

**HIRERS AND FIRERS IN AUSTRALIAN TELEVISION NEWS:
using oral history to mark generational change**

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Abstract

A small group of senior news managers controls the hiring of television journalists in this shrinking area of employment in Australia. This paper examines the career and educational histories of key members of this managerial group, as they existed at the end of August 2007, reflected against their roles in selecting journalists for hire. The national heads of news and current affairs at all the free-to-air networks and pay television news channel Sky News have taken part, along with the Sydney news directors at all the free-to-air networks and the deputy news director at Sky. The information gathered suggests that generational change will occur between the most senior TV news executives and those who are to follow them. All of those interviewed started work in another form of journalism before television. Only two of the news directors and heads of news and current affairs interviewed had completed journalism training at a tertiary institution. Of the more senior rung – the network heads of news & national news and current affairs directors - only one had completed formal tertiary study. However, all but two of the news directors (the second rung of news management) had completed some form of university study, either before entering journalism or since. This would suggest the start of a generational shift at the level of senior hirers: those journalists trained through traditional cadetships are only just beginning to be replaced by those with tertiary qualifications. This suggests we are seeing the last generation of non-university trained journalists wielding hiring and firing power over television journalism in Australia before they make way for the next (university-trained) generation.

The leadership of television news and current affairs in Australia has seen enormous upheaval in recent years: since 2002 every national director of news and current affairs across the free-to-air news networks had changed at least once by mid-2007. Every Sydney news director had been replaced at least once. At the same time these huge changes did not appear to have altered the demographical characteristics of this important group: they were all, in August 2007, veterans of journalism with elaborate and lengthy television pedigrees.

More importantly, this small group of people – especially in the commercial free-to-air and pay television sectors – appeared to wield enormous individual power in deciding their network's journalism news objectives and the journalists hired to achieve them. This paper explores the career histories of these senior managers and their level of involvement in journalism recruitment at their networks. The aim is to look for any career history pattern in how these people moved to their positions of power, their role in recruiting and what implications this might have for future television journalism management in Australia. At the same time it is timely to record

these personal histories at this time (mid-2007): every network head of news and current affairs (the most senior rung of television news management in Australia), was approaching retirement age after working throughout the three ages of television news production: film, tape (ENG) and now digital (Willis 2005).

Especially in television, journalism management has not received much attention in recent academic literature in the antipodes or elsewhere. Usually it is discussed at ownership, not operational, level (Howard 2006, Wilson 2006, Rosenberg 2002). Management styles and station fortunes are most likely to be covered (if at all) in academic literature produced in the United States because of the wealth of publications and television stations there. The American journal *St. Louis Journalism Review* keeps regular tabs on personnel movement in television management and occasionally looks at problems faced by managers at individual stations. Examples include Chicago-based WBBM-TV (Cohen 2000) and Channel 9, Saint Louis (Posorske 2002). *American Journalism Review* has published several papers since 1999 comprising case studies of television stations' news services using an in-depth interview with the most senior news director (Heyboer 2000, Lisher 1999).

Elsewhere in the Pacific region, across both sides of the Tasman, it appears the most likely place to find academic discussion of personnel and power structures in any print, TV, radio or online newsroom is in academic papers on gender balance in the media. In *Pacific Journalism Review's* "Gender" issue in 2006, then Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Pru Goward, noted (as many Australian academics have done before her) that young women dominate journalism classrooms at universities and entry level journalism positions, yet "there is a rapid dropping off as they move up the ladder" (Goward 2006, p 15). In that paper she said only one major Australian metropolitan newspaper, the *Sunday Telegraph*, was edited by a woman (2006, p 15) and only 15 percent of all media executives in Australia were women (Goward 2006, p17). Densem in her study of gender imbalance in journalism courses in Australia and New Zealand (Densem 2006) has taken up where the work of Alysen and Oakham (1996) began ten years earlier. In the same year Roger Patching's important work examining the explosion of Australian journalism graduates in a shrinking market noted that course coordinators reported that female journalism students "outnumber males by at least two to one in their courses, some putting the

figure at four to one”(1996, p57). Densem wrote more recently that at some journalism schools in New Zealand the ratio of young women to young men applying for entry to journalism study is 7:1, (2006, p 37) as has been the case for years, and yet in a 2003 survey she cites to provide a snapshot of New Zealand’s news media (Lealand 2004) just 53% of respondents were women, barely outnumbering their 47% male counterparts (2006 p 38). She then discusses her survey of young journalism hopefuls investigating why they seek to enter the profession.

