

## Reviews—Recensions

W. Jack McDougall, ed., *The Role of the Voluntary Trustee*. London, Ontario: Research and Publication Division, School of Business Administration, University of Western Ontario, 1976. 145 pp.

One of the most interesting, most difficult, loneliest, and most responsible positions is that of the voluntary trustee. In the days when appointments were conferred on the basis of status, it was relatively simple. We assume that a trustee knew the right people, was appointed, showed up at meetings, sought private funds, and agreed with administrator's recommendations at appropriate moments. Today the voluntary trustee is involved in a wide range of complicated issues, occasionally inordinate pressures, with little or no formal training for his precise responsibility, and often a minimal credibility among many of the professionals with whom he interacts.

In the face of this, it is welcome that, after ten years of working with profit-making companies to improve their effectiveness, the School of Business Administration at the University of Western Ontario broadened its approach to encompass the boards of voluntary organizations with its May, 1975, seminar on the Role of the Voluntary Trustee.

In order to look at the concept of trusteeship and the problems faced in common by voluntary institutions, 27 invited participants (22 trustees and 5 senior administrators — all men), representing various non-profit institutions, gathered for a one-day seminar.

The participants, described as a "representative" group "actively alert to the issues of trusteeship" included men of various ages from six provinces. A partial list of their trustee affiliations illustrates scores of different voluntary undertakings in the areas of welfare, health-care, education, culture, and community services.

The seminar was planned around three broad topics: The Relationship of Trustees to Administration, The Monitoring Role of a Trustee, and the Role of the Trustee and the Challenge of the External Environment. As is usual in seminars, some topics were covered better than others. The topics, a background essay, and a list of questions that represented the issues involved was sent to each participant in advance of the seminar in order to stimulate thinking. The participants, including G. Allan Burton, Richard M. Ivey, J. Allyn Taylor (seminar chairman), and D. Carlton Williams, were assigned to small groups (balanced geographically and by type of institution represented) for discussion before meeting in plenary session.

*The Role of the Voluntary Trustee* is a compendium of papers and discussion presented at the seminar. The reader is warned that "it is not a tidy document — (it is not precise and it has no index) . . . there is no attempt to give 'answers' because many of the issues have

no answers.” But, it does provide an opportunity for the reader to reflect on the role of the voluntary trustee, to sketch the dimension of the responsibility, and to question one’s own participation or relationship to trusteeship. As one who serves in this capacity in a variety of settings, I look favourably on any assistance to the trustee’s role.

Keynote speaker for the seminar was the Honourable John P. Robarts, former Prime Minister of Ontario and Chancellor of the University of Western Ontario. In “The Need for Widened Trusteeship” he sets the background for discussion with the legal definition of a trust as an “obligation binding a person, who is called a Trustee, to deal with property over which he has control . . . for the benefit of persons who are called beneficiaries . . .”

Robarts interprets the term “trustee” to include politically elected representatives. In referring to this “professional trustee” he comments that “the moment you pay and the moment you have a professional, you are going to have a conflict between what he may think objectively and what he thinks in terms of preserving his own position and the social or financial standing that position may give him.” In Robarts’ view, the professional trustee contradicts the basic concept of the trustee because he loses the personal responsibility, and the feeling of service to one’s fellow man. This may be true, but it fails to address the burden of voluntary trusteeship on all but the comfortably wealthy and the attitude held by many that trustees are do-gooders or dilettantes.

Robarts also points out the profound effects of the “incredible entry of governments” into all forms of what were formerly voluntary activities. In his view this removes decision-making powers from the voluntary trustee and, even more disturbing, makes the position unattractive to the very calibre of person sought for the position. In 1946, the three levels of government contributed 76 per cent of the funds to health, education, welfare and cultural services in Canada. By 1969, this had grown to more than 90 per cent of the total. One cannot ignore the possible steering effect on all institutions of government grants, particularly conditional grants. It also suggests a different skill for today’s voluntary trustee who can no longer rely solely on the ability to raise funds from the private sector of the community as justification for his trusteeship.

The keynote speech also points out that the trustee’s role has grown increasingly difficult because of the size and complexity of the institutions served. Although Robarts recognizes that trusteeship is a “labour of love” and doubts that “you could ever pay them to do it,” he, nevertheless, recognizes the ever-mounting pressures on trustees. The public desire to participate in every decision made by a public or quasi-public body, while appropriate, does complicate administration and decision-making. Trusteeship may seem less a desirable social position and more a difficult service to the community. How much pressure and battle can be expected of a trustee in the name of community service?

