

THE ABC'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS: A CONTINUING (HI)STORY

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Abstract

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, like other media organisations, is the site of continuing workplace change thanks to the advent and development of digital media. The author has been participant and witness to this change in both radio and television, since the early 1990s. This paper describes and analyses how this period of broadcasting history is playing out in the ABC, how it has influenced drama and documentary production in television and journalism in radio, from the perspectives of both managers and producers. It begins by analysing the traditional prevalence in media production of a Weberian division of labour, between 'artist' and 'artisan'. It goes on to argue that technological developments and reductions in public funding were together responsible for two significant changes to industrial relations of production at the ABC. These were the industrial re-classification of ABC Radio workers, and the corporate restructure that took place in the mid-1990s, following similar organisational change in Britain by the BBC. The paper concludes that the institutional goals and judgements affecting the decision to adopt digital media technologies may have initiated change, but they will need revitalising if change is to lead successfully to new relations of production and means of representation.

Introduction

Digital media convergence is changing the relations of production, relationships with the audience and concepts of professionalism within broadcast production. The digital environment is indiscriminating: words, sound and pictures can all be created or collected, manipulated, stored and replayed using the same medium. Digital media can appear on the "old media" platforms of print, radio, television, but the Internet is central to the dissemination of multimedia content. Like other media organisations, Australia's national public service broadcaster, the ABC, is the site of continuing workplace change. This paper is a narrative of this ongoing change.

The paper begins by analysing the traditional prevalence in media production of a Weberian division of labour, between "artist" and "artisan", framing this within the concept of professionalism. It goes on to argue that technological developments and reductions in public funding were together responsible for two significant changes to industrial relations of production at the ABC. These were the corporate restructure called "One ABC", which took place in the mid-1990s following similar organisational change in Britain by the BBC, and the industrial re-classification of ABC Radio workers that occurred from the early 1990s. The paper goes on to explore how technological and structural changes have affected documentary and drama production, using examples from the ABC. It then looks at the introduction of cross-platform skills in ABC regional radio, and the implications for traditional work

practices and workplace relations. Finally, it returns to the idea of professionalism and considers how it and the relationship with audiences are changing for media workers.

The Weberian divide

The historical model of film, radio and television production is characterised by Weberian “rationality”; that is, by the strict division of labour in a bureaucratic, hierarchical structure. The key division has been between those who conceptualise (producers/authors/artists) and those who execute the work (technicians/craftworkers/artisans). Both pride themselves on carrying out their jobs “professionally”, which former BBC controller Stuart Hood defines as “[bringing] to bear on the task in hand a number of known and tried skills that will produce predictable results” (Hood, 1987: 35). In other words, the means of production give rise to conventions of representation. Tulloch described the phenomenon in his studies of Australian and British television drama, when he observed that producers no less than crew have been “positioned inside industrial methods of production” (Tulloch, 1990: 176).

Efficiency, cost-minimisation and profit maximisation are the justifications of such a system in a capitalist society, affecting a public service bureaucracy dependent on taxpayer funding, as much as a commercial enterprise. The national broadcaster is also positioned at the “high” end of the cultural spectrum, so concepts of authorship and professionalism assume all the greater importance there, since high culture stresses the role of the individual author.

The traditional divide between craftworker (technician or artisan) and author (producer/director or artist) is of immense practical consequence in radio, television and film production. One of those consequences is that maintaining the divide necessitates employing more people in order, as it were, to fill both camps. The largest single component of the budget in a broadcasting organisation may be its salaries, so it is not surprising that a broadcaster funded through the public purse, such as the ABC¹, always has an eye open for a way to reduce salary costs.

¹ The ABC is funded by the parliament, through a budget appropriation, on a triennial basis.

“One ABC” - the organisational restructure and its impact

The 1996 restructure of the ABC, called “One ABC”, included the introduction of “contestable” television program bids from outside the ABC, following the “producer choice” model previously introduced by the BBC. Many ABC television producers perceived this as a direct challenge to their professionalism. Moreover, digital technology has blurred the line between professional or broadcast quality, and amateur or home video production. The result of both these factors - and they were explicitly related in the rationale for the One ABC restructure - is that authorship of television programs is no longer the exclusive province of the professional producer.

