

**Connecting at a Time of Disconnection:
The Development and Implementation of Websites by Non-Profits in the Field
of Separation and Divorce
by**

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**We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard**

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Abstract

Information technology is increasingly used by human and social service organizations in their administration and service delivery. This thesis examines the use of the Internet and websites by five non-profit organizations in providing family law services in British Columbia. The research used a grounded theory approach as well as drawing methodologically from critical theory and liberation theology. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, participants articulated the experience of their organizations in developing, implementing and managing a website.

Multiple themes emerged from the interviews: the use of websites for the dissemination of information, as an external representation or “public face” of the organization, and as a means to achieving organizational efficiencies. Responses further focused on the impact of non-profit status on the use of information technologies and the research and website development issues faced by these organizations.

Examiners:

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The advent of the Internet and the ensuing technological revolution that has occurred in the later part of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century is having significant cultural impacts on our world. Human and social service organizations and professionals have found their sites of practice affected by this phenomenon and have responded in a variety of fashions: some have attempted to fully incorporate new technologies into their site of practice while others have been far less accepting or able to implement the use of technology.

One area where technology has affected and become incorporated into sites of practice is the use of the Internet. Many organizations have chosen to design and implement Internet web sites as a service delivery tool. These sites range from being comprehensive, and interactive to being simplistic with minimal information and little interactivity. As information placed on websites becomes dated or stale, some organizations have procedures and resources for maintaining and updating their sites to ensure they maintain currency. Other sites have never been or are rarely updated, making the site obsolete and decreasing in usefulness over time.

Upon commencing the thesis stage of my M.A. studies, I decided to focus on the use of websites within the human and social services. My interest in this field has stemmed in large part from my work experience. My area of practice is a service delivery section of British Columbia's Ministry of

Attorney General, and the organization for which I work provides a range of services to families undergoing separation and divorce. Services are provided primarily to families of modest means and include dispute resolution, parent education, court ordered investigations and the provision of legal information. My role within the organization is that of a program and policy analyst. I am responsible for program and policy development, including the exploration and implementation of new delivery means to provide services to families in need.

In my work I have had cause to be involved with the development and ongoing maintenance of my organization's Internet and Intranet sites. I have also had a large amount of experience reviewing and surfing the websites of other organizations for the purpose of finding information, viewing how their sites are set up, seeking services and maintaining my professional knowledge.

From this exposure to the use of websites in the human services field, I have seen some emerging trends in the use of websites by organizations within this field. I have seen that many organizations invest resources in websites without full understanding of the investment required, a clear purpose for their site and broad understanding of how the Internet is best used. It has been my experience that some organizations implement sites as a result of social pressure or as a conforming response to the implementation of the new technology by other organizations. Another aspect of the adoption of web-technology is the development of websites as a result of financial

pressures. Internet sites are attractive because they offer the ability to reach a large number of people at relatively low cost. I am familiar with at least one substantial organization that was subject to a significant budget cut who responded by investing a good deal of time and resources into their website in an attempt to mitigate the adverse impact on their clients.

My experiences with the use of the Internet have led to a sense of curiosity about the use of the Internet as a service delivery method in the human services field. This curiosity led me to look for opportunities to find out more about this relatively new service method, and is the main impetus for my research area that I will detail below.

This thesis is to satisfy an academic requirement for a Master's of Art in Human and Social Development at the University of Victoria. Over the four years that I have been a student within this program, the various courses I have completed on theory, methodology, policy analysis and program development have contributed to my current approach and perspective. This thesis builds on and is a culmination of that learning process, and it is my most rigorous and concentrated effort to demonstrate and employ all of the tools and learning I have incorporated over the last half decade. The philosophy of the program is based on interdisciplinary and critical analysis and training and instruction within the program focus on 'integrating skills in research methods with critical inquiry...exploring knowledge, theory, policy and practice of human service and community work...and the intersections of human service work, disciplinary boundaries and knowledge, and community

relations' (Department of Human and Social Development 2004). It is within this context that I have developed as a student and professional, and it is from this foundation that I conduct program development and policy analysis.

Purpose of Research Study

The purpose of my thesis is to study the development and maintenance of service delivery-focused websites by non-profit organizations in the separation/divorce field. Through the use of in-depth interviews I have examined the experiences of a selective sample of organizations in this field. My research probed what led to the development of the sites, the goals and needs that the sites were designed to address, what research was conducted prior to site implementation, what purpose each site serves, what impact the site has had, and whether the organizations view themselves as providing innovative service delivery through their site.

Chapter 2 Literature Review and Context

My thesis focuses on three distinct yet interrelated areas: the social phenomenon of separation and divorce, private non-profit organizations, and the implementation and use of information technology, specifically the Internet, by human and social service organizations. The following is an overview of some of the literature related to each of these areas to provide some of the context within which my thesis occurred.

Separation and Divorce

Separation and divorce has been a fairly recent phenomenon in western society, and Canada is good example of how the attitudes towards and incidents of separation and divorce have evolved over time. In her article entitled One Hundred Years of Families, Anne Milan provides an overview of the evolution of family structure in Canada over the last century. At the turn of the 20th century, 'It was rarely done, but couples could end their marriage through legal separation, annulment or divorce. Given that existing laws were restrictive and divorce was only granted with proof of adultery, there were only three divorces per 10,000 marriages in 1901...' (Milan 2000, p.3). After World War II there was a temporary increase in the rate of divorce, which Milan attributes to the dissolution of impulsive wartime marriages.

The introduction of the *Divorce Act* in 1968 had a dramatic effect on the number of divorces in Canada. It instituted the "no-fault" divorce based on a separation of at least three years, and it was subsequently amended in

1986 to reduce the minimum separation period to one year. This new legislation caused a very dramatic increase in divorce rates in the 1970's, which has dropped incrementally in the last 15 years. The following table outlines the divorce rate from 1921-2002:

Figure 1



(Statistics Canada 2004)

Similar legislation was passed around the same time in other Western countries and had similar impact (Vlosky and Monroe 2002). More marriages were ending due to divorce rather than death, and by the mid-eighties over 50% of marriages in North America ended in divorce (Pinsof 2002).

At the same time that the rate of divorce increased substantially, there were also increases in the number of common-law marriages and the settlement of marriage breakdowns via a separation rather than divorce. The

result has been much greater variation and complexity of family structures. In terms of the future trends in Canada, Milan states that 'marital histories are becoming more complex. Common-law unions, delayed marriages or no marriage at all will probably increase...Divorce will likely remain an option when relationships no longer fulfill the expectations of one or both partners' (Milan 2000, p.11).

As the chart above outlines, the current divorce rate in Canada is around 38%, as of 2002. The statistics on separations are also an interesting indicator to consider:

Of all the children born in 1983-84, almost one in five experienced the separation of their parents by the time they were ten years old...The children who are least likely to see their parents separate are the ones whose parents are legally married with no cohabitation before marriage (14%). About one-quarter of children whose parents lived together before legal marriage have seen their parents separate. The highest frequency of separation is for children whose parents lived common-law throughout; over half see their parents separate by the time they are ten years old (Vanier Institute of the Family 2004, p. 35)

With divorce becoming such a significant factor in families, substantial resources were required to support and assist in the various social, psychological, financial and legal processes. Divorce lawyers, accountants, pension consultants, counsellors, mediators, separation and divorce educators, and custody evaluators are just some of the professionals working in the "Divorce Industry". As authors like DeWitt describe, a subset of legal, psychological, financial and social service professionals have emerged to assist in handling of this relatively new demographic characteristic (DeWitt 1992).

Social and Human Services Non-Profit Organizations

Non-governmental organizations in the human and social service sectors in Canada have a significant presence and role in the delivery of services. These organizations range from small non-profit grassroots agencies to large community social service agencies to private for-profit companies. For the purpose of my thesis, I decided to focus on private non-profit organizations. There were several reasons for this decision. First, I was interested in learning about the experiences of these organizations and their use of technology. Having worked with non-profits over the years, I am familiar with some of the financial struggles they face as well as some of the creative means they utilize to provide client services and to work within their limited resources. Secondly, I am employed by a large public sector government Ministry. I wanted to use the opportunity of this thesis research to broaden my knowledge of and experience in the human services field by becoming more familiar with the non-profit sector. The organizations I involved range in size from very small (1-5 employees) to very large (over one hundred employees), with most of the organizations fitting within the category of "small".

Non-profit organizations are sometimes referred to as the third-sector within the three types of organizations. '...three broad families of organizations have been identified – government agencies, for-profit businesses, and "third-sector" organizations variously termed nonprofit, voluntary or nongovernmental.' (Lewis and Madon 2004, p.120). There are

multiple definitions of what constitutes a non-profit organization. For example, Vakil defines them as 'self-governing, private, not-for-profit organizations that are geared to improving the quality of life for disadvantaged people' (Vakil 1997, p. 2060). While the term that I will use in this thesis to denote these organizations is "non-profit organization", other titles or phrases are also commonly used, such as "not-for-profit", "non-governmental organization" (NGO) and "third sector organization".

The relative importance of non-profits in delivering health and social services has been valued in varying degrees since their inception. Clague, in his historical case study of the health and social services in British Columbia from the beginning of the 1970's to the end of the 1990's, presents an overview of the third sector's role in this field. He describes how their role has varied and been valued differently depending on the conventional wisdom of the government of the day. It is clear from his case study, however, that no matter the perspective on this sector it continues to play a fundamental role in the welfare state (Clague 1997). Others have noted that non-profits have become an increasingly important sector due to pressure from citizens, government, other organizations, pressure from social and technological change, and from an ever-present suspicion of the state's capacity to respond to citizen needs. 'With their small scale, flexibility and capacity to engage grass-roots energies, private non-profit organizations have been ideally suited to fill the resulting gap' (Salamon 1994, p. 110). As a result, societies

worldwide are experiencing a blossoming of third-sector organizations (Salamon 1994).

For non-government organizations, in particular non-profits, funding is a substantial issue and concern. These organizations are typically characterized by tight budgets, ongoing fundraising and crafting of funding proposals, and little financial security past the next fiscal year or provincial/federal budget. As Ng notes in her research on a community employment centre, most of these community groups are financially dependent upon federal, provincial and municipal governments (Ng 1990). In the United States, 'government has thus emerged as a major source of financial support for America's nonprofit sector, outdistancing private philanthropy by almost two to one. In other advanced countries, government support is even more pronounced' (Salamon 1994, p. 120). The support for non-profit agencies by Canadian governments is significant. The Canada West Foundation commissioned a research study on Canadian non-profit social welfare agencies and found that 'most agencies receive a very large percentage of their revenues from government sources. On average, government funding accounts for 81% of annual revenues' (McFarlane and Roach 1999, p.3). A substantial amount of funding is provided through government sanctioned gaming, such as lotteries, casinos, and bingo halls. In some cases, this creates internal conflict for an organization as they are in the business of helping individuals and families. Furthermore, given that

government funding is largely provided on an annual basis, these organizations operate with ongoing uncertainty of future funding.

The level of support for and funding of nonprofit agencies is higher in countries with high levels of government social welfare programs. In his research comparing various European, North and South American countries, Salamon found that the countries with the most sizable nonprofit agencies were Western European countries that also had the largest government social services and programs. Salamon states: 'The European "welfare state", it turns out, is not a welfare state at all but a welfare partnership that relies heavily on private, nonprofit groups' (Salamon 2002, p.3). This assertion holds true for Canada, as evidenced by the Canada West research that shows that there is a substantial funding of and reliance on non-profit organizations. Additionally, there is no negative correlation between the level of government support and the level of volunteer and community support for such organizations (McFarlane and Roach 1999). This relationship is explained in part by the fact that 'the relationship between government and the nonprofit sector has been characterized more by cooperation than conflict, as government has turned extensively to the nonprofit sector to assist it in meeting human needs' (Salamon 1994, p. 120).

While nonprofits do have a portion of their work completed by paid staff, they tend to rely significantly on volunteers. Salamon found that worldwide the average agency has 35% of its work conducted by volunteers. He also found that countries with high amounts of government welfare

spending had the highest levels of volunteerism and activism. He speculates that concurrent high levels of government spending and volunteerism are a result of a strong national or cultural emphasis on social welfare (Salamon 2002).

In its research on the voluntary sector, the Canada West Foundation found that volunteer participation in non-profit social welfare agencies was quite extensive. In fact, only 8.7% of the organizations surveyed did not have any volunteers. Volunteers contributed an average of 3.3 hours per week. Across their full research sample, volunteers accounted for an average of approximately 3.5 full-time equivalents per agency (McFarlane and Roach 1999).

Non-profits have varying mandates or roles, dependant upon the area within which they operate. In their article titled The Changing Role of Nonprofits in the Network Economy Te'eni and Young describe these organizations as having three main roles: supplying goods and services that are available in the private marketplace (such as day care, education and training, counselling); providing "public goods" (such as social justice, environmental conservation and world peace); and finally providing government-financed services (such as social services, health care and education) (Te'eni and Young 2003). These authors argue that "non-profit organizations have traditionally excelled in facilitating transactions and creating relationships based on their information-related advantages, precisely where government and business fall short (Te'eni and Young 2003,

p. 398). While the need is evident for non-profit organizations, they occupy an ambiguous position within our society. 'Although they are not part of the private sector, they are expected to function in a highly competitive environment. Although not part of the public sector, they often attempt to deliver services to the neediest among us. Although they are not informal grassroots organizations, they are expected to serve as vital mediating institutions thereby enhancing and strengthening democracy' (Brainard and Siplon 2004, p. 435).

In her paper on Canada's voluntary sector, Sherri Torjman describes how the presence of approximately 175,000 nonprofit groups and organizations help ensure a healthy democracy and assist in protecting social, economic, cultural, environmental and political issues and interests. She describes three key roles of these organizations: delivery of services, testing innovative models and providing ethical leadership (Torjman 1999). My research focused more on two of those roles: service delivery and the testing of innovative models. One specific area of the research was to look at how much the organizations involved were utilizing their Internet sites to test or implement innovative practice or models.

Torjman argues that the voluntary sector '...is in an ideal position to play this leading-edge role. Many voluntary organizations are flexible and are not bound by Byzantine rules and hierarchical relationships...Its leading-edge capacity also includes an important research and demonstration role in which a new model or program design can be tested...' (Torjman 1999, pp. 1-2).

My research examined what level of implementation and usage of leading-edge technology was there by some organizations in their service delivery models.

The Internet and information technology in the human and social services sector

The current research on the implementation and use of the Internet in the human and social services field ranges from topics on the use of the Internet in training social service professionals, to the issue of access (on the part of both client and professional), to articles giving suggestions as to how organizations should establish information technology resources.

A large body of the research examines the lack of access to technology, due to poverty, literacy, living in rural areas or language barriers. These access challenges are typically called “information poverty” or the “digital divide”. An example is Hersberger’s research study with homeless persons to determine their use or lack of use of the Internet. While she found that the homeless persons she interviewed did not perceive their lack of access to be negatively affecting their everyday lives, her work evidenced a clear lack of access to digital information and to the Internet in this specific population (Hersberger 2002).

McNutt et al.’s research on information poverty in the Latino community found that minority groups like the Latino population do have significant challenges in obtaining access to information technologies. These include literacy issues and a lack of access to computing resources such as

computers and Internet connections (McNutt, Queiro-Tajalli et al. 2001).

Another example of information poverty is Butterfield's work on the impact of information technology on human services. He conducted research on how the adoption of various information technologies is impacting human service organizations and articulated the challenges that clients face given their lack of access to financial resources, let alone technological resources (Butterfield 1998).

While the human service sector is not as technologically advanced as some parts of the business sector, many social service organizations are clearly focused on implementing information technology in their work. Butterfield's research describes several areas that are being affected by this increased focus. First, he argues that the nature of work in human service organizations is changing, both in terms of the technical skills required and the manner in which professionals provide service. He also describes how the implementation of technology has a financial impact on the organization as resources are expended purchasing new equipment that might otherwise be allocated to other aspects of the organization. He found that funders and clients have increased expectations that organizations implement technological advancements, and that organizations are experiencing an increased reliance on electronic data collection software. With respect to the Internet, Butterfield describes that the attraction for human service organizations to utilize Internet resources is the ease of access and ability to instantly transform and communicate information (Butterfield 1998).

Some authors focus on writing material to assist human service organizations in determining effective ways to implement new technologies. Schoech, in his book Human Services Technology: Understanding, Designing and Implementing Computer and Internet Applications in the Social Services, talks about how information technologies have a great capacity to assist social service organizations. He argues that as information exchange is a substantial component of social service work, information technologies that 'collect, store, manipulate and communicate information have a dramatic impact on human services' (Schoech 1999, p.1). He goes on to describe one of the dangers associated with implementing information technologies: the desire to replace expensive human personnel with inexpensive technology. This danger clearly exists for social service organizations, as their main expense as an organization tends to be the cost of employing highly skilled professionals (Schoech 1999).

Some literature focuses on the reasons behind an organization's decision to develop Internet sites. One author argues that organizations are implementing websites, in part, as a response to perceived or actual social pressure. There is a sense that "everyone else is doing it" and organizations fear that they will be left behind or seen to be not as current as others who have expended resources on developing a site. This author states that 'Inter-organizational social pressures have an impact on the implementation of new technologies like the Internet' (Flanagin 2000, p. 639).

Although the issues of ethics, confidentiality and privacy related to information technology and human services are not going to be examined in this thesis, it is worth noting that a good deal of literature focuses on it. Authors and researchers examine issues such as the transmission of personal information across state and national borders, the sharing of personal information and data between organizations, and the use of personal information in data management systems that analyze and disseminate service delivery data. Other issues include the use of the Internet to communicate personal information and data, the increasing prevalence of organizations that have the mandate to collect, analyze and disseminate human service data, the increasing use of electronic workplace surveillance, and the increasing amount of services that are provided via technology.

Legal and ethical issues such as these have highlighted a need for guidelines or parameters for social service organizations to address them. Levine argues that human service professionals should be equipped with frameworks that are based on human service ethics and values so that they can then determine how to address the ethical and legal dilemmas which face them. She states that 'while distressing, ethical dilemmas are a normative aspect of these technologically sophisticated times' (Levine 2000, p. 174).

