have something, But to look at it on the other side, I think that it is not that evident for management to enact all these changes. I think they are honesty trying to build something positive and once we have a CBA in place and policies and procedures from one agency instead of three, I ought to think that we will adapt to the change.

There are similar echoes from other participants. Participant 001 states, "Um I think once we have a collective bargaining agreement and one set of job titles I think that that would help, I don't think this service model is designed, is specific enough yet". Participant 002 brings forth an overall analysis that, "previous to the amalgamation you dealt with people from all other agencies, and now that we are the same agency it's easier in the sense that they're coworkers of ours, so, it's easier to reach them". Participant 004 compared the previous agencies as more generic whereas the new agency looked to be more specialized:

> I think more areas of specialization in services they seek and less generic. We heard it from workers, from supervisors, and we feel that it has a really big impact on clients. And once were able to consolidate into one collective bargaining agreement I think will be able to realize that a little bit more and I think its going to be beneficial to everybody and very responsive to everybody whether they are staff, supervisors, or clients.

Participant 003 was the only individual to see no specific benefits from amalgamation into a new agency, as she believed that the previous agencies had a better sense of community. She stated, "…At this point I see no benefit, maybe it is because it is

relatively new, but speaking from my day-to-day work I don't see it benefiting clients. As workers we feel that our CBA isn't being followed…"

At this early stage in the amalgamation, there seems to be a few themes that are emerging in terms of the benefits of amalgamation. Four of the five participants agreed there were some positive aspects to the amalgamation. One participant emphasized the strength of having an autism program that previously did not exist in their legacy organization. This program allows autism specialists to work within CAS bringing expertise and skills that were not previously available before. Another participant noted the ease in communication between the previously separate agencies, as all workers in the three districts were now able to share information quickly and efficiently from the same IT platform.

Although some improvements were noticed, there was a clear message from participants that the lack of a CBA still holds significant barriers in creating consistency for both workers and administration. Previously, each agency had its own CBA with relative strengths and weaknesses. Rather than include the bargaining of a central CBA as part of amalgamation, bargaining did not start until the agency was formally amalgamated. This meant workers doing the same job were operating under quite different conditions, terms and wages. Agency #1 administration and OPSEU local were still in negotiation as of May 2013 without any specific deadline. One participant felt that this had a negative impact on their work, as their CBA was simply not being followed by the new agency.

The delay of the CBA has further important and significant implications. There are no agreed-upon principles outlined in a CBA that guides the work of the new agency

or its workers. Instead, front line staff relies on personal knowledge and skills gained from previous experience spanning five to twenty five year careers. They work according to their own interpretation of old policies and procedures outlined in their previous CBA's from their original agency employers. This highlights the serious and imperative importance that institutional memory has within social service organizations. In everyday practice, it also means that workers are undertaking the same work in very different ways, with little or nothing to say whether they are doing it right or wrong and nothing to protect them if management decides they are doing it wrong.

Agency #1 administration claims to be and appears to be working judiciously to ensure the amalgamation of the three agencies is smooth and successful. However, when initially planned, the Province of Ontario expected the CAS administration to have a new CBA in place within the first year of amalgamation. This deadline has passed and a new CBA is unlikely to be signed in the immediate future. All interviewees agreed that if a CBA was in place the transition could be streamlined and made easier for all participants involved. Instead, the slowness of the amalgamation of the CBAs has resulted in complications in the work of front line workers, supervisors and managers.

Service Delivery

The austerity-driven changes to public sector organizations are one of the main factors shaping the amalgamation. The government of Ontario was very clear on the message of efficiency and restraint when they created the CPSCW. As participant 004 notes, " the amalgamation was precipitated by the CPSCW".

The data show that front line workers tend to be concerned about how the changing service delivery model affects their day-to-day interactions with service users, whereas senior administrators concerns are geared towards the delivery of services at the organizational level. For example, management concerns seem to focus significantly on the operational functions of human resources, payroll, quality improvement and property management. Participant 001 explained the service delivery model "as a work in progress". Similarly participant 004 reiterated, "the process might take up to 2-5 years". While all three other participant 002, 003, and 005 outlined specific service programs such as the intake process as an example of a delivery model that initially ran into problems, was addressed, but in their views still a problem. In short, two participants looked at service delivery from an organizational standpoint (including the administrator), whereas the others defined it through the specificity of programs developed through the amalgamation.