In a December 1996 newsletter to staff, the new structure was described as preparing the Corporation “for the multi-channel environment in which program content will be delivered across a wide range of media forms including over the air radio and television, cable services and multimedia”. This explicit policy decision coincided with a major cost-cutting exercise; the federal budget of the previous August had confirmed that the government would cut over ten percent, or 55 million dollars, from the ABC's funding. Management claimed that the new structure would save “around \$27 million a year in operating costs, and result in a 20 per cent reduction in the number of senior executives” (ABC, 1996a).

The most controversial aspect of the re-structure from the point of view of television production staff was the decision to separate program production from program commissioning (and scheduling). The distancing of Commissioning Editors from producers was intended to ensure “transparency”, as it was described. This was taken to mean that Commissioning Editors should operate at the same distance from in-house producers as they did from independent commercial producers. Not only would this result in the best product being commissioned, so the argument went, but also in more efficient management of the ABC's resources. The then Managing Director, Brian Johns, justified the change in a Message to All Staff of 9 December 1996: “this separation increases our flexibility to adapt content to new forms and delivery to changing audience needs. This also allows us to better control our production costs” (ABC, 1996a). Thus, technological change and cost-savings were linked, as drivers of organisational change. In the following two years, twenty percent of television staff

were retrenched and the percentage of funds spent on in-house television production was reduced from seventy-five to fifty.

The way in which this “increased flexibility” and “better control [of] production costs” would be achieved was by not only by separating the Commissioning Editors from the producers, but also by “test[ing] the cost of ABC production against the external market”; in other words what had already been introduced in the BBC as “producer choice” and which in the ABC was called “contestability”.

Production staff at ABC TV were not slow to recognise the implications for in-house production of the new structure. In November 1996, a group of 13 executive producers - all but the EPs in News and Current Affairs - wrote to the Chairman of the ABC Board, Donald McDonald. In their letter they asserted that: “We do not argue against change in itself. We have always welcomed and encouraged creative and technological change as a re-invigorating aspect of our daily work.” (ABC, 1996b). However, not only was the proposed restructure based on a “flawed and incomplete grasp of the way television programming is made” but also “The proposed restructure would lead to a swift and major reduction in ABC-produced programming, with the consequent threat to the ABC's independence and integrity.” The executive producers argued both that the new structure would be unworkable and that it would do nothing to support “the ideals of public broadcasting, the expectations of our audience or the value and professional abilities of those who create the ABC's output.” The letter concludes: “Instead of “creative regeneration” we see cheap populism. Instead of a “strong, viable in-house capacity” we see forced redundancies and the slow destruction of the ABC's unique program-making capacity.” (ABC, 1996b). It is a forceful expression of the relationship that these producers see between professionalism, quality and public service broadcasting.

The February 1999 round of contestable bids illustrates the relationship between outsourcing and technology, in its preamble to a call for documentary proposals:

The advances in DVC [digital video compact] equipment have had as dramatic effect on documentary as the advent of 16mm and the Nagra did thirty years ago. Its size allows more intimate shooting. Its costs allow longer term examination of the subject material. *It opens doors to people who could not previously find a way into the exclusive club of documentary*

makers. However, it still needs articulate, intelligent and focussed directors to make full use of the potential. (*ABC 1999 Round of contestable bids – in author's possession. Emphasis added*).

The final two sentences identify ABC producers as part of an “exclusive club” both by virtue of their professional skills and their place of employment, but still pay homage to the role of an ‘author’, or individual director.