With respect to issues specific to non-profit organizations, some research suggests that the application of information technology by nonprofits has not been as advanced as it could be (Burt and Taylor 2000, Pew

Partnership for Civic Change 2000). Limited resources are challenges faced by many non-profit organizations, and these limitations have an impact on their utilization of their websites. For example, in a research study on non-profit organizations in South Africa, the authors found: 'Many NGOs experienced problems with a lack of technical knowledge, a lack of time, money and manpower to optimize their websites. These technical and infrastructure limitations hampered these organizations from exploiting the interactive potential of the Internet and made their sites both communicatively ineffective and potentially irrelevant to their broader organizational missions' (Naude, Froneman et al. 2004, p. 90).

Nonprofits that have embraced technology like the Internet have utilized it for varying purposes. Some organizations see the Internet as a primary means of outreach, advertising, fundraising and advocacy (McNutt and Boland 1999, Brainard and Siplon 2002, Jamieson 2002, Brainard and Brinkerhoff 2004). Others use the Internet to foster communities and engagement (Rheingold 1993). Each of these were articulated by the participants of this research as part of their goal in using the Internet. This will be discussed further in the analysis chapters.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented an overview of the literature regarding three distinct yet interrelated areas: private non-profit organizations; the social phenomenon of separation and divorce; and the implementation and use of information technology, specifically the Internet, by human and social service

organizations. It is the intersection of these three areas that frame my research and sample. Specifically, I will be examining the use of websites by non-profit organizations operating within the field of family law.

Chapter 3 Methodology

For the purpose of my thesis, I use the definition of methodology as put forward by Harvey: 'Methodology is thus the point at which method, theory and epistemology coalesce in an overt way in the process of directly investigating specific instances within the social world. Methodology, in grounding enquiry in empirical instances, thus makes explicit the presuppositions that inform the knowledge that is generated by the enquiry' (Harvey 1990, pp.1-2). In my research, I draw from three separate areas: critical theory, grounded theory, and liberation theology.

Critical Theory

There are several aspects of critical theory that match well with my perspective, the first of which is the emphasis on 'speculation' or critique. In his text on critical theory, How notes that critical theorists do not accept things at face value and attempt to look beyond appearances. Rather, they continually perceive their world to be a dialectic between subject and object, and this lends itself to a critique of empiricism. Additionally there is a continual focus on determining what factors have lead to the creation of the current set of 'facts', and applying a critical evaluation of them as a means of initiating change (How 2003).

Another aspect of critical theory that lends itself to my theoretical perspective is the intention of transformation and empowerment. As Neuman states, the goal of critical researchers is to 'critique and transform social

relations. They do this by revealing the underlying sources of social relations and empowering people, especially less powerful people' (Neuman 1997, p.74). Critical research's goal of empowerment fits well with my ideological background, as well as my practice.

Critical research can be best understood in the context of the empowerment of individuals. Inquiry that aspires to the name critical must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or sphere within the society. Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label "political" and unafraid to consummate a relationship with an emancipatory consciousness (Kincheloe and McLaren 1994, p.140).

Critical theory has been used to evaluate the implementation and use of technology. Much of the discussion regarding technology tends to focus on it being either a positive and helpful element of society or being very bad and better to be avoided. As stated previously critical theory attempts to get beyond dialectical relationships and forces. How states, for example, that critical theory would attempt to interrogate dialectical perspectives that would see technology to be either emancipatory or destructive. The task of critical theorists is to try to move beyond to a more "rational" approach (How 2003). By incorporating critical theory in my research, it should assist in moving away from the binary of technology being "good" or "bad".

Thomson, in his chapter on the futures of critical theory, outlines the arguments of three critical theorists, Heidegger, Marcuse and Feenberg, regarding the nature and impact of technology. Thomson describes Heidegger's perspective to be that technology has colonizing tendencies. Heidegger deconstructs technology as being a transforming force which

refashions the world to view even ourselves as 'no longer conscious subjects in an objective world but merely as resources to be optimized, ordered, and enhanced with maximal efficiency' (Thomson 2003, p.62). Feenberg, on the other hand, argues that technology can be democratized, but in order for that to occur there would need to be an increasing intervention of subjugated groups in its development and implementation. Feenberg holds a more optimistic perspective in that he feels that progressive reform is possible and that humans have the capacity to control technology and its impacts (Thomson 2003).

An example of critical theory applied to a specific technological system is Benoit's work, which provides an analysis of the information systems used in library and information sciences. Benoit bases his critique of the system on Habermas' theory of communicative action. He argues that library and information sciences need to embrace a theoretical framework that 'may recast the end-user as a communicatively competent, self-advocating, and equal participant whose input may be directed at the information providing activities' (Benoit 2002, p.466). This is diametrically opposed to the traditional view of the end-user who is a passive recipient of knowledge and who holds no valuable input or feedback about the process or method of providing information to the users.

Grounded Theory

Methodologically I also draw upon grounded theory in my research. Grounded theory is a qualitative approach to research that allows themes to

emerge from the data. Corbin and Strauss define it as a theory ‘...that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon’ (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.23). Rather than beginning one’s research with a theory that is to be proved, the researcher studies a particular area and whatever themes arise are coalesced to describe the basic social processes.

Grounded theory ‘uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon’ (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.24). A theory is constructed through a systematic process. The researcher groups data that have commonalities, places interpretations on the data and then provides them with a conceptual label. Then the research outlines statements of how the concepts are related. In other words, the data are interpreted and themes within the data are related to form a conceptual scheme (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Grounded theory does provide for the “standards” of scientific enquiry, such as significance, theory-observation compatibility, generalizability, consistency, reproducibility, precision, and verification. Research that is based upon grounded theory should meet the following tests: the data should be valid, reliable and credible, the process for generating the theory should be adequate and the research findings should have empirical grounding (Strauss and Corbin 1990). While I have not conducted my research exclusively from a grounded theory approach, these tests should apply to my analysis.

Liberation Theology

Finally, I base my research on a faith-based perspective that leads me to work towards addressing inequality and oppression in order to show love and to work towards the common good. In many ways, liberation theology captures this sense of the 'dialectical relationship between justice and love, where justice is the struggle to empower victims of injustice, the mutual struggle being a sign of love' (Lange 1998, p.83).

Liberation theology focuses on the spiritual as well as physical, psychological, and social needs of citizens. It seeks to conduct analysis of the social conditions of citizens with the purpose of relieving oppression, improving relationships, and moving towards freedom. 'Social analysis develops our awareness and makes it critical, so that together we may somehow progress toward justice' (Czerny 1992, p.366). Working for justice results in increased freedom, through letting go of self and selfishness in solidarity for the other (Gutierrez 1973).

Working towards a more just society involves a belief that people have an innate desire for a common good. As Charles Taylor expresses, '...we come to one of the most basic aspirations of human beings, the need to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see as good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value in order to make minimal sense of our lives, in order to have an identity, we need an orientation to the good' (Taylor 1989, p.43).

Summary

I have outlined the theoretical perspective and methodological approach that have guided my research and analysis. Drawing from the three separate areas identified above allowed me to proceed in a manner that best suits my personal standpoint. To that end, my approach was to conduct a grounded theory approach with a theoretical perspective framed by critical theory and liberation theology.

Chapter 4 Method, Ethics and Access

Method

In conducting this research, I carried out qualitative interviews that were semi-structured in nature. This technique of interviewing is used by qualitative researchers to “meet” interviewees in their own location and focus on their experiences (Oakley 1981, Boyd 2001). Questions attempted to draw out the experience of the participants in the development and implementation of a website on separation and divorce issues.

I chose interviews as the data collection method to provide for what Maccoby and Maccoby state is the purpose of interviews, as quoted by Kirby: ‘a guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis’ (Kirby and McKenna 1989, p.66). I structured the interviews in a manner that supports my methodological approach. Kirby’s work on qualitative research in human services partly informed the interview structure. She identifies several ways to structure interviews that were applicable to my approach. I attempted to create a tone of equality rather than that which Kirby defines as “researching down”. I gave the participants as much information as possible regarding both my subject and my approach. In my interviews, I attempted to create a sense of interaction and sharing rather than merely reporting and recording. Other components of interviewing that Kirby suggests include ensuring that the participant is a recipient as well as a provider during the process, conducting an interview of myself with the interview questions in an exercise

in reflexivity prior to commencing interviews with participants, and modeling and incorporating collaboration as much as possible in the research (Kirby and McKenna 1989). I attempted to incorporate these suggestions as best as possible in my interviews.

In conducting the interviews and gathering the data, I attempted to recognize the presence of my own theoretical and experiential perspective. As a means of distinguishing between my perspective and the perspective provided by the participants, I relied on the tenets of grounded theory to allow the relationships and the themes to arise from the data itself. As Wolcott warns, novice researchers should be cautious of not solely identifying and gathering data that confirms the researcher's perspective. He states 'I think the antidote here is to maintain a healthy skepticism toward everything one hears, sees, remembers, records, and writes in the course of developing a study. A guiding question: Am I attending as carefully to what *is* going on as I am attending to what I *think* is going on?' (Wolcott 1994, p.21).

I felt that this was an important consideration throughout the process, from designing the interview schedule, to conducting each interview and then in the analysis stage. My previous and ongoing experience in the utilization of websites by human service organizations provided me with experience to draw upon in the research, but it also created the potential that I would attempt to find information that confirmed personal expectations or hypotheses I held internally. My thesis committee also brought to my attention the need to be vigilant in this area when they reviewed a draft of my

proposal. In that proposal, I had identified several propositions about what I anticipated I would find in my analysis stage. The committee articulated that such an identification of themes I speculated would come out of the data was not in accordance with the tenets of grounded theory. That particular discussion was a particularly poignant and practical lesson for me in my incorporation of a grounded theory approach.

Interview Questions

The questions probed six main areas related to the development and implementation of a website by each organization. Each of the six areas had a primary question, which was proceeded by several more in-depth follow-up questions. Within this structure, there was additional dialogue between the participant and myself, and I posed additional questions that were responsive to the experiences described by each participant. The following is a discussion about each of the question areas in the interviews. Attached to this thesis as Appendix A is the actual interview schedule utilized in the interviews. The six question areas were:

- 1) Goal of site, needs being addressed
- 2) Research conducted during site development/implementation
- 3) Financial resources utilized in site development/implementation
- 4) Human resources utilized in site development/implementation
- 5) Usage and uptake of the site
- 6) Applicability and innovativeness of the site

The first question focused on what led the organization to determine that a website was necessary. This question area was to elicit information

about the needs that the organization was trying to address as well as any identified vision or goal of the site. My hope in posing questions in this area was that the participants would reflect on the discussions and decisions that led them to have a website in its current form. I recognized that some organizations had recently or were in the process of implementing substantial revisions to their website. In those circumstances, I framed the questions around the decision to revamp their website.

The second question area focused on what I called the research and development stage of implementing a website. I queried each participant about what, if any research, they conducted during the development of their site on the use of websites. Follow-up questions related to how the results of the research were applied to their site, what information each organization had regarding non-profits and the use of websites, and the intended audience at the time of development. My rationale in focusing on these areas was several-fold. First, I had a strong curiosity regarding whether or not any of the organizations had made specific efforts to conduct any form of systematic exploration about how to best use the Internet within their own context and mandate. Secondly, I was very curious about the use of the Internet by non-profit organizations and therefore was interested in hearing from each participant what information or knowledge they had achieved in this area. Finally, as the Internet is still a nascent phenomenon, particularly in the human and social services fields, I wanted to explore how organizations

would go about the various development activities to implement a site of their own.

The third and fourth areas of study or questioning revolved around the resources that the organizations used or applied towards the development and implementation of their sites. Firstly, I asked each participant about their assessment of the level of financial resources applied to the site. I also asked whether the money applied to the site came from within each organization or if the organizations had received funding from an external source. Similar to the question regarding the finances was the question about the level of human resources applied to the site. Additional questions included whether the site was developed by internal or external persons as well as several questions regarding the ongoing maintenance activities conducted by the organization. The impetus for these questions stems from my experience and involvement with a number of different non-profit organizations, all of which faced ongoing concerns and challenges in their financial and human resources. Also, the literature on non-profit organizations detailed earlier outlined that these types of organizations do tend to operate with constrained resources. Given that those challenges are widespread in many non-profits, I was curious how much of those limited resources were applied by each organization to building and maintaining a website.

The fifth question set focused on the uptake and usage of their website. I wanted to hear from each participant what response he or she had seen from his or her organization implementing a site. I was interested in

hearing from each of them as to how well received their site was as well as what feedback had been received with respect to changes required.

Participants were asked to identify anecdotes stemming from the provision of feedback from people external to the organization as well as any comments on the actual usage of the site. Additionally, participants were asked about whether the site provided any unexpected benefits to the organization and what, if any, areas were identified for improvement.

As the site for this study was the area of family law, the final set of structured questions focused on how applicable or suited the site was for persons experiencing separation and divorce and what the organization could provide to those persons that would be more challenging without a site. I also asked questions about innovation and each organization's site. These questions stemmed from Torjman's work on how non-profit organizations fulfill, amongst other roles, a role of implementing innovative means of service delivery for other service providers like government to emulate (Torjman 1999).

Finally, I structured two additional questions to allow participants to discuss additional information not captured by the above questions. I was attempting, as Boyd does in her research on the illicit drug use of women, to elicit what additional information the representatives would like to add, what additional areas they feel I should examine and what comments or suggestions they would make to others in similar circumstances as theirs (Boyd 2001).

In structuring the interview schedule, I made significant efforts to ensure that the interview questions did not lead or bias the participants' responses. At the direction of my committee, I circulated a draft of the interview schedule for their feedback and guidance. Upon receiving some feedback from all three members of my committee, and with the guidance of my supervisor, I then incorporated that feedback into the interview schedule. At that point, I still felt an additional need to ensure the questions were not leading and that they were comprehensible and would draw out the experiences of the participants. To that end, I interviewed myself with the draft questions, as suggested by Kirby in her work on interviews (Kirby and McKenna 1989). I then piloted the questions, prior to the first interview, with my spouse who works for a small non-profit organization in a non-related field that has recently implemented a website. The process of interviewing myself as well as piloting them with my spouse led to refinements of the questions to ensure clarity and that the questions focused on the areas I was interested in hearing about. Two particular insights ascertained in this process were that a couple of my original questions were leading and that there were a couple of duplicate questions.

Sample

My proposal included a plan to interview 5-10 individuals from different non-profit organizations working in the separation and divorce field. Participants were selected through a selective sample. I identified a number

of non-profit organizations that provide services in the area of investigation (separation and divorce) and which had Internet websites.

One consideration in developing the overall sample was to examine geographical considerations. I decided to restrict the sample to British Columbia-based organizations. Several factors lead to this decision. First, it was my goal to interview all participants face-to-face, which would be challenging if any organization were based outside of British Columbia. Secondly, I felt that restricting the sample to British Columbia organizations would allow for greater comparability in areas such as resource availability as each organization would be operating within the same provincial context.

Another consideration that I applied in developing the sample was to try to ensure a gender balance in organizational mandates. By that, I mean that there are organizations that assist persons experiencing family law issues with mandates and focuses directed primarily towards women or towards men. I wanted to ensure that the sample I constructed provided for the inclusion of at least one organization that directs its services to women and at least one organization that directs its services to men.

I used multiple methods to identify the organizations that met the above criteria in order to be part of the overall sample. Firstly, I drew upon my own familiarity with the field of family law, particularly in British Columbia. I developed a list of organizations that I believed were non-profits and provided some family law services. I then reviewed the list of organizations that provided submissions to the federal government in their consultations on

custody and access issues in 2001 (IER Planning 2001). These consultations were held to determine viewpoints on potential changes to the *Divorce Act*, so I felt that this would be a good source of active organizations in British Columbia with an interest in family law. Finally, I conducted several intensive searches on the Internet to supplement the list of organizations I had developed. The first search I did was to determine whether each organization on my draft sample had a website. I then reviewed any links or references to other organizations on each particular website, with the presupposition in mind that this might lead me to sites of other organizations that I had not yet identified. Finally, I conducted several key word searches using different Internet search engines to ascertain whether there were any additional organizations operating in my study area.

From this overall sample, I selected the organizations based on their relative size, type of services offered and their apparent ongoing use of the Internet to provide service. I also ensured that there was one organization included that was female-focused and one organization that was male-focused.

As it turned out, it was the criteria of the ongoing use of the Internet that proved to be somewhat challenging in constructing the sample. For example, there were numerous “men’s rights” organizations with websites constructed; however, the vast majority of those sites had not been updated in two or more years. I excluded any organization with a “stale” site from the selective sample and therefore can only speculate as to the reasons why the

sites were not maintained. My definition of a “stale” site was a website not maintained or updated in more than two years. This was easy to determine as almost all websites now identify the date of the last update.

The presence of a multitude of “stale” sites certainly raised questions in my mind about the appearance that some organizations invested resources into building websites and then were not or could not expend the ongoing resources required to continue to utilize the site. Whether this was a result of resource scarcity, low uptake from users or some other reason is not within the scope of my research but would be an interesting question to pursue in some other research project.

To determine which organizations had websites that were current or used on an on-going basis, I had to review each organization’s site in detail. This review caused me to access most or all of the pages within the website. As I accessed the various pages, I made notes regarding the currency of the site, the content within it and the focus of each page and the site as a whole. I also used the sites to gather contact information from each of the organizations. This fulsome review of each site proved to be very useful in the interviews with participants as I was able to converse knowledgeably with participants about their site, about my impressions and reactions from accessing their site, and about the methods used within each of their sites to provide information to users.

Upon reviewing the organizations against the above-mentioned criteria, I arrived at a selective sample of six organizations that I decided to

contact. Again, all the organizations were British Columbia based save for the one in Ontario. As I will describe in greater detail below, I was able to conduct interviews with five of the six organizations in the selective sample.

Participants

Upon determining which organizations with whom I wanted to conduct the research, I needed to identify one individual employed by the organization who was familiar with the organization itself, its decision-making process as well as its website. I have some degree of familiarity with most of the organizations within the sample and therefore had some idea as to who I believed would be a key participant. I also asked the organizations for input on appropriate participants. I made informal contact via telephone with a representative from each organization to determine the person who would be best suited to participate in the research. With respect to each of the sample organizations, there was nothing additional required to determine the participants.

I then proceeded to make contact with each proposed participant. With all participants, this initial contact was in the form of an informal phone call. Having explored the purpose of my research and the general nature of my participation request over the phone, I followed up with each participant using a contact letter with the appropriate consent information (the contact letter and consent document are available as Appendices B and C). I developed this material as per the ethical guidelines put forward by the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Committee.