Since this research focuses on the perception of the amalgamation through the workers perspective, it is important that both components are represented. Although some participants may express themselves differently, they are the product of similar NPM polices that interconnect with one another. As mentioned in the literature review, the managerialist ideology goes beyond the simplification of agency administrators implementing new or revamped service delivery programs of amalgamated agencies. A shift from "thin" rather than "thick" definitions of needs leaves front line workers with a narrow interpretation of what is defined as "essential" (Aronson, Sammon, 2001).

In this case, some of the participants have identified with the lack of interpretation of some new policies since the amalgamation. For example, participant 003 explains that

because Agency #1 is a multi-service agency it delivers both child welfare and mental health programs. If a referral is made to a mental health program, the worker still bases their work on their previous legacy agency, which may not be consistent with new policy from Agency #1. An understanding of Agency #1's new policies may not be known by the worker as no guidance or communication has been provided. Yet the onus is on them to interpret the new policy.

Participant 005 provides a similar example of referrals coming into the agency and taking a longer time getting to the desk of the workers because of complex administrative procedures and policies. "Sometimes a school has an immediate crisis that needs to be handled right away but it takes 3 hours to get to the desk of a supervisor before its even handed over to the worker, so after that amount of time, is it really still a crisis". Participant 001 echoes this sentiment and notes some new policies lack interpretation across a geographical area as vast as Agency #1 mandates:

> We're still doing things differently, I think part of the difficulty with the new structure is that you have managers that are responsible for workers right across the district and that's a difficult way to work. We need better communication that we are all doing the same thing because were not all doing the same thing right now.

Participant 002 supports the statement made by participant 001 and provides an example of a situation where a lack of interpretation lead to some issues on the service user. "I know there [has] been some concerns with regards it being centralized out of Timmins. When you call it's an automated message you get re-routed to and then you speak to a receptionist and/or intake worker".

These examples provide a common theme that resonates with participants, which is related to the problem of agency referrals - a problem that became worse as a

consequence of centralizing services. The argument is often made at a governmental level that decentralizing services will provide better quality of services and more decisions making abilities for organizations (Parker, Bradley, 2000). But in the case of the CPSCW recommendation to amalgamate the opposite seemed to occur and the centralization of services becomes the exclusive aspect of restructuring.

In the case of Agency #1, policies that are initiated by the state (MYCS) through recommendations of the CPSCW had a trickle down effect to the front lines. The research participants provided examples of policy problems but seemed to find them hard to understand, perhaps because alternatives were not readily available. Participant 003 noted that a common strategy discussed in the work place by front line workers is "to wait, things are coming, things will be great, we will get more". Participant 002 echoed these sentiments. "Change is lengthy and we're often feeling like we don't know what's going to happen". In addition participant 001 stated "I just learned this week that our referral form is actually a word document that you can do online. Did anyone think to communicate that? No, so I've been sharing with people".

Workers from previous legacy agencies seem to have greater difficulty adjusting to the amalgamation in large part because most of the policies seem to come from the Timmins office. Participant 001 termed Agency #1's new policies as "how Timmins did things beforehand". Thus an unintended consequence of centralization in such large geographical area is that workers from legacy agencies feel they have just been merged with the largest agency in the amalgamation and forced to take on its policies and character.

The Impact of Restructuring

Neoliberal policy critics have challenge the notion of sustainability within a market driven approach in the public sector (Larner, 2001, Baines 2004, Clarke, 2004). In the reality of current economic times, financial sustainability is at the forefront of public sector re-organization culture. With just over a year of official implementation under way, specific themes such as communications and service delivery continue to be points of contentions on the front lines. Some of the issues and concerns that emerged during the amalgamation were apparently dealt with efficiently and swiftly, while others lingered around and continued to impact the daily lives of workers and those they serve. This section of the discussion aims to provide an analysis of how participants see the direction of the amalgamation moving forward. As noted above all participants said that they understand that amalgamations are not a short process and that some level of patience has to be assumed. But at what point does a level of patience run low, or impact the day-today functions of individual workers in ways that are no longer acceptable? Over one year into the amalgamation, there remain questions about how realistic it is to expect neoliberal policies aimed at efficiency to help the collective well being of service users. As noted in the introduction, one of the striking changes has been the shift to referring to service users as "consumers of services". These are not neutral terms. In terms of consumers, the notion of "choice" in and consumption of services is what drives this notion. In a social service organization that is strictly mandated and regulated by government, the market-based notion of customers becomes an issue that adds further stress on front line staff and may impact on the efficiency the amalgamation ultimately seeks.