McGregor (2006) examines the status of women in New Zealand media by examining their representation “at governance level, and in newspaper editorships and broadcasting executive positions” and also discusses why women’s status is so low, given the so-called “feminization” of the media in the last three decades (McGregor 2006, p 23). Turley has looked at the global representation of women and notes the “steady increase in the percentage of news items reported by women ... (from 28 percent in 1995 to... 37 percent in 2005)” (Turley 2006). Despite this increase, however, women still feature less often on a worldwide count reporting the world’s news.

Thus, it appears to be in this context, the apparent absence of women, that senior news management personnel are discussed most often in a local region’s academic literature. As will be seen, this gender discussion could have application to the data assembled here because of the almost complete absence, in 2007, of women on the most senior rungs in Australian television news management.

Data Collection Methods

Most of the data used for this paper comes from interviews conducted between April 2005 and September 2007. The national heads of news and current affairs and their Sydney news directors (or equivalent) at Australian television’s five free-to-air networks (ABC, SBS, 10, 7 & 9) at the end of August 2007, along with the then network news director and his deputy at Sky News Australia, were the personnel tabled in this study. In those interviews they were asked the following questions (to enable a recording of their personal histories and their view of their role in journalism recruitment at their networks):

1. *Could you give me a potted history of your own career path to this point?*
2. *Are you or have you been a “hirer” or a “firer” for your current network. What’s been your role in recruitment?*

With the exception of the Nine Network’s Director of News and Current Affairs, John Westacott, and Sky Deputy News Director, Ian Ferguson, the main data was collected via face-to-face audio recorded interviews. Westacott and Ferguson were only appointed to their positions in mid-2007 and so their data was collected by phone. In a number of the other cases, follow-up email communication was made to clarify and augment information supplied in the face-to-face interviews. This also enabled the oral history data to be organised along such numerical lines as the number of years each respondent had been a journalist or had worked in television. The follow up inquiries also clarified each respondent’s movements throughout his career between print, radio and television media platforms. To provide some contextual background, additional information was also sourced on current events from newspaper reports.

It is not new for oral history (recording witness accounts of events from the perspective of the witnesses’ personal experience of the events) to be used to explore changes in Australian television and other media. The Film and Broadcast Industry Oral History Group (FBIOHG) and through its predecessor, the Filmmakers Oral History Group, has been operating since 1991 to further the progress of film oral history (Jeffrey 2006). But the group is focussed on film and generally this method for collecting data in the broadcast media has concentrated on radio, non-news television program-makers and drama film-makers. The closest equivalents to the study of a group of broadcast managers during a particular era were found in radio research. One recent example was Duigan’s oral history case study of three dozen New Zealand broadcasters in the post world war two so-called Golden Age of Radio (2005).

The study in this paper of senior television managers seeks to capture an era just past (the analogue and electronic era) and the one we are currently beginning (digital). It will appear that these senior players in mid-2007 are soon to be replaced by both younger “digital immigrant” (Prensky 2001) generations who do not remember the

film era of television news gathering and by the even younger “digital natives” (Prensky 2001) who do not remember vinyl LPs or tape vision editing machines.

The managers selected here included national network news and current affairs heads along with their metropolitan news chiefs from one capital city: Sydney. This cross-section is instructive because Sydney operates as ‘head office’ for all free-to-air networks and pay television news service Sky News Australia. Sydney news directors are, by geography, the most regular senior contact network news heads have at local news level. From SBS, the executive producer of World News Australia was included, as the most senior news person reporting to the head of news and current affairs. From ABC, one of two network editors of news was included because of the substantial role he had played personally in cadet recruit selection and training. Additionally, his senior position straddling daily news production and news management matched the linking role between operations and management filled by Sydney news directors at commercial networks.

Australia’s television news chiefs’ TV careers in hindsight

The person among those interviewed with the longest history in television (more than forty-four years by August 2007) was Seven Network Director of News and Public Affairs, Peter Meakin. He joined Seven in May 2003 (Overington & Lehmann 2006) (Meakin 2005) after being removed as director of news and current affairs at Channel Nine where he had worked for thirty years. Before that he was with Mike Willesee’s *Transmedia* current affairs production company and, from age 27, news director at Channel Ten (Meakin 2005). His Director of News, Sydney, Chris Willis, had, by August 2007, been a journalist for more than thirty-one years. Twenty-five had been in television (Willis 2006). He was Adelaide news director at Seven before becoming Sydney news director three years ago (Willis 2005).