Many ABC producers strongly rejected the assumption that the ABC was “a closed shop determined to protect its own position”, asserting rather that “Contestability” was the ABC's response to political pressure that the national broadcaster should be “opened up to the independents” (*The No-Collocation News*² 1998). The authors of this anonymously produced fortnightly newsletter also claimed that independent commercial producers have no commitment to the principles and practices of public broadcasting:

ABC program-makers choose to work in this environment because they have a commitment to its ideals. Commercial producers operate in the ‘independent’ sector because they don't wish to work in an institutional framework - and because they want to profit directly from the programs they make. Both positions are entirely fair and reasonable. What is patently not fair, however, is to guarantee a large proportion of the ABC's budgets and timeslots to precisely that group of people who've rejected its principles (*The No-Collocation News, 1998*).

So the response of these ABC television producers to the restructure focused principally on the perceived threats to the role of an “independent national public broadcaster”, which has developed a “unique program-making capacity”. It is clear from this and earlier quotations from the letter written by the Executive Producers that professionalism at the ABC includes the “ideals” of public broadcasting, and contestability was seen as threatening both. Both television and radio are under challenge from the combination of the availability of relatively inexpensive digital video, cheaper and more powerful computers, and the Internet. The combination, in particular the way in which the Internet has produced a new level of audience activity, represents a direct challenge to the historical divide between the amateur and the professional.

² This anonymously-produced newsletter was established to protest against what were then proposals, since realised, to co-locate ABC radio and television headquarters in Ultimo in Sydney. It was widely circulated within the ABC.

Technological change and the reclassification of ABC radio workers

In ABC Radio, the advent of digital technology offered an opportunity to reduce the number of people needed to produce a program. It also offered the possibility of bridging the long-standing divide between the artisan and the author. In radio terms this was between so-called “operational” or technical production staff, and producers (including journalists). The “operators” (or the ABC job classification ROPOs, standing for Radio Operations Production Officers) were well trained, often highly skilled and proud of their “professionalism”. They were also almost completely alienated from the products of their own labour.

In a system derived from the BBC, radio's technical operators (or ROPOs) worked in a pool. They were rostered on to a range of programs. An operator would turn up as scheduled on the right day at the right time, without knowing much about the program other than which studio it was in and who was producing it. ROPOs exercised a number of skills, known and tried, with predictably successful results: the sound levels would be right, the program would go to air as planned or be recorded cleanly and clearly, be edited swiftly and skilfully. On the same day, the same operator might go on to another program, with as little information about it, but would exercise the same professional care and skill in doing his (rarely, then, her) job. It was the producers who authored the programs; theirs were the ideas, the passion and the knowledge of what they were making. And theirs was the substantial credit, both at the end of the program and in the size of their pay packets, relative to the technical operators.

In a highly demarcated system of production, each occupational group jealously guards its own work and it was not easy to move out of one group into the other. In ABC Radio that chance first arrived for many people when the ABC launched a youth music radio station called 2JJ in 1975. 2JJ was called the “Contemporary Radio Unit” or CRU, by ABC management and, to their frequent alarm, was run by its young and mainly university-educated originators along collective lines, deliberately casting aside the elaborate classifications, demarcations and hierarchies that characterised the national broadcaster.

The then Director of ABC Radio, Malcolm Long, realised in the late 1980s that digital technology would make it possible to apply the 2JJ model of multi-skilling to the other ABC radio networks. Using digital devices and applications, a producer or journalist could learn quite easily to record and edit sound as well as write, a presenter could learn to operate an appropriately-configured studio without needing a panel operator. Twenty years later, this is taken for granted in most broadcasting organisations and most employ fewer, more multi-skilled people. As a result of implementing this vision, ABC Radio removed a whole class of workers - the ROPOs or technical operators. A restructure amalgamated four separate groups - announcers, producers, production assistants and technical operators - into a single Broadcaster classification, in 1992. Reflecting the significance attached to distinguishing technical work (craft) from production work (art), the inclusion of the ROPOs in the new structure attracted by far the most employee concern. The Radio Broadcaster Structure Agreement states that: "The Broadcaster Structure is designed to ensure that the ABC has a skilled and flexible workforce that maintains the highest quality output. ... [It] offers mobility for staff in those work environments where task broadening and skill enhancement are beneficial ... and provides for a smooth introduction of new technologies." (ABC-PSU, 1992, p.3).