Service Users

All participants were asked how they felt this amalgamation was affecting service

users, drawing on their personal and professional experience. There were multiple themes

emerged from this question and provided some data that sheds further light on the

neoliberalisation of Agency #1. There were two participants who believed that in order to

further benefit clients, there needed to be some consolidation of current organizational

issues surrounding adjudicating the CBA and policies/ procedures for some of the teams

working on old legacy organizations policies. Participant 002 notes that,

> A lot of the models are in the midst of changing and they all need a lot
> of work. And what's difficult is that one team is doing things one way,
> and another team is doing things another way, and your trying to work
> through that without having specific policy and procedures.

Drawing from similar themes found in previous discussion, participant 004 notes that

some policies can't be changed because we are under separate CBA's. She states, "I

think will be able to realize that a little bit more and I think its going to be beneficial to

everybody and very responsive to everybody whether they are staff, supervisors, or

client". The lack of clarity in regard to conditions and terms of work meant that workers

felt unsure proceeding with certain practices and strategies given that the non-existent

CBA. Two participants argued that there would be beneficial aspects to the amalgamation

for clients once there are better structures in place. Although there are no ways of

measuring at this point if a unified CBA and policies and procedures will solve the

problem, it still ensures some form of expectation in the amalgamations purpose.

Three of the five participants believed that the amalgamation has not benefited the

clients up to this point in time. Participant 003 noted, "At this point in time I see no

benefit, it's too much of a message with little action, we don't know what is going on,

I'm spending less time than ever with clients because of paperwork". Participant 005

followed up by claiming that there seems to have been little impact on the service user at

this point. "I think the impact has been on workers that have taken bigger caseloads along

with a longer process of waiting for approval because everything has to go through

Timmins and then back to us". This suggests that the model of centralizing services in an

agency that covers as much geographical space as Agency #1 is currently not being more

efficient for workers. Technology does not necessarily make things get approved faster.

In some cases, the chain of command appears to begin at one specific site where it goes

to through one process before and it arrives at Agency #1, it is then returned back to the

initial site that made the referral which in retrospect provides a delay in worker response.

Participant 001 provided an example of how some change has impacted workers since the

amalgamation and provides this response.

> I've been here for so long and my focus has always been to give good
> service to the kids and work with them and to help them, and that's not
> what I'm allowed to do anymore, the accountability and paper work
> piece, all of that is taking up time and what I can do to a client is less,
> and there's a struggle with who's more important, the child or the
> administrative side and it seems there's been a shift for people and
> that's really difficult.

This statement underscores NPM's model of seeking increased accountability,

efficiency, and sustainability, through an increased amount of paperwork and

documentation (Harris, 1998). Harlow (2003) outlines this approach as a managerial-

technicist approach (Appendix A) that has developed in the profession of social work,

often introduced by government by bureaucrats who exist far away of where the services

actually take place and have little knowledge of how these decisions impact service users,

communities and workers. In essence, all of the data in reference to this question also underscore the way that existing policies are reshaped and reformed through a managerial approach.

In the case of the still non-existent CBA, the only body that could really challenge the development of a new CBA is OPSEU local bargaining team but they seem reluctant to challenge the process for fear of being totally excluded and, similar to research participants, continue to wait and hope that the amalgamation will result in benefits for all.

Community Impact

This research confirmed there was representation from the three previous legacy organizations. Fortunately, the five participants that were interviewed for this project each worked in a different community covering the north, central, and south campuses of Agency #1. Throughout the study, there were various mentions by the participants of details and examples from the specific locations but this data was left out of the discussion and findings in order to respect anonymity. Though the research participants came from three different sites, the amalgamation involves a total of 23 different sites across northeast Ontario. Northern Ontario is often seen as a distant land for many individuals, it is sparsely populated and a long distance away from major urban cities. Furthermore many of the communities rely on mining and forestry as the main economic engine. Many smaller businesses have benefited from organizations like CAS by providing various goods and supplies. Two out of the 5 participants noted that some of the centralized policies initiated by the main campus affected relationships workers had with longstanding community members. Some of these relationships were formed with

small local business, health and social service organizations, and community/voluntary groups. Some may refer to this as unintended consequences of an amalgamation and that, organizations should have the right to chose whichever purchaser or corporation they may want to do business with, after all these are fundamental proponents of pro-market principles (Baines, 2004). However, the centralization of purchasing and relationship building with the community meant that local relationships were often ignored and replaced with new ones. These new practices impacted a wide range of former community partnerships and business ties legacy organizations cultivated over years of offering services.