Network Ten’s Network Head of News, Jim Carroll, was appointed late in 2005 after thirty-one years in journalism, nineteen in Australian television. In his first TV job he was a Sydney-based producer at Channel Seven, then became London bureau chief, followed by foreign editor and then deputy news director. He went to Channel Nine as *The World Tonight’s* executive producer and then established Nine’s *Nightline* program before joining Ten (Carroll 2005).

Ten's Sydney news director is David Breen. By mid-2007, he had been a journalist for twenty-one years, seventeen of them in TV (Breen 2006). He began his television career in Tasmania with TAS-TV. He joined Ten in Sydney as a network producer before taking up senior and executive producer roles with the 5pm and late news. He was appointed deputy news director before becoming Sydney news director in 2003 (Breen 2005).

John Westacott took over in August 2007 as the Nine Network's Director of News and Current Affairs after twenty-three years at the station. He had been a journalist for forty-one years. Twenty-six of those years had been in television beginning with a producer role on Channel Ten's *The Reporters* program followed by ABC *Nationwide* then Nine's *Today*, *A Current Affair* and *Sixty Minutes* programs (Westacott 2007). He was *Sixty Minutes* Executive Producer for more than a decade and half before his new appointment in mid-2007.

The Channel Nine Sydney news director in August 2007, John ChouEIFate, had been in the role little more than a year. He was appointed to the position in July 2006 after fourteen years as Sydney newsroom chief of staff. Mr ChouEIFate had, by mid-2007, worked as a journalist more than thirty-one years. Twenty-one of those years had been in television beginning as chief of staff at Ten's *Good Morning Australia* and then in the Ten newsroom.

Of those interviewed, Sky News' national news director in mid-2007, Ian Cook, was second only to Seven's Peter Meakin for the length of his television career. In August 2007 Ian Cook had been a journalist for forty-three years, mostly in television. A few brief interruptions included national service in Vietnam and time with *The West Australian* newspaper after that (Cook 2006). His first television job (combined with radio) was with ABC in Perth when he was eighteen. From then he worked for every commercial network: twice as news director for Seven, once for Ten and from 1975 until the early nineties in Sydney for the Nine Network. Early in his career he worked for ITN in Britain and decades later left Nine to return to London as news director at British pay news service BSkyB. He came back to Australia for his second stint as

news director at the Seven network before joining Sky News Australia in 2003 (Cook 2005).

His deputy news director at Sky, Ian Ferguson, had only been appointed to the Sky position in August 2007. Ian Ferguson began his media career as a radio announcer in 1980 at a local radio station in Nowra NSW before moving into the 2ST newsroom. He went on to work at major radio newsrooms such as 2GB and 2UE as well as the Ten Network and Capital Television Wollongong. Ian worked overseas in London and Singapore (including for BSkyB and for major local Singapore broadcasters) as a journalist and producer. He also worked as a media consultant to a range of clients while based in Singapore. He was news director at 2GB for a year on returning from Singapore before being enticed to Sky News as Ian Cook's deputy in mid-2007.

In August 2007, Head of News and Current Affairs at ABC, John Cameron, had been a journalist for thirty-seven years and in television with the national broadcaster for twenty-four of them (Cameron, 2006). He had held news and current affairs reporting and producing roles, including as North American bureau chief from 1989-91. He had been state head of news and current affairs in Queensland followed by Victoria, and then national editor for news and current affairs (Cameron, 2005b).

In August 2007, John Mulhall was one of two national network editors overseeing the daily direction of ABC television news programs across the country. He had been a journalist for more than twenty-seven years, mostly in television (Mulhall, 2005a). His first job in TV journalism was as an associate producer on Nine's *Today* program. He moved to WIN television in Wollongong as a reporter and eventually became news director. He moved to ABC Sydney as a senior producer on the 7pm news and filled several senior editorial roles before being appointed network editor (Munhall 2005a) in 1996.

The head of news and current affairs at SBS television, Paul Cutler, had, by August 2007, been a journalist since the 1960s, nearly 40 years, and in television for 29. He described his career as "a mixture of provincialism and internationalism" (Cutler 2005). Of the six network news chiefs, he has had the most varied overseas experience. He first travelled to London from New Zealand in the 1970s and later

worked in the United States and Hong Kong. His first television job was as a producer on the BBC Nine O'clock News. He returned to New Zealand in the 1980s and held various senior editorial roles with TVNZ over 20 years (Cutler 2005). He joined CNN in Atlanta after that as director of Asia programs before moving to Hong Kong and becoming managing editor of CNN's eight Asian bureaux (Cutler 2005). He moved to Australia in early 2005 to take up his position at SBS. He is the only TV head of news and current affairs in Australia who has come to his role with no previous Australian media experience.