The terms of this agreement echo those of a 1991 Industrial Agreement for journalists (in a separate Journalist/Reporter job classification structure). It too was designed 'to assist the ABC to achieve a more skilled, flexible and efficient workforce, capable of making the most effective use of available resources while maintaining the highest quality output.' (ABC 1993, p.2). The "typical tasks and skills" for the lowest level of journalist (above Cadet) include: "Set up and operate studio, phone-in and recording facilities. Identify, diagnose and report equipment faults. Operate computerised office and information management systems, including BASYS and D-Cart"³(ABC 1993, p.19). The tasks of operating studio equipment and diagnosing faults would have been the responsibility of radio operations staff, prior to these agreements.

³ BASYS is a networked news copy system, D-Cart is a digital audio multi-user recording, editing and replay system developed by the ABC. Both systems have been superseded, since the beginning of the 21st century.

However, in the job classification structure that applies to ABC Television, the distinctions between author and craftworker have proved more tenacious. Executive Producer (EP), Producer, Production Support Officer, Television Operations Production Officer (TOPO) and Broadcast Engineering Officer (BEO) all still exist as distinct classifications (although proposals for a new workplace agreement reduce the number of awards in ABC Television from 46 to 4). The Production Support group includes researchers, floor managers, assistant directors and production managers. The TOPO group includes camera operators, audio operators and editors. These classifications are grouped into departments that also maintain the author/technician distinction.

These demarcations are one reason that the systematic introduction of cross-media production began in radio rather than in television. Nonetheless, the technical justifications for the strict artist/artisan divide in television production have progressively diminished over the past twenty years.

Technological change and television production

In those twenty years there have been some major changes to the ways in which television is produced. These are changes that would have been quite marked and obvious to the television audience, but have become taken for granted over time. The source of most of these changes is changing technology; but what ABC Television has chosen to do with the new technologies and the restructuring of production which the new technologies have made possible, have in turn affected the place of authorship in television production.

Television drama in the tradition Australia inherited from the BBC was made mostly in the studio, using constructed sets and heavy pedestal cameras. From the 1960s, it was recorded on 2-inch videotape, which required highly skilled and often extremely time-consuming lighting. The lighting set-up alone for a single play could take many hours. If there were scenes shot on location, they were shot on 16mm film. Although the cameras were portable, they were heavy and delicate. Again, lighting was very important, and a large support crew was required. In fact, whether in studio or on location, for drama or for documentary, a large number of people was needed.

Over the last ten to twenty years, film has become less and less often used for television, as the cheapness, simplicity and increasing quality of videotape have gradually made it the dominant recording medium. Which videotape formats are considered to be broadcast quality has also changed. Once, only 2-inch videotape was broadcast, today there are programs that put home video (initially analogue and now digital) formats to air, although these formats are still not considered professional broadcast quality. A program such as *Australia's Funniest Home Videos* advertises in its title the standard you expect, while the ABC-TV satirical drama *Frontline* (1995-1997) broke new ground in its use of compact format digital video. Video also became progressively more tolerant of low lighting levels, so the flat, flood-lit look that so marked early location drama shot on videotape was no longer needed; nor, of course, a team of specialist lighting technicians.

Video cameras have become progressively more portable and lighter weight and most recently, broadcast quality compact high-definition digital video (HDVC) has arrived; compact digital video was the format seen by Australian audiences first in *Frontline* and then in the documentary series *Race Around the World* (1997-98). The former made an artistic point by contrasting the “grainy reality” of the compact video pictures for the “off-air” events of the story, as opposed to the “high gloss” look of the studio cameras (and lighting) for the fictional current affairs program. *Race* demonstrated that compact digital video cameras can capture high quality pictures. Series in the “fly on the wall” documentary tradition, such as *Uni* and *Kings* (1999)⁴, both of them recorded for the ABC by one man, Simon Target, have subsequently demonstrated the unobtrusiveness and relative robustness of the lightweight DVC cameras, which almost match professional-quality pictures. The second-generation, 3CCC (“three chip”) digital cameras had higher quality pictures, but the sound quality of the built-in microphones remains relatively inferior and their very smallness reduces the stability of the pictures since, unlike the older, larger and heavier cameras, they cannot be held against the operator’s head and shoulder to reduce “camera wobble”, something that stabilising software cannot completely overcome.