Access to Participants

When I submitted my proposal to my thesis committee, I did not anticipate access to be a significant issue in this research. I felt that I had identified enough potential organizations to participate so that if any had declined there would still be sufficient organizations to provide a satisfactory sample. However, as I reviewed all of the potential organizations against my sample criteria, I discovered that there were only a limited number of organizations that fit. I was not greatly concerned at that point because I felt that I had identified through the selective sample a satisfactory number of organizations. My only concern hinged upon the possibility that not all organizations would participate.

Of the six organizations in my selective sample, I was able to successfully interview participants from five organizations. There was one organization in my sample with which I was unable to complete an interview. I had received an informal commitment via e-mail from the Executive Director based on my informal and formal contacts with him to participate. Subsequently however, I was unable to gain his commitment to a particular day and time for an interview. After unsuccessfully attempting on several occasions to establish an interview time, it became evident to me that he did not have an interest in participating in the research. At that point, I decided to cease further attempts to contact him and sent him an email to that effect.

Another access issue that presented itself was the need to identify the most suitable person within the organization for the interview. I wanted to

speak to someone who was familiar with the organization itself, its decision-making process, as well as the website utilized by the organization. For some of the organizations I had immediately identified the representative who I would like to interview based on my knowledge of the organization. However, I was required to conduct further research of other organizations to ascertain the suitable person, as detailed in the section above.

The final access issue that confronted me was establishing mutually convenient times for the interview to take place. Each participant identified early on that they had various constraints upon their time that would make it challenging to find the amount of time required for the interview. One participant in particular expressed initial reservations about participating given the amount of time that the interview would entail. As a result, I did experience some scheduling problems for the interview, none of which were impossible to overcome. I should also comment that all interviews occurred over the month of December, which further compounded the scheduling challenges.

Interviews

As the participants whom I was able to establish interviews with were all from within British Columbia, it was my intention to conduct the interviews face-to-face. I was ultimately able to have face-to-face interviews with four of the five participants. Due to the access issue I described above, I was unable to secure a time to meet face-to-face with one participant. In fact, I scheduled an in-person interview, only to have it cancelled at the very last minute due

the participant experiencing an illness. Therefore, that interview was conducted via telephone.

In determining the location for the interviews I suggested that the participants designate a setting that was the most convenient for them. At the selection of the participants, all identified a preference for the interview to take place at their place of work. The one exception, of course, was the interview conducted via telephone; however, the participant was at her place of work during the interview. In all cases, I ensured that the interview location was in a setting that allowed for confidentiality: i.e. an enclosed space that did not allow someone else in the vicinity to overhear the interview.

The length of the interviews varied from between one to two hours to conduct, with average length being just over one and a half hours. Each interview was audio-taped. Upon completion of the interviews, I transcribed each interview and provided the participants a copy of the transcript for review and any additional comments. This post-interview review was voluntary and I received no additional feedback from the participants from this post-interview review.

I identified that upon completion of the research I would maintain the transcripts for a period of 12 months, upon which time they will be destroyed. During the period prior to the destruction of the data, I will maintain all data in a secure fashion. All written material and physical data (i.e. interview tapes) will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office. All electronic data and files will be kept in a password-protected folder on my computer. This information

and my plans for the data retention and destruction was described to the participants in the consent form.

Ethical Considerations

In keeping with the requirements for research projects at the University of Victoria, I submitted an application for ethical review of human research to the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. In the application, I identified my research project to qualify as minimal risk to the participants. The persons who I interviewed were not of a group considered marginal, at risk, or incompetent. They were professionals who were not placed at risk by this research. All participants were adults of varying ages and from both genders. All participants were employees of organizations with some depth of experience in the particular organizations. Their respective roles in their organizations varied but included positions such as Executive Director, Program Director and Coordinator.

In the ethics application, I stated that the research investigation did not involve sensitive, personal issues and therefore I did not anticipate any emotional/psychological risk to the participants. To ameliorate any anxiety that the research participants felt, I provided each participant with verbal information in advance of the interview regarding the type of questions I used in the interviews. I also informed participants before the interviews that they could stop the interview at any time for a break, to reschedule, or to cease their involvement altogether.

The one inconvenience to the participants that arose in this research was the amount of time involved in participating in the research. This caused the participants to take time away from their ongoing work. This was described to the participants in the consent form where I stated the amount of time anticipated that would be required for the interviews. In several instances, participants articulated that the amount of time for the interviews did cause an inconvenience for them. However, none felt that the inconvenience was too onerous for them to participate.

Given that the interviews were conducted in-person or over the telephone by myself, I had no opportunity to protect the anonymity of the participants from myself as the principal researcher. This lack of anonymity was explained in the consent process. I articulated in the consent form that while I would ensure confidentiality of the individual participants, because I was going to be interviewing individuals I would know their identity.

I have protected the confidentiality of participants and their organizations in the research. I have taken steps to ensure that the identity of the participants and their organizations are not identifiable in this thesis. Direct quotes and information obtained during the individual interviews are only used in a manner that does not reveal the identity of the participants. To that end, I have changed the names of the participants. In the analysis chapters, I have occasionally included a reference to the question that I posed as a way of illuminating the participants' comments. In those instances, I identify myself as "Dan". In the quotes, I also deleted any

reference that might cause the participant or his/her organization to be identifiable. The consent form outlined issues related to the confidentiality of participation and I discussed the issue at the beginning of the interviews.

Three of five of the individuals whom I interviewed were familiar to me on a professional basis. The other two individuals were not familiar with me but were familiar with the organization for which I work. As such, I determined that I needed to disclose both my educational and professional background to each participant at the beginning of the research process. In three cases, the organizations receive some of their funding from the Ministry for which I work. In those three circumstances, I made all attempts to address this issue as clearly and openly as possible to ensure that there was no perception of power-over in the interviews. In the three interviews, I received full assurances from each participant that they did not perceive or feel any matters of concern with my involvement and my current work circumstance.

An additional ethical issue I felt the need to address was ensuring that the individuals did not feel coerced to participate in the research. In my informal contact with each participant, I identified both my academic and professional standpoint to ensure that each participant had full knowledge of my role within the Ministry. Throughout the consent process and interviews, I raised this issue with each participant to ascertain whether this played a factor in the participants' decision to participate. Again, each participant

provided assurances that they did not feel coerced or compelled to participate in the research.

While all participants articulated that they were willing to participate voluntarily in the research despite my “other hat” as an employee of the Ministry, there were a couple of instances in two of the interviews where a certain amount of awkwardness appeared to be present as a result of my “other hat”. In one of the interviews, when querying the participant about challenges her organization had faced in the implementation of its website, she referenced a set of circumstances where actions taken by employees within my Ministry had created some additional challenges for her organization. These actions were taken unbeknownst to her and her colleagues and this did have an impact in the manner that they created their website. Although I was not involved in the circumstances that she described, I was aware of them. It was apparent to me that there was a certain level of awkwardness for the participant in describing the impact this had on her organization and I suspect that she may have provided a more fulsome and explicit response had I not been employed by the Ministry.

Another example of how my employment appeared to play a role in the interviews was when one participant described how her organization designed its website in part to address budget cuts it had experienced because of government reducing the funding to that organization. Again, this was not an event with which I had direct involvement. That said, my standing as an employee of the government that had reduced her organization’s

budget felt like it affected to a certain degree the responses she was providing.

Finally, another example of the challenge created by my employment status was when one participant described his vision of the role that his organization plays. He felt the organization is one that proactively tries to build relationships between service providers. He felt very strongly that organizations assisting families undergoing family law issues should be collaborating and coordinating in substantial ways, including in the area of web-based information services. He made statements to the effect that he did not believe that government, in particular my Ministry, was as effective as it should be in working collaboratively with non-profit organizations. Again, while this was not a direct criticism levied against me, there was an air of awkwardness in that he was reflecting his viewpoints about my employer and some of my colleagues.

In each of the above examples, I attempted as much as possible to ensure that the participants were aware that any of their comments would not be attributed to them personally in my thesis, and that I was participating in the interviews wearing my “graduate student hat” rather than my “Ministry of Attorney General employee hat”. I acknowledged that it was not simple for the participants to divest themselves of the knowledge regarding my employment status. However, addressing this issue directly with the participants did seem to alleviate some of the awkwardness. I am also conscious of the possibility that the only awkwardness that was present

during the interviews was felt by me and that it is possible the participants were not concerned at all. However, in my reflections post-interview I observed that the participant and the researcher both felt awkward.

Limitations of the Research

I interviewed only one member of each organization. While the representatives were all very knowledgeable of the organization and its processes, he/she may not have been aware of all areas or may not have been able to respond fully to certain questions. I believe that this limitation is alleviated somewhat by the fact that the participants self-identified as being the most knowledgeable persons from their respective organizations to speak about their websites. However, the interviews only captured the perspective of one representative, which may not have been reflective of other members of the organization. During the interviews, two participants in particular expressed that others within their organization would also be very insightful and helpful to me.

While I reviewed the sites extensively in order to be familiar with their content as a means of improving the interview, I did not conduct research on the actual site. An area for future research that I believe would be valuable would be to conduct a thorough comparison of various organizations' websites. This type of analysis is not part of the methodology that I used. However, I see that using a different methodology like discourse analysis would have some value in conducting research of Internet sites. Comparing the means utilized to convey information, provide services and assist users

could provide good insight into what techniques are more effective in meeting a specific mandate or objective. After reviewing individual sites and the responses of participants regarding aspects of their site that they believe to be the most effective and innovative, I believe that a more structured comparative analysis of a number of sites could lead to the development of overall strategies or effective methods from which other organizations could learn. As I will show below in my analysis, reviewing other organizations' websites appears to be a popular means of determining the content of one's own site. Therefore, a more structured comparative analysis would be of value to organizations in this field.

Another limitation is the fact that I relied strictly on the interviews to create a story of how the site was developed and maintained. Other material might have provided additional data that would support or give a different impression. For example, there may be records of organizational meetings, meeting minutes or a project plan created to guide the site development. In more than one interview, the participant asked if I was interested in reviewing these organizational records. While I declined to do so, an analysis of those data sources may have led to more comprehensive and encompassing research findings.

Analysis of the Data

In my analysis of the interview data, I drew heavily from grounded theory and maintained a focus on the tenets of critical theory. As outlined in my methodology section, critical theory's focus on looking beyond

appearances and on examining the dialectic between subject and object, its emphasis on critiquing and transforming social relations to engender empowerment, and its deconstruction of the dialectic that technology is either all good or all bad influenced my analytical approach (Neuman 1997, How 2003).

My goal in the analysis was to allow the themes to arise from the data rather than measuring the data against predefined hypotheses. This approach is identified as an inductive approach where I, as the researcher, immerse myself in the data. Doing so allowed me to identify the themes or dimensions that seem to have meaning for the participants (Abrahamson 1983). Creswell states that this process of "...taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories is called the *constant comparative* method of data analysis" (Creswell 1998, p. 57). In approaching this constant comparative method of data analysis, I was guided in part by procedures suggested by two of my professors, Dr. Marge Reitsma-Street and Dr. Susan Boyd.

Reitsma-Street suggests breaking analysis into four distinct but related processes: inspecting, organizing, reducing and transforming. Inspecting entails listening, sitting with it, rereading it. Organizing entails putting it in display form, putting it in categories and mapping it out. She states that reducing is the process of summarizing and describing the data, using concepts and theory to reduce it. Finally, transforming the data involves making sense of the data based on relationships, questions. The research

looks for patterns, metaphors that can be used and begins to give meaning to the data (Reitsma-Street 2004). Strauss and Corbin reflect these processes in their discussion on qualitative research: 'Because the investigator cannot possibly present all the data en toto to the readers, it is necessary to reduce these data...Reducing and ordering materials of course represents selection and interpretation' (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 22).

Boyd suggests that the researcher should let the data speak to him or her and should note consistencies and inconsistencies. Researchers should look for the underlying assumptions, the myths and ideologies, and the economic imperatives that are evident in the data. Finally, she argues that a key step is to recognize how social relations are shaping phenomenon (Boyd 2003).

So how did I conduct my analysis in keeping with the above-suggested approaches while drawing from grounded theory? A theory is constructed through a systematic process. The researcher groups data that have commonalities, places interpretations on the data and then provides them with a conceptual label. Then the research outlines statements of how the concepts are related. In other words, the data is interpreted and themes within the data are related to form a conceptual scheme (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

My first step in completing this systematic process was to construct the data. As identified above, each interview was audio-taped and then transcribed by myself. The transcription process is an onerous and laborious

task, which I experienced in this research process. Despite that, the transcription of tapes was the first of several ways in which I engaged with the data. I was able to “relive” the individual interviews, but in a time and place that allowed me to make notes to myself on reflections and insights that occurred during the transcription.

After transcribing all five interviews, I reread each interview individually to further digest the material, thoughts, and statements that were a part of each one. I then began the process of organizing the data through “open coding”. Open coding ‘allows researchers to identify and even extract themes, topics or issues in a systematic manner’ (Berg 2001, p. 164). In conducting open coding, I tried to follow the four basic guidelines suggested by Strauss: (1) ask the data a specific and consistent set of questions; (2) analyze the data minutely; (3) frequently interrupt the coding to write a theoretical note; and (4) never assume the analytic relevance of any traditional variable such as age, sex, social class and so forth until the data show it to be relevant (Strauss 1987, p. 251).

In order to complete open coding, I decided to utilize a three-column approach. The first column included the interviews, the second column included the key concepts found within the interviews, and then the third column was my initial reactions and feelings that arose as I analyzed the data.

I reviewed each interview and identified for each sentence or series of sentences the key concept that was apparent within it. As I proceeded

through each of the interviews, I also created a separate file for the key concepts that began to start consistently arising from each interview. Once I had identified the key concepts throughout all five interviews, I then constructed a file for each of the main questions that I asked in the interview. Within each of these files, I began to cut and paste the responses of the participants along with the key concept I assessed for their responses. As I pasted their responses into the specific files, I did so in a manner that began to organize the responses into similar concepts. For example, I quickly discovered that each participant responded to the questions about resources applied by their organizations with some comments about “resource scarcity”. I would then paste all quotes that focused on resource scarcity within my “resource question” file and group them together.

As I went through this organization process, I discovered that some of the concepts appeared to fit better in a different “question” file. For example, a participant may have responded to a question about her site’s innovation with statements about the ability of a non-profit organization to be innovative. As the centralizing concept was about the role of non-profits, I would place that quote in the question file that focused on non-profit organizations.

Once I had organized all the concepts within the various files, I proceeded to go one-step deeper in the analysis. I reviewed each of the files that I had constructed and began to note the prevailing concepts that I began to see into what would look like an outline for a paper. After going through each of the files and pulling out the concepts that were prevalent, I then had

an outline that identified the main themes and the corresponding concepts within each theme.

At that point, I then read each of the files I had constructed and began to order the quotes and concepts by determining the theme that appeared to be the most prevalent and encompassing for that question. I wanted to have each theme for each question in descending order with the most prevalent and encompassing at the top descending to the theme that appeared the least significant or the least encompassing of the participants. While doing this, I further organized all of the quotes within each theme into specific categories. For example, within the theme of “information provision/dissemination” I would have categories like “equipping service providers” and “educational information and tools”. The final step in my analysis was reviewing the central themes against the literature and presenting my theoretical formulations based on the data. This final step will be detailed in the following section.

Chapter 5 Analysis of Role and Function of Websites

Overview

I recall during discussions on research practice that several professors emphasized the point that no matter how inclusive and participatory your research process is and no matter how much you may strive as a researcher to not be researching “down”, at the point of conducting your analysis you will be faced with very powerful choices as to what to do with your data. At this stage, the researcher has the control over what information is included and what information is discarded, what is focused on and what is glossed over. The power of these choices weighed heavily upon me as I completed the analytical steps I described in the previous section and constructed this analysis section of my thesis.

Most challenging was balancing the need to focus on some of the overarching themes that were present in the data and my desire to include all the points raised by the participants as a way of honouring their participation and their experiences. Decisions about what not to include in this document were some of the most challenging choices I had to make. I even went so far as to construct a file titled “Quotes that were excluded”, partly out of the slim possibility that I would find a way to weave them in and partly as a way of trying to respect the points raised that were excluded by still “organizing” them in some fashion. At the end of the day, choices were made and themes were identified. I believe that what follows respects and honours the input and experiences of the five people I interviewed.

I have organized the information provided into the themes that became apparent to me as I analyzed the data. I appreciate that others reviewing the data may organize them differently, focus on different themes or interpret comments in varying ways. Below is my translation and interpretation based which is shaped by my experiences in this area. I found that there were five main areas that came up for all participants, and many of their comments fit within these five areas. Again, there were certainly points made that do not fit within these five areas; however, it was these five themes that I felt the participants were mainly focusing on in their interviews.

I have organized the themes into two chapters. The first chapter discusses the three themes that relate to the role and function that the websites play for the five organizations. The individual themes are: 1) Provision/Dissemination of Information; 2) Public Face of the Organization; and 3) Efficiencies. The final two themes have been organized in the next chapter, which focuses on the issues that participants identified relating to websites and their organization's status as a non-profit, as well as issues relating to research and implementation. The fourth and fifth themes are: 4) The Right Tool for the Job? Non-Profit Organizations and Websites; and 5) Research and Implementation of Websites.

Provision/Dissemination of Information

The overarching theme in the data was with respect to the goal that the organizations were attempting to achieve and the needs they were trying to meet through their site. All participants clearly identified that the main reason they and their organizations invested time, money and energy into websites was for the purpose of providing and disseminating information.

A significant focus of many human service organizations is the delivery of information to clients, practitioners and other partners. Within such organizations there appears to be an increased focus on the use of the Internet to assist with information delivery. For human service organizations, the attraction to utilize the Internet for this purpose is the ease of access and ability to instantly transform and communicate information (Butterfield 1998). As information exchange is a substantial component of human service work, information technologies that “collect, store, manipulate and communicate information have a dramatic impact on human services” (Schoech, 1999, p.1).

All the interviews evidenced this use of the Internet for information exchange. When asked about why his or her organization decided to develop a website, each participant talked about the need to provide and disseminate information. The following quotes from Anne and Sara respectively exemplify this need:

Anne: We decided we needed a site because an organization like ours produces a lot of information; very specific kinds of information that isn't necessarily accessible in other places or is of particular interest to

a particular audience. So we felt that to have a site would allow people to get that information without having to phone us and have us mail them materials or etc etc. It seemed pretty obvious it would get people access to some of the information that we have, so that was the main reason.