Mark Boyd, Executive Producer of World News Australia, was in August 2007 effectively Paul Cutler's news 'second in command'. Mr Boyd also originally came from New Zealand and had worked at TVNZ with his current boss but came to SBS three years earlier in 2002. In mid 2007, he had been a journalist for twenty years and in television for seventeen (Boyd 2006), firstly as an on-road reporter at TVNZ and then ten years as foreign editor before moving to Australia (Boyd 2005).

Figure 1. Network news chiefs: years in journalism & television journalism

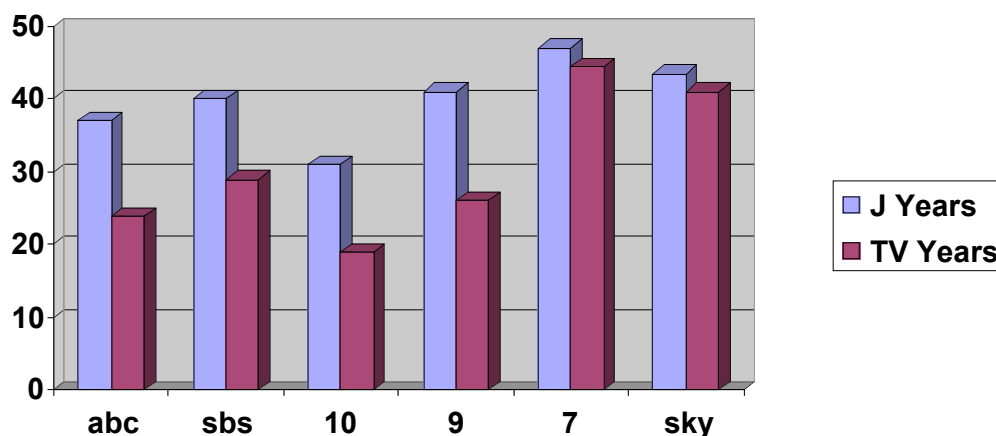
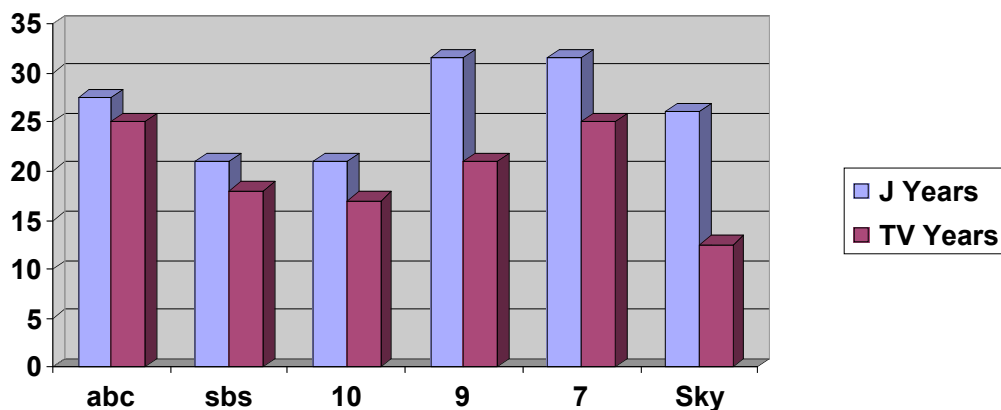
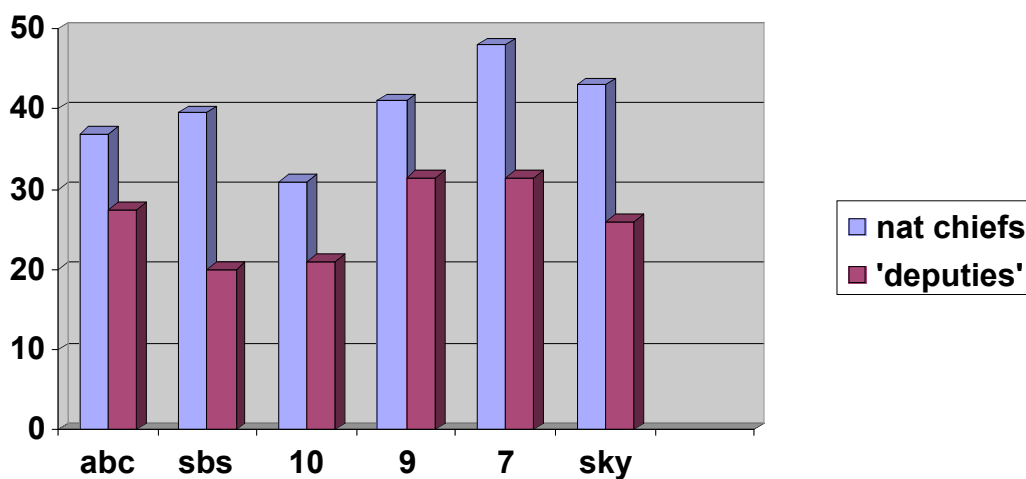