⁴ *Uni* was about Arts students at the University of Sydney and *Kings* an ‘inside look’ at the Kings School, an Australian ‘great public school’ on the English model.

These things may sound like technical quibbles but a concern to maintain acceptable standards - or Hood's "predictable results" - are a part of what professionalism means, whatever the business. So the willingness of television stations to put such pictures to air - especially the national public broadcaster, with its historical obligation to offer audiences "quality" in both form and content - represents a very real challenge to professional standards, among technicians especially. "Reality" for television was associated above all with the look of the news report, especially when the footage was live or a report of a breaking story. In pursuit of visual realism, the "on the run" look of news reports were transferred first to longer form documentary and then to drama: uneven lighting, "poor" framing, "unsteady" camerawork, and "poor" or confused sound. Of course the *cinema vérité* tradition was established long before the advent of compact format digital video and this undoubtedly influenced even studio-based television drama and documentary as far back as the late 1960s.

In television today, two distinctive styles of documentary⁵ production coexist. The first requires a sizeable crew and features a central presenter, usually a well-known personality, who appears on-camera and introduces and tells the story, for example, the nature documentaries of David Attenborough. In this style of documentary the personality-presenter is usually also the writer. There is a director whose job is the visual realisation of the author's intent, using usually one camera operator, possibly a camera assistant and one sound recordist. This kind of documentary preserves the author/technician distinction and uses conventional means of representation, mediating events through the presenter. It is also expensive to produce.

The second kind is typified by the documentary series of the former ABC director mentioned earlier, Simon Target, who specialised in the 1990s in "inside looks" at institutions, rather in the tradition of Fred Wiseman. This type of documentary is characterised by one person having an idea and shooting it entirely themselves, although not normally also editing it, and Target has acknowledged the extremely important role of his editor, John Pleffer. People such as editors and graphic artists have historically been seen in the "artisan" rather than the "artist" group. However,

⁵ I am here distinguishing documentary from the hybrid forms of so-called 'reality TV', that combine 'fly on the wall' video footage with elements of the game show, such as the *Survivor* or *Big Brother* programs.

the significance of the editor's role in particular to the recent low-cost digital video broadcast documentaries raises the question of whether there can ever be said to be a single author in television production. The teaching of television production tends to emphasise the collective nature of the enterprise, using the word in the sense of teamwork, and not with the implication that there is an equality or interchangeability of team members' roles (Millerson, 1990, p.363ff.). This emphasis can be seen as a reflection of the "industrial system working in its own interests and the interests of dominant groups"(Newcomb, 1991, p.93). For ABC television producers, changes offered by lightweight digital technology and spurred on by budget reductions can be - and are - viewed as a threat to the producer (or artist) group. In the literal sense of a threat to staff jobs they certainly are. On the other hand, it can also be argued that the system within which ABC TV producers work has acted to constrain their creativity, to exclude other creators, and to maintain traditional forms of representation. This has been one argument of independent producers anxious to sell their work to the ABC, who have historically complained of finding it difficult to penetrate the organisation.

With or without a separate editor, the one-person "videography" approach to documentary making is a low-cost option for the ABC, much lower than for the personality-presenter style. The simplicity, robustness and portability of the new technology has also opened up the documentary genre to authors whose professional background is not production (Simon Target was originally a camera operator, so on the technician or artisan side of the divide).

Another example of this kind of documentary screened on ABC Television illustrates crossing the divide from the other direction. *Rumble in the Jungle* (1998) was made by a former scientist, now an ABC television producer, who became aware of a proposed expedition down the Amazon. He persuaded its organisers to let him go with it, with a compact digital camera, and came back with footage, which, again with the assistance of an editor, made a compelling program. In this case, a producer took on a technical or craft role, which he would once have been obliged to leave to a camera operator.