The capital that social service agencies accumulate is not the same as a private entity. Social service capital tends to be the agency, administrators, workers, and board of governors, community partners and service users. Thus, an agency's relevance in communities cannot simply be assumed as a continuance of the work legacy organizations provided. Staging a few community events cannot provide the presence and community approach that smaller decentralized structures serving the needs of their diverse community through close partnerships.

Future Developments

All participants had in one way or another expressed that they intend to be part of the future of Agency #1 for the foreseeable future. Although there are many critical discussions emerging from this research, participants argued that they understand that the amalgamation is a part of their future. Three of the five participants also noted that they were present the last time their legacy organization amalgamated. Thus for a majority of

the participants, there was an ongoing experience in amalgamations. None of the previous amalgamations were done at the same scale as the one discussed in this thesis, but the participants' knowledge serve as institutional memory of prior experience in agency restructuring in Ontario's CAS's in the 1990's. Participants that were present at the prior amalgamation all mentioned that they saw some benefit for the future of the agency. They felt they had taken prior amalgamations in stride and learned that there can become positive aspects.

As the amalgamation continues to develop its mandates across its jurisdiction, the participants have taken their past and new work experience in their respective legacy organization along to Agency #1 to provide varying observations of the direction the agency maybe going into. Participant 005 noted that,

> I have just come to believe that working for the Ministry you have to accept that there will always be these major changes, they will always implement new protocol, and always change the laws. I have this constant notion that things will change and I have learned that in this field, you just have to adapt.

Participant 003 noted a similar perspective by stating that, " either you keep going and adapt yourself to the status quo, or you leave and won't be around to see the future". The sentiment of adapting seems to be a current theme among all the participants in one-way or another. Participant 002 also stated "it's hard to even envision where it's going and how were going to land, and how slow the process is". It is difficult to adapt to a process when that often relies on a future that has no fix dates and workers are told to expect that amalgamation will take 2-5 years. For example a participant noted that"…There's a lost of unity and confidence in people, you can sense that in your managers where you use to

have a very trusting relationship with managers and now that 's gone…" Other

participants stated similar statements in the shift from worker to supervisor relationship.

Thus the adaptation is far more than merely setting a new structure in place; it plays on

the human components of previous relationship with supervisors or managers.

Participants 001 state that they also have seen this shift the relationship between workers

and management:

> I feel that with the new agency there is a large lost in the humanistic
> approach to managing. They may have good intention by trying to adapt
> to one rule fits all approach, but it really just becomes all about numbers
> now, whereas before if I had a personal problem I could go to my
> manager, now things are very black and white, there is no sense of a
> small community, compassion has been taking out of an agency that is
> suppose to be people first.

Thus 4 out of the 5 participants concluded there has been major change in previously

good professional relationships as staff and managers adapted to the new agency

structure.

Some were not comfortable with these changes and were legitimately concerned

with the present and future states of their workplace. Only one participant saw the future

of this agency as a strong positive unilateral influence for Agency #1, she states,

> Well I think for this agency in the future, both for the north east and
> provincially is the sky's the limit kind of thing, I think that we're
> leaders I think that we've proven that were leaders in the past as three
> past as three independent legacy organizations, I think that now as one
> organization coming together we have an extremely strong leadership
> team, um its very visionary that can see a tremendous amount of
> potential in us as an organization and sees a tremendous amount of
> potential in each individual staff member.

Only one participant outlined an unequivocal positive and open future for the

organizations limits, other participants expressed less optimism and significant concern.

This could be due to the different positions that participants occupied within the large and diverse agency. Though with a majority expressing concerns, it seems that the issue is sufficiently widespread to suggest substance and a need for management to intervene convincingly.