Figure 2. Sydney news directors & equivalent deputies: years in journalism and television journalism.



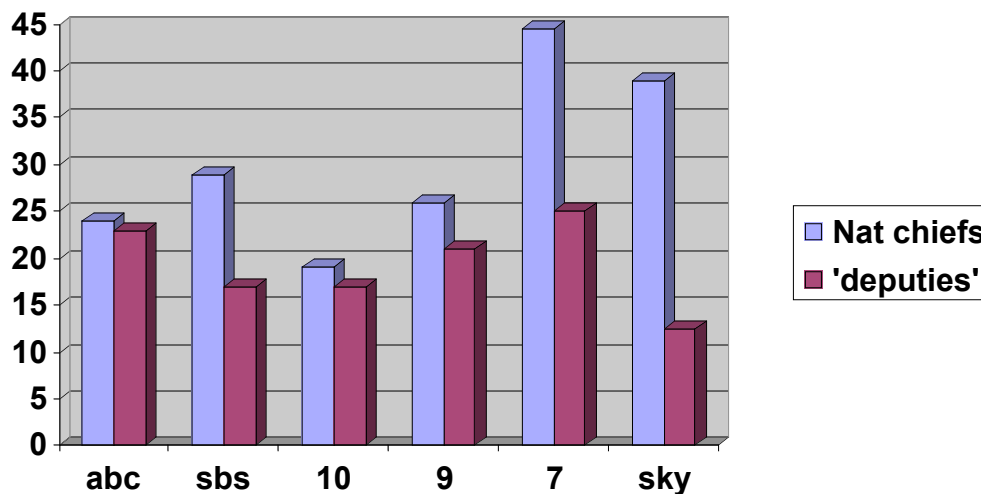
These diagrams summarise the years of journalism and television journalism experience across the top two rungs of television news management in Australia. It's apparent that there is a distinct difference between the number of years of experience each rung possesses. This difference is better illustrated in the next diagram:

Figure 3: Years in journalism: comparing news-c/aff heads & Sydney news directors or equivalent deputies



In general journalism terms the network heads of news and current affairs appear to have at least ten years more experience than their Sydney news directors or equivalent deputies.

Figure 4: Years in television journalism: news-c/aff heads & Sydney news directors or equivalent deputies



The difference in *television* journalism experience between the two rungs in August 2007 was less consistent. It was just a few years at ABC and the Ten Network but twenty years at Seven and thirty years at Sky (due largely to Peter Meakin's and Ian Cook's longevity in television). Nonetheless, the fact that in general journalism *and* TV journalism the senior manager had, at every network, more years of experience than his underling provided, in mid-2007, a clear generational marker between the two levels of seniority.

Australian news chiefs' career beginnings

Of all the eleven network heads of news and current affairs and other news managers discussed here, only Sky News' Ian Cook began his journalism career in television and even that ABC position was combined with radio (Cook 2005). It therefore can be said that every one of the managers mentioned started in either print or radio before (or while) working in television. Of those twelve managers, only three had never gained at least some print experience at some point in their careers.

ABC news and current affairs head, John Cameron and network head of news at Ten, Jim Carroll, moved from print journalism to radio and then television. John Cameron went from newspapers in New Zealand and Britain to Radio New Zealand before joining ABC (Cameron 2005a). Jim Carroll was a *Daily Mirror* copy boy, then

worked in suburban papers, then Triple M Radio, followed by his first television-related job at Viznews London. He returned to radio at Sydney's 2CH before joining Seven (Carroll 2005). ABC news network editor, John Mulhall, also followed the print-radio-TV path: he began his journalism career freelancing for magazines in London then moved to Cairns ABC Radio before joining Nine's *Today* program (Mulhall 2005a).