In drama such as *Wildside* (1998)⁶, the impact of digital format video and lightweight cameras is to make it look strikingly different from traditional television drama. In early television drama the cameras had to be relatively static; camera movement consisted of zooms, pans, tilts, or - provided the budget ran to it - dollying. Shot framing followed Hollywood movie industry conventions of wide establishing shot, medium shot, close up. By contrast, in any episode of contemporary television drama in the “gritty realism” style of a *Wildside*, the camera is seldom still, and the use of close-up and extreme close-up frequent. Both sound and vision are layered; for example, a scene might be framed and shot through an out-of-focus foreground such as a wire fence.

In traditional television drama each line is delivered clearly and audibly (probably by actors trained originally in theatre), with one speaker finishing before the next one starts. In contemporary television drama we have become used to sound which is also layered, not always clear or easily audible, as speakers overlap, interrupt one another or the scene gives us more than one conversation occurring simultaneously. One impact of highly mobile cameras in drama has been to free-up actors to a far greater extent than formerly, from the technical constraints on performance of film making. This was evident in *Wildside* and film critic Lynden Barber drew attention to it: ‘In conventional film-making, actors must concentrate on hitting their marks (spots marked on the floor to ensure they’re correctly positioned for the lights and camera). With handheld cameras, the actors are more free to create spontaneous performances.’ (Barber, 1999). In *Wildside* the director did not direct the actors, only the cameras. The actors spent an intensive period with a “performance coach” prior to shooting, then directed themselves when the cameras rolled, while the director concentrated on getting the pictures.

From an employer's viewpoint it is now both economical and possible to encourage multi-skilled workers and the breakdown of a strict division of labour (Meade, 1998). It was in order to encourage such multi-skilling that, beginning in the early 1990s, the ABC began to recruit people specifically to be trained across more than one media platform.

⁶ *Wildside* was a co-production with the ABC, in which operational and technical staff were supplied from the ABC, but the editorial staff - including director, writers and script-editors - were from the

The “new breed” of broadcast journalist

Since 2001, when the Federal Government granted the ABC 17-million dollars, for “regional initiatives”, some thirty “cross media” or “online” producers have been appointed and trained to work in local radio stations⁷. Training of the first 18 cross-media recruits began at the end of February 2002 as a cooperative exercise between the Radio division and the relatively recent division of New Media. For bureaucratic purposes the recruits were classified as regional radio journalists; but they were explicitly required to include digital video production and photography, as well as Web site production in their duties. The period of time the participants had been working in radio ranged from weeks to years. Each person selected had training and/or experience in at least one of radio, video or Web production, sometimes two, but none had experience of all of them.

Their formal training course in cross-media skills was one very intensive week (this was extended to two weeks for later intakes, but sometimes this training was not actually done until some weeks or even months after the individual had started work). It covered both editorial and technical issues. Editorial issues included ABC-specific policies to do with commercialism, for example, and more general ones, such as copyright in Web sites or managing an online forum. The technical side of the course covered the capture and editing of still and moving images, using digital media, and production for the ABC's online gateway to local radio, The Backyard⁸. Participants were taught to compose and capture images using digital still cameras and DV (digital video) cameras. They were taught the rudiments of lighting and their camera kits carry one light. They were taught image editing and manipulation using Photoshop Elements and the non-linear digital video editing software Adobe Premier. In sum, they were taught the minimum they needed to know to do their cross-media jobs. This included advice on writing for the Web and a lesson in HTML, to produce and upload stories to those areas of the ABC Web site to be made accessible to them, using a database and Web template system called Wallace, both developed in-house.

commercial production company.

⁷ Local radio includes all ABC radio stations that serve a local community, whether in the State capital cities, where they are called Metropolitan stations, or in small cities and towns, where they are called regional stations. Regional stations may broadcast to very large areas geographically, with listeners living in diverse situations, from those in substantial country towns to others in very remote communities or on single properties.

⁸ <http://www.abc.net.au/backyard>.