To provide a common base for discussing the role of the voluntary trustee, an essay entitled “Trustees as Servants” by Robert K. Greenleaf was sent in advance to the participants. Greenleaf is widely regarded as a businessman and philosopher with special renown in the field of trustee responsibilities. His essay, reprinted in full in this monograph, is most valuable reading because it raises consciousness about the issue of trusteeship; his attendance at the seminar must have been an asset to the discussion.

Greenleaf defines the key to effective trusteeship as objectivity and noninvolvement. He sees the trustee standing outside the active programme of the institution, and managing. This is quite distinct from the administration or staff of an institution whose delegated re-

sponsibility it is to operate the institution. It is this separation of function, managing versus operating, which is the most difficult for the trustee and often for the administrator. Management functions are defined as setting the goals and the concept of the institution, approving plans for reaching those goals, appointing top administrative officers, assessing the performance of the institution and taking appropriate action based upon the results of that assessment. Administrative functions include planning to accomplish goals, organizing, controlling operations, and supporting (by research and development) all actions necessary to reach the goals set by the trustees.

An effective relationship between trustee and administrator is essential to the health of the institution. If trustees are honorary, nominal, and, therefore, inefficient, the management/operation relationship breaks down and trustees simply provide the “cover of legitimacy” without fulfilling their function. A mediocre institutional performance is bound to result.

Today, the approach to determining board membership is changing. There is an increasing recognition of the right to representation by and the value of input from people “inside” the institution – a representative democracy – to which the seminar paid scant attention. Is the special insight of these “inside” people compatible with the need to stand outside the active programme and evaluate its effectiveness? What difficulties do they face in overcoming the “vested interest” approach of their constituents? Do they possess the openness to change which is assumed by a supposed immunity from operational pressures? Does this require a redefinition of the trustee’s responsibility and his relationship to the institution?

The Monitoring Role of a Trustee is the one that he usually sees the most clearly – in half its aspect. The conventional trustee, according to Greenleaf, limits his role by assuming that the administration, if left alone, will operate the institution as it should be. Not so in today’s experience. Trustees challenge, more and more, the assumptions of administrators for the betterment of both positions. But only a few trustees are capable of setting goals for their own performance and judging those performances objectively. Only a few are able to cope with the absence of a recognizable measure – the profit statement, for example – to evaluate a non-profit institution’s performance. Only a few are able to sort through the mass of documentation, retain the essence of the goal, set aside what Greenleaf refers to as the conventional “reacting” role, and adopt an initiating or “affirmative” role.

Greenleaf quite rightly emphasizes the importance of information to the effective functioning of the trustee. The uninformed trustee is an easily recognized problem. Poorly informed trustees, in an effort to seem involved, will often meddle into operating functions, blurring even more their separation from administrative responsibility. Lack of information is not always the case. It is, instead, lack of information appropriate to the specific decision required from the trustee. Trustees are often bombarded with reams of paper, much of it not directed at the essence of the issue before them from the precise aspect from which they should be deliberating the issue. Trustees need information of a special sort to make their independent judgment, their unique “trustee judgment”, and they are often unaware of the nature of that need.

The difficulties inherent in coping with a deluge of information result in a circumstance in which it is rare to find a trustee who is willing to become involved in institutional areas which are outside the expertise he has gained in a career. It is not at all unusual to find “big businessmen” on boards who concern themselves only with financial statements and with

none of the service goals of, say, a health care institution. While this may be understandable, it carries regrettable implications.

While orientation programmes for trustees are difficult to organize, they are essential to the trustee's effectiveness and competence. The most concrete recommendation of Greenleaf's paper is a "Chairman's Institute" where the "art of chairmanship is researched and taught" and to which chairmen would return periodically for refresher courses and new knowledge.

The third topic placed before the seminar, *The Challenge of the External Environment*, is paid less attention. The participants do recognize that the intervention of government is their "greatest single challenge." Selected comments from the discussion groups are included in the monograph. As would be assumed from any seminar, there is undoubtedly more value in participating in the discussion than in reading portions of it.

In one section, so brief that it belies its significance, the participants express their concerns about the tripartite relationship among administrators, professional staffs (health professionals or university professors) and voluntary trustees. This relationship seems fraught with pressure and suspicion. The most obvious example occurs at a time of budgetary compression. It is the natural desire of programme-oriented staffs to press for budget expenditures, and the natural instinct of administrators to restrict expenditures and balance budgets. How should the trustee act in this pressure-cooker? Can any consensus emerge?