Sara: It was our mandate that drove that thinking. Our mandate really is to make information...as publicly accessible as possible, about public access. That was one way which we do that. We did that very early on and at that point, although the work has changed a lot in six years and websites are much important than they were then, I think even then it became clear it was going to be an important tool for us, both to get the information out, both promotionally and sort of a proactive way, but also to have it be accessible to people. The whole notion was we were never going to charge people for the information we provided, like the private service providers always cost. We were never going to do that; it was contrary to our way of thinking, so we were going to take as much information and put it out there to use.

Clearly there are many means and media for imparting information other than the Internet. However, the participants discussed how the Internet is a much more comprehensive and effective vehicle for this part of their service delivery. For example, Sara below described how she saw the distinct advantages of using the Internet as a tool:

Sara: I think that we are able to provide a whole package of info, otherwise we would be sending out pieces, dribs and drabs, here's an article, there's an article. This is comprehensive, everything is there and I think what we end up doing is answering questions that haven't even been asked yet in people's minds...

I think it's just the amount of detail and the amount of, not peripheral but tangential info, the way you can link to other documents, other sites, other info that is sort of related but probably if you were just doing it over the telephone you wouldn't get into it. But now it's suddenly there for the person. You can outline options that way that you couldn't possibly [otherwise], you wouldn't start sending out another organization's literature, but if you can link to their site, that's now possible. So now for an example, When Your Marriage Breaks Up booklet, you can link directly to that. If I was going to handle all these calls, I wouldn't send that out, I might in extreme circumstances but not on a routine basis, so people wouldn't get that additional info,

that add on, which is very important. So we are now offering such hugely expanded info to them.

Proponents of the Internet talk frequently about the ability for it to be accessible to people without limitations of geography and how it provides for equal access to information to people with the means to use it. Clearly there remains ongoing concerns about information poverty and an unequal ability to access the Internet, particularly by the type of clients serviced by human service organizations (Butterfield 1998, McNutt, Queiro-Tajalli et al. 2001, Hersberger 2002). At the same time, there is a recognition that the Internet provides for an opportunity to broaden communication and to expand the number of communities serviced and reached by an organization. The following quotes and my questions to the participants evidence this:

Sara: One thing is that the site is used for research purposes. University students, college students, internationally it's used. I was recently contacted by a representative from the New Zealand government. New Zealand is interested in [service area] models and they had studied our site inside and out to see what kind of [service area] model was being used in British Columbia...It's actually being used on a very high level. That kind of thing would never be happening without the website. They learned about us entirely through the Internet.

Dan: So people are accessing your site to learn more about your organization, about [service area] processes...

Sara: They were interested in the whole [reference deleted] model...they noticed there was some discussion as regards to family. They are using it for actually developing their own internal models around it. I do get emails from university students who are working on research papers; I get it from college students thinking about pursuing a career, wanting to connect...that kind of thing. They find us that way. Who would ever dreamt that would have been the result...

Dan: You also mentioned the posting of articles as a way of broadening knowledge?

Sara: Sort of putting it out for everybody. We encourage our members to contribute to that, part of the way they can promote themselves and make a contribution back to the community and help develop the field. But it was actually a broader vision. That was [name]'s idea to do that, partly about raising [the profession] up a notch as well and giving it an academic aura as well...there's actually academic work going on in this areas and some very fine papers written on this, some very interesting research has been done on this and here are some examples of what that looks like.

All the organizations shared this focus on disseminating information for altruistic purposes. While each organization had a specific mandate, they all identified that they also valued the ability to broaden understanding and disseminate useful information to communities broader than just their target audience. Activities such as the dissemination of information about an organization and its work to a larger audience is a common feature amongst these types of organizations. 'First, there is the need for high-quality information about their work on the ground, which is crucial to ensure accountability, to learn from experience, and to develop and disseminate good practice' (Lewis and Madon 2004, p. 117). The following quotes are two examples of this:

Sara: I got a call from Winnipeg; they really liked the process, had found it on our site, wanted to modify it to their purposes and asked us if they could. Again they commented on how great it was to have that out there, and the knowledge that it is saving other organizations a lot of work, why duplicate these things, is very gratifying to me because its an ultimate form of flattery that they think we have done a job well enough that they don't feel they need to make it better. Also, I just like the idea of helping other organizations because we are in the same boat in terms of limited time and resources, so if someone can benefit from the work we've done, that's a boon to everybody.

Ryan: We are also able to share a lot of info we have. We have a lot of general info about the court process and we don't look at it as a

copyright issue; to give that over to someone who can use it, we can be very flexible and just give permission if you are going to use it as something for support, just get it out there so. Even with [service area] and the media planning that's going on, we can give that to the media coordinator for the Attorney General to give to the media. That serves as well, so we can be flexible on how to use the material.

Because we are non-profit we develop things and give people permission to adapt them and to use them all the time; we don't charge them. People say maybe we should but our goal is to educate. If you have that philosophy...as long as we survive and can balance the budget at the end of the year.

Several of the participants interviewed stated that their websites provide information targeted to address specific needs of clients or people experiencing a family law issue in their life. While the sites may also provide information that is more general or provide information that is pertinent to a wider audience, the organizations have attempted to address very specific needs of a particular target audience. Research conducted in this area has suggested the importance of designing websites in a strategic manner in order to be respond to the information needs of stakeholders (Esrock and Leichthy 1998, Taylor, Kent et al. 2001).

Colleen:...we know that the kind of questions people are asking before they move forward, you know either because a crisis has happened, the kid has been scooped, they have just walked out or they come home to an empty house, all of those things, so we wanted to try and build a site so people who, not people who are in the crisis 911 stage, but people who are trying to decide what to do next, at the info seeking stage, could use it as well as those who might want to use it for self help.

Ryan: It is not like we are saying we are giving you legal advice, we are not giving procedural advice, what we are doing is combining the emotional and the legal in terms of the context of education on how to deal with your problem on that level... here's a whole type of education that's necessary that isn't about how do you fill out forms or what are the next steps in dealing with the registry, its not procedural

information. So what we are looking at, that's an example of the third lens [self-help lens]. If you look at the Divorce Act, what is it there...Another example is if you are going to put stuff on the Child Support Guidelines, well you wouldn't want to just do the technical stuff of the Child Support Guidelines, but want to combine it with a bit of the emotional stuff, the way you treat your ex, all of that stuff has implications. That's what that centre is all about.

In designing a site to meet such individual needs, particularly in the human services field and this area of family law, the information provided via the websites should be constructed in a manner that respects clients' individual circumstances and needs. Ideally, organizations construct websites in a manner that empowers the clients, meets their needs and provides opportunities for them to access information and services in a manner that is respectful of their individual circumstances. All of these goals are in keeping with the philosophy of the human service professions (Burke and Harrison 1997, Dominelli 1998). For some participants, it was the ability of their clients to access the information at their own pace and at a time of their choosing that was of great value:

Dan: How would you say that your site is particularly suited to people experiencing family law issues in their lives?

Colleen: Well, I think that it is probably, there are lots of good things about the website; if you look at the computer use in this province it is pretty high. While we have discovered that a lot of people are using it after hours at work, there are a lot of people using at home so that they can actually get on with finding about stuff in the relative comfort of discomfort of their own home without having to go out and seek the information out...I think that it is quite useful for people to be able to sit back, because you can be able to present the info in a way so they can assess where they are at and where they want to go.

Sara: ...the fact that it's there twenty four hours a day for people and weekends, that gives it an accessibility you could never handle with a normal office.

And it's that whole self serve piece. With the directories in particular, in a second people can now get a [deleted] phone number...now they can access it themselves right away. They can think about what their needs are and do a search, find names, pull up a resume, they can do that all at once.

One participant discussed how his organization's website was a powerful and useful tool for people who have experienced great trauma. The site was available to be accessed whenever the victims were in an emotional state that allowed them to address the issues. The site has sections that focus on the institutional abuse of aboriginal persons. For the aboriginal community, there is an ongoing need for support and resources for the victims (Fournier and Grey 1997). Ryan described how his organization's site is attempting to provide some of that support through its website.

Ryan: ...the institutional abuse project, that's a workshop on institutional abuse. By doing a web element to go with it, people can go through it afterwards because it's a very emotional topic, they may not take in all the info, they can go back and refresh.

The whole institutional abuse website is tied to the workshop we do. What we have done is partner with the Law Commission of Canada who did the report on restoring dignity and we are trying to put together, one thing a site can do if you are talking about a sensitive issue like this in the community, especially people like survivors, they need to reflect on it, they need to go back and then they have got a resource they can go back to. People sometimes need to see thing sometimes ten times, it might be months before they are ready, and there is something there that's neutral, can be accessed in privacy and in that sense it provides a kind of service you couldn't do otherwise.

The value of providing information in a manner that tries to meet the needs of individuals and in a manner that assists persons who have experienced significant and sensitive issues or events is laudable. The one area that the participants did not address when discussing the use of

websites for this purpose was how this fits with the concerns of the inability for some to access the internet, or to access it in a private setting. For example, people facing poverty issues often are only able to access the Internet at public places such as a library. An aboriginal person who has experienced institutional abuse at a residential school and whose only access to the Internet is at a public library, the band office or friendship centre is not likely to access the type of website described by Ryan, particularly if it would take five to ten times to make it through the entire site. There is a significant discord between the idea of providing support and assistance over the Internet to persons on sensitive and emotional issues, when the ability to access the information in a private space is compromised.

One of the focuses for providing information via the Internet is to address the needs of service providers. There is an ongoing need on the part of such service providers for more information, up to date resources, and tools to better assist them in working with their clients. Many, such as victim services workers and family advocates, assist families and individuals in a variety of service areas and thereby are in need of specific and specialized information in all the areas within which they operate. Others, such as public librarians and teachers, are confronted with information needs on the part of the public or students and student's families that are in areas largely out of their field of expertise. The following excerpt is an excellent example of how one of the organizations saw addressing this need as one of the major objectives of its site:

Colleen: So when the Law Foundation came up with a request for proposals for three year funding for something to deal with civil justice area, I sat down with a group of service providers to see if there's something to do collectively, and they said, "why don't we have a family law website, like Pov Net?" only a website that would be strictly for family law that would assist people in the community who are working with our client groups who need some assistance with both understanding the information that's made available, doing some procedural assistance... we have always known that people need more information in family law than in almost any other areas...and we've seen that that the website could be used to deliver legal information services very effectively to all these community groups and the clients they serve...

Dan: And what would you say were the general objectives at that point?

Colleen: The general objectives were to provide a more equitable distribution of information and easier access to a lot of info for a range of info and service providers, everything from public libraries to family service workers, immigrant settlement workers, that they could just easily access correct, accurate, current legal information about family law...

Another participant described how the focus of his organization's website was to provide information to service providers in a targeted fashion: using educational information and materials. That information could be in the form of a page that focuses on the implementation of particular piece of legislation such as the Child Support Guidelines. It could also include some educational tools that could assist professionals in educating about that type of legislation. The focus for this is to equip professionals who provide education on specific areas of law, particular family law, with some advanced information and resources to do that successfully.

Ryan: The second function is that we do a lot of training. We do probably one hundred and fifty workshops, professional development community workshops per year. We realized for a long time, for example on the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, we probably did eighty

workshops on that. But you know, we didn't get all the teachers...we tend to get the more keener teachers. I am concerned about teachers in more remote communities, I am concerned about the fact that sometimes when we do those workshops, in some cases we could get them for a whole day, but in some cases we could only get them for two hours. There are a whole lot of issues. We are also concerned about the fact that even if we do the teachers and train them on a workshop that what happens in six months they want to use it, there's no place to go back for a refresher. We need to create a training centre, that was the second component.

Later in the interview, Ryan expanded on this concept of educational information provided via the website:

Ryan: The thing about the site, the site has two functions. It has the function of not just learning about the Act but also has unit activities about how to teach the activities that we have on the learning centre. What we want is the teacher who is going to be working with students about the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* issue; we have got *Youth Criminal Justice Act* programming on the [site]. Its quite different and so what happens though is part of the learning on the thing is we have exercises and activities where we are saying "well this is what you should be doing if you are a teacher and you want to work with your students".

The provision of information is clearly a strong focus of the participants interviewed and their organizations. That said, one participant cautioned that organizations must equip people with information in a manner that does not propel them, particularly service providers, to go beyond their mandate. This is a particular concern in the family law area where a clear distinction is made between providing legal information and advocacy and practicing law. Colleen describes this tension between providing information and not leading people to take actions for which they were not formally trained or mandated:

Colleen: So we were really careful with how we set that [website] up, we also didn't want people to practice law, and they weren't, because they didn't have the training or the skills, or the actual degree and paid liability insurance. So we need to work with both, that was a real

concern of [Colleen's organization], including me, and we worked with our [staff] to figure how, how could we help these people who were assisting clients, and often advocating for them, and some of them are now in court because of some of the cutbacks. How could we do that job without providing advice? So that one took hard work and we have people signed up and they have to agree to certain things, and they have to read this and understand what's going on...And there was just this sort of uncertainty about encouraging people to practice law, and it's not what we want and that wasn't the intention, but it was the concern.

In summary, this theme presents that the substantial focus of all five organization's website is on the provision of information via the Internet. While the sites have other purposes that will be discussed in the next two sections, the consistent purpose that superceded the others was this desire to make information available to their particular users and audience. I have noted some variance in the focus of each website as to whether the information was being directed to specific clients, to practitioners, or to the larger communities, but despite the varied target users the goal remained the same.

Public Face of the Organization

The next theme that arose from the data was the use of websites as a means to display a “public face” of their organization. Participants talked about using their website to let people know who they were, to conduct public relations activities, and to project an image of what the organization was about. Some saw the implementation of a website as a means of establishing credibility for their organization and felt that there was a certain expectation that they must have a website in order to be considered a reputable organization.

This theme was probably the one that surprised me the most as I had not anticipated that it would be such a strong focus. Upon seeing the theme consistently identified by each of the participants, I conducted a literature search on this area to see if other researchers had identified this in any of their work. I quickly discovered that what the participants were describing to me was applicable to many non-profit organizations (Johnson 1997, White and Raman 1999, Ha and Pratt 2000, Kent, Taylor et al. 2003). For organizations, websites can accomplish multiple purposes in relationship-building. For one, they can provide a medium for communicating with stakeholders and for providing those stakeholders and the public with a means of viewing and understanding the organizations better (Kent, Taylor et al. 2003). One of the benefits that arise from this focus on the use of websites as the public face of the organization is that ‘Organizations that can create identification between themselves and their publics increase the

likelihood that publics will turn to that organization for guidance. Thus, from a stakeholder perspective, organizational websites are important tools for creating strong, mutually beneficial ties with publics' (Kent, Taylor et al. 2003, p. 73).

While the particular need or focus for each of the organizations involved in my research differed somewhat, there was a clear consistency in their sense that their website was a public face to their organization:

Anne: The thing about our organization is that we are always challenged by communicating to the world what it is we are. Our name doesn't mean anything and define who we are, and we are always struggling with that; lawyers know what we do but the broader community doesn't always.

Tom: To me running a nonprofit is not that different than a business in that you are offering a service, you need to get the word out, you need to project a professional competent image and there's a whole variety of ways to do that. Now, not a lot of money to play with so the Internet is a pretty sort of cheap advertising marketing tool and I am computer savvy, Internet savvy to know that there's real benefits to get from a site. But I don't think my expectations were that we were going to be able to do much more than have one other avenue of showing our face.

Ryan: Then we said we have to move and we started moving and what we did originally, we developed what I would consider a classic version of a corporate website. So what you get up there, you want it to look good and it basically talks about who you are, your programs, the resources, how to contact you etc... We did it initially because we had to make our first steps, we said, ok lets get all our info together, lets organize it.

On a somewhat different note, Sara highlights how the "public face" facet of her organization's website provided it with a degree of legitimacy and credibility:

Sara: Having a site I think gives a credibility but I think more than that even, it has made the society real, tangible, concrete. It actually has a persona when it has a site, instead of just this organization that's out there that you get letters from and there's someone there who answers the phone and whatever, I think that it gives it a concreteness that you could never have, definitely a personality, a life, all in the look of it, what's on there, those are things to pay attention to when you have the site. Because it does define the society very much but it definitely gives it a level of reality that you wouldn't have otherwise.

Dan: That parallels the conversation we had about having an office space and how that reflects on your organization. What you are talking about is the same sort of thing but on a virtual level?

Sara: It is a very similar idea. I think that is not just from the public's perspective and the members...But beyond that, for our board, for me, it is something to hold onto, it's very real. Although its ironic because there is nothing real about it, and yet I imagine the society without a website and I don't know if it would be a society in our case but we really have actually put everything, it's all there, the only thing that's not there is soon going to be in the member's only section, some of the forms that our members fill out after they get admitted. We put everything on the site, it's who we are.

The credibility piece more than anything surprises me, the credibility it has given the Society. I don't think that I really thought about that part, that any of us really did. I think we knew that it was important in terms of getting the info out and helping people access it. I don't think we anticipated how important that would be in terms of the organization's status and popularity if you can call it that, and the importance in the [deleted] community, the legitimacy in the [deleted] community. It certainly has given us legitimacy that may have taken much longer.

For these organizations, their website is a publicly available representation of who the organization is. Therefore, there is a need to ensure that the website reflects positively upon the organization. Participants talked about this posing challenges for them as they tried to balance the resources expended on the site with the knowledge that it represents an image of them:

Anne: Donors think of giving money. If something is too glossy, too high end, they think: "what are you spending your money on...?" On the other hand because we are a legal organization we need to have people have confidence in our professionalism or our level of particular ability. We always have to balance those things and I think the website does that.

Tom: It takes time and it's probably a little bit related to my personality. I don't want to be a control freak and control everything but consistent with what you said, we have established a good reputation in the community, so stuff that goes up on the site I want to filter it personally before it does so it's not gender biased, so it doesn't have a message of anger attached to it. Those kinds of things have harmed men's groups or parent's groups in the past. Which means that some of the changes that happen on the site get clogged going through me.