The Head of Network Scheduling described being cross-media as involving “thinking differently”. The cross-media journalists would need to approach stories with the different platforms (radio, the Web and digital TV) in mind. These new jobs, she emphasised, involved producing, presenting, writing, recording, shooting and editing their own stories. She described the opportunity as a continuing building of skills, across platforms. What the ABC underestimated was not only the time needed to learn these new skills but also the importance to media practitioners of having a professional identity, and of seeing themselves as professionally competent.

An “ideology of professionalism” at the ABC may have the effect of ensuring acceptance of technological change and consequent changes in work practices (Prasad and Prasad 1994, p.1452 and see Henningham 1995). On the other hand, issues of professionalism place considerable pressure on the “new breed”. In response to the concern of these staff about time management, their trainers put the onus back on the journalists to be organised and prioritise. Self-management is one of the qualities by which ‘professional’ work is defined⁹.

The other anxiety that surfaced for the cross-media producers was about professional competence, particularly around the production of digital video for the Web and for digital television. This part of their job was of least interest and lowest priority to their bosses, the local radio managers, who in most cases, as career radio broadcasters, knew even less than their new staff member, about producing short form digital television. No matter how supportive they were, therefore, the RPMs were able very little help with this task. Professionalism needs cultivation to flourish and ABC Regional radio stations are small workplaces; typically around 4 or 5 people. Regional Program Managers have varying levels of knowledge of and interest in cross-media production. Australia's geographic size makes it expensive and time-consuming to keep bringing the cross-media producers together. All of this affects the amount and quality of personal and professional support available to people whose jobs may look a bit like the existing ones but actually have quite different demands and duties. The result for some of them is a sense that they lack a clear professional

⁹ This raises the contentious question, not discussed by this paper, of whether or not journalism is a profession. One of the reasons Hartley (1996) argues journalists are not and can not be professionals is precisely that they do not manage themselves in the same sense as, say, doctors or lawyers.

identity. 'Sometimes you don't know what you are - radio, Web, video', said one. Another said that when she tried to describe what she does, people look at her as though she is 'some kind of alien'.

Assuming that the organisational culture of the ABC is to expect professional standards and behaviours from its broadcasters, it is clear that some confusion of professional identity is being experienced and expressed as such by the "new breed" of cross-media journalist-producers. Most are expected to include traditional radio production in their work, yet what they are being asked to do is far more than that traditional role. There has to date been limited understanding from managers and colleagues of the demands of these hybrid roles.

Relationships with the audience

The ABC has explained its reasons for placing cross-media journalists in regional radio in terms of the relationship between ABC programs, program makers and audiences. The Web is seen as "adding value" for listeners to existing content in the form of transcripts, text stories, audio files, recipes, photographs and video. It also provides the opportunity for ABC Radio to develop new content, in the form of online forums, feature stories, presenter profiles and listener feedback. Going beyond listener feedback, the Web presents the ABC with opportunities for much greater local connection. Localism can be served relatively inexpensively, given the relatively small number of staff in any one regional station and the size of the areas they cover, through local diaries, sporting results, "what's on" features, and profiles of local characters. Most of this material - not all - can be sourced directly from the local community and is set up so that individual audience members can submit material to the appropriate form 'pages' of the Web site. Finally, the Web builds awareness of the ABC's services, increases its profile and, the ABC hopes, increases the size of the audiences for both radio and what is offered online.

One of the key characteristics of the Internet is interactivity. This can take the form of hypertext links on the Web pages and/or of allowing individuals to 'post' contributions directly to a Web site. The Backyard, the ABC's local gateway for regional radio, provides a range of opportunities for audiences to do both. However, the relationship with the audience is still one that emphasises control, by the

broadcaster of the audience. Audience management was an important issue covered in the training of the cross-media journalists. The ABC runs online forums, often immediately following a radio or television broadcast and often on controversial current issues. The ABC moderates posts to a forum, but has the facility to move material to unmoderated chat rooms off the ABC site. Achieving a balance between encouraging, censoring and creating an acceptable discussion environment is seen as a considerable challenge and one that was discussed several times throughout the training week.