The national news and current affairs chiefs at Seven, Nine and SBS came to television directly from newspapers with no radio experience. Seven's Peter Meakin began in journalism at the *Adelaide Advertiser* before becoming solo journalist at Mt Gambier television (Meakin 2005). Nine's John Westacott started as a copy boy in 1966 at the Daily Telegraph, moved to a cadetship with the *Wyang Advocate* and *Entrance Guardian* on the NSW Central Coast and worked on papers in Hong Kong and England before returning to News Limited in a range of reporting and editorial roles. He rose to Assistant Editor on *The Australian* before jumping to television. SBS's Paul Cutler moved from provincial then metropolitan newspapers in New Zealand to South African paper, *Pretoria News*, then worked for four years at Reuters in Fleet Street before becoming an associate producer in the BBC's television newsroom (Cutler 2005).

Two Sydney news directors in August 2007 also came directly from print to television journalism. Nine's John ChouEIFate, like his superior at Nine, John Westacott, started in papers as a *Daily Mirror* copy boy. He then progressed to a News Limited cadetship, was graded as a journalist and by 24, had become News Ltd news editor. His next move was to television at Ten's *Good Morning Australia* program (ChouEIFate 2005). David Breen began in journalism freelancing for magazines in London. He later joined News Ltd as a cadet and worked for a number of newspapers covering various rounds before joining TAS-TV (Breen 2005).

Four of the managers discussed here began their journalism careers in radio rather than newspapers. But of the four, only SBS World News Australia EP, Mark Boyd, and Sky Deputy News Director, Ian Ferguson, had never held a print or print news agency job. Mark Boyd first worked at New Zealand pirate station, Radio Hauraki, then freelanced in London radio for the BBC World Service. On his return home he

joined Radio New Zealand before moving into television at TVNZ (Boyd 2005). As already outlined, Sky's Ian Ferguson, began his journalism career in regional NSW radio before moving to Sydney metropolitan radio and then television work with the Ten network. Seven's Sydney news director, Chris Willis, also began in radio – in Adelaide – but before moving to television freelanced in London working for AAP, the agency news service which serves newspapers, radio and television (Willis 2005). The other news manager who began his career in radio (combined with television) rather than newspapers is Sky News' Ian Cook. However, he also gained print experience after his start in broadcast media.

It can therefore be said that in August 2007 the most senior rung of television news managers was dominated by those who “cut their teeth” as journalists in print journalism, not broadcast. This might influence the news values and skills most favoured by these key drivers of television news programs. If so, it suggests there will be further implications if, when generational change occurs at this level, those stepping into the most senior shoes come with purer broadcast journalism pedigrees uninfluenced by the news gathering *modus operandi* of traditional print journalists.

Education levels in the senior ranks

Of the twelve managers surveyed here, six had never undertaken degree studies at a tertiary education institution. Four of those six, John Cameron (ABC), Peter Meakin (Seven), John Westacott (Nine), and Ian Cook (Sky), were in August 2007 the most senior news managers at their networks or news channels. Here's John Cameron's description of the “classical” journalism training he received, familiar to many who followed the junior cadet/copy-boy route into the craft:

Straight from school to a newspaper cadetship at 17, in the days when you learnt a lot in a hurry on the job from crusty old hard-drinking, chain-smoking subs. These days, the treatment would be rated as bullying of the first order, but you certainly remembered their rules on style and grammar... The only formal training has come in the form of occasional work-related editorial and managerial courses over the years (apart from going to night school for typing lessons in my first few months - 30 girls and one boy in the class, from memory!). John Cameron, Head of News and Current Affairs, ABC (Cameron 2006)

John Westacott was sent by Nine in the 1990s to do a short non-degree business course at Harvard University but he does not regard this as serious tertiary study. He said he learned most of his general knowledge when he spent a year after finishing his cadetship crewing on a Mediterranean pleasure boat that had a library full of books. It was then that he first asked himself whether he should have pursued a broader education rather than going straight from school to newspapers:

.. but I knew from the word go I wanted to be a journalist and I couldn't wait... The (Harvard) business study has been a great help for running programs and it means the bean counters can't put it over you. John Westacott, Director of News and Current Affairs, Nine Network (Westacott 2007)

The only national head of news and current affairs in Australia to have undertaken formal tertiary journalism study was, in August 2007, Paul Cutler at SBS. He graduated from the School of Journalism in Wellington, New Zealand, in the 1960s before seeking his first newspaper job (Cutler, 2005). His “exceptional” education among Australian network news chiefs could be attributed to the acceptance of journalism tertiary training across New Zealand well before it became commonplace in Australia.