Sara: That was one of the driving factors to get a new look, our site was old and stale now, gloomy, no longer at all being able to compete in this flashy overstated world that is out there now. I didn't want to be like them either but I realized that we have to live in that world on the Internet and we can't look like army barracks material, which is what we look like right now, in a world that has moved forward so much in terms of what the sites look like. There is a competitive part of it, even though we are a non-profit, it's a wanting to keep up with what other like minded orgs are doing and even non like-minded orgs are doing. You want your site to be great, part of its pride; it's a reflection of what you feel about yourself as a society, part of its pride.

In her interview, Sara identified that the site is a reflection of her organization. She then described how this influences not just the design of the site but also any content that may or may not be posted:

Sara: The only other thing I guess is I have talked a lot about what you include and I have touched on what you don't include but that's a real important consideration, in both maintenance and development, the decision about what not to include. Not just about scope, which is important, you know who you are, you know who you're serving. All of that decides what you do and do not include but there are other sensitivity aspects around a site, decisions that have to be made internally, information that may serve some needs but you decide still that you are not going to try to meet. Because of again, perhaps the standards you are trying to maintain or the image you are trying to maintain. So decisions about what not to include because there is no end of people who like you to do things for them on your site or who

you could offend by posting something you really want to post. And you may end up posting it after you make that very hard decision, that it's important in the big picture to post it anyway. Those are the behind the scenes decisions that are equally important to your look and what you do post, the things you decide not to do. Those are hard ones, sometimes, very hard, I find those harder.

Within the realm of displaying a public face of the organization, participants identified the use of their site as a public relations tool. For these organizations, the site not only provided the ability to portray who the organization was, it also allowed the organization to promote and market itself:

Sara: We don't really do much in the way of presentations; the Internet is really it...That is actually more promoting rather than creating easy access.

Tom: That was the original perspective; to basically get our name out there more...Essentially I probably see it as a marketing tool. You are having a phone conversation with someone for the first time, rather than talking for an hour and describing what we do, go and have a look at our site. It's a way to introduce people to what we do. That's probably for my perspective its biggest value: as a marketing tool.

Organizations that use their websites as a means of a public relations tool should be aware of both the advantages and disadvantages to this approach: 'With Webbed communication, the potential for organizations to have direct communication with interested publics is possible. The limitation of Webbed communication is that the actual design of a website can dramatically influence a visitor's perception of an organization' (Kent, Taylor et al. 2003, p.74).

One aspect of this theme that I found particularly intriguing was what I would call inter-organizational peer pressure. Most of the participants

discussed that they felt a certain degree of outside expectation that their organization have a website established as a means of identifying who their organization was. Sara was quoted above talking about how her website provided her organization with a certain degree of credibility that would have been much more challenging to achieve without it. Participants articulated, as I will show below, that without a website their organization would be considered less reputable or not regarded as highly by outsiders.

Butterfield's work on technology in the human services found that funders and clients have increased expectations that organizations implement technological advancements as they appear. When new technologies arise, organizations must find some means of implementing them or risk losing funding opportunities and clients (Butterfield 1998). Another author has argued that organizations are implementing websites, in part, as a response to perceived or actual social pressure. There is a sense that "everyone else is doing it". Organizations fear that they will be left behind or seen to be not as current as others who have expended resources on developing a site. Inter-organizational social pressures have an ongoing and significant impact on the implementation of new technologies like the Internet (Flanagin, 2000). One research study found that most organizations in the study were not able to identify if their site was reaching its target audience. Instead, respondents articulated that their site were serving more as a "status symbol" or an "image building" function (White and Raman 1999).

Amongst the participants in my research, these factors were identified as *playing a role in their organization's development and implementation of a website*:

Anne: Also, it was the time that everyone was expecting people to have sites and we felt it was about time we had one.

Tom: It's another way to get your presence out there. To me it seemed like a necessary component of living in the age that we are living in...

Ryan: The first thing was to get it up there to have a website and say "Here it is, this is us". We need it; people are asking us about going to our website.

It helps our credibility with funders. It's funny; you need a website now, if you don't have one you aren't a credible organization. What has worked out very well... it gives you a lot of credibility and that helps us.

Colleen described the pressure she and her colleagues felt when they were just at the beginning stages of developing a website, when many other organizations had already "gone live":

Colleen: ...so we were taking a look at that and trying to keep track of who else was doing what to whom here...

Dan: Within British Columbia?

Colleen: And within Canada, because so much of it is similar, and we were slow. I mean people were putting up sites left, right and center, at times we felt we were behind the eight-ball but we just wanted to do it right...

Within this theme, the conversation that sticks with me the most in this regard was one that I had with Sara. We were talking about her office space and how that reflects upon her organization, and then almost immediately talked in the same manner about her organization's website. For Sara, the sense of the orderliness conveyed to someone accessing its website is just

as important as what is conveyed by someone walking in the door of her office. In the relatively short amount of time that the Internet has been operating, it has become remarkably intertwined with many aspects of our daily lives and work. I expressed earlier in this section that I was surprised at how prevalent this theme was displayed in the interviews. I have little doubt that had I been doing this research in five or ten years time, the expectation and acknowledgement of how websites play this public face role would be almost a given.

Efficiencies

Another significant theme was the focus on achieving efficiencies through the implementation and maintenance of a website. Each participant, at some point in the interview, identified that their organization's site provided for a more efficient way of disseminating information than other means at their disposal. Many organizations, particularly non-profits with limited budgets, view the Internet as having particular advantages in this area (Marchand and Lavoie 1998, Kent, Taylor et al. 2003). Participants identified that there were organizational savings in staff time. This generally resulted from staff members not having to spend the time providing whatever information was housed on their site to each individual person who wanted to access it. It also saved the organizations money, as a website is an inexpensive way of providing publication material. This is contrasted with the more expensive route of continuing to print the material in booklets, brochures and so on. Other efficiencies were achieved as well which will be evidenced below by the participants.

As I analyzed the data and began to see this theme consistently in the interviews, I struggled with the question of what to name it. The term that I continued to go back to was "efficiency". This was despite my strong desire to identify another term that was not as loaded or considered to be by some as a current "buzz word". "Efficiency" has always struck me as a term that further displays how economics and a for-profit mentality have become the main weathervane for measuring good human and social service delivery. I

recognize that efficiency is important for organizations to ensure that resources are devoted to clients rather than other areas such as administration. My caution with this concept is that organizations need to ensure that they do not sacrifice too much in the name of efficiency. Despite my resistance to using a term that carries so much personal baggage for me, it was the only one that fit with the theme that arose out of the data.

The concern that too many non-profit organizations have focused on providing services from a for-profit or business mentality has been voiced by other researchers as well. For example, Richard Bush articulated a caution that non-profits had too exuberantly embraced private sector models and practices. He felt that this over-emphasis on a for-profit model would cause non-profits to lose their valuing of participation and membership (Bush 1992). In the years subsequent to his article, others have identified what they believe to be the further transformation of non-profits away from the values of citizen driven services and advocacy. Increasingly there is a call for these organizations to refocus on what differentiates non-profit organizations from those in other sectors (Van Til 2000, Brainard and Siplon 2004). It was with these reflections in mind that I began to articulate this theme.

The first area that the participants talked about was the fact that providing substantial information via a website is cheaper, easier, and faster than having to do so through tasks like printing, mailing and faxing:

Ryan: With our resources, since we don't have a printing budget, we are putting more and more online pdfs [documents that can be downloaded]; research we have done we are trying to make that more

available. So people aren't just going on and seeing this is who we are and brochures, we are really trying to get more content.

That's been very useful; because you know all the interest on the [specific subject area] we were able to just post it up there, all the research and people passing it along and people downloading it. We haven't had to worry about sending out copies. People phone me, a lot of people have phoned me, I just say, well, go to the website, click on there and you are welcome to it. There has been a ton of efficiencies; we would have been stuck having to do this otherwise. We have got lots of people trying to get everything up. You want to meet every need you can. We would have said, well we are going to charge; this thing is like 200 pages. All those kinds of issues, we would have produced 50 copies, that's very nice.

Anne: We wouldn't be able to give people written materials or copies of things very effectively with faxing or mailing, which is so much more time-consuming than having the site there and saying well go download it. It's massive when it comes to administrative stuff. I think there's lots of students, there's more info on our site than anywhere else in the office. If someone wants something it's more helpful and, I find I download stuff all the time. I will be at home working and will download something, so in that sense it's really a good thing. It is those documents that people can download that helps a lot.

The other significant area that the participants discussed in terms of efficiencies was with respect to the time savings that were achieved by putting information on-line. The most vocal about this aspect of efficiency was Sara, who is the person within her organization with almost exclusive responsibilities to communicate with the public and members:

Sara: But what happened, in response to my experiences on the ground taking phone calls from people over the years, getting emails from people with questions, was certain needs started to emerge that we obviously could fill with our website.

Dan: What needs would those be?

Sara: For example...there were these constant questions that come up. There was clearly a need to be able to have a consistent way of answering them and secondly to put it out there. So people who were on the site, because more and more people were coming onto the site,

could find that info and it would be there for them and they could call me instead with the more focused question instead of these repetitive general umbrella questions. Part of it also frankly was survival because the office was starting to get very busy. I am limited in the amount of time I have to work. These questions that were actually time consuming but easy to answer and they had very clear answers. Why would I be handling hundreds and hundreds of these when we could cut that maybe in half or reduce it by ninety percent, who knows, by putting the info out there instead? Part of it was being very practical and was almost a financial resources issue: the understanding that because people were coming to the site, lets take advantage of that and starting posting this info that we are constantly being asked for, and it does work.

Dan: You have seen the impact?

Sara: It definitely works; the way I know is because for example people were constantly phoning to get application packages...Now I will get very few calls. I will get calls from people saying, "I have been on your site, I saw the application package, I saw what the admission processes looks like", and they will have just a short, targeted focused question. I will get applications coming in; I have never heard of this person, it's clearly been downloaded off the site, other things that have clearly been downloaded off the site.

There is the resource issue: if I tried to handle all those, if every visitor to the site phoned this office, I would likely be in a straightjacket by the first month. We have had months where it's been over 5000 people, it wouldn't be possible. There's been huge costs savings in having it, although the site does cost in itself...There's the cost thing, I just had the vision of trying to mail things to people over and over again, that's a huge piece.

Sara provided a clear description of the timesavings and the increased access to information provided by her organization's website. What she does not articulate is what is in place to reach those persons who face access challenges due to issues like literacy, poverty, and English as a second language. As noted in the literature, access and information poverty are significant issues that face persons in the area of web-based services (Butterfield 1998, McNutt, Queiro-Tajalli et al. 2001, Hersberger 2002). So

while organizations such as Sara's may find their website as an efficient means of reaching an increased number of people, the need to reach out to those who cannot access the website is crucial.

One of the organizations involved in this research took the efficiency attribute of websites a step further when it identified its website as an effective means of responding to budget cuts it had incurred. In her interview, Colleen described how her organization had suffered a reduction in its budget and subsequently decided to place an increased emphasis on its website to mitigate some of the impacts of this cut.

Dan: I would like to hear more about that, about how such a significant financial impact on your organization had an impact on the website.

Colleen: Well the site became more important, because one of our strategic objectives when we downsized and when we restructured and went through our strategic planning was to see how we could use technology and people, and it's also one of the reasons why the list serve became more important and we actually put a lot more effort in terms of promoting it with service providers to get them on so they can get...some advice about what they might not do, and what they might do.

Colleen stated during other parts of the interview that her organization did not expect that the website would be a full and suitable replacement to completely mitigate the entire budget cut. It was recognized that a website could only do so much. However, she identified that the website was expected to compensate for the budget reduction to the greatest amount possible.

While analyzing each of the interviews, I was struck and subsequently convinced by how a website could truly create substantial and helpful

efficiencies for these non-profit organizations. Clearly there were concrete advantages that such efficiencies created for the organizations I examined. At the same time, I continued to reflect on one of the dangers associated with implementing information technologies: the desire to replace expensive human personnel with inexpensive technology. This danger clearly exists for social service organizations, as their main expense as an organization tends to be the cost of employing highly skilled professionals (Schoech 1999). While the efficiencies achieved by each organization's website were of great assistance to each of them, Schoech's concern was echoed by Colleen:

Colleen: ...we are still caught in sort of a culture of loss with the loss of service providers in the province, and what we still hear and I believe to be true is that people need people to help them with this kind of stuff by and large, and people would way rather have somebody do it for them, count me in on that one.

...we were expected to fill in the gaps for all the services that were cut...now we weren't expected to fill **all** [my emphasis] the gaps; people honestly understand that a piece of paper and a website is not going to provide people with face-to-face hands-on service.

The use of the organizations' sites to achieve efficiencies and to save financial and human resources is a laudable use of this technology. I have expressed some reservations about how this focus on efficiency and resources can become such a high priority that client service, organizational goals and non-profit values can be sacrificed. However, for the five participants it was apparent that the benefits their sites brought to their organizations are assisting in their work.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have presented three of the five themes that arose from the data. The three themes in this chapter related to the role and function that websites play for the organizations involved in this research study. The following chapter will describe the final two themes that I identified in my analysis of the interviews.

Chapter 6 Analysis of Non-Profit Status, Research and Implementation Issues

In the analysis that I conducted of the five participant interviews, two themes became apparent that were in addition to the three that I describe in the previous chapter. The first pertains to the issues and implications of implementing websites within the context of a non-profit organization. The second theme that I describe in this chapter details some of the research and implementation issues and activities of developing a website that the participants described.

The Right Tool for the Job? Non-Profit Organizations and Websites

One of the question areas that I posed to the participants was regarding any issues within this topic area that related to their status as a non-profit organization. My sample had been intentionally drawn solely from non-profit organizations as I was inquisitive about this sector and how websites were playing a role in their work. Previous research on technology and non-profits has shown that only small proportion of these organizations utilize advanced information technology in their work (Burt and Taylor 2000, Pew Partnership for Civic Change 2000). The literature review I conducted prior to the interviews suggested that issues specific to non-profits would crop up in the interviews. This was actualized in the interviews because all participants articulated how their organization's status as a non-profit played a

role in some shape or fashion in the development and implementation of their website.

The first issue that arose was that of the need for each organization to build the website based on the context in which it operated. The importance of recognizing the context has been documented by other authors as well:

'While the role of information systems in NGOs is essentially no different from that of information systems in other sectors of the economy, this article argues that features related to the context, culture, and values of the NGO sector warrant specific considerations' (Lewis and Madon 2004, p. 117).

Another author identified a theoretical emphasis on identifying how the social context of an organization directly influences how the technology is implemented. This is identified as the "social shaping" or "social construction" of technology (Williams 1999). For non-profits operating in the realm of family law, participants articulated that responding to the context of the organization entails identifying the client/user base and the landscape around the organization:

Tom: I think it's [website] a valuable tool, but that's how I see it, as a tool. I don't have huge expectations. In some ways I think it's serving it's purpose at the moment.

Dan: Would your perspective be different if you were working in the for-profit sector?

Tom: Well we also, we give away a lot of services. If I were working in the for-profit sector I would probably use it much greater than a marketing tool because what we are doing here, and what I see as the difference between the for-profit and the not-for-profit sector. We would be looking for clients or contracts to fund our business, and that would come out of the service that we offer. Here our product is the services that we offer so we don't really sell a product; well our

workshops are a product and we don't sell those workshops, we offer them for free as we get funded so our funding comes from generally organizations. The Law Foundation, HRDC, whoever. Our website plays a pretty minor component in that....we have a client base but the client base doesn't generate direct revenue for us. The client base generates revenue for us in that they are the hook, if you will, for the funding organizations, so it's not an immediate...It depends on the product or the service that the for-profit business offers but if we were for-profit we would probably want to get the people to walk through the door so we could charge the fee, and the more we got through the more we could hire and so we could expand. It's different here: the more people who walk through the door and we don't have the infrastructure to deal with them, we are offering an inferior product so we need to go to the funders, get the money first, increase our infrastructure...it's a little bit of a different structure, but the key is over here with the funders.

Anne talked about how her organization attempts to be conscious of the context in which it operates and focused on communicating that to the woman who designed their website:

Dan: Which raises another question for me: what information had you come across on the use of websites by organizations like yours, small non-profits? Has this come up?

Anne: To some degree. With the web designer we had a couple conversations about that because her experience had been in more for-profit kind of things. So I had to say we really don't have the money to do that special software, to do that flashy thing, that's not important to us. Then we had to have a big discussion about the accessibility of the site because for her she wanted to use the latest bells and whistles but we wanted to ensure that people could still access the site at computer systems that weren't up-to-date. Also special software for people with disabilities. We had to go through it a few times to say "well I think this would work" and we had to sort of compare it with people we know to see is it accessible for you? It still isn't, there's still pieces of it that people have trouble with, but for the most part we have tried to manage that. That's a piece that people trying to sell fancy things, they would use the latest thing and it would be expected of them and it would have to be glossy and regularly up-to-date and you are talking about teams of people working on it. Again, for us it is volunteers, but yeah there are a few things we had to say won't work

for us because of the nature, and of course the context too, who is our audience and that kind of thing.

In the quote above, Anne articulated an issue faced by each of the organizations whose websites I reviewed: being innovative with the material they post and the way they set up their websites in a context of very limited resources and clients who might be left behind if the innovations are too cutting edge. I found this issue to be quite intriguing. It has been suggested in the literature that one of the roles non-profits play in our society is that of testing out new innovations in service delivery for government and other sectors to learn from and eventually incorporate into their operations. (Torjman 1999, pp. 1-2). This was not clearly evidenced in the responses provided by participants in this research study, as Anne's comments above and Ryan's below show:

Ryan: I want to look at getting the videos into Flash, so people won't have to download any program, which is a different level. It's hard because you are a non-profit but you want to have that level of technology that people are used to. But the main area for innovation is the content and making sure that we have content that's useful, and there's quite a few gaps. Oh there's tons of gaps, there is so much stuff that we need to develop, whole lot of stuff on the site around other languages, we haven't dealt with. There's other stuff around the other communities, like the disability communities. We are really at an early stage. One of the challenges is that we are not really big. There are organizations with less resources than us; we are trying to get at a point to function you have to have a certain level of credibility to even be considered credible. But we aren't [deleted], we aren't the Ministry. On some levels we have more freedom to move, for innovation, but on other levels there are the resource issues; that is the tradeoff.