This concern for some kind of control over the relationship with the audience goes back to the establishment of public service broadcasting in Britain. It was inherent in the “sense of social responsibility” towards the audience and tone of voice that public broadcasting adopted (Smith 1973, p.33). In Australia as in Britain, at the emergence of broadcasting early in the twentieth century, there was discussion mainly “about what kind of public control there should be, not whether there should be any” (Smith 1973, p.31). During the nineteenth century, the era of industrialisation, of the emergence of a mass audience and of the mass media, the point of cultural control was shifting, from the audience to the communicator. The advent of cable and satellite television with its hundreds of channels, and of the Internet, is not only fragmenting audiences but is now arguably shifting the point of cultural control back to them. There seems little recognition so far of the extent to which the work of the cross-media producers could change the ABC's historical relationship with its audiences.

Conclusion

An important argument of this paper is one also made by Cottle (1999) and Marjoribanks (2000), is that, in an institutional context, the decision to adopt new technologies is made by senior managers, operating under economic, political and cultural constraints. The technology alone does not determine its uses; rather there are human and institutional “goals and judgements which explain why and how a technology is applied” (Ursell 2001, p.178).

The ABC is a publicly-funded broadcasting organisation that inherited a Reithian¹⁰ cultural mission and operates in a competitive media environment. Its senior executive seeks to balance the demands of these factors, which are often in tension with one another. The move to embrace the possibilities of digital technology (including the Internet) satisfies economic and political demands on the ABC to make efficient use of its resources, and requirements both cultural and legislated that it will be “innovative” and “provide ... services of a high standard” (ABC Charter¹¹).

The advent in the late twentieth century of lightweight, relatively inexpensive digital means of production, in combination with the growth of the Internet and the kind of institutional structural changes described in this paper, present both opportunities and threats to broadcasters. On the one hand, professional status is threatened if anybody can be a media producer; on the other, there is an opportunity to engage the audience in ways that may give rise to new means of representation. Both carry considerable significance for public service media organisations in particular, because of the historical cultural relationship between professionalism and quality on the one hand, and the inherent obligation to the audience, the public, on the other. Bromley (1997) suggests that training journalists across several media will result in new classes of media workers, replacing the old demarcations. Thus, multi-skilling and digital convergence contain “the potential for the final fragmentation of journalism”. It will break up into “entrepreneurial editors”, “machine hands and extensions of the computer [and] In between, there may develop several levels of employment as media technicians-with-words (and pictures)” (all quotes from Bromley 1997, p.346). This is perhaps unduly pessimistic a picture. Deuze and Dimoudi (2002) for example, are much more optimistic about the impact on professionalism of online or Internet journalism, seeing it as offering a new professional model, the key characteristic of which is “empowering audiences as active participants” (Deuze and Dimoudi 2002, p.85).

Certainly, ABC television producers reacted to an organisational restructure

¹⁰ John Reith, the first Director-General of the BBC, is credited with creating a model for public service broadcasting with the threefold aim of information, education and entertainment.

¹¹ The ABC's Charter is found in Section 6 of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983. It is quoted in each Annual Report, and in the Editorial Policies of the corporation.

(motivated by the twin forces of technological change and budget reductions) as threatening their concepts of quality and professionalism. An alternative is to view the combined impetus of new technology and a new level of competition from independent and commercial sectors as presenting an opportunity to develop new kinds of programming and a new relationship with the audience. Against this must be set the empirical observation that ABC cross-media producers and their managers are concerned about time management and professional competence. The organisation appears at this stage not to be demanding production at the cost of undermining the quality of work, while moving to introduce cross-media work practices beyond regional radio workplaces, to news journalism in both radio and television. On the other hand, the ABC is experiencing real anxiety about audience relations, uncertain how to “manage” audience activity, while recognising such activity must be embraced if the ABC is to remain relevant. If this concern can be resolved and employee concerns about professional quality allayed, then a new model of professionalism may emerge and with it not only new means of representation but also new relations of production.

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