At the next rung down in the August 2007 news hierarchy, Nine's John Chouefate and Sky Deputy News Director, Ian Ferguson, were the only “deputies” without formal tertiary study in their backgrounds. Seven's director of news in Sydney, Chris Willis, had completed the first year of an arts degree when he was offered a radio cadetship in 1974. He didn't complete his undergraduate study but in the mid-1990s graduated with a diploma in media management from Sydney's Macquarie University (Willis 2006). David Breen at Ten gained a Bachelor of Teaching degree from the University of Tasmania along with a Tasmanian Teaching Certificate and worked as a teacher before moving into journalism (Breen 2006). TV network editor at ABC, John Mulhall, completed a three-year course in engineering/surveying after high school and used those skills to work his way through a journalism degree at Mitchell College of Advanced Education (now Charles Sturt University) (Mulhall 2005a).

Like his boss at network level, the person who had in mid-2007 attained the highest number and level of academic qualifications among Sydney-based news directors is both a New Zealander and works for SBS. Mark Boyd completed two years of an Arts degree at the University of Auckland before studying six months at Auckland Technical Institute for a certificate of journalism. He returned to university in 1988 and finished his original degree. In the 1990s, while working, he studied part-time to gain a Master of Arts (involving a journalism research thesis on political coverage during the New Zealand election) also from the University of Auckland (Boyd, 2006).

The role played by news chiefs in recruitment

It appears that in August 2007 at commercial free-to-air networks and at Sky the heads of news and current affairs either had ultimate power over the hiring of journalists for their news programs or exercised this power in consultation with their news directors or delegated it to their deputies entirely. In some cases, there appeared to be discrepancy between how the network news chiefs and their deputies viewed the process.

Seven's Peter Meakin said he leaves much of the hiring to his "news directors and (current affairs program) executive producers" (Meakin, 2005) but "when it comes to senior people" is "happy to be involved". Chris Willis said, for Sydney news, he (Chris) is "the one who does the recruiting. *Peter's the one who has the final say*, but in practice he and I work together on it." (Willis, 2005)

Sydney news director, David Breen, said he hires reporters and producers for the local Sydney news, but canvasses the opinions of network news managers and his '2IC', the Sydney news editor: "Ultimately, I'm responsible for hiring and firing in the Sydney market" (Breen 2005). Breen said, in the three years preceding mid-2007, he had hired one trainee each year. In all cases, he said, this was someone with a little experience already in radio or television rather than a fresh graduate (Breen 2005).

News reports of one hundred job cuts at Channel Nine in 2006 indicated that the then new head of news and current affairs, Garry Linnell, was overseeing the redundancies (with assistance from his predecessor, Mark Llewellyn, before he moved to Seven) (Overington & Lehmann 2006). John Chouiefate, as the then new Sydney News

Director at Channel Nine, was responsible for hiring junior journalists to fill gaps left in news production by the staff cuts. John Westacott, in his newer role appeared to gain ultimate power from August 2007 to hire and fire. He indicated in news reports on his appointment that staff would not be welcome any longer at Nine if they couldn't meet the high level of energy and commitment required (Tabakoff 2007).

By mid-2007, Sky News appeared, of all the commercially operated newsrooms, to have made the most offers of jobs each year to graduates fresh from journalism courses. Then Network Director of News, Ian Cook, had made all the appointments of producers and reporters including at very junior levels from the time he joined Sky. He also spent time each year at at least one journalism school working with students to assess talent and recruit to entry positions in his newsroom (Cook 2006).

The ABC said it had a transparent formal selection process for the “more than 700 journalists based in more than 60 centres around Australia and more than 20 correspondents in 12 overseas bureaux” (ABC 2007). Most key journalism positions such as specialist reporter rounds, bulletin and program executive producers and other senior producers, have been advertised in national newspapers and on the ABC's online site before a formal panel interview selection process. Foreign correspondent roles based in ABC overseas bureaux have for decades been advertised internally - only ABC employees are eligible to apply for these positions (Forbes 2006). The ABC cadet selection process has been tracked over the past decade in detail in a number of papers by Barbara Alysen in her examination of cadet recruitment across ABC and several major newspapers (Alysen 1999; 2001; 2005).