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how workers have experienced the effects of neoliberal restructuring through the amalgamation of Agency #1. The research focused around the first hand experience of workers across Agency #1, with an emphasis on a sample size that included insight from the administration and front line workers across the three the three major campuses of Agency #1. The data shows that the amalgamation had a significant impact on the work of the participants and their sense of optimism around their work and the future of the amalgamation. Whether they kept the same position or moved into new positions, the influence of the amalgamation significantly impacts their current employment. The data show that the majority of participants in this study had little to no opportunity to influence or partake in the process of amalgamation and those that did wondered if their participation had any impact on anything other than their own sense of being consulted. No evidence emerged to support the claim that management is acting on the suggestions of front line workers.

There is some evidence that neoliberal ideological notions of public sector restructuring have influenced the process of amalgamations from the beginning. Basing it's recommendations on expertise and a top down approach, the 2012 report "Amalgamations of Children's Aid Societies: Lessons Learned" lists the MYCS, CAS

administrations, and board of governors as the leaders and authorities in the restructuring, rather than those providing or receiving services. Adapting a strict linear approach, it seems the strategy used in the Agency #1 amalgamation was adapted from NPM's emphasis on efficiency, management control and routinization of everyday work. Moreover, it supports the notion that the amalgamation was influenced and managed out of one centralized location in a very large geographical area and generated tighter management control rather than greater voice or participation for workers, service users or communities.

Additionally, it was evident that the current structure of Agency #1 has major issues concerning the general dissemination of information. Communications problems were listed as a common reason why participants felt a lack of support and direction in the amalgamation process. They felt this lack of communication hindered their capacity to be aware of and adapt to new policies and characteristics of their jobs. Not having clear policies and procedures across the north, central and south campuses were mentioned as a constant problem. Moreover the way to communicate new policy and provide training through technological approaches also generated some problems with frontline workers feeling alienated from IT based learning opportunities and left on their own to interpret how policies should be implemented. The methods of communicating new policy to workers who feel their caseloads are already overburdened gave them little time or incentive to incorporate new practices that had not been clearly defined to the front line workers. This likely resulted in rushed and under-resourced workers interpreting policies in a "thin" way and having few, if any, opportunities for reflection or further thought on the matter. Furthermore, Agency #1's current lack of a central CBA as

well as the lack of a process for developing one in a timely and consultative manner, is sending a message that the employer is not putting the needs of the workers anywhere near the top of the amalgamation's agenda. It was clear from the participants perspective that the absence of a clear unified CBA provided further distractions in the development unity between the north, central, and south campuses.

The immediate implementation and communication of clearer agency wide policies and procedures, along with a new CBA, were strong suggestions for improvement made by the participants in this research. It is not clear if the implementation of these policies would provide different working environments for the participants. But what the participant highlight is that they understood that the amalgamation is here to stay, thus if this is the future of their organization, they want the ability to provide good services for clients under one set of policies and one centralized CBA. Furthermore, the opportunity to provide a service delivery approach that is easily interpreted through better a communicative system is paramount to participants who often feel disjointed with the central campus.

Overall, this study indicates that the process of the early stages of amalgamating social service agencies is a difficult transition. More specifically, the amalgamation has an affect on the labour process of front line workers who seem to have had a difficult time adjusting to new agency policies. The current high demand of caseloads on top of new agency measures is thought to be negatively impacting the quality of work being delivered to clients. Current institutional practices are not providing the greater efficiency for workers promised by the amalgamation. The main claim of the MYCS mandate to amalgamate was sustainability and efficiency. Currently the notion of efficiency has not

reached the front lines of the organization, despite the willingness of the workers to cooperate with the amalgamation. The majority of the research participants expressed hope that, in time, things would get better if the agency focused on a process that would immediately relieve stress on the workers. The workload pressures are evident, but participants were still optimistic that the future of Agency #1 can be positive through greater communication in front line demands.

Conclusion

In ending, the impact of this amalgamation has set precedence in remote or sparsely populated areas can be restructured through using means of centralization as a driving force. It is evident from this research that the amalgamation is highly entrenched in NPM frameworks, traditionally NPM trumpets the benefits of decentralization whereas this was a process of centralization. Factors such as geography this large, sparse population, and many physical sites are influential in using centralization as a concept. Furthermore, neoliberalism pursues the notion of shrinking state services in order to save cost and improve efficiencies. These themes conflicts with the concept of neoliberalism drive to decentralize and govern at a distance. In this case, centralizing this new agency through amalgamation was deemed as the most sustainable approach for future social services in northeastern Ontario. Centralization generated problems in relation to communication and other worker challenges related to size and dispersed population which ironically seemed to function better under the prior model of decentralization. In ending, it is fitting to attribute the resiliency of workers who previously experienced living through a CAS amalgamation. Workers living the day-to day impact of the

restructuring have fostered a philosophy of accepting towards amalgamations as being a factor of working for government.