Mutual trust is essential for our institutions. Trustees must act responsibly in order to counteract the suspicion with which they are regarded by both other groups. Greenleaf states that those institutions which have been reluctant to accept the parity of trustee judgment are in crisis. Further exploration of this aspect would be of real significance. If trustees who care about the institution (and caring is vital) are seen to represent the selfless interest in an age of "me first-ism", perhaps they can find a mechanism for developing consensus in those institutions. That contribution alone would be of inestimable value.

The School of Business Administration at the University of Western Ontario is considering ways of continuing to assist trustees in bringing more effectiveness to their organizations. The seminar and the monograph provide a good start. The suggestions given for another seminar ("include some women . . . stay within 3 or 4 main issues and focus on definite recommendations . . .") are valid and should be acted on. There is much to explore regarding the motivation of trustees, the impact of changing composition of boards, the relationship between trustees and professionals, the development of consensus, and the search for competent and concerned trustees.

Given the difficulties of achieving a good trustee performance – the enormity of the responsibility, the time necessary to absorb vital information and its implications, the patience to develop the necessary performance skills, all while remaining objective and non-involved – is it any wonder that conscientious voluntary trusteeship is a very challenging "labour of love"?

Greenleaf notes that "trustees have a kind of power that administrators and staffs do not have – they have the legal power to manage everything in the institution; they have all the legal power there is. They may delegate some of it, but they can also take it back. They cannot give any of it away, irretrievably, and still be trustees." The trustees' ability to deal with that power, to learn to transmit it to serve effectively for the benefit of their

institutions, may determine the quality of those institutions for the future. The implications for society are obvious.

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*Quelques caractéristiques des étudiants du niveau post secondaire au Canada.* Ottawa: Secrétaire d'Etat 1976. 179 pp.

Le lecteur moyen, auquel cet ouvrage s'adresse, trouvera sûrement intéressant l'ensemble des renseignements bien présentés dans de nombreux tableaux et figures. L'objectif de ce rapport est de "donner un aperçu aussi vaste que possible des caractéristiques générales des étudiants du post secondaire et de faire des remarques préliminaires sur les données". (p. 3). Dans ces conditions, l'analyse devait rester "dans les limites de la simplicité" et on ne peut reprocher aux auteurs d'avoir rencontré leur objectif.

On ne s'étonnerait pas si le lecteur averti ne brûle pas d'enthousiasme pour un tel rapport qui, sans aucun doute, ne produira aucun ras de marée dans les milieux de la recherche et de la planification de l'éducation. Ce qui est fort malheureux parce que les résultats de l'enquête devaient "servir à ceux qui s'occupent de planifier l'enseignement au gouvernement et dans les divers établissements du gouvernement", (p. V) de même qu'aux enseignants et au public en général.

Le véritable intérêt d'une telle enquête réside dans la possibilité de dépasser l'ordre de la statistique élémentaire et de permettre l'analyse beaucoup plus détaillée de phénomènes que l'on voudrait expliquer. Par exemple l'accessibilité aux études post secondaires était une préoccupation importante de cette enquête. A cause des impératifs d'une analyse simplifiée, les auteurs en sont réduits à reprendre les clichés les plus usés de la sociologie de l'éducation. De plus, malgré la simplicité de l'approche, la description des résultats n'est pas toujours très claire. Il faut attribuer cela aux difficultés de la traduction.

Soulignons en outre l'interprétation ambiguë de la question portant sur la langue. La question trente est la suivante: "Quelle langue parlez-vous le plus souvent à votre domicile actuel, chez vos parents?" (p. 113).

Les réponses à cette question sont analysées sous le titre: Modifications dans l'utilisation de la langue.

En fait, c'est seulement au Québec qu'on a constaté un changement important, alors que 52 pour cent des étudiants sont passés de l'anglais et d'autres langues au français . . . le gain net au Québec était aussi vers le français puisque 52 pour cent des étudiants sont passés au français contre 46 pour cent à l'anglais. (p. 52).

Cette interprétation semble outrepasser la portée réelle de la question posée. Nous avons tous connu des étudiants qui acceptaient, pour des raisons fort diverses, d'étudier et de vivre pour un temps limité dans une autre langue, sans pour autant changer de langue.