In August 2005 ABC cadetship coordinator, Heather Forbes, was responsible for designing and publicising the selection process, fielding enquiries and helping assess who had met selection criteria. National news and current affairs chief, John Cameron, had “been involved in recruitment in three states over many years, and nationally as a regular member of the cadet selection process since the early 1990s” (Cameron 2005b). Throughout his period as national news and current affairs head Cameron has had a major impact on the selection criteria for cadets. His national network editor, John Mulhall, has “...been involved in the cadet selection process for several years... on various committees for selecting staff and senior appointments...

and has... been a member of the ABC Standing Committee on Spoken English..(including as) chairman for several years of that” (Mulhall 2005a). He also designed writing and grammar modules used in ABC cadet training.

As with ABC, permanent appointments at SBS have usually been subject to a selection process involving a panel interview. Paul Cutler said he only likes to get involved when hiring senior journalists such as executive producers, leaving appointments below that level to program makers:

....most of the hiring decisions are made by the executive producers of the programs. They're the people who have to work with people. And I'm a great believer in making sure that they also negotiate contracts with their staff as well. Paul Cutler, SBS, Director of News and Current Affairs (Cutler 2005)

In mid-2007, SBS World News Australia programs had permanent journalists including a political reporter in Canberra, reporters in Sydney and Melbourne, a chief of staff, day editor and bulletin producers appointed through the formal selection process overseen by news executive producer, Mark Boyd. He also oversaw the annual selection of three news cadets (Boyd 2005). Additionally, there are usually several casual journalists employed daily to produce packaged foreign stories for the bulletins. These people are usually recruited and rostered by the newsroom day editor.

It would appear therefore that at each of the commercial sector networks the decisions about whom should be hired to fill permanent producer and reporter journalism positions resided, in August 2007, in just one or two pairs of hands. At the national broadcasters, ABC and SBS, formal processes were in place around the hiring of key journalists but the network news chiefs and their Sydney deputies still had enormous input into the process, selection criteria and ultimate choices. Of all the television networks, only the ABC appeared to have a person whose job was largely taken up with overseeing cadetship recruitment. However, while Ms Forbes' influence has been huge, she ultimately has had to defer to the Head of News and Current Affairs on selection criteria and process for filling these positions.

Discussion

In August 2007, all of Australia's heads of news and current affairs and Sydney news directors were men. All but one senior news manager had begun his journalism career in either newspapers or radio – not television. All but two executives had had some experience of working in the most traditional platform, print newspapers. All of the senior managers discussed here fitted into the 'baby boomer' demographic or were on the cusp between it and Generation X.

What is even more interesting to note, however, is a major difference in mid-2007 between the most senior rung of television news management and that immediately below it. Only one head of national news and current affairs in Australia, a New Zealander, had formal tertiary study under his belt. Yet among the Sydney news directors, the next management rung down, only two had undertaken no tertiary study. All the rest had a Bachelors degree or a postgraduate qualification.

At the same time, those senior managers with tertiary study behind them still differed in their educational backgrounds from younger journalists: they had done degrees and courses other than the undergraduate journalism qualifications ubiquitous by 2007 among junior journalists. Only Paul Cutler from SBS and John Mulhall from ABC had an undergraduate qualification in journalism roughly equivalent to those gained by most new entrants to journalism since the 1980s.

Significantly, all the network heads of news and current affairs in August 2007, except possibly Jim Carroll at Ten, were only a few years from traditional retirement age. The youngest could be said to have been in his mid-fifties but nearly all those at that senior level were in their mid-sixties. This suggests that a major generational change was, in mid-2007, about to take place at the most senior tier of television news management in Australia. It will be interesting to see if the 'second tier', the 'deputies', identified here automatically step up to the next level and take over as network news and current affairs chiefs. This would make a university education the rule rather than the exception among the most senior hirers and firers in television news even if most of them do not have the now popular journalism degrees.

It will also be interesting to see who then moves up to fill the vacated ‘deputies’ shoes. If they are *younger* they could be managers who have never known the pre-electronic film era of television news gathering. As a result, they are likely to have a different view of the kinds of skills that are important in the young journalists they hire from those criteria deemed important by their powerful predecessors. If significantly younger the new group of senior managers might also have a greater chance than previously of including women in their ranks: because potential women managers won’t have reached that age, as noted in previous commentary on gender and journalism (Goward 2006), by which time so many women seem to disappear from the journalist workforce in Australia.

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