Recommendations

This study has extracted a few further areas of research from the data presented as well as coded data that was not reported in the main body of this thesis. These recommendations include:

➢ Examining the impact of the restructuring through a confidential systematic review of all front line workers and supervisors views of the amalgamation. It should be conducted by a third party organization midway through the process of the estimated amalgamation timeline (2-5 years). This would ensure a constructive and critical analysis of the ongoing direction of the agency.

➢ An examination of which method would be best to train workers who already face large and demanding caseloads. In addition to the large distances between satellite campuses and the main campus, training via technological approaches has its limitations and alternative methods needs to be consulted.

➢ Explore how service users are adjusting to the amalgamation through a research study that also includes citizens involved with Agency #1 as foster parents and/or volunteers. These individuals are often omitted from research but bring forth valuable data on the delivery of services.

➢ Provide a plan on how Agency #1 will ensure that all communities with satellite campuses sustain a large role in the community through strong participation and partnerships via municipal professionals and business leaders.

➢ Provide updates on when current policies and procedures will become unilateral throughout the agency. In addition, ensure that the CBA is bargained in good faith and in a timely matter so that consistency is ensured.

➢ Update the agencies website and include map or service area, there is currently little information on the website. The website of the newly amalgamated agency Lennox and Addington would be a good template.

➢ To value how centralization impacts single communities and assess if they are truly efficient for service users.

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Feature	Implications Reflexive-therapeutic perspective	Socialist-Collectivist perspective	Individualist-reformist perspective	Managerial-Technicist perspective
Individualization	Social work aims to help individuals achieve self-fulfillment	Social work's focus on individuals ignores policy implications of personal problems. And discourages collective responses.	Social work's role treats people as individuals. While bureaucrats treat them as categories of problem.	Social work's role treats people as individuals. While bureaucrats treat them as categories of problem.
Use of Knowledge	Knowledge allows workers act skillfully and without risk to clients	Knowledge should be shared with clients, empowering them to act on their own behalf.	Social work uses psychological and social knowledge. Evidence and argument to help clients.	Social workers use knowledge of the law, policy and organizational procedures to carry out their duties.
Relationship	Relationship carries communication, which influences clients and also creates personal involvement, which 'moves 'clients to respond.	Relationship with workers can offer experience of cooperative endeavor, but may lead to manipulation through personal influence.	Social work relationships personalize services and influence clients to change more readily.	Impersonality increases as contact is brief, clients become consumers choosing services, and written contracts represent partnership.
Organizational Context	Agencies' functions give focus to therapeutic intervention	Agencies represent the interests of powerful groups in society. They reduce the pressures of an oppressive society & maintain dependence on discretionary services.	The organizational context of practice sanctions social work action on society's behalf and limits and directs social work activity in accordance with socially defined objectives	In line with government directives technologies of performance define the activity of social workers.

Feature	Implications Reflexive-therapeutic perspective	Socialist-Collectivist perspective	Individualist-reformist perspective	Managerial-Technicist perspective
Need	Social work identifies and works with the needs that clients exhibit or express	Social work's role in assessing need may give or deny access to services through resource allocation or rationing.	Social work defines and responds to need on society's behalf, ensuring that resources are effectively used.	Indicators of need are defined centrally and practitioners work to assessment schedules.
Maintenance and Social Institutions	Social work helps clients participate in social structures which give them support and fulfillment.	Social work maintains important social institutions. Such as community and family. Which support the present social order and limit possibilities of change.	Social work plays an important pan in maintaining social institutions, which provide stability and continuity in society.	Social institutions. Like social work itself, are in a process of re-figuration.
Advocacy	Social work helps people gain the personal power to achieve their aims in life	Social work should create structures for client Cooperation to fight for needs.	Social work advocates for clients* needs in agencies and policy changes.	Co-opted into budgetary responsibility, social workers do not act as advocates and service users are expected to advocate them-selves.

Table 1. Competing perspectives on social work (an adaptation of Payne, 1997: 295-96).

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