None of the participants identified that they had websites that were high in innovations on a technical sense, though some felt the amount and

type of information content in their sites was innovative. Examples of this are the following statements from Sara and Ryan:

Sara: I don't think it's innovative itself, it's hugely functional. I know that our directories have been stolen, so other people think they are innovative, but I don't really see it as innovative, I don't see it that way. I have dreams that are more in the line of innovative. I think the only way it's innovative is in its scope. I think it's unusual to have a site, there's certainly no other site in British Columbia quite like ours, in that sense it's innovative in that we have taken what originally was a small concept and expanded upon it to really truly try to meet the needs but it's not innovative in a technical sense. It's more innovative in its willingness to try and accommodate, in terms of content...

Ryan: Thirdly we have tried to do things on the site that I think are groundbreaking, for example the [deleted title] site is groundbreaking and so we are trying to establish with that and the [other title site] that there should be this kind of use of the web to assist the victims and their families and even the public.

Another role that non-profits often play is providing services or information that cannot or will not be provided by other sectors, particularly government. For example, there are areas that government will not enter into due to sensitivity concerns, due to concerns of providing unequal levels of service, or due to its focus on meeting the preferences of the majority of citizens. This creates a gap that is filled in part by non-profit organizations. "Nonprofits have a role in providing public goods because governments are incapable of completely satisfying the demand for them. The basic reason is that individuals' preferences for public goods are heterogeneous, whereas government must largely provide public goods in a uniform way" (Te'eni and Young 2003, p. 406). Areas where non-profits provide for the public good are public safety, community health, assistance to the poor, advocacy and overseas aid. An example is the recent tsunami disaster in Asia. A

substantial portion of the aid contributed by the Canadian federal and provincial governments was provided to non-profit organizations like the Red Cross and Oxfam. I believe that this was due in part to the fact that non-profits have greater flexibility in how they provide assistance and services.

In the interview with Ryan, he described how his organization plays this type of role:

Ryan: The other thing which we would offer around the [deleted subject area] or the [deleted subject area] that is interesting is that government wouldn't want to do this stuff. They are part of the litigation; you need to have something outside that is considered independent. Independent yet hopefully a credible voice that can do certain things that government can't do. That's why you will notice [branches of government] don't do the website.

The individual organizations' attempts to address the needs of their members was another issue that arose in the interviews. The nature of non-profit organizations is such that many rely on the inputs (both financial and time) of members. For these organizations, ensuring that the members continue to be a part of the organization entails finding ways to further those members interests (Olsen 1982). One means of doing so can be through their website:

Meeting information needs is essential for survival in a competitive marketplace. We believe that websites that facilitate interactivity and increased responsiveness to stakeholder information requests are essential for resource-dependant organizations to meet their stakeholder needs. Thus, organizations that rely on members for money and action must provide certain features on their websites. Design features that serve member public needs include but are not limited to, information about how to join, how to contribute money, updated calendars of events, frequently asked questions and answers, downloadable information, and opportunities for members to interact with the organization via the Internet (Kent, Taylor et al. 2003, p.65).

A few participants in my research identified that this is part of their website's focus. They talked specifically about how this was applicable for organizations that clearly relied to some degree upon members for donations of time and money:

Sara: For the members, you have to be realistic as a non-profit, you want members, you want them to stay and to be happy, you want to offer them something, and it creates tangibility for them as well.

...it's become a major membership benefit and draw to be on the [site]. The fact that there's a directory, that people have their own entry with their photo, whatever info, that is a membership benefit. It has actually drawn people to the [site] one of the things you got on the [site]. It has been good for us that way as well; meeting the needs of our members and meeting our basic financial need to have members as well.

You do have to compete with the other orgs, whether it's for dollars or whatever; the reality is there's a certain competitiveness. We are lucky because we don't have to worry about member dollars as much as other people do, there's a lot of concern about that with some non-profits, when their money is coming from memberships, but you do have to keep in the back of your mind when you are in our situation where you are not entirely reliant upon that, that you do need to keep trying to draw people as well

In Tom's case, communicating with members and providing them with information was the second highest priority for his organization's website, after public relations. He expressed that, despite his organization's identification that it should meet its members' needs, the website has not been fully utilized in that capacity:

Dan: What led your organization to decide to use a website or determine it was necessary?

Tom: Well it is now 2004, it was 2002 or 2003 when we actually got it up and running about a year ago...I think we underutilize our site quite a bit, but that was the original perspective, to basically get our name out there more and also be able to use it as a tool to communicate with

our membership. We haven't done a good job with that. We can improve on that that.

Dan: What needs were you trying to meet?

Tom: Outside of communicating with membership which is something we still going to do more of, we do that somewhat, we have a newsletter that we put out a couple of times but the last issue has been a year in the making.

Tom went on to describe further challenges his organization faced in trying to utilize the Internet as a means of supporting its members and board:

Tom: Our original intention was to do a newsletter three times a year that would be posted on line [for the organization's members] and I think we have our first two on there but the last one was about a year ago. There is a third one that has stopped at the gatekeeper; it has been sitting on my desk since September or October. It is dated now, so it is probably going to die there. We could utilize it and haven't done this, its set up to do this, there's a forum discussion board, I don't know if its being utilized by the general public, we wanted to use that for board discussions but we just have email discussions which works too.

When asked about issues that arose specific to their organization's status as a non-profit, several participants identified a common experience: being assisted by another non-profit organization. What intrigued me about this experience is that they had been assisted by a particular non-profit organization that specialized in assisting other non-profits, either specifically in the area of communications and the Internet or in a more general area. Given the lack of resources and internal expertise faced by these organizations, the fact that there were external agencies that could assist them in this very specific area was noteworthy in my mind:

Dan: What research did [the organization] do in the development phase?

Ryan: One of the things we got some benefit from was that [a different non-profit] association had its conference and had a whole discussion on websites and profiled all the sites across the country. That was a chance to put that out and see what people were doing. That was one focus.

Anne: ...we try to all the time [to place more focus on the website] and we recognize that it could be a central tool but we don't have an internal person that's a website person so we rely on volunteers and that gets hard to keep going.

Dan: How does the site fit within the rest of your communication activities?

Anne: We are just in the process in the last year of trying to fine-tune our communications plans and tools that we have to try to bring them all together. We recently, not recently, a year ago, we hired the organization called IMPACTS. I can't remember what that organization stands for, it's a non-profit communications firm and they do workshops and all kinds of things. We hired them to do an assessment of all our communication tools. They did talk about the site being very good, and talked about how to bring that closer into and use that as a way to design some of our other communication. We have a newsletter that goes out 4 times a year and we have pamphlets on various projects and things.

Dan: So that organization works especially with non-profits re communications?

Anne: Yes and they are a nonprofit themselves.

Tom mentioned that his organization's site is hosted by another non-profit organization that also tries to provide support to non-profits in the community:

Tom: I think [the designer] ran into a couple technical challenges but there wasn't any major roadblocks. Because we were doing it pretty cheaply the money wasn't a big deal; we were hosted by [name of another non-profit]. They host the site; they provide website hosting for all their memberships. That's a free service.

Dan: Did they provide any additional assistance?

Tom: They haven't. Well I should not say that, they had a couple students who helped but they weren't around before we had our site. I think they are applying to have a grant to help their membership become more Internet savvy.

As more and more organizations embrace the Internet and design websites, the need for supporting organizations that can assist them is likely to increase.

I crafted the title of this theme as a question, because in my mind it is a question that each individual non-profit should consider. The advantages brought to an organization through the implementation of a website can be significant, but there is a need to do so in a manner that reflects the character, context and nature of each non-profit organization. Participants identified, within this theme, various issues that are pertinent to the use of technology and specifically the Internet by non-profit organizations. I believe that their reflections and experiences provide valuable information and lessons for other organizations and the people involved within them.

Research and Implementation of Websites

What research did each organization conduct prior to and during the implementation of their site? How did the organizations develop and implement their sites and what challenges did the organizations face during that process? The responses to these questions had a lot of similarities, but they also identified some varying experiences. While there was not one singular theme that was prevalent in the responses, there were several “sub-themes” that all fit within the category of “research and implementation”.

When I asked participants to identify the research they conducted during the development phase, I tried to ensure that they knew I was using a very broad definition of the word “research”. I explained to them that for the purpose of this research I was using that term to include any activity they conducted to help them better develop their website. I then provided them with some examples of what I was talking about, such as spending time looking at other websites, talking to employees of other organizations, reflecting on their own experiences when surfing the Internet, as well as more “traditional” research activities such as reading articles and books and interviewing potential users.

Most of the participants interviewed stated that they, or someone within their organization, had conducted some form of research prior to implementing their website. That said, one participant identified that for her organization there had been limited research conducted, the reason being that the site was an ancillary component of the organization’s

communications and program focus. Instead of research, her organization relied almost solely on the advice it received from the volunteer site developer who constructed the website, combined with their own views on what she was suggesting:

Anne: One of the things was that we, because websites are, well some orgs make them central to their communications; unfortunately for us it wasn't central. It was hard to put a lot of resources and energy into that kind of research...so really a lot of it was driven by her [the web designer]. [She would say] "here is the most up to date version", or "the best way to do this", so the ideas were generated by her...she created a number of example kind of sites and people on our board and staff would look at those and make comments. We didn't spend a lot of time looking around at other sites saying we like this and this.

For the organizations that did conduct some form of research, three methods were used: looking at other sites, interacting/consulting with other organizations, and responding to feedback from users. The primary method used was spending time looking at other websites and identifying aspects that they liked and disliked. This activity was also used as an opportunity to generate ideas for their own sites. Colleen and Sara, who are responsible for their respective organization's site, provided the clearest comments of this method:

Colleen: This was a project manager who did the charter who fleshed out the document that we had done for the funding application which had been, I thought had been sufficient, but apparently not. We built a little team here in the office to look at websites...and I had a three ring binder full of websites that we had critiqued...

Dan: So your team spent time reviewing other law related websites?

Colleen: Yea, family law, Google, and not just family law, and not just Google, but looking at different websites. At the time the [American organization], do you know who the [American organization] is? It's the American federal agency that funds [deleted] in the United States.

They have a technology division that funds and co-funds state enterprises to develop new technologies, so they are the people who have funded some of the development in simplifying forms and doing on-line forms that are really really interactive...much better than the income tax forms and they were also setting up standard websites and they had rules about guidelines for accessibility. So we were taking a look at that and trying to keep track of who else was doing what to whom here...

Colleen described some of the areas that other organizations have focused on in their websites that she and her colleagues were particularly intrigued by:

Colleen: There are tons of good sites to look at in the United States on civil law because they have moved faster than we have on them. They have done some really exciting things in terms of, and it's the [American organization] that helped fund the first of these interactive forms and easy file forms for low income people. And, you know, just set on simple things like maintenance, landlord tenants, child protection stuff. There are a couple sites that are almost all pictures to help explain information which have been used particularly; one that I've seen is aboriginal for one of the tribes in the US, which is quite interesting.

Dan: How do you hear of those sites, are you on list serves?

Colleen: Yeah, we're on list serves, the service is on a list serve and you just poke and find out. It takes time, and being open and inquisitive and curious, and going cross eyed from time to time. I don't do it as much as I would like to, but again that is the advantage of having this incredible team here; there are a ton of people who keep their eyes and ears open. Just as there is, I am sure that the Attorney General Ministry knows about this, there's an incredible court, American court system list serve that actually gives awards to the best court sties. You can get on their sites and they all share best practices. Its looking for best practices in the areas of law, and what you are trying to do with, like citizen engagement, self help, training for advocates or staff or whatever.

Along the same lines, Sara described how her personal interest in the Internet assists her in working on her organization's website:

Sara: I also get on the net, I am a net junkie, I am curious, want to see what other orgs are doing and I do look at what other orgs are doing,

not just other orgs. I want to get on the net once in a while to see what is happening in that world so that our site stays current in terms of the technology and the look it has. That was one of the driving factors to get a new look; our site was old and stale now, gloomy, no longer at all being able to compete in this flashy overstated world that is out there now.

In addition to viewing and monitoring what other organizations have been doing with their sites, research also constituted liaising with people outside of the organization. A couple of the participants discussed that their organization focused on interacting and consulting with other organizations and individuals:

Colleen: ...and then we talked with others, we talked with advocates, with people we knew in the community who might be, we talked with advocates...to see what they thought would work and that was done on both a formal and informal way...

...we talked to Continuing Legal Education and we talked to, well, [individual name] was on the committee, and we talked to Law Students Legal Advice program who do legal advice, and we worked really worked closely with Continuing Legal Education and showed them what we were doing so they didn't feel like we were encroaching on their territory or cutting in on their income. And we talked to the Law Society and their Access to Justice people and we talked to the judiciary, as well as talking to the government folks, and set up processes so that the [deleted] materials would be reviewed by registry staff, and that the judges know what we are going.

Ryan: Since we have launched the site I have had more contact with other organizations like [organization name] and [organization name] who are working on sites too, we do a lot more talking about sites, what would make sense on ours, what would make sense on theirs.

While some organizations identified that their research activities were limited to reviewing other websites or liaising with other organizations, one participant stated that the main thing she did was review the feedback that she received from users of her organization's first website. She described a

process of receiving ongoing feedback and attempting to be responsive to that feedback in improving the site. For this participant, research constituted responsiveness to the users as opposed to a process of site comparison and analysis:

Sara: I think that the research we have done has been more about responsive to the feedback that we have got, that's really what it's been about. When I get calls from people, I pay attention number one to their questions. When there are patterns emerging, questions keep coming up, I note that. I see that as an information need and immediately think, not even consciously, about how that might go on our site, is it suitable for the site, how could it be incorporated in the site? So the questions, the feedback people have made over the years, comments or complaints on the phone. They don't know, don't understand how to do such and such with a search on the directory and if they do this happens...It's a responsiveness, essentially to questions and feedback. That has been it.

...so that's one of the benefits in being able to do it myself; in this case the person on the ground is the person dealing with it, everything from our board to our members, to the public. I handle all the calls. I am totally aware of what the big picture looks like, so I can actually make that site respond to those needs as much as possible. That is one of the benefits and keeps our site growing in that way. Whereas if you had a different person managing the site from the person responding to the phone calls from the public, they wouldn't have the same sensitivity to maybe what changes need to be made. Sometimes you need to hear the voices of the people, to hear the language of where they are coming from, the level that they are functioning at and you need to read between the lines to understand what they can't even articulate themselves and provide that information.

In addition to the methods each organization utilized to conduct their research, of equal or even greater interest to me was the information and knowledge gained by this research. In the previous theme, I identified some of the literature that states non-profit organizations must be aware of and build programs responsive to their operational context. I wanted to hear from the participants what they learned that was of particular interest to them given

the context in which they operated. The following quotes provide some of this learning and knowledge:

Ryan: What we wanted to do was to design the backend [of the website] so we could use it for new laws. So there's a lot of work in working with the designer, in this case we were working with [web design company] who are doing all the programming. Well you don't want to have to do the programming from scratch each time there's a new law; it's too expensive. So we had to come up with a conception of what kind of programming package are we going create that will allow us to use it as the frame work for the next set of laws and then next after that. For example the *Divorce Act* [amendments] will be coming out soon and we are in a position where we have the whole back end together. It will look different, the way the activities play out will be different but the whole function is there. It means when I go to apply for funding we will be able to do it for probably half the cost. When you are doing that you have to be thinking that.

Sara: The fact that it is all there for them, partly also just that it's an awareness of who your clientele is in terms of visiting the site and in terms of who...are those people. Very important to stay aware of that and the site has to be appealing to and appealing both in terms of the aesthetics and the content and organizational, the structure of it. It has to be aesthetically in terms of the organization. It has to be in the right language. It can't be too legal, even though our primary clientele are lawyers. It can't be too basic even though we have parents coming on now involved in child protection that may be borderline literate. You have to be aware of all layers of your clientele; somehow find a way of appealing and being able to help all of them.

Colleen: We learned, we found some structures that really seemed to work, that were more intuitive. We got some guidelines about dealing with accessibility issues and color issues, and some really good design guidelines on testing your work, so you could observe people using your work and see whether it was working. So that kind of stuff was really important. We learned more than ever before to try and keep it relatively uncluttered. We learned that we were stuck with print, it's text heavy. The self-help materials particularly are text heavy and we are still struggling with that. The society has just got a new content management package which we are exploring with one of the easier sites because it will allow us to parcel out this material more effectively and give us a strong search engine which we don't have and which people need.

What we noticed, and why it was taking us so long, we deconstructed our [information resource]. We tried to make them for the website, and what most people were doing was taking print products and pdfing them and then you really do have a problem with text heavy dense material that you have to struggle through. So we had seen, I guess the things that we liked where people had taking things apart and done them by steps and give people breaks, you know? I do this now and then I can go have a coffee and then I can do this now, so that, and people have told us they really like that and there is some other navigation techniques they like. The regular users want us to give them some quick hits, some quick navigational things which we haven't figured out yet, which we need the content manager to do.

The next sub-theme in this area of research and development was around the audience of the site. Previous quotes included above related to issues around the audience. This sub-theme is more explicit about the audience. All the participants interviewed were able to identify, some more clearly than others, the target audience for their organization's site. This identification, in the participants' minds, allowed their organization to target the focus of the site, to design the site according to the audience's needs and capacity, and subsequently market the site to that target audience:

Colleen: We did a survey and did some focus groups and found that the regular users are, not surprisingly, the community advocates who are working with different clients. But 50% of the users were individuals who were acting on their own on the [site] and were struggling through the materials. And we'd get emails saying that they had been successful and it's been great, thank you very much, all those things, but you have to be computer literate and you have to understand the documentary process. You just have to be someone who has filled out enough income tax forms or child tax credits or any of those things to really understand it, its all about filling out pieces of paper in the right way...

Tom: I guess three groups: one, our membership. One is the people who can utilize the services we offer here and the other is the professional community to see there's another resource in the community they can refer to.

Sara: Our target audience is anyone who is interested in [the service offered by Sara' organization], number one. Primarily British Columbia residents of course, anybody and everybody who is interested. We are interested in meeting their needs, doesn't matter who they are. Whether that goes to the Supreme Court judges, Provincial Court judges, the lawyers, legal assistants, secretaries, teachers, social workers, therapists, community info referral services, the legal and referral ends, the actual public which is families, husbands and wives undergoing separation and divorce, teenagers, I have had contact with teenagers with problems at home, teachers where there is problems with the kids or in the home, staffing problems.

One of the participants, Anne, struggled with identifying specifically who her organization's target audience was. Anne had also stated throughout the interview that their website was not a primary focus for her organization, which is reflected in the lack of clear audience identification:

Dan: Who is the intended audience for your site?

Anne: We don't know for sure. We presume that law students and lawyers are a big audience for us and I think that's fair to say. I think people who are thinking of being members or donors. We don't actively seek media attention so we haven't set it up for media, though we are working on a media kit on line for people but we don't think the media spend a lot of time on our site. So yeah, mostly people in the legal field, which partly reflects the audience who we work with most anyway.

Dan: Are members of the public part of your intended audience?

Anne: It's becoming more so as we build in terms of our community relations and projects that involve more people than just lawyers. So we are finding more and more people from the broader community are accessing it. We haven't done a formal study of the audience.

As an organization goes through the various work associated with building a website, it has to make certain decisions on content, structure, layout and the technologies used within the site. Each of the organizations examined in this research completed this piece of work as it developed its

website. The organizations made these decisions based on the research conducted, the target audience, resources available, advice received from their web designer, and the context that the organization operated within.

One of the decision areas that several of the participants identified as requiring attention was the need to balance access issues and the desire to be innovative and appealing:

Colleen: ...the other piece that we were conscious of was that we were not targeting high end users, so we had to keep it very simple and we needed to be careful about stuff like graphics and we needed to be able to give people a way to print stuff off relatively easily. So there were some sort of cute things, stuff that we couldn't do.

...[the audience] is community organizations, libraries are sophisticated Internet users, library staff, but not necessarily sophisticated about the content...And then we have the community groups who range from sophisticated users to first-timers, and we've watched them get more sophisticated and we've actually, well you will ask me that later but we run a number of training programs to help them get more sophisticated. So we wanted to make sure that those people could access the site and feel confident and comfortable in it so that they could both find information so they could help their client, or they could refer the client to more appropriate place or site.

Anne: From a design perspective, I don't think we should do innovation because it makes it less accessible for people, and it's always a thing with non-profits. For us it's an interesting balance.

Tom: Innovative content? Technically no, I don't think we are innovative. Specifically I didn't think that would be an advantage; we wanted it to be user friendly as much as possible. A lot of people don't know how to use the Internet or are not that familiar, are intimidated.

Once the organizations made the decision to implement a site, there is clearly a need to determine how the site will be developed from a technical perspective. Not surprisingly, all of the organizations had to obtain the services of outside experts to complete this aspect of the work. There was

one exception to that, as one of the organizations had internal expertise in website design. Whether the outside resource was paid or provided the work on a voluntary or quasi-voluntary basis depended on the size of the organization and the amount of resources it had to spend in this area.

Anne: First off we needed a designer and didn't have a lot of money. What happened was we went to the British Columbia Institute of Technology to see if they had some students. The woman there said "I don't have some students but I have a small group of graduates who have started their own company and they might be willing to do it just to get themselves going". So I approached that group and there were three women who had started their own thing and one of the women said she would be willing to do it for free. Just as a recent grad she had all the latest, knew all the latest things on website design...

Tom: I knew somebody in Victoria who designed a number of sites and so I sat down with him and looked at the sites that he had done and we basically used one of his sites as a template. I mean it doesn't look anything like it but that's where we started and we just worked together. He did most of the work; he would come up with some design concepts and I would filter them.

I have got outside resources for the technical aspects; it is being managed by myself. The design itself, the creating of the design, the look, the making, putting that on the Internet and making the site live, the whole programming that has to go on behind the scenes, for example the designer will create the look of the menus but somebody has to actually do the programming to make it work...Anytime we have had to add a whole new section, not talking about just adding pages to an existing section but creating a whole new section, which now means adding a footer, the links have to work, adding a navigation button on the navigation bar, that type of programming work I don't do, that gets subbed out.

This process of working with an external person who is relatively unfamiliar with the organization is not always a smooth one. Several of the participants articulated challenges that arose while working with outside resources:

Sara: I sort of know in terms of the descriptive adjectives what I was looking for; you sit down with the designer and talk about what does that look like in terms of an image. I had rejected a couple designs; in fact I fired the first designer for the revamp because it does not at all capture what I was aiming for. That's a very difficult thing to try to explain to somebody. I'm not a designer, at all, I know it when I see it, I say, that's it or it needs more of this other thing.

...because I am not a graphic artist and a programmer...I don't do any of the behind the scenes work including how things look, where they are placed, all of it. And so the biggest thing has been translating the image I have in my head and my understanding of who our client group is and what it should look like, all of it, to transfer that image clearly enough to the programmer and the designer so that they understand and go along with it.

Anne: One of the problems with the site is she put this great little scroller on the front page and it looks nice but we can't change it because it's a certain kind of software, so whenever we want to change it, and its supposed to be the latest thing, we have to email her and get her to do it, so that's been complicated.

We have a student volunteer but it's just hard to do with a volunteer. They don't know as much about the org and what our goals are and a lot of it is very legal material so unless you have a lawyer going that case isn't right or that shouldn't be there; that's hard to do.

Listening to Sara and Anne talk about their experience in working with outside consultants, and reflecting upon my own experience in this particular issue, I considered that perhaps what organizations in this circumstance would be assisted by is a list of questions or areas to address with the contractors. As Sara and Anne both described, working with an outsider can be challenging because that person comes with a certain perspective. This is particularly true with web designers who typically are unfamiliar with the mission or mandate of the contracting organization. Therefore, contractors will build based on their own experience and frame of reference. Organizations working with these designers would be assisted by having

certain questions that will prompt the designer to build a site that works within the context of that organization.

When I asked the participants to identify whether they had used external resources to assist with the development of their site, I also asked them to describe the financial and human resources that were applied to the development and implementation of their site. All the organizations articulated that the website did not have substantial resources applied to it in comparison to the rest of the organization's budget and staff allocation. Within this question area there was one consistent response from the participants that I found to be noteworthy. This was with respect to how the website development and implementation activities were funded. While I decided not to highlight the other categories about resources, I did want to identify this particular area.

In the literature review section above regarding non-profit organizations, I identified that non-profit organizations tend to receive the majority of their funding from external funders (Ng 1990, Salamon 1994, McFarlane and Roach 1999, Salamon 2002). This fits very well with the experiences of the organizations that were involved in this research. Each participant identified how a substantial portion of the resources applied to the development of their site were funded by outside agencies.

Here are some excerpts that identify the external funding nature of the website development:

Ryan: What we do on all of our projects now we build a component for websites so any resources that being developed there's a component about either putting it up, a resource that's simply downloadable, a PDF on the site, but it depends on what the function is around what that resource will be. It is one of the expectations; there are three of us that work on project development, so it is one of the questions you are asking, how does it fit on that? Everything that's been developed on here has been developed with different pots from different funders. For example the [website section] came from the Federal Department of [X], [Y organization] funded the [website section], the [website section] was funded by the [Z] Ministry... They all come from different pots.

Colleen: I applied for a grant and got [X amount] over a five year period, and we are spending between [X and Y] of that a year on mostly on external contracts and some hardware/software pieces, as well as some of our own staff, but we have broken that down... Historically this grant has paid for any development work of the new materials.

Anne: We recently applied for a grant because what we are thinking of doing is, we have a school based program, we are thinking of doing something for youth, just redesigning it around our "no means no" and our workplace rights stuff that we are working on so we hope we will have a chunk of money for that...

Sara: We got, for the revamp, we did get a small grant from the Ministry of [X]... Part of this was because we had to add the [service area] piece to the site but we have received no additional monies to do any of the work to that piece. So there was not new money to the society even though the extra management piece was handed over to us, but what the ministry did was provide us with a small amount of money to expand our database plus to do some website work. We had wanted to do some website work so in addition to adding the directory we did all this other stuff as well. So it will largely be paid for from that grant but there will be some spillage over as well.

The fact that the organizations receive such a substantial amount of their funding, including funding for developing and maintaining their websites, from outside sources does create potential challenges. One such challenge is the possibility that the organization becomes more focused on addressing the needs or desires of the funder rather than the needs of the client or the

mission and values of the organization itself. They may find themselves being more accountable to the funder than the recipient of their services (Lewis and Madon 2004). I see this to be an area of importance for organizations to be cognizant.

Site development should be focused on the needs of the users and audience, rather than focusing on the goals or vision of the funding organization. For organizations that do not currently have sites and are considering how to go about constructing one, clearly there are opportunities for an infusion of resources from external funders that may provide the assistance needed to do so. Finally, the organizations in this research that appeared to be the most successful in achieving external funding for their sites were the ones that were able to tie the website in with the other aspects of their service delivery.

For most organizations, implementing a new project or service is usually followed by some sort of evaluation to determine its effectiveness. This is an additional category that I identified within the theme of Research and Implementation: evaluating the site. It was not surprising to me to hear from the participants that there was little in the way of evaluation activities completed on their websites, other than Colleen's organization. Colleen stated that her organization had completed several different evaluations of the site, which I discuss below. Other participants articulated that their organization had not conducted any such evaluations and therefore were

challenged to determine how well it is working, who the users are and whether their needs are being met.

Some participants identified how this lack of knowledge about the site and its impact was becoming problematic for them:

Anne: The other challenge is that question of who is accessing it and who's not...is it being utilized by the people who want to utilize it?

Sara: In terms of feedback, I guess the numbers speak to some extent, you know that you are accomplishing your mission when the numbers continue to go up. You may read too much into it because you don't know, you don't really know what those numbers mean, you don't really know how people are using the site or why they are using the site or what they are doing when they are in there, you get a sense of what pages they are in, but why? You have no idea.

This lack of evaluation, or at least lack of defined and empirical evaluations, is problematic for non-profit organizations in their use of websites and their work overall. Evaluation activities assist these organizations to ensure their services are being provided in a high quality and cost effective manner that targets the proper audience/client group (Lewis and Madon 2004). Non-profits in general have been criticized by some for not having more effective and ongoing evaluations of their services. Fowler argues that 'An almost universal weakness of NGOs is found within their often-limited capacity to learn, adapt and continuously improve the quality of what they do. This is a serious concern' (Fowler 1997, p. 64).

Each of the participants talked about the challenges in conducting a formal evaluation of a website, and this is something that I have experienced as well in my work. Given that the very nature of the interaction users have with the organization is via a computer and a website, evaluating that

interaction can involve a good deal of work. There is some literature available with suggestions on how to address this challenge. For example, Kent and Taylor identify five principles to apply when determining when a website has been successful. They suggest reviewing the site to see if it meets the following principles: a 'dialogical/feedback loop, usefulness of information, generation of return visits, intuitiveness/ease of the interface, and the conservation of visitors' (Kent and Taylor 1998, p.324).

While only Colleen identified that her organization had conducted any formal evaluation, all participants articulated that they do receive informal feedback from users, members, and other staff about their sites. Given the lack of formal evaluation, for most of the organizations user feedback constitutes their evaluation of their site:

Colleen: And they love it, and they communicate that. If it's our staff, through our conferences and through how they record that stuff, we get rave reviews from [professionals in the field] who refer all the time.

I mean the thing that surprised me is that we were at an open house for one of the Court Services things and I think, the [professional], just grabbed my boss and couldn't stop praising. It's amazing to hear how much...[professional] calls me up and says, "have you got this next piece up, we are training and were going to be using to train our staff, we are waiting," Which is always comforting to know that your material is seen to be accurate enough and detailed enough that its being used. We've had some cute emails, but I actually don't have that kind of memory. We had one that the editor likes the best; we got one from Australia that said "can you come down to Australia and build a site for us?"

Tom: Generally the feedback is, gee, good website, looks good, it's been not extraordinary feedback in terms of "oh, what an incredible website", but it's been positive, good website, easy to get around, good links, that kind of things. One of the better [service area] websites.

Sara: We have had comments from other orgs about our site. We have had a lot of positive feedback on the site; I also listen to the positive on the site. It seems to, I don't know quite know how, but it seems to appeal to a lot of people who are looking for info. Obviously, it's not for the thrill seeker; it's a dry site, 100% info driven but we are not trying to sell anything and people like that. When they are looking for [service area information] they don't want a bunch of flashy stuff, to feel like they are being sold anything. The fact that it's all there for them...More telling though is the feedback that I get from live ones that phone in, that talk to me. People don't give me a lot of detail but I have been repeatedly told how useful they find the site

As I stated earlier, Colleen's organization also utilized some more formal techniques to get a sense of how well the site was constructed and how it was working for their users:

Dan: You were talking about usefulness of the site and the very positive response from the service providers, so the evaluations that have been conducted, what did those look like, what was the process?

Colleen: I need to dig them out because my mind isn't working clearly. The first one looked at the charter document and checked off whether or not we had done what we said we would do and set up two focus groups to see how people actually used it and what the problems were. It ended up being focus groups with service providers. I have never been able to do it with clients, and some of it is me balking at it as well. Like everybody else, I say the client is in the middle of a problem and I don't want to stop them and say, by the way, how do you like our website? And then last year we again took a gaggle of people who were using the website and gave them three problems and said "figure out how you would use the site to solve these problems" and observed and had them talk about what would make it easier, and it was so interesting. And I think you should do that for every page. And if you are not interested in getting a client, grab somebody from accounting and say hey, or intake, and just hey look at this try to do this, look what happens because you sure get the "aha's" fast.

And we are undertaking an evaluation on [one part of the site], and we should get some information back on how [site] works, we have got some feedback on how the [professionals] who are promoting the website, we know that they use it a lot and we do a count on it but we are also now talking to clients who use it and it has turned out to be harder to do than we had hoped. We have, it is [consulting firm] who are doing it, they are great, I really like working with them. They have

interviewed some of the users and they are now going to go in and do observations I think because we were having trouble having people to agree and with the new Privacy legislation you have to get signed consent before, and then before. And it's a transient population.

In summary, the organizations utilized multiple methods for researching how their site should be created, the most common being reviewing other existing sites. Once this research was completed, the organizations went through development activities to determine who the audience was, how to structure the site to ensure accessibility, and to identify outside resources to assist with the development. For all five organizations, there was partial or full funding of the site development by outside funders. Finally, in assessing the effectiveness of the site most organizations focused on the feedback they were receiving from users, while one organization conducted more formal evaluations processes.

Summary

When I first began the analysis phase of this research, I was overwhelmed by the amount of data and the task at hand. Despite the many courses I had taken over the years and the multiple projects and tasks I have completed in my work, the process of analyzing and coding such substantial interview data seemed almost insurmountable. As I worked through the analysis process however, I quickly began to appreciate the logic and procedures within the task. In reflecting upon that process, I recall a quote from Berg that summed up my sentiments quite well:

Coding and other fundamental procedures associated with grounded theory are certainly hard work and must be taken seriously, but just as many people enjoy finishing a complicated jigsaw puzzle, many researchers find great satisfaction in coding and analysis. As researchers move through the coding process and begin to see the puzzle pieces come together to form a more complete picture, the process can be downright thrilling. Time consuming, tiring, and even laborious as the process is, it is seldom boring (Berg 2001, p. 245).

To borrow from Berg's analogy, the jigsaw puzzle constructed through this process was one that identified some of the things at play when these five organizations implemented their websites. For them, a website was a powerful tool for their organizations to use in communicating information. It also provides a face for the organizations to display who they are to persons without and within the organization. The third piece of the puzzle is the focus on efficient service delivery and how the Internet can assist in "doing more with less". Fourthly, these organizations are all non-profits and this status has an impact in how they incorporate the Internet into their service delivery and

focus as an organization. The final puzzle piece that I have highlighted in this chapter is the manner in which the organizations implemented this technology, both in terms of research and development.

Chapter 7 Conclusions, Questions and Reflections

Overview

In this study, I researched the development and implementation of websites by five non-profit organizations that operate in the field of family law. I began the research wanting to learn more about the goals and needs the organizations were trying to meet, what activities they undertook during the development phase, and what the response has been on the part of users. I was curious to hear from the participants about their experience in developing a site from the standpoint of a non-profit organization and how they directed their site to meet the needs of persons undergoing a separation or divorce. I interviewed five participants from five separate non-profits in British Columbia using semi-structured interviews.

I conducted the analysis of the interview data using grounded theory methods as my basis for the inquiry. I also reviewed the data through multiple lenses of critical theory, liberation theology and personal experience. Through a process of open coding and a constant comparative method in order to begin to ascertain the categories and corresponding themes that arose from the data. In the end, I outlined five areas I felt were the primary themes the participants were articulating. The five are: 1) Provision/Dissemination of Information; 2) Public Face of the Organization; 3) Efficiencies; 4) The Right Tool for the Job? Non-Profit Organizations and Websites; and 5) Research and Implementation.

For all of the participants, their organization's website was first and foremost a medium for communicating information. The target audience of the information varied somewhat dependant upon the focus and mandate of the individual organization. For some, their desire was to enhance the level of understanding and the available information in their field as a whole. Others were targeting service providers, while still others were focusing their information provision on clients themselves. I should note that the above noted audiences are not mutually exclusive. Some organizations focused on providing information to all three of those audiences.

When I was considering this area of research as a possible topic for my thesis, I had speculated that these organizations would have developed websites primarily for the purpose of providing information, or as a means of service delivery. In reviewing the transcripts and analyzing the data, I came to the realization that those two purposes are one and the same for these organizations. For them, providing information **is** service delivery as they are focused, in part, on making information available to those who are in need of it. The five organizations that I examined are in the business of information exchange.

Given that focus for service delivery, it is not surprising that these organizations have invested in the Internet as a means of assisting them communicate information. The Internet, by its very nature, is a technology designed to communicate information. There continue to be concerns about access to the information, particularly for persons within vulnerable

populations. The five organizations I examined determined within that even with those access concerns in mind, the Internet was a valuable tool for them to include in their service delivery structure.

I noted some concerns over this issue of access and identified some of the research that has been conducted with respect to information poverty and access challenges on the part of some vulnerable populations. This concern does not take away from the ability of organizations to reach multiple users via their websites. What it does is highlight the need to continue to find ways to assist persons who are not able to or prefer not to access information via the Internet. As much as proponents laud the Internet as being a significant tool for democratizing information availability, there remains the need to ensure that services provided by nonprofit organizations truly serve all audiences and populations regardless of race, class, gender, ethnicity and so on.

An additional area for exploration from a critical theory perspective is in relation to Benoit's research on information technology. Benoit suggests that organizations should focus on reconsidering their traditional view of the users of information technology as passive recipients of information (Benoit 2002). While some of the participants that I interviewed did make reference to some work they have done in trying to engage users as active participants, it was not a high priority for most of them. Movement towards increased empowerment, participation and partnership between service providers and

clients/users will require the development of information technology in a manner that embraces the client/users as equal partners.

Another area that warrants comment in the area of the use of websites to provide information is that non-profit organizations in the human and social services field must be wary of the tendency to replace expensive human assets with cheaper technologies (Butterfield 1998). In this field in particular there is a distinct need to help individuals and families through personal interactions, not via an impersonal website or interactive telephone system. While information provision is clearly a key piece of these organizations, there are additional pieces that a website cannot provide, such as personal support, validation, human interactions and even just a person who will listen to your story. Therefore, organizations should be conscious of the role of technologies such as websites and develop them in a strategic manner that is mindful of the other needs that the "information recipients" may have.

Additionally, organizations should be wary of creating "information overload". With the advent of the Internet and other information technologies, there is more information available to persons in our society than at any point in our history. Again, organizations should be strategic in how they organize the information on their sites so as to provide it in the most helpful and effective manner. As this information, for most of the organizations, is being directed in part to clients undergoing personal issues and challenges, it is important to provide the information in a manner that is empowering and

restorative rather than in a manner that will overwhelm clients or cause them to disengage.

My final area of comment regarding the use of websites to provide information is with respect to the goals of liberation theology: attempting to improve the social conditions of citizens by relieving oppression, improving relationships, and moving towards justice (Gutierrez 1973, Czerny 1992, Lange 1998). Strictly providing multiple persons with information via a website is not the ultimate goal of these organizations. Rather, the goal of the organizations should be to provide clients/users with the resources and tools necessary to provide for the improvement of their personal conditions. This would involve not just strictly providing information but additionally providing support, resources, opportunities for interaction, and working towards empowering the clients.

This is becoming increasingly important in the area of family law, in particular in British Columbia. Recent cuts to legal aid in BC have left families and individuals, who previously could have received information, advice and representation, with limited options for resolving their issues. These cuts have raised significant concerns on the part of many advocacy groups that the current system is further layering on oppression and inequality. This is particularly argued in terms of women, who have historically been disadvantaged economically by separation/divorce and face an increased risk of violence during this period (Brewin and Stephens 2004). Increasingly people are faced with the specter of proceeding to court to resolve disputes

without legal representation and will little support to do so in a complex and conflictual environment (Reid, Sinniw et al. 2004). Organizations such as the ones represented in this research are attempting to respond to this situation in accordance with each of their mandates. One way they have tried to respond is through the use of the Internet. However, as Colleen stated in her interview, a website is no replacement for direct face-to-face support and services.

The second theme that was identified in the data was that websites provide a public face to the individual organizations. For some, the purpose was for public relations and marketing the organization. Another aspect of this was to establish credibility for the organization within its field. Organizational websites were also seen by some of the participants to be necessary given the age that we live in, that the social expectations to have a website is so great that they would be considered “less than” without one.

While I found myself surprised by the amount of attention this theme received from the participants in their interviews, I have respect for the purpose they are trying to meet. Participants were committed to their organizations and strongly valued its role within the field. They all believed, to a greater or lesser extent, that a website would further their organization's interests and would provide a means to better identify to the larger public who they were and how they could assist.

The issue that struck me in this theme that I want to highlight is that only one of the participants stated their organization had this purpose in mind

when they began building their website. The other participants all identified that their site, in larger or smaller fashion, has met this perceived need. However, it did not appear that this had been the original intent or at least had not been specifically contemplated and identified as such when the organizations began to develop their sites. What this says to me is that other organizations that are contemplating constructing a website should be conscious of this issue from the beginning. This will allow them to design their sites in a manner that specifically addresses this need and in a manner that reflects the principles of the organization.

In addition, I want to call into question the declaration that in the current time and place there is an expectation that all organizations should have websites. I have concerns over this being considered an unassailable fact, as I believe it will cause some organizations to develop sites when there is no need. Developing and maintaining a website requires a certain level of resources, and it would be problematic for some organizations with a limited budget to implement a site largely as a response to “organizational peer pressure”. While the Internet is clearly a very powerful tool that can be of great assistance to some organizations, its power and usefulness does not extend to all organizations.

The third theme that I identified was that of efficiencies. Each of the participants articulated that for their organization having a website achieved certain efficiencies that could not be achieved through other means. Without their website they would have had to increase their publications budgets,

increase the amount of staff time available to deal with incoming questions and queries, and likely decrease the organization's expectations as to how much information it would be able to provide to interested persons.

Organizations that achieve efficiencies through technologies like the Internet should be commended. If the end result is an organization that is better able to serve its client base, that organization has been successful in my mind in being proactive and strategic in its orientation and practice.

Certain cautions do arise for me on the topic of efficiencies. The first, which I have identified above in the section on information provision, is a concern that organizations will begin to replace human service providers with technology such as websites (Schoech 1999). Clearly the cost of a website can be less than that of a highly skilled and educated social service professional and one can imagine the corresponding appeal of such a site. It is my belief that the current emphasis on e-government stems in part from a sense that it is too expensive to provide adequate service to citizens through direct face-to-face interactions. To be clear, I am not advocating against the use of technology within the social service context. Rather, I believe that it must be applied and utilized in a manner that complements and enhances the human interactions, not replaces them. This certainly holds true in the area of separation and divorce where people are experiencing significant emotional, financial and social upheaval. Most need significantly more assistance than what can be provided over the Internet.

A second caution regarding efficiencies is that social service organizations are becoming engendered with a business or for-profit mentality. In the recent British Columbian climate of retrenchment and service cutbacks, a business-styled mentality focused on efficiency and “doing more with less” holds great resonance. While I am not putting forward that a focus on efficiencies is all bad, nor am I of the opinion that it is inherently good either. The challenge for social service organizations in the current climate is to provide services to clients with increasingly limited resources, but to do so in a manner that continues to value the organization’s status and history as a non-profit. It is crucial that these organizations embrace a focus on efficient service delivery without losing sight of what makes for high quality client service. Here again, liberation theology and critical theory provide some perspective. Liberation theologians would articulate the need to work towards social justice and relieving oppression. This needs to be a consideration when identifying what “efficient” service delivery entails. Critical theory would also question the underlying social structures that have lead these organizations to taking on such a business-oriented culture and what that impact has on clients. While that analysis is beyond the scope for this research, it is worth further exploration.

The fourth theme that arose from the data was the issues faced by non-profit organizations as they implement websites. Participants identified that it was imperative that their website be designed in a manner that was reflective and respectful of the context in which their organization operated.

They also discussed that their organizations attempted to balance the question of whether innovative technologies adversely affect their clients' ability to access their sites. Another area specific to non-profits who implement websites is that they can be used to support and draw members. Finally, some of the participants identified ways in which their organizations had been supported by other non-profit organizations in their development of a website.

I found the comments and concepts put forward by the participants in this area of issues to be quite insightful and informative. Reflecting on the areas they identified as important for consideration, it struck me that the lessons they had learned, and the perspectives they held on these particular issues, would be of value to other organizations contemplating setting up or redesigning their websites. Most of these organizations had not been privy to research information on issues to consider as they developed their sites. Had they been exposed to some of the lessons other similar organizations had learned in that development process, they would have been better equipped to have a clearer sense on how to develop their own site.

I was also intrigued when I heard a couple of the participants identify that they had been assisted by partner non-profits who had some expertise in the area of website development and communications. As organizations continue to become more and more specialized in their service delivery and their resources for incorporating new technologies continues to be limited, I see the existence of such supportive organizations as being of significant

value. Further support should be provided to those types of organization as they provide a specific yet vital service.

The final theme that I identified in the interview data was with respect to the research, implementation and evaluation activities that the organizations underwent as they constructed their websites. Participants identified that they utilized several different methods of research in ascertaining how they wanted their site built. The majority of them used external resources in that building process and they relied heavily on user feedback as the evaluation method.

In reviewing how the participants relied primarily on looking at other sites and getting advice from their outside designer in determining how to develop the site, and reflecting on my own experiences in that area, I considered how such activities may have been assisted by a framework or guiding questions. There are multiple levels and layers to website design: from the technology that it rests on, to the navigational considerations, to the visual imagery utilized and the manner that information is provided. As organizations are reviewing other sites against their own sense of what they would like, I believe that an analytical guide or reference document would be an asset in this endeavour.

In discussing how her organization tried to ascertain the value of its website, Colleen identified some unique and insightful means they had utilized. I would put forward that those types of ideas, and others similar to them, would be of value to other non-profit organizations. As websites

continue to get more advanced and are increasingly relied upon, one of the key challenges for organizations will be to monitor and evaluate their usage. Techniques used by organizations like Colleen's should be shared with other similar organizations.

Future Research Questions

As I went through the various stages, a number of questions worthy of further exploration came up for me. They include:

1. Has the implementation of information technologies like the Internet influenced the values of non-profit organizations, including the increasing emphasis on a for-profit philosophy and business model?
2. How can the Internet be further used as a transforming tool for organizations seeking to eliminate inequalities and transform social injustices?
3. How should organizations respond to the access concerns that arise when technology such as the Internet is implemented, particularly organizations that are focused on serving vulnerable populations?
4. How can non-profit organizations implement a movement towards increased empowerment, participation and partnership between service providers and clients/users through the use of information technology in a manner that embraces the client/users as equal partners?

Conclusion

As I reflected upon the participants that were involved in this research, the organizations that they represented, the clients they served, and the data and themes they provided in their interviews, I thought about how much their world and practice has changed. The context in which non-profits operate and the technologies available has undergone dramatic change in recent years.

Voluntary (nonprofit) organizations...are facing fundamental shifts in the social, economic, and political spheres in which they operate. Heightened competition for both funding and volunteers, accompanied by acute pressures to deliver performance improvements, bring strong imperatives for organizational transformation, if voluntary organizations are to position themselves effectively for long-term survival under these conditions. At the same time, advanced information and communication technologies have the capability to support innovative and potentially radical strategic responses to the challenges faced (Burt and Taylor 2003, pp. 115-116).

In describing the position and arguments put forward by several critical theorists with regards to technology, Thomson identifies one of the current debates in the field: is technology a transforming force which refashions the world to view most things, including humans, as resources to be optimized, ordered, and enhanced with maximal efficiency? Or do humans have the capacity to control technology and its impacts and to democratize it? (Thomson 2003) I contemplated this debate throughout my research and am left wondering whether organizations like the ones I researched would be successful in transforming and utilizing technologies like the Internet to better assist their clients, or would the technologies shape the organizations and

have an impact on their values and identity as an organization. Expressed in another way,

Are new modes of involvement and interaction occurring within voluntary organizations as they embrace information technologies? Are these new organizational arrangements permitting more effective deployment of professional staff and volunteers with all that implies for enhanced performance and quality of service? To what extent are information technology-enabled transformations challenging voluntary organizations' deepest values, and to what extent is the transformational potential that the technologies make possible delimited and shaped by those values? (Burt and Taylor 2003, p. 116)

I believe that the questions posed above will confront non-profit organizations as they embrace and implement information technologies within their service delivery model. How each organization holds true to the values and principles that they were based on will be determined in part by how they respond to this issue.

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Appendix A Interview Schedule

Interview Questions

1. What led your organization to determine that a website was necessary/warranted? (what needs was the site intended to meet)¹

Follow-up questions:

- When your organization decided to build the site what was the intended goal(s) of the website as it pertained to the needs identified?
- What was the objective(s) of the site, or the vision as to how it would work?

2. Did your organization conduct any research regarding your website and how you wanted it developed? If so, how did you go about this research?

Follow-up questions:

- What would you say you learned in the research and how was that applied in your development activities?
- What information, if any, did your organization receive regarding the use of websites by non-profits?
- During this development stage, what was the intended audience of the site?
- What challenges did your organization face in the development process? Please provide examples.

3. What financial resources were applied to the development and initial implementation of the site? I am not asking for a specific budget but a description statement regarding the significance of resources.

Follow-up questions:

- If any costs were incurred, were these funded from within or did your organization receive outside funding assistance?

4. What human/personnel resources from within the organization were applied to the development and initial implementation of the site?

Follow-up questions:

¹ In cases where the site has recently gone through a significant overhaul, the questions will be directed accordingly, for example, "What led your organization to determine that a significant overhaul/revamping of your website was necessary/warranted?"

- Who developed the website? If it was someone/some company outside of the organization, who in your organization was responsible for managing the development of the site?
- Please describe any ongoing maintenance/updating of the site that occurs.
- What is the goal of the ongoing maintenance/updating?
- Who is currently responsible for the ongoing maintenance?

5. What has been the experience of your organization in terms of the usage and usefulness of the site as a means of providing information and/or as a service delivery tool?

Follow-up questions:

- (If none provided so far) Please describe some examples/anecdotes of how the site has been used by people outside of the organization.
- Are there aspects of the website that you believe could be improved (things not working well, gaps)? If so what? Do you have any anecdotes/examples from a client perspective?
- Have there been unintended/unexpected benefits to having a website for your organization, separate from its original purpose?
- How has the site and its usage assisted your organization in its role and mandate as a non-profit?

6. How is your website particularly suited to be used by someone experiencing family law issues?

Follow-up questions

- What is your organization able to provide through your website to a person going through their separation /divorce that you would otherwise be unable or less able to provide?
- Are there any aspects of your organization's website that you would describe to be innovative? If so, please provide examples and details.
- Are there any innovative developments you would like to see added to your site that would better assist a person experiencing family law problems?

7. Are there other questions you think I should ask? What would you have included?

7. Is there anything you would like to add? Any additional comments or questions?

Appendix B Invitation Letter

Dear X,

I am conducting research as part of my thesis work, and I am writing to request your involvement in this project. The study is entitled "Connecting at a Time of Disconnection: The Development and Implementation of Websites by NGOs in the Field of Separation and Divorce". It is being conducted as part of the requirements for a Master's degree in the department of Human and Social Development at the University of Victoria, where I am currently studying as a graduate student.

The purpose of my thesis is to examine the development and maintenance of websites by non-profit organizations in the separation/divorce field. I am seeking to find out the experiences of the organizations in their development and implementation a website. I am planning on conducting semi-structured interviews with representatives from non-profit organizations involved in the separation/divorce field.

Research of this type is important because the Internet is becoming a significant part of many people's lives. Organizations (non-profit, for-profit, and government) are all investing a significant amount of resources into developing websites. In the area of human and social services, some organizations are constructing website resources as a means of providing service to the public. While some research has been done on the effectiveness of using the Internet in the human and social services, it is not significant given the increasing utility of the Internet. This research will add to the existing knowledge in this area and could provide some guidance to persons responsible for building web-based services.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a representative of an organization that works in the separation/divorce law field and your organization maintains a website in this area. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include one face-to-face audio taped interview that will take no more than 2 hours of time. The questions will be focused on the experience of your organization in the design and implementation of its website. Questions will be posed regarding what led to the development of the sites, what research was conducted prior to site implementation, what purpose the site serves, the apparent impact of the site, and what, if any innovative service is the organization providing via the site. The results of the interview will be compared to those of the other interviews. I am hopeful that you will agree to participate in this research. Please contact me regarding any questions you may have and to indicate your interest in participating at the following:

E-mail: dan.vandersluis@gems5.gov.bc.ca
Phone: 250-751-7454
Address: 2828 Gorge Vale Place
Nanaimo, BC V9T 3E3

Thank you for your attention,

Sincerely,

Dan VanderSluis

Appendix C Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled "Connecting at a Time of Disconnection: The Development and Implementation of Websites by NGOs in the Field of Separation and Divorce" which is being conducted by myself, Dan VanderSluis. I am a graduate student in the Department of Human and Social Development at the University of Victoria and you may contact me if you have further questions at the following:

E-mail: dan.vandersluis@gems5.gov.bc.ca
Phone: 250-751-7454
Address: 2828 Gorge Vale Place
Nanaimo, BC V9T 3E3

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct thesis research as part of the requirements for a degree in Human and Social Development. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Susan Boyd, Professor. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-8203 or by e-mail at scboyd@uvic.ca.

The purpose of my thesis is to examine the development and maintenance of websites by non-profit organizations in the separation/divorce field. I am seeking to find out the experiences of the organizations in their development and implementation a website. I am planning on conducting semi-structured interviews with representatives from non-profit organizations involved in the separation/divorce field.

Research of this type is important because the Internet is becoming a significant part of many people's lives. Organizations (non-profit, for-profit, and government) are all investing a significant amount of resources into developing websites. In the area of human and social services, some organizations are constructing website resources as a means of providing service to the public. While some research has been done on the effectiveness of using the Internet in the human and social services, it is not sufficient given the increasing utility of the Internet. This research will add to the existing knowledge in this area and could provide some guidance to persons responsible for building web-based services.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a representative of an organization that works in the separation/divorce law field and your organization maintains a website in this area. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include one face-to-face audio taped interview that will take no more than 2 hours of time. The interview will be based on a series of questions that have been developed by myself, and there will be some follow-up or clarifying questions based on your responses. The questions will be focused on the factors that affected your organization's design and implementation of its website. Questions will be posed regarding the preliminary research that was conducted by your organization prior to designing your site, the reasons why the site was created and the apparent impact of the site.

Upon completion and transcription of the interview, you will be provided a copy of the transcript for review and any additional comments. This post-interview review will be voluntary and will take no more than one hour to complete.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. The research will not involve deception of any kind and it will not involve any sensitive or personal issues. The only inconvenience anticipated would be the amount of time involved in participating in the research and the possibility that the interview would take time away from your work.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be included in the research report and I will destroy your data after 2 months of you indicating you do not desire to continue in participating in the research.

As stated above, I will be conducting individual interviews. Therefore I am not able to ensure that your responses to me during the interviews are anonymous. To prevent any risk to you, I will maintain your confidentiality in reporting my results. I will make every effort to ensure that readers of my report will not be able to identify you from the text. I will protect your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data by ensuring that no one other than myself has access to it. The physical data will be stored in my office and only transported in my locked vehicle trunk. Electronic data will be stored only on my computer and will be password protected. The participant consent letters will be stored in my locked filing cabinet. One year after the completion of my thesis requirements, all data I have regarding this project, including electronic files, will also be destroyed.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: the results will be incorporated into my thesis, and therefore available as such. In addition to my thesis, I currently anticipate disseminating the results in a more publicly accessible fashion through the design of a website. The website will include the results and a link to the actual thesis.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4362).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Name of Participant Signature _____ Date _